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Communication Skills-II

Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Open University

Communication Skills - II

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BSCITRAE-205

Communication Skills-II

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Business Communication

Unit 1: INTRAPERSONAL AND INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION

1

Unit Structure

1.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After studying this unit student should be able to:

- What is business communication?
- Self-Concept
- Interpersonal needs
- Rituals of Conversation
- Employment Interviewing
- Conflict in the Work Environment

1.2 INTRODUCTION

You will be interviewing a group of potential employees to fill a role called “Library Coordinator.” In this role, an employee will need to have excellent communication skills to interact with a variety of visitors to the library including faculty members, staff, and students.

You want to ensure he includes some good questions in his interview script to determine interpersonal skills among the applicants. What types of questions might you ask to find out more from each candidate?

When asked the question, “What are you doing?” in a professional context, the answer typically involves communication; communication with self, with others, in verbal (oral and written) and nonverbal ways. How well do you communicate, and how does it influence your experience within the business environment?

Through communication, how might you negotiate relationships, demands for space and time, across meetings, collaborative efforts, and solo projects? In this chapter you will explore several concepts and attempt to answer the question, “What are you doing?” with the answer: communicating.

1.3 WHAT IS INTRAPERSONAL COMMUNICATION?

Intrapersonal communication can be defined as communication with one’s self, and that may include self- talk, acts of imagination and visualization, and even recall and memory (McLean, 2005). You read on your phone that your friends are going to have dinner at your favourite restaurant. What comes to mind? Sights, sounds, and scents? Something special that happened the last time you were there? Do you contemplate joining them? Do you start to work out a plan of getting from your present location to the restaurant? Do you send your friends a text asking if they want company? Until the moment when you hit the “send” but- ton, you are communicating with yourself.

Communications expert Leonard Shedletsky examined intrapersonal communication through the eight basic components of the communication process (i.e., source, receiver, message, channel, feedback, environment, context, and interference) as transactional, but all the interaction occurs within the individual (Shedletsky, 1989).

From planning to problem solving, internal conflict resolution, and evaluations and judgments of self and others, we communicate with ourselves through intrapersonal communication.

All this interaction takes place in the mind without externalization, and all of it relies on previous interaction with the external world.

1.4 SELF CONCEPT

Returning to the question “what are you doing?” is one way to approach self-concept. If we define ourselves through our actions, what might those actions be, and are we no longer ourselves when we no longer engage in those activities? Psychologist Steven Pinker defines the conscious present as about three seconds for most people. Everything else is past or future (Pinker, 2009). Who are you at this moment in time, and will the self you become an hour from now be different from the self that is reading this sentence right now?

Just as the communication process is dynamic, not static (i.e., always changing, not staying the same), you too are a dynamic system. Physiologically your body is in a constant state of change as you inhale and exhale air, digest food, and cleanse waste from each cell. Psychologically you are constantly in a state of change as well. Some aspects of your personality and character will be constant, while others will shift and adapt to your environment and context. These complex combinations contribute to the self you call you. You may choose to define yourself by your own sense of individuality, personal characteristics, motivations, and actions (McLean, 2005), but any definition you create will likely fail to capture all of who you are, and who you will become.

Self-concept is "what we perceive ourselves to be," (McLean,, 2005) and involves aspects of image and esteem. How we see ourselves and how we feel about ourselves influences how we communicate with others. What you are thinking now and how you communicate impacts and influences how others treat you. In a previous chapter you reviewed the concept of the looking-glass self. We look at how others treat us, what they say and how they say it, for clues about how they view us to gain insight into our own identity. Developing a sense of self as a communicator involves balance between constructive feedback from others and constructive self-affirmation. You judge yourself, as others do, and both views count.

Self-reflection is a trait that allows us to adapt and change to our context or environment, to accept or reject messages, to examine our concept of ourselves and choose to improve.

Internal monologue refers to the self-talk of intrapersonal communication. It can be a running monologue that is rational and reasonable, or disorganized and illogical. Your self-monologue can empower and energize you or it can unintentionally interfere with listening to others, impede your ability to focus, and become a barrier to effective communication.

You have to make a choice to listen to others when they communicate through the written or spoken word. Refraining from preparing your responses before others finish speaking (or before you finish reading what they have said) is good listening, and essential for relationship-building. It's good listening practice to take mental note of when you jump to conclusions from only partially attending to the speaker or writer's message. There is certainly value in choosing to listen to others in addition to yourself.

One principle of communication is that interaction is dynamic and changing. Interaction can be internal, as in intrapersonal communication, but can also be external. We may communicate with one other person and engage in paired interpersonal communication. If we engage two or more individuals, group communication is the result.

1.5 INTERPERSONAL NEEDS

We communicate with each other to meet our needs, regardless of how we define those needs. From the time you are a new born infant crying for food or the time you are a toddler learning to say “please” when requesting a cup of milk, to the time you are an adult learning the rituals of the job interview and the conference room, you learn to communicate in order to gain a sense of self within the group or community–meeting your basic needs as you grow and learn.

Interpersonal communication is the process of exchanging messages between two people whose lives mutually influence one another in unique ways in relation to social and cultural norms (University of Minnesota Libraries Publishing, 2013). A brief exchange with a grocery store clerk who you don’t know wouldn’t be considered interpersonal communication, because you and the clerk are not influencing each other in significant ways. If the clerk were a friend, family member, co-worker, or romantic partner, the communication would fall into the interpersonal category.

Aside from making your relationships and health better, interpersonal communication skills are highly sought after by potential employers, consistently ranking in the top ten in national surveys (National Association of Colleges and Employers, 2010). Interpersonal communication meets our basic needs as humans for security in our social bonds, health, and careers. But we are not born with all the interpersonal communication skills we’ll need in life.

1.5.1 Social Penetration Theory

How do you get to know other people? If the answer springs immediately to mind, we’re getting somewhere: communication. Communication allows us to share experiences, come to know ourselves and others, and form relationships, but it requires time and effort. Irwin Altman and Dalmas Taylor describe this progression from superficial to intimate levels of communication in social penetration theory, which is often called the Onion Theory because the model looks like an onion and involves layers that are peeled away (Altman & Taylor, 1973). According to social penetration theory, we fear that which we do not know. That includes people. Strangers go from being unknown to known through a series of steps that we can observe through conversational interactions.

At the outermost layer of the onion, in this model, there is only that which we can observe. We can observe characteristics about each other and make judgments, but they are educated guesses at best. Our nonverbal displays of affiliation, like a team jacket, a uniform, or a badge, may communicate something about us, but we only peel away a layer when we engage in conversation, oral or written.

As we move from public to private information we make the transition from small talk to substantial, and eventually intimate, conversations. Communication requires trust and that often takes time. Beginnings are fragile times and when expectations, roles, and ways of communicating are not clear, misunderstandings can occur.

According to the social penetration theory, people go from superficial to intimate conversations as trust develops through repeated, positive interactions. Self-disclosure is “information, thoughts, or feelings we tell others about ourselves that they would not otherwise know” (McLean, 2005). Taking it step by step, and not rushing to self-disclose or asking personal questions too soon, can help develop positive business relationships. Figure 9.1 below, an image of onion layers resembles the process of building interpersonal communication relationships.

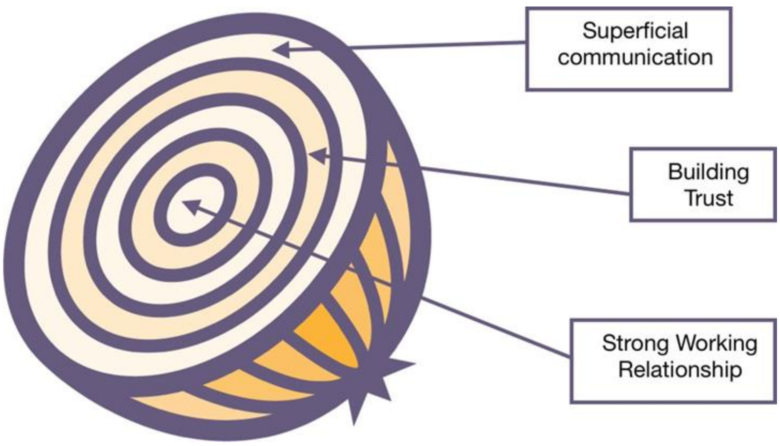


Figure 9.1. Layers of disclosure in interpersonal communication.

1.5.2 Principles of Self-Disclosure

From your internal monologue and intrapersonal communication, to verbal and nonverbal communication, communication is constantly occurring. What do you communicate about yourself by the clothes (or brands) you wear, the tattoos you display, or the piercing you remove before you enter the workplace? Self-disclosure is a process by which you intentionally communicate information to others, but can involve unintentional, but revealing slips.

1.5.3 Interpersonal Relationships

Interpersonal communication can be defined as communication between two people, but the definition fails to capture the essence of a relationship. This broad definition is useful when we compare it to intrapersonal communication, or communication with ourselves, as opposed to mass communication, or communication with a large audience, but it requires clarification. The developmental view of interpersonal communication places emphasis on the relationship rather than the size of the audience, and draws a distinction between impersonal and personal interactions.

For example, one day your co-worker and best friend, Iris, whom you've come to know on a personal as well as a professional level, gets promoted to the position of manager. She didn't tell you ahead of time because it wasn't certain, and she didn't know how to bring up the possible change of roles. Your relationship with Iris will change as your roles transform. Her perspective will change, and so will yours. You may stay friends, or she may not have as much time as she once did. Over time, you and Iris gradually grow apart, spending less time together. You eventually lose touch. What is the status of your relationship?

If you have ever had even a minor interpersonal transaction such as buying a cup of coffee from a clerk, you know that some people can be personable, but does that mean you've developed a relationship within the transaction process? For many people the transaction is an impersonal experience, however pleasant. What is the difference between the brief interaction of a transaction and the interactions you periodically have with your colleague, Iris, who is now your manager?

The developmental view places an emphasis on the prior history, but also focuses on the level of familiarity and trust. Over time and with increased frequency we form bonds or relationships with people, and if time and frequency are diminished, we lose that familiarity. The relationship with the clerk may be impersonal, but so can the relationship with the manager after time has passed and the familiarity is lost. From a developmental view, interpersonal communication can exist across this range of experience and interaction.

Regardless of whether we focus on collaboration or competition, we can see that interpersonal communication is necessary in the business environment. We want to know our place and role within the organization, accurately predict those within our proximity, and create a sense of safety and belonging. Family for many is the first experience in interpersonal relationships, but as we develop professionally, our relationships at work may take on many of the attributes we associate with family communication. We look to each other with similar sibling rivalries, competition for attention and resources, and support. The workplace and our peers can become as close, or closer, than our birth families, with similar challenges and rewards.

1.6 RITUALS OF CONVERSATION

You no doubt have participated in countless conversations throughout your life, and the process of how to conduct a conversation may seem so obvious that it needs no examination. Yet, all cultures have rituals of various kinds, and conversation is one of these universal rituals. A skilled business communicator knows when to speak, when to remain silent, and to always stop speaking before the audience stops listening. Expectations may differ based on the type of conversation and the knowledge and experience of participants, but here are the basic five steps of a conversation.

Photo by Kawtar CHERKAOUI on Unsplash

Steven Beebe, Susan Beebe, and Mark Redmond offer us five stages of conversation that are adapted here for our discussion (Beebe, Beebe, & Redmond, 2002).

1. Initiation

The first stage of conversation is called initiation, and requires you to be open to interact. How you communicate openness is up to you; it may involve nonverbal signals like eye contact or body positions, you may be smiling or facing the other person and making eye contact. For some, this may produce a degree of anxiety. If status and hierarchical relationships are present, it may be a question of who speaks when, according to cultural norms.

2. Preview

The preview is an indication, verbal or nonverbal, of what the conversation is about, both in terms of con- tent and in terms of the relationship. A word or two in the subject line of an e-mail may signal the topic, and the relationship between individuals, such as an employee-supervisor relationship, may be understood. A preview can serve to reduce uncertainty and signal intent.

3. Talking Point(s)

Joseph DeVito characterizes this step as getting down to business, reinforcing the goal orientation of the conversation (DeVito, 2003). In business communication, we often have a specific goal or series of points to address, but we cannot lose sight of the relationship messages within the discussion of content. By clearly articulating, either in written or oral form, the main points, you provide an outline or structure to the conversation.

4. Feedback

Similar to a preview step, this stage allows the conversational partners to clarify, restate, or discuss the points of the conversation to arrive at a sense of mutual understanding. Western cultures often get to the point rather quickly and once an understanding is established there is a quick move to the conclusion.

Feedback is an opportunity to make sure the interaction was successful the first time. Failure to attend to this stage can lead to the need for additional interactions, reducing efficiency across time.

5. Closing

The acceptance of feedback on both sides of the conversation often signals the transition to the conclusion of the conversation.

There are times when a conversational partner introduces new information in the conclusion, which can start the process all over again. You may also note that if words like “in conclusion” or “oh—one more thing” are used, a set of expectations is now in force. A conclusion has been announced and the listener expects it. If the speaker continues to recycle at this point, the listener’s listening skills are often not as keen as they were during the heat of the main engagement, and it may even produce frustration. People mentally shift to the next order of business and this transition must be negotiated successfully.

By mentioning a time, date, or place for future communication you can clearly signal that the conversation, although currently concluded, will continue later. In this way, you can often disengage successfully while demonstrating respect.

1.7 EMPLOYMENT INTERVIEWING

In order to make the transition from an outsider to an insider in the business world, you’ll have to pass a series of tests, both informal and formal. One of the most common tests is known as an employment interview. An employment interview is an exchange between a candidate and a prospective employer (or their representative). It is a formal process with several consistent elements that you can use to guide your preparation.

Employment interviews come in all shapes and sizes, and may not be limited to only one exchange but one interaction. A potential employee may very well be screened by a computer (as the résumé is scanned) and interviewed online or via the telephone before the applicant ever meets a representative or panel of representatives. The screening process may include formal tests that include personality tests, background investigations, and consultations with previous employers.

Depending on the type of job you are seeking, you can anticipate answering questions, often more than once, to a series of people as you progress through a formal interview process. Just as you have the advantage of preparing for a speech with anticipation, you can apply the same research and public speaking skills to the employment interview.

The invitation to interview means you have been identified as a candidate who meets the minimum qualifications and demonstrate potential as a viable candidate. Your cover letter, résumé, or related application materials may demonstrate the connection between your preparation and the job duties, but now comes the moment where you will need to articulate those points out loud.

If we assume that you would like to be successful in your employment interviewing, then it makes sense to use the communication skills gained to date with the knowledge of interpersonal communication to maximize your performance. There is no one right or wrong way to prepare and present at your interview, just as each audience is unique, but we can prepare and anticipate several common elements.

1.7.1 Preparation

Would you prepare yourself before writing for publication or speaking in public? Of course. The same preparation applies to the employment interview. Briefly, the employment interview is a conversational exchange (even if it is in writing at first) where the participants try to learn more about each other. Both conversational partners will have goals in terms of content, and explicitly or implicitly across the conversational exchange will be relational messages. Attending to both points will strengthen your performance.

On the content side, if you have been invited for an interview, you can rest assured that you have met the basic qualifications the employer is looking for. Hopefully, this initiation signal means that the company or organization you have thoroughly researched is one you would consider as a potential employer. Perhaps you have involved colleagues and current employees of the organization in your research process and learned about several of the organization's attractive qualities as well as some of the challenges experienced by the people working there.

Businesses hire people to solve problems, so you will want to focus on how your talents, expertise, and experience can contribute to the organization's need to solve those problems. The more detailed your analysis of their current challenges, the better. You need to be prepared for standard questions about your education and background, but also see the opening in the conversation to discuss the job duties, the challenges inherent in the job, and the ways in which you believe you can meet these challenges. Take the opportunity to demonstrate the fact that you have "done your homework" in researching the company.

Table 9.1 “Interview Preparation Checklist” presents a checklist of what you should try to know before you consider yourself prepared for an interview.

Table 9.1 Interview Preparation Checklist

What to Know	Examples
Type of Interview	Will it be a behavioural interview, where the employer watches what you do in a given situation? Will you be asked technical questions or given a work sample? Or will you be interviewed over lunch or coffee, where your table manners and social skills will be assessed?
Type of Dress	Office attire varies by industry, so stop by the workplace and observe what workers are wearing if you can. If this isn’t possible, call and ask the human resources office what to wear—they will appreciate your wish to be prepared.
Company or Organization	Do a thorough exploration of the company’s website. If it doesn’t have one, look for business listings in the community online and in the phone directory. Contact the local chamber of commerce. At your library, you may have access to subscription sites such as Hoover’s Online (http://www.hoovers.com).
Job	Carefully read the ad you answered that got you the interview, and memorize what it says about the job and the qualifications the employer is seeking. Use the Internet to find sample job descriptions for your target job title. Make a written list of the job tasks and annotate the list with your skills, knowledge, and other attributes that will enable you to perform the job tasks with excellence.
Employer’s Needs	Check for any items in the news in the past couple of years involving the company name. If it is a small company, the local town newspaper will be your best source. In addition, look for any advertisements the company has placed, as these can give a good indication of the company’s goals.

1.7.2 Performance

You may want to know how to prepare for an employment interview, and we're going to take it for granted that you have researched the company, market, and even individuals in your effort to learn more about the opportunity. From this solid base of preparation, you need to begin to prepare your responses. Would you like some of the test questions before the test? Luckily for you, employment interviews involve a degree of uniformity across their many representations. Here are eleven common questions you are likely to be asked in an employment interview (McLean, 2005):

1. Tell me about yourself.
2. Have you ever done this type of work before?
3. Why should we hire you?
4. What are your greatest strengths? Weaknesses?
5. Give me an example of a time when you worked under pressure.
6. Tell me about a time you encountered (X) type of problem at work. How did you solve the problem?
7. Why did you leave your last job?
8. How has your education and/or experience prepared you for this job?
9. Why do you want to work here?
10. What are your long-range goals? Where do you see yourself three years from now?
11. Do you have any questions?

When you are asked a question in the interview, look for its purpose as well as its literal meaning. "Tell me about yourself" may sound like an invitation for you to share your text message win in last year's competition, but it is not. The employer is looking for someone who can address their needs.

In the same way, responses about your strengths are not an opening to brag, and your weakness not an invitation to confess. If your weakness is a tendency towards perfectionism, and the job you are applying for involves a detail orientation, you can highlight how your weaknesses may serve you well in the position.

You may be invited to participate in a conference call, and be told to expect it will last around twenty minutes. The telephone carries your voice and your words, but doesn't carry your nonverbal gestures. If you remember to speak directly into the telephone, look up and smile, your voice will come through clearly and you will sound competent and pleasant. When the interviewers ask you questions, keep track of the time, limiting each response to about a minute. If you know that a twenty-minute call is scheduled for a certain time, you can anticipate that your phone may ring may be a minute or two late, as interviews are often scheduled in a series while the committee is all together at one time. Even if you only have one interview, your interviewers will have a schedule and your sensitivity to it can help improve your performance.

You can also anticipate that the last few minutes will be set aside for you to ask your questions. This is your opportunity to learn more about the problems or challenges that the position will be addressing, allowing you a final opportunity to reinforce a positive message with the audience. Keep your questions simple, your attitude positive, and communicate your interest.

At the same time as you are being interviewed, know that you too are interviewing the prospective employer. If you have done your homework you may already know what the organization is all about, but you may still be unsure whether it is the right fit for you. Listen and learn from what is said as well as what is not said, and you will add to your knowledge base for wise decision-making in the future.

Above all, be honest, positive, and brief. You may have heard that the world is small and it is true. As you develop professionally, you will come to see how fields, organizations, and companies are interconnected in ways that you cannot anticipate. Your name and reputation are yours to protect and promote.

1.7.3 Post-performance

Remember that feedback is part of the communication process: follow up promptly with a thank-you note or email, expressing your appreciation for the interviewer's time and interest. You may also indicate that you will call or email next week to see if they have any further questions for you.

You may receive a letter, note, or voicemail explaining that another candidate's combination of experience and education better matched the job description. If this happens, it is only natural for you to feel disap- pointed. It is also only natural to want to know why you were not chosen, but be aware that for legal reasons most rejection notifications do not go into detail about why one candidate was hired and another was not. Contacting the company with a request for an explanation can be counterproductive, as it may be interpreted as a “sore loser” response. If there is any possibility that they will keep your name on file for future opportunities, you want to preserve your positive relationship.

Although you feel disappointed, don’t focus on the loss or all the hard work you’ve produced. Instead, focus your energies where they will serve you best. Review the process and learn from the experience, knowing that each audience is unique and even the most prepared candidate may not have been the right “fit.” Stay positive and connect with people who support you. Prepare, practice, and perform. Know that you as a person are far more than just a list of job duties. Focus on your skill sets: if they need improvement, consider additional education that will enhance your knowledge and skills. Seek out local resources and keep net- working. Have your professional interview attire clean and ready, and focus on what you can control—your preparation and performance.

1.8 CONFLICT IN THE WORK ENVIRONMENT

The word “conflict” produces a sense of anxiety for many people, but it is part of the human experience. Just because conflict is universal does not mean that we cannot improve how we handle disagreements, misunderstandings, and struggles to understand or make ourselves understood.

Photo by Chris Sabor on Unsplash

Conflict is the physical or psychological struggle associated with the perception of opposing or incompatible goals, desires, demands, wants, or needs (McLean, 2005). When incompatible goals, scarce resources, or interference are present, conflict is a typical result, but it doesn’t mean the relationship is poor or failing. All relationships progress through times of conflict and collaboration. How we navigate and negotiate these challenges influences, reinforces, or destroys the relationship. Conflict is universal, but how and when it occurs is open to influence and interpretation. Rather than viewing conflict from a negative frame of reference, view it as an opportunity for clarification, growth, and even reinforcement of the relationship.

1.8.1 Conflict Management Strategies

As professional communicators, we can acknowledge and anticipate that conflict will be present in every context or environment where communication occurs. To that end, we can predict, anticipate, and formulate strategies to address conflict successfully. How you choose to approach conflict influences its resolution. Joseph DeVito (2003) offers several conflict management strategies that you might adapt and expand for your use.

1.8.2 Avoidance

You may choose to change the subject, leave the room, or not even enter the room in the first place, but the conflict will remain and resurface when you least expect it. Your reluctance to address the conflict directly is a normal response, and one which many cultures prize. In cultures where independence is highly valued, direct confrontation is more common. In cultures where the community is emphasized over the individual, indirect strategies may be more common. Avoidance allows for more time to resolve the problem, but can also increase costs associated with problem in the first place. Your organization or business will have policies and protocols to follow regarding conflict and redress, but it is always wise to consider the position of your conversational partner or opponent and to give them, as well as yourself, time to explore alternatives.

1.8.3 Defensiveness versus Supportiveness

Defensive communication is characterized by control, evaluation, and judgments, while supportive communication focuses on the points and not personalities. When we feel judged or criticized, our ability to listen can be diminished, and we may only hear the negative message. By choosing to focus on the message instead of the messenger, we keep the discussion supportive and professional.

1.8.4 Face-Detracting and Face-Saving

Communication is not competition. Communication is the sharing of understanding and meaning, but does everyone always share equally? People struggle for control, limit access to resources and information as part of territorial displays, and otherwise use the process of communication to engage in competition. People also use communication for collaboration. Both competition and collaboration can be observed in communication interactions, but there are two concepts central to both: face-detracting and face-saving strategies.

Face-detracting strategies involve messages or statements that take away from the respect, integrity, or credibility of a person. Face-saving strategies protect credibility and separate message from messenger. For example, you might say that “sales were down this quarter,” without specifically noting who was responsible. Sales were simply down. If, however, you ask, “How does the sales manager explain the decline in sales?” you have specifically connected an individual with the negative news. While we may want to specifically connect tasks and job responsibilities to individuals and departments, in terms of language each strategy has distinct results.

Face-detracting strategies often produce a defensive communication climate, inhibit listening, and allow for little room for collaboration. To save-face is to raise the issue while preserving a supportive climate, allowing room in the conversation for constructive discussions and problem solving. By using a face-saving strategy to shift the emphasis from the individual to the issue, we avoid power struggles and personalities, providing each other space to save-face (Donohue & Klot, 1992).

In collectivist cultures, where the community’s well-being is promoted or valued above that of the individual, face-saving strategies are common communicative strategies. In Japan, for example, to confront someone directly is perceived as humiliation, a great insult. In the United States, greater emphasis is placed on individual performance, and responsibility may be more directly assessed. If our goal is to solve a problem, and preserve the relationship, then consideration of a face-saving strategy should be one option a skilled business communicator considers when addressing negative news or information.

1.8.5 Empathy

Communication involves not only the words we write or speak, but how and when we write or say them. The way we communicate also carries meaning, and empathy for the individual involves attending to this aspect of interaction. Empathetic listening involves listening to both the literal and implied meanings within a message. By paying attention to feelings and emotions associated with content and information, we can build relationships and address conflict more constructively. In management, negotiating conflict is a common task and empathy is one strategy to consider when attempting to resolve issues.

1.8.6 Managing Your Emotions

There will be times in the work environment when emotions run high. Your awareness of them can help you clear your mind and choose to wait until the moment has passed to tackle the challenge.

Emotions can be contagious in the workplace, and fear of the unknown can influence people to act in irrational ways. The wise business communicator can recognize when emotions are on edge in themselves or others, and choose to wait to communicate, problem-solve, or negotiate until after the moment has passed.

1.8.7 Evaluations and Criticism in the Workplace

There may come a time, however, when evaluations involve criticism. Knowing how to approach this criticism can give you peace of mind to listen clearly, separating subjective, personal attacks from objective, constructive requests for improvement. Guffey offers us seven strategies for giving and receiving evaluations and criticism in the workplace that we have adapted here.

1.8.8 Listen without Interrupting

If you are on the receiving end of an evaluation, start by listening without interruption. Interruptions can be internal and external, and warrant further discussion. If your supervisor starts to discuss a point and you immediately start debating the point in your mind, you are paying attention to yourself and what you think they said or are going to say, and not that which is actually communicated. Let them speak while you listen, and if you need to take notes to focus your thoughts, take clear notes of what is said, also noting points to revisit later.

1.8.9 Determine the Speaker's Intent

We have discussed previews as a normal part of conversation, and in this context they play an important role. People want to know what is coming and generally dislike surprises, particularly when the context of an evaluation is present. If you are on the receiving end, you may need to ask a clarifying question if it doesn't count as an interruption. You may also need to take notes and write down questions that come to mind to address when it is your turn to speak. As a manager, be clear and positive in your opening and lead with praise. You can find one point, even if it is only that the employee consistently shows up to work on time, to highlight before transitioning to a performance issue.

1.8.10 Indicate You Are Listening

In many Western cultures, eye contact is a signal that you are listening and paying attention to the person speaking. Take notes, nod your head, or lean forward to display interest and listening. Regardless of whether you are the employee receiving the criticism or the supervisor delivering it, displaying listening behaviour engenders a positive climate that helps mitigate the challenge of negative news or constructive criticism.

1.8.11 Paraphrase

Restate the main points to paraphrase what has been discussed. This verbal display allows for clarification and acknowledges receipt of the message.

If you are the employee, summarize the main points and consider steps you will take to correct the situation. If none come to mind or you are nervous and are having a hard time thinking clearly, state out loud the main point and ask if you can provide solution steps and strategies at a later date. You can request a follow- up meeting if appropriate, or indicate you will respond in writing via e-mail to provide the additional information.

1.8.12 If You Agree

If an apology is well deserved, offer it. Communicate clearly what will change or indicate when you will respond with specific strategies to address the concern. As a manager you will want to formulate a plan that addresses the issue and outlines responsibilities as well as time frames for corrective action. As an employee you will want specific steps you can both agree on that will serve to solve the problem. Clear communication and acceptance of responsibility demonstrates maturity and respect.

1.8.13 If You Disagree

If you disagree, focus on the points or issue and not personalities. Do not bring up past issues and keep the conversation focused on the task at hand. You may want to suggest, now that you better understand their position, a follow-up meeting to give you time to reflect on the issues. You may want to consider involving a third party, investigating to learn more about the issue, or taking time to cool off.

Do not respond in anger or frustration; instead, always display professionalism. If the criticism is unwarranted, consider that the information they have may be flawed or biased, and consider ways to learn more about the case to share with them, searching for a mutually beneficial solution.

If other strategies to resolve the conflict fail, consider contacting your human resources department to learn more about due process procedures at your workplace. Display respect and never say anything that would reflect poorly on yourself or your organization. Words spoken in anger can have a lasting impact and are impossible to retrieve or take back.

1.8.14 Learn from Experience

Every communication interaction provides an opportunity for learning if you choose to see it. Sometimes the lessons are situational and may not apply in future contexts. Other times the lessons learned may well serve you across your professional career. Taking notes for yourself to clarify your thoughts, much like a journal, serve to document and help you see the situation more clearly.

Recognize that some aspects of communication are intentional, and may communicate meaning, even if it is hard to understand. Also, know that some aspects of communication are unintentional, and may not imply meaning or design.

People make mistakes. They say things they should not have said. Emotions are revealed that are not always rational, and not always associated with the current context. A challenging morning at home can spill over into the work day and someone's bad mood may have nothing to do with you.

1.9 LET US SUM UP

To summarize, self-concept involves multiple dimensions and is expressed as internal monologue and social comparisons. Self-concept can be informed by engaging in dialogue with one or more people, and through reading or listening to spoken works; attending to what others communicate can add value to your self-concept. The interpersonal relationships are an important part of the work environment. We come to know one another gradually (layer by layer). The principle of self-disclosure is a normal part of communication. The conversations have universal aspects we can predict and improve. We can use the dynamics of the ritual of conversation to learn to prepare for employment interviews and evaluations, both common contexts of communication in the work environment. Employment interviews involve preparation, performance, and feedback. The conflict is unavoidable and can be opportunity for clarification, growth, and even reinforcement of the relationship. Try to distinguish between what you can control and what you cannot, and always choose professionalism.

1.10 FURTHER READING

- A Literary Devices article describes the literary devices of "interior monologue" and stream of conscious- ness. http://literarydevices.net/stream-of-consciousness/
- Read an informative article on self-concept and self-esteem by Arash Farzaneh. http://psychol-ogy.suite101.com/article.cfm/impact_of_selfconcept_and_selfesteem_on_life
- Advice from Monster.ca on Job Interviews https://www.monster.ca/career-advice/article/interview-per- formance-tips-canada
- Globe and Mail: Conflict-management skills now in high demand in the workplace https://www.theglobeand- mail.com/report-on-business/careers/career-advice/life-at-work/conflict-management-skills-now-in- high-demand-in-workplaces/article29722270/

1.11 ASSIGNMENTS

1. Define intrapersonal and interpersonal communication.
2. Give examples of interpersonal needs in the communication process.
3. Discuss social penetration theory and self-disclosure and its principles.
4. List five steps in any conversation.
5. Describe several strategies for resolving workplace conflict related to evaluations and criticism.

Unit 2: INTERCULTURAL AND INTERNATIONAL COMMUNICATION

2

Unit Structure

2.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVE

After studying this unit student should be able to:

- Intercultural Communication
- Common Cultural Characteristics
- Divergent Cultural Characteristics
- International Communication and the Global Marketplace
- Styles of Management

2.2 INTRODUCTION

Culture is a complicated word to define, as there are several ways that culture is used in business contexts. For the purposes of this chapter, culture is defined as the on-going negotiation of learned and patterned beliefs, attitudes, values, and behaviours. Unpacking the definition, we can see that culture shouldn't be conceptualized as stable and unchanging. Culture is "negotiated," and as you will learn later in this chapter, culture is dynamic, and cultural changes can be traced and analysed to better understand why our society is the way it is. The definition also points out that culture is learned, which accounts for the importance of socializing institutions like family, school, peers, and the media. Culture is patterned in that there are recognizable widespread similarities among people within a cultural group. There is also deviation from and resistance to those patterns by individuals and subgroups within a culture, which is why cultural patterns change over time. Last, the definition acknowledges that culture influences your beliefs about what is true and false, your attitudes including your likes and dislikes, your values regarding what is right and wrong, and your behaviours. It is from these cultural influences that your identities are formed.

2.3 INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

Source: pixabay.com

Culture involves beliefs, attitudes, values, and traditions that are shared by a group of people. Thus, you must consider more than the clothes you wear, the movies you watch, or the video games you play, all representations of environment, as culture. Culture also involves the psychological aspects of your expectations of the communication context. From the choice of words (message), to how you communicate (in person, or by e-mail), to how you acknowledge understanding with a nod or a glance (nonverbal feedback), to the internal and external interference, all aspects of communication are influenced by culture.

It is through intercultural communication that you come to create, understand, and transform culture and identity. Intercultural communication is communication between people with differing cultural identities. One reason you should study intercultural communication is to foster greater self-awareness (Martin & Nakayama, 2010). Your thought process regarding culture is often “other focused,” meaning that the culture of the other person or group is what stands out in your perception. However, the old adage “know thyself” is appropriate, as you become more aware of your own culture by better understanding other cultures and perspectives. Intercultural communication can allow you to step outside of your comfortable, usual frame of reference and see your culture through a different lens. Additionally, as you become more self-aware, you may also become more ethical communicators as you challenge your ethnocentrism, or your tendency to view your own culture as superior to other cultures.

Ethnocentrism makes you far less likely to be able to bridge the gap with others and often increases intolerance of difference. Business and industry are no longer regional, and in your career, you will necessarily cross borders, languages, and cultures. You will need tolerance, understanding, patience, and openness to difference. A skilled business communicator knows that the process of learning is never complete, and being open to new ideas is a key strategy for success.

Communication with yourself is called **intrapersonal** communication, which may also be intracultural, as you may only represent one culture. But most people belong to multiple groups, each with their own culture. Does a conversation with yourself ever involve competing goals, objectives, needs, wants, or values? How did you learn of those goals, or values? Through communication within and between individuals many cultures are represented. You may struggle with the demands of each group and their expectations and could consider this internal struggle intercultural conflict or simply intercultural communication.

Culture is part of the very fabric of our thought, and you cannot separate yourself from it, even as you leave home, defining yourself anew in work and achievements. Every business or organization has a culture, and within what may be considered a global culture, there are many subcultures or co-cultures. For example, consider the difference between the sales and accounting departments in a corporation. You can quickly see two distinct groups with their own symbols, vocabulary, and values. Within each group, there may also be smaller groups, and each member of each department comes from a distinct background that in itself influences behavior and interaction.

Intercultural communication is a fascinating area of study within business communication, and it is essential to your success. One idea to keep in mind as you examine this topic is the importance of considering multiple points of view. If you tend to dismiss ideas or views that are “unalike culturally,” you will find it challenging to learn about diverse cultures. If you cannot learn, how can you grow and be successful?

2.3.1 How to Understand Intercultural Communication

The American anthropologist Edward T. Hall is often cited as a pioneer in the field of intercultural communication (Chen & Starosta, 2000). Born in 1914, Hall spent much of his early adulthood in the multicultural setting of the American Southwest, where Native Americans, Spanish-speakers, and descendents of pioneers came together from diverse cultural perspectives. He then travelled the globe during World War II and later served as a U.S. State Department official. Where culture had once been viewed by anthropologists as a single, distinct way of living, Hall saw how the perspective of the individual influences interaction. By focus- ing on interactions rather than cultures as separate from individuals, he asked people to evaluate the many cultures they belong to or are influenced by, as well as those with whom they interacted. While his view makes the study of intercultural communication far more complex, it also brings a healthy dose of reality to the discussion. Hall is generally credited with eight contributions to the study of intercultural communication as follows:

1. Compare cultures. Focus on the interactions versus general observations of culture.
2. Shift to local perspective. Local level versus global perspective.
3. You don’t have to know everything to know something. Time, space, gestures, and gender roles can be studied, even if we lack a larger understanding of the entire culture.
4. There are rules we can learn. People create rules for themselves in each community that we can learn from, compare, and contrast.
5. Experience counts. Personal experience has value in addition to more comprehensive studies of inter- action and culture.
6. Perspectives can differ. Descriptive linguistics serves as a model to understand cultures, and the U.S. Foreign Service adopted it as a base for training.
7. Intercultural communication can be applied to international business. U.S. Foreign Service training yielded applications for trade and commerce and became a point of study for business majors.
8. It integrates the disciplines. Culture and communication are intertwined and bring together many academic disciplines (Chen & Starosta, 2000; Leeds-Hurwitz, 1990; McLean, 2005).

The American psychologist Gordon Allport explored how, when, and why people formulate or use stereotypes to characterize distinct groups. When you do not have enough contact with people or their cultures to understand them well, you tend to resort to stereotypes (Allport, 1958).

As Hall notes, experience has value. If you do not know a culture, you should consider learning more about it first-hand if possible. The people you interact with may not be representative of the culture as a whole, but that is not to say that what you learn lacks validity. Quite the contrary; Hall asserts that you can, in fact, learn something without understanding everything, and given the dynamic nature of communication and culture, who is to say that your lessons will not serve you well? Consider a study abroad experience if that is an option for you, or learn from a classmate who comes from a foreign country or an unfamiliar culture. Be open to new ideas and experiences, and start investigating. Many have gone before you, and today, unlike in generations past, much of the information is accessible. Your experiences will allow you to learn about another culture and yourself, and help you to avoid prejudice.

Prejudice involves a negative preconceived judgment or opinion that guides conduct or social behaviour (McLean., 2005). As an example, imagine two people walking into a room for a job interview.

You are tasked to interview both, and having read the previous section, you know that Allport (1958) rings true when he says we rely on stereotypes when encountering people or cultures with which we have had little contact. Will the candidates' dress, age, or gender influence your opinion of them? Will their race or ethnicity be a conscious or subconscious factor in your thinking process? Allport's work would indicate that those factors and more will make you likely to use stereotypes to guide your expectations of them and your subsequent interactions with them.

People who treat other with prejudice often make assumptions, or take preconceived ideas for granted without question, about the group or communities. As Allport illustrated, you often assume characteristics about groups with which you have little contact. Sometimes you also assume similarity, thinking that people are all basically similar. This denies cultural, racial, ethnic, socioeconomic, and many other valuable, insightful differences.

2.4 COMMON CULTURAL CHARACTERISTICS

Groups come together, form cultures, and grow apart across time. How do you become a member of a community, and how do you know when you are full member? What aspects of culture do people have in common and how do they relate to business communication? Researchers who have studied cultures around the world have identified certain characteristics that define a culture. These characteristics are expressed in different ways, but they tend to be present in nearly all cultures.

2.4.1 Rites of Initiation

Cultures tend to have a ritual for becoming a new member. A newcomer starts out as a nonentity, a stranger, an unaffiliated person with no connection or even possibly awareness of the community. Newcomers who stay around and learn about the culture become members. Most cultures have a rite of initiation that marks the passage of the individual within the community; some of these rituals may be so informal as to be hardly noticed (e.g., the first time a coworker asks you to join the group to eat lunch together), while others may be highly formalized (e.g., the ordination of clergy in a religion). The nonmember becomes a member, the new member becomes a full member, and individuals rise in terms of responsibility and influence.

Across the course of your life, you have no doubt passed several rites of initiation but may not have taken notice of them. Did you earn a driver's license, register to vote, or acquire the permission to purchase alcohol? In North American culture, these three common markers indicate the passing from a previous stage of life to a new one, with new rights and responsibilities.

Rites of initiation mark the transition of the role or status of the individual within the group. Your first day on the job may have been a challenge as you learned your way around the physical space, but the true challenge was to learn how the group members communicate with each other. If you graduate from college with a Master of Business Administration (MBA) degree, you will already have passed a series of tests, learned terms and theories, and possess a symbol of accomplishment in your diploma, but that only grants you the opportunity to look for a job—to seek access to a new culture.

In every business, there are groups, power struggles, and unspoken ways that members earn their way from the role of a "newbie" to that of a full member. The newbie may get the tough account, the office without a window, or the cubicle next to the bathroom, denoting low status. As the new member learns to navigate through the community—establishing a track record and being promoted—he passes the rite of initiation and acquires new rights and responsibilities.

Over time, the person comes to be an important part of the business, a "keeper of the flame." The "flame" may not exist in physical space or time, but it does exist in the minds of those members in the community who have invested time and effort in the business. It is not a flame to be trusted to a new person, as it can only be earned with time. Along the way, there may be personality conflicts and power struggles over resources and perceived scarcity (e.g., there is only one promotion and everyone wants it). All these challenges are to be expected in any culture.

2.4.2 Common History and Traditions

Think for a moment about the history of a business like Tim Hortons—what are your associations with Tim Horton, the relationship between hockey, coffee, and donuts? Traditions form as the organization grows and expands, and stories are told and retold to educate new members on how business should be conducted.

The history of every culture, of every corporation, influences the present. There are times when the phrase "we've tried that before" can become stumbling block for members of the organization as it grows and adapts to new market forces. There may be struggles between members who have weathered many storms and new members, who come armed with new educational perspectives, technological tools, or experiences that may contribute to growth.

2.4.3 Common Values and Principles

Cultures all hold values and principles that are commonly shared and communicated from older members to younger (or newer) ones. Time and length of commitment are associated with an awareness of these values and principles, so that new members, whether they are socialized at home, in school, or at work, may not have a thorough understanding of their importance.

2.4.4 Common Purpose and Sense of Mission

Cultures share a common sense of purpose and mission. Why are we here and whom do we serve? These are fundamental questions of the human condition that philosophers and theologians all over the world have pondered for centuries. In business, the answers to these questions often address purpose and mis- sion, and they can be found in mission and vision statements of almost every organization. Individual mem- bers will be expected to acknowledge and share the mission and vision, actualize them, or make them real through action. Without action, the mission and vision statements are simply an arrangement of words. As a guide to individual and group behavioural norms, they can serve as a powerful motivator and a call to action. For example, Boeing Canada's Purpose and Mission, and Aspiration statements are as follows:

Purpose and Mission: Connect, Protect, Explore and Inspire the World through Aerospace Innovation

Aspiration: Best in Aerospace and Enduring Global Industrial Champion

Based on these two statements, employees might expect a culture of innovation, quality, and safety as core to their work. What might those concepts mean in your everyday work if you were part of Boeing "culture?"

2.4.5 Common Symbols, Boundaries, Status, Language, and Rituals

Many people learn early in life what a stop sign represents, but not everyone knows what a ten-year service pin on a lapel, or a corner office with two windows means. Cultures have common symbols that mark them as a group; the knowledge of what a symbol stands for helps to reinforce who is a group member and who is not. Cultural symbols include dress, such as the Western business suit and tie. Symbols also include slogans or sayings, such as “Mr. Christie you make good cookies” or “Noooobody”. The slogan may serve a marketing purpose but may also embrace a mission or purpose within the culture. Family crests and clan tartan pat- terns serve as symbols of affiliation. Symbols can also be used to communicate rank and status within a group.

Space is another common cultural characteristic; it may be a nonverbal symbol that represents status and power. In most of the world’s cultures, a person occupying superior status is entitled to a physically elevated position—a throne, a dais, a podium from which to address subordinates. Subordinates may be expected to bow, curtsy, or lower their eyes as a sign of respect. In business, the corner office may offer the best view with the most space. Movement from a cubicle to a private office may also be a symbol of transition within an organization, involving increased responsibility as well as power. Parking spaces, the kind of vehicle you drive, and the transportation allowance you have may also serve to communicate symbolic meaning within an organization.

The office serves our discussion on the second point concerning boundaries. Would you sit on your boss’s desk or sit in his chair with your feet up on the desk in his presence? Most people indicate they would not, because doing so would communicate a lack of respect, violate normative space expectations, and invite retaliation. Still, subtle challenges to authority may arise in the workplace. A less than flattering photograph of the boss at the office party posted to the recreational room bulletin board communicates more than a lack of respect for authority. By placing the image anonymously in a public place, the prankster clearly communicates a challenge, even if it is a juvenile one. Movement from the cubicle to the broom closet may be the result for someone who is found responsible for the prank. Again, there are no words used to communicate meaning, only symbols, but those symbols represent significant issues.

Communities have their own vocabulary and way in which they communicate. Consider the person who uses a sewing machine to create a dress and the accountant behind the desk; both are professionals and both have specialized jargon used in their field. If they were to change places, the lack of skills would pre- sent an obstacle, but the lack of understanding of terms, how they are used, and what they mean would also severely limit their effectiveness. Those terms and how they are used are learned over time and through interaction. While a textbook can help, it cannot demonstrate use in live interactions. Cultures are dynamic systems that reflect the communication process itself.

Cultures celebrate heroes, denigrate villains, and have specific ways of completing jobs and tasks. In business and industry, the emphasis may be on effectiveness and efficiency, but the practice can often be "because that is the way we have always done it." Rituals serve to guide our performance and behaviour and may be limited to small groups or celebrated across the entire company.

Rituals can serve to bind a group together, or to constrain it. Institutions tend to formalize processes and then have a hard time adapting to new circumstances. While the core values or mission statement may hold true, the method of doing things that worked in the past may not be as successful as it once was. Adaptation and change can be difficult for individuals and companies, and yet all communities, cultures, and communication contexts are dynamic, or always changing. As much as we might like things to stay the same, they will always change—and we will change with (and be changed by) them.

2.5 DIVERGENT CULTURAL CHARACTERISTICS

We are not created equal. Cultures reflect this inequality, this diversity, and the divergent range of values, symbols, and meanings across communities. People have viewpoints, and they are shaped by their interactions with communities. Let's examine several points of divergence across cultures.

Source: Pixabay.com

2.5.1 Individualistic versus Collectivist Cultures

The Dutch researcher Geert Hofstede explored the concepts of individualism and collectivism across diverse cultures (Hofstede, 2005). He found that in individualistic cultures like the United States and Canada, people value individual freedom and personal independence, and perceive their world primarily from their own viewpoint. They perceive themselves as empowered individuals, capable of making their own decisions, and able to make an impact on their own lives.

Cultural viewpoint is not an either/or dichotomy, but rather a continuum or range. You may belong to some communities that express individualistic cultural values, while others place the focus on a collective view- point. Collectivist cultures (Hofstede, 1982), including many in Asia and South America, focus on the needs of the nation, community, family, or group of workers. Ownership and private property is one way to examine this difference. In some cultures, property is almost exclusively private, while others tend toward community ownership. The collectively owned resource returns benefits to the community. Water, for example, has long been viewed as a community resource, much like air, but that has been changing as business and organizations have purchased water rights and gained control over resources. How does someone raised in a culture that emphasizes the community interact with someone raised in a primarily individualistic culture? How could tensions be expressed and how might interactions be influenced by this point of divergence? In the following sections these viewpoints will be examined.

2.5.2 Explicit-Rule Cultures versus Implicit-Rule Cultures

Do you know the rules of your business or organization? Did you learn them from an employee manual or by observing the conduct of others? Your response may include both options, but not all cultures communicate rules in the same way. In an explicit-rule culture, where rules are clearly communicated so that everyone is aware of them, the guidelines and agenda for a meeting are announced prior to the gathering. In an implicit- rule culture, where rules are often understood and communicated nonverbally, there may be no agenda.

Everyone knows why they are gathered and what role each member plays, even though the expectations may not be clearly stated. Power, status, and behavioural expectations may all be understood, and to the person from outside this culture, it may prove a challenge to understand the rules of the context.

Outsiders often communicate their “otherness” by not knowing where to stand, when to sit, or how to initiate a conversation if the rules are not clearly stated. While it may help to know that implicit-rule cultures are often more tolerant of deviation from the understood rules, the newcomer will be wise to learn by observing quietly—and to do as much research ahead of the event as possible.

2.5.3 Uncertainty-Accepting Cultures versus Uncertainty-Rejecting Cultures

When people meet each other for the first time, they often use what they have previously learned to under- stand their current context. People also do this to reduce uncertainty. Some cultures, such as the United States and Britain, are highly tolerant of uncertainty, while others go to great lengths to reduce the element of surprise. Cultures in the Arab world, for example, are high in uncertainty avoidance; they tend to be resistant to change and reluctant to take risks. Whereas a U.S. business negotiator might enthusiastically agree to try a new procedure, the

Egyptian counterpart would likely refuse to get involved until all the details are worked out.

Charles Berger and Richard Calabrese (1975) developed Uncertainty Reduction theory to examine this dynamic aspect of communication. Here are seven axioms of uncertainty:

1. There is a high level of uncertainty at first. As we get to know one another, our verbal communication increases and our uncertainty begins to decrease.
2. Following verbal communication, nonverbal communication increases, uncertainty continues to decrease, and more nonverbal displays of affiliation, like nodding one's head to indicate agreement, will start to be expressed.
3. When experiencing high levels of uncertainty, we tend to increase our information-seeking behaviour, perhaps asking questions to gain more insight. As our understanding increases, uncertainty decreases, as does the information-seeking behaviour.
4. When experiencing high levels of uncertainty, the communication interaction is not as personal or intimate. As uncertainty is reduced, intimacy increases.
5. When experiencing high levels of uncertainty, communication will feature more reciprocity, or displays of respect. As uncertainty decreases, reciprocity may diminish.
6. Differences between people increase uncertainty, while similarities decrease it.
7. Higher levels of uncertainty are associated with a decrease in the indication of liking the other person, while reductions in uncertainty are associated with liking the other person more.

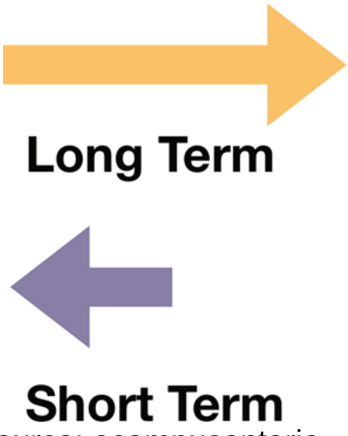
2.5.4 Time Orientation

Edward T. Hall and Mildred Reed Hall (1987) state that monochronic time-oriented cultures consider one thing at a time, whereas polychronic time-oriented cultures schedule many things at one time, and time is considered in a more fluid sense. In monochromatic time, interruptions are to be avoided, and everything has its own specific time. Even the multitasker from a monochromatic culture will, for example, recognize the value of work first before play or personal time. Canada, Germany, and Switzerland are often noted as countries that value a monochromatic time orientation.

Polychromatic time looks a little more complicated, with business and family mixing with dinner and dancing. Greece, Italy, Chile, and Saudi Arabia are countries where one can observe this perception of time; business meetings may be scheduled at a fixed time, but when they actually begin may be another story. Also note that the dinner invitation for 8 p.m. may in reality be more like 9 p.m. If you were to show up on time, you might be the first person to arrive and find that the hosts are not quite ready to receive you.

When in doubt, always ask before the event; many people from polychromatic cultures will be used to foreigner’s tendency to be punctual, even compulsive, about respecting established times for events. The skilled business communicator is aware of this difference and takes steps to anticipate it. The value of time in different cultures is expressed in many ways, and your understanding can help you communicate more effectively.

2.5.5 Short-Term versus Long-Term Orientation



Source: ecampusontario

Do you want your reward right now or can you dedicate yourself to a long-term goal? You may work in a culture whose people value immediate results and grow impatient when those results do not materialize. Geert Hofstede discusses this relationship of time orientation to a culture as a “time horizon,” and it under- scores the perspective of the individual within a cultural context. Many countries in Asia, influenced by the teachings of Confucius, value a long-term orientation, whereas other countries, including Canada, have a more short-term approach to life and results. Indigenous peoples are known for holding a long-term orientation driven by values of deep, long-term reflection and community consultation.

If you work within a culture that has a short-term orientation, you may need to place greater emphasis on reciprocation of greetings, gifts, and rewards. For example, if you send a thank-you note the morning after being treated to a business dinner, your host will appreciate your promptness. While there may be a respect for tradition, there is also an emphasis on personal representation and honour, a reflection of identity and integrity. Personal stability and consistency are also valued in a short-term oriented culture, contributing to an overall sense of predictability and familiarity.

Long-term orientation is often marked by persistence, thrift and frugality, and an order to relationships based on age and status. A sense of shame for the family and community is also observed across generations. What an individual does reflects on the family and is carried by immediate and extended family members.

2.5.6 Masculine versus Feminine Orientation

Hofstede (2009) describes the masculine-feminine dichotomy not in terms of whether men or women hold the power in a given culture, but rather the extent to which that culture values certain traits that may be considered masculine or feminine. Thus, “the assertive pole has been called ‘masculine’ and the modest, car- ing pole ‘feminine.’ The women in feminine countries have the same modest, caring values as the men; in the masculine countries they are somewhat assertive and competitive, but not as much as the men, so that these countries show a gap between men’s values and women’s values” (Hofstede, 2009).

You can observe this difference in where people gather, how they interact, and how they dress. You can see it during business negotiations, where it may make an important difference in the success of the organizations involved. Cultural expectations precede the interaction, so someone who doesn’t match those expectations may experience tension. Business in Canada still has a masculine orientation—assertiveness and competition are highly valued. In other cultures, such as Sweden, business values are more attuned to modesty (lack of self-promotion) and taking care of society’s underserved members. This range of difference is one aspect of intercultural communication that requires significant attention when the business communicator enters a new environment.

2.5.7 Direct versus Indirect

In Canada, business correspondence is expected to be short and to the point. “What can I do for you?” is a common question when a business person receives a call from a stranger; it is an accepted way of asking the caller to state his or her business. In some cultures it is quite appropriate to make direct personal observation, such as “You’ve changed your hairstyle,” while for others it may be observed, but never spoken of in polite company. In indirect cultures, such as those in Latin America, business conversations may start with discussions of the weather, or family, or topics other than business as the partners gain a sense of each other, long before the topic of business is raised. Again, the skilled business communicator researches the new environment before entering it, as a social faux pas, or error, can have a significant impact.

2.5.8 Materialism versus Relationships

Members of a materialistic culture place emphasis on external goods and services as a representation of self, power, and social rank. If you consider the plate of food before you, and consider the labour required to harvest the grain, butcher the animal, and cook the meal, you are focusing more on the relationships involved with its production than the foods themselves. Caviar may be a luxury, and it may communicate your ability to acquire and offer a delicacy, but it also represents an effort. Cultures differ in how they view material objects and their relationship to them, and some value people and relationships more than the objects themselves. The United States and Japan are often noted as materialistic cultures, while many Scandinavian nations feature cultures that place more emphasis on relationships.

2.5.9 Low-Power versus High-Power Distance

In low-power distance cultures, according to Hofstede (2009), people relate to one another more as equals and less as a reflection of dominant or subordinate roles, regardless of their actual formal roles as employee and manager, for example. In a high-power distance culture, you would probably be much less likely to chal- lenge the decision, to provide an alternative, or to give input. If you are working with people from a high- power distance culture, you may need to take extra care to elicit feedback and involve them in the discussion because their cultural framework may preclude their participation. They may have learned that less powerful people must accept decisions without comment, even if they have a concern or know there is a significant problem. Unless you are sensitive to cultural orientation and power distance, you may lose valuable information.

2.6 INTERNATIONAL COMMUNICATION AND THE GLOBAL MARKETPLACE

In this section, we'll examine intercultural communication from the standpoint of international communication. International communication can be defined as communication between nations, but we recognize that nations do not exist independent of people. International communication is typically government to government or, more accurately, governmental representatives to governmental representatives. It often involves topics and issues that relate to the nations as entities, broad issues of trade, and conflict resolution. People use political, legal, and economic systems to guide and regulate behaviour, and diverse cultural view- points necessarily give rise to many variations. Ethical systems also guide behaviour, but often in less formal, institutional ways. Together these areas form much of the basis of international communication, and war- rant closer examination as seen in Figure 10.1 below.

2.6.1 Political Systems

You may be familiar with democracy, or rule by the people; and theocracy, or rule of God by his or her designates; but the world presents a diverse range of how people are governed. It is also important to note, as we examine political systems, that they are created, maintained, and changed by people. Just as people change over time, so do all systems that humans create. A political climate that was once closed to market forces, including direct and indirect investment, may change over time.

Political systems are often framed in terms of how people are governed, and the extent to which they may participate. Democracy is one form of government that promotes the involvement of the individual, but even here we can observe stark differences. In Canada, people are encouraged to vote, but it is not mandatory. When voter turn out is low, voting minorities might have greater influence on the larger political systems. In Chile, voting is mandatory, so that all individuals are expected to participate, with adverse consequences if they do not. This doesn't mean there are not still voting minorities or groups with disproportionate levels of influence and power, but it does underscore cultural values and their many representations.

Centralized rule of the people also comes in many forms. In a dictatorship, the dictator establishes and enforces the rules with few checks and balances, if any. In a totalitarian system, one party makes the rules. The Communist states of the twentieth century (although egalitarian in theory) were ruled in practice by a small central committee. In a theocracy, one religion makes the rules based on their primary documents or interpretation of them, and religious leaders hold positions of political power. In each case, political power is centralized to a small group over the many.

A third type of political system is anarchy, in which there is no government. A few places in the world, notably Somalia, may be said to exist in a state of anarchy. But even in a state of anarchy, the lack of a central government means that local warlords, elders, and others exercise a certain amount of political, military, and economic power. The lack of an established governing system itself creates the need for informal power structures that regulate behaviour and conduct, set and promote ideals, and engage in commerce and trade, even if that engagement involves nonstandard strategies such as the appropriation of ships via piracy. In the absence of appointed or elected leaders, emergent leaders will rise as people attempt to meet their basic needs.

2.6.2 Legal Systems

Legal systems also vary across the planet and come in many forms. Some legal systems promote the rule of law while others promote the rule of culture, including customs, traditions, and religions. The two most common systems are civil and common law. In civil law the rules are spelled out in detail, and judges are responsible for applying the law to the given case. In common law, the judge interprets the law and considers the concept of precedent, or previous decisions. Common law naturally adapts to changes in technology and modern contexts as precedents accumulate, while civil law requires new rules to be written out to reflect the new context even as the context transforms and changes. Civil law is more predictable and is practised in the majority of countries, while common law involves more interpretation that can produce conflict with multiple views on the application of the law in question. The third type of law draws its rules from a theological base rooted in religion. This system presents unique challenges to the outsider, and warrants thorough research.

2.6.3 Economic Systems

Economic systems vary in similar ways across cultures, and again reflect the norms and customs of people. Economies are often described on the relationship between people and their government. An economy with a high degree of government intervention may prove challenging for both internal and external businesses. An economy with relatively little government oversight may be said to reflect more of the market(s) and to be less restricted. Along these same lines, government may perceive its role as a representative of the common good, to protect individual consumers, and to prevent fraud and exploitation.

This continuum or range, from high to low degrees of government involvement, reflects the concept of government itself. A government may be designed to give everyone access to the market, with little supervision, in the hope that people will regulate transactions based on their own needs, wants, and desires; in essence, their own self-interest. If everyone operates in one’s self-interest and word gets out that one business produces a product that fails to work as advertised, it is often believed that the market will naturally gravitate away from this faulty product to a competing product that works properly. Individual consumers, however, may have a hard time knowing which product to have faith in and may look to government to provide that measure of safety.

Government certification of food, for example, attempts to reduce disease. Meat from unknown sources would lack the seal of certification, alerting the consumer to evaluate the product closely or choose another product. From meat to financial products, we can see both the dangers and positive attributes of intervention and can also acknowledge that its application may be less than consistent. Some cultures that value the community may naturally look to their government for leadership in economic areas, while those that rep- resent an individualistic tendency may take a more “hands off” approach.

2.6.4 Ethical Systems

Ethical systems, unlike political, legal, and economic systems, are generally not formally institutionalized. This does not imply, however, that they are less influential in interactions, trade, and commerce. Ethics refers to a set of norms and principles that relate to individual and group behaviour, including businesses and organizations. They may be explicit, in the form of an organization’s code of conduct; or may reflect cultural values in law. What is legal and what is ethical are at times quite distinct.

Some cultures have systems of respect and honor that require tribute and compensation for service, while others may view payment as a form of bribe. It may be legal in one country to make a donation or support a public official in order to gain influence over a decision, but it may be unethical. In some countries, it may be both illegal and unethical. Given the complexity of human values and their expression across behaviours, it is wise to research the legal and ethi- cal norms of the place or community where you want to do business.

2.6.5 Global Village

International trade has advantages and disadvantages, again based on your viewpoint and cultural reference. If you come from a traditional culture, with strong gender norms and codes of conduct, you may not appreciate the importation of some Western television programs that promote what you consider to be content that contradicts your cultural values. You may also take the viewpoint from a basic perspective and assert that basic goods and services that can only be obtained through trade pose a security risk. If you cannot obtain the product or service, it may put you, your business, or your community at risk.

Furthermore, “just in time” delivery methods may produce shortages when the systems break down due to weather, transportation delays, or conflict. People come to know each other through interactions (and transactions are fundamental to global trade), but cultural viewpoints may come into conflict. Some cultures may want a traditional framework to continue and will promote their traditional cultural values and norms at the expense of innovation and trade. Other cultures may come to embrace diverse cultures and trade, only to find that they have welcomed some who wish to do harm. In a modern world, transactions have a cultural dynamic that cannot be ignored.

Intercultural communication and business have been related since the first exchange of value. People, even from the same community, had to arrive at a common understanding of value. Symbols, gestures, and even language reflect these values. Attention to this central concept will enable the skilled business communicator to look beyond their own viewpoint.

It was once the privilege of the wealthy to travel, and the merchant or explorer knew firsthand what many could only read about. Now we can take virtual tours of locations we may never travel to, and as the cost of travel decreases, we can increasingly see the world for ourselves. As global trade has developed, and time to market has decreased, the world has effectively grown smaller. While the size has not changed, our ability to navigate has been dramatically decreased. Time and distance are no longer the obstacles they once were.

The Canadian philosopher Marshall McLuhan, a pioneer in the field of communication, predicted what we now know as the “global village.” The global village is characterized by information and transportation technologies that reduce the time and space required to interact (McLuhan, M., 1964).

2.7 STYLES OF MANAGEMENT

People and their relationships to dominant and subordinate roles are a reflection of culture and cultural viewpoint. They are communicated through experience and create expectations for how and when man- agers interact with employees. The three most commonly discussed management theories are often called X, Y, and Z. As seen in Figure 10.2 below, the three theories and their influence on intercultural communication will be described.

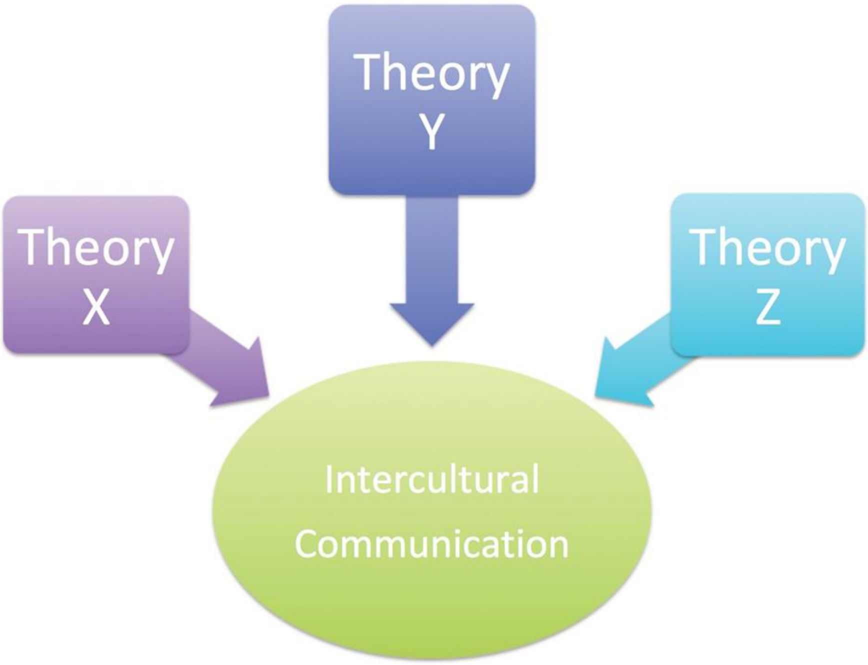


Figure 10.2 Intercultural communication and theories X, Y, and Z.

2.7.1 Theory X

In an influential book titled The Human Side of Enterprise, M. I. T. management professor Douglas McGregor described two contrasting perceptions on how and why people work, formulating Theory X and Theory Y; they are both based on Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Maslow, A., 1954; Maslow, A., 1970). According to this model, people are concerned first with physical needs (e.g., food, shelter) and second with safety. At the third level, people seek love, acceptance, and intimacy. Self-esteem, achievement, and respect are the fourth level. Finally, the fifth level embodies self-actualization.

Theory X asserts that workers are motivated by their basic (low-level) needs and have a general disposition against labour. In this viewpoint, workers are considered lazy and predicted to avoid work if they can, giving rise to the perceived need for constant, direct supervision.

A Theory X manager may be described as authoritarian or autocratic, and does not seek input or feedback from employees. He or she may use control and incentive programs to provide punishment and reward.

In **Theory Y** employees are described as ambitious, self-directed, and capable of self-motivation.

A Theory Y manager determines that a job well done is reward in and of itself, and the employee may be a valuable source of feedback. Collaboration is viewed as normal, and the worker may need little supervision.

Theory Z takes the view that workers are seen as having a high need for reinforcement, where belonging is emphasized.

In Theory Z management, workers are trusted to do their jobs with excellence and supervisors are trusted to support them (Massie & Douglas, 1992).

Each of these theories of management features a viewpoint with assumptions about people and why they do what they do. While each has been the subject of debate, and variations on each have been introduced across organizational communication and business, they serve as a foundation for understanding manage- ment in an intercultural context.

Management Theories X, Y, and Z are examples of distinct and divergent views on worker motivation, need for supervision, and the possibility of collaboration.

2.8 LET US SUM UP

An intercultural communication is an aspect of all communicative interactions, and attention to your perspective is key to your effectiveness. Ethnocentrism is a major obstacle to intercultural communication. An ethnocentric tendencies, stereotyping, and assumptions of similarity can make it difficult to learn about cultural differences. All cultures have characteristics such as initiations, traditions, history, values and principles, purpose, symbols, and boundaries. The cultures have distinct orientations when it comes to rules, uncertainty, time and time horizon, masculinity, directness, materialism, and power distance. After learning more about cultural differences in business contexts, what advice do you have for Abe, where her country of origin culture and customs are different from the new Canadian customs she encounters? Should she assimilate and just shake hands with male colleagues? If it's important for her to maintain some of her customs, how might she communicate about that with her new colleagues?

2.9 FURTHER READING

- Global Affairs Canada, Cultural Information: Answers to your intercultural questions from a Canadian and a local point of view https://www.international.gc.ca/cil-cai/country_insights-apercus_pays/ci-ic_ca.aspx?lang=eng
- Cultures at Work: Intercultural Communication in the Canadian Workplace by Ana Maria Fantino
- (2006) http://volunteeralberta.ab.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Cultures-at-Work-Ana-Maria-Fan- tino-2006.pdf
- Conestoga College: Welcome to Intercultural Communication https://www.conestogac.on.ca/intercultural- communication/

2.10 ASSIGNMENTS

1. Define Culture
2. Define intercultural communication
3. Discuss the effects of ethnocentrism.
4. List several examples of common cultural characteristics.
5. Describe international communication and the global marketplace
6. Give examples of various styles of management, including Theory X, Y, and Z.

Unit 3: GROUP COMMUNICATION, TEAMWORK, AND LEADERSHIP

3

Unit Structure

3.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVE

After studying this unit student should be able to:

- What Is a Group?
- Group Life Cycles and Member Roles
- Group Problem Solving
- Business and Professional Meetings

3.2 INTRODUCTION

Interpersonal communication occurs between two people, but group communication may involve two or more individuals. Groups are a primary context for interaction within the business community. Groups overlap and may share common goals, but they may also engage in conflict. Within a group, individuals may behave in distinct ways, use unique or specialized terms, or display symbols that have meaning to that group. Those same terms or symbols may be confusing, meaningless, or even unacceptable to another group. An individual may belong to multiple groups, adapting their communication patterns to meet group normative expectations.

3.3 WHAT IS A GROUP?

Most humans form self-identities through their communication with others, and much of that interaction occurs in a group context. A group may be defined as three or more individuals who affiliate, interact, or cooperate in a familial, social, or work context. Group communication may be defined as the exchange of information with those who are alike culturally, linguistically, and/or geographically. Group members may be known by their symbols, such as patches and insignia on a military uniform. They may be known by their use of specialized language or jargon. Group members may also be known by their proximity, as in gated communities. Regardless of how the group defines itself, and regardless of the extent to which its borders are porous or permeable, a group recognizes itself as a group. Humans naturally make groups a part of their context or environment.

3.3.1 Types of Groups in the Workplace

As a skilled business communicator, learning more about groups, group dynamics, management, and leadership will serve you well. Mergers, forced sales, downsizing, and entering new markets all call upon individuals within a business or organization to become members of groups. Groups may be defined by function.

They can also be defined, from a developmental viewpoint, by relationships within the group. Groups can be discussed in terms of their relationship to the individual and the degree to which they meet interpersonal needs. Some groups may be assembled at work to solve problems, and once the challenge has been resolved, they may dissolve into previous or yet to be determined groups. These temporary problem-solving groups are called functional groups and may be familiar to you.

In an academic or professional context, to be a member of a discipline is to adhere to a similar framework to for viewing the world. Disciplines involve a common set of theories that explain the world, terms to explain those theories, and have an applied purpose related to increasing knowledge. In business, you may have col- leagues that are marketing experts that are members of the marketing department and perceive their tasks differently from a member of the sales staff or someone in accounting. You may work in the mailroom, and the mailroom staff is a group in itself, both distinct from and interconnected with the larger organization.

Relationships are part of any group, and can be described in terms of status, power, control, as well as role, function, or viewpoint. Relationships are formed through communication interaction across time, and often share a common history, values, and beliefs about the world around us.

Through conversations and a shared sense that you and your coworkers belong together, you meet many of your basic human needs, such as the need to feel included, the need for affection, and the need for control (Schutz, 1966). In a work context, "affection" may sound odd, but we all experience affection at work in the form of friendly comments like "good morning," "have a nice weekend," and "good job!" Our professional lives also fulfill more than just our basic needs (i.e., air, food, and water, as well as safety). While your work group may be gathered together with common goals, such as to deliver the mail in a timely fashion to the corresponding departments and individuals, your daily interactions may well go beyond this functional perspective.

3.3.2 Primary and Secondary Groups

There are fundamentally two types of groups, primary and secondary. The hierarchy denotes the degree to which the group(s) meet your interpersonal needs. Primary groups meet most, if not all, of one's needs.

Groups that meet some, but not all, needs are called secondary groups. Secondary groups often include work groups, where the goal is to complete a task or solve a problem. Secondary groups may meet your need for professional acceptance and celebrate your success, but they may not meet your need for under- standing and sharing on a personal level.

In terms of problem solving, work groups can accomplish more than individuals can. People, each of whom have specialized skills, talents, experience, or education come together in new combinations with new chal- lenges, find new perspectives to create unique approaches that they themselves would not have formulated alone.

3.3.3 If Two's Company and Three's a Crowd, What Is a Group?

This old cliché refers to the human tendency to form pairs. Pairing is the most basic form of relationship formation; it applies to childhood best friends, college roommates, romantic couples, business partners, and many other dyads (two-person relationships). A group, by definition, includes at least three people. We can categorize groups in terms of their size and complexity.

The larger the group grows, the more likely it is to subdivide. Analysis of these smaller, or microgroups, is increasingly a point of study as the Internet allows individuals to join people of similar mind or habit to share virtually anything across time and distance. A microgroup is a small, independent group that has a link, affiliation, or association with a larger group. With each additional group member the number of possible interactions increases (Harris & Sherblom, 1999; McLean,, 2003).

Small groups normally contain between three and eight people. One person may involve intrapersonal communication, while two may constitute interpersonal communication, and both may be present within a group communication context.

Group norms are customs, standards, and behavioural expectations that emerge as a group forms. If you post an update every day on your Facebook page and your friends stop by to post on your wall and comment, not posting for a week will violate a group norm. They will wonder if you are sick or in the hospital where you have no access to a computer to keep them updated. If, however, you only post once a week, the group will come to naturally expect your customary post. Norms involve expectations that are self and group imposed and that often arise as groups form and develop.

If there are more than eight members, it becomes a challenge to have equal participation, where everyone has a chance to speak, listen, and respond. Some will dominate, others will recede, and smaller groups will form. Finding a natural balance within a group can also be a challenge. Small groups need to have enough members to generate a rich and stimulating exchange of ideas, information, and interaction, but not so many people that what each brings cannot be shared (Galanes, Adams, & Brilhart, 2000).

3.4 GROUP LIFE CYCLES AND MEMBER ROLES

Groups are dynamic systems in constant change. Groups grow together and eventually come apart. People join groups and others leave. This dynamic changes and transforms the very nature of the group. Those who are in leadership positions may ascend or descend the leadership hierarchy as the needs of the group, and other circumstances, change over time.

Group socialization involves how the group members interact with one another and form relationships.

3.4.1 Group Life Cycle Patterns

In order to better understand group development and its life cycle, many researchers have described the universal stages and phases of groups. While there are modern interpretations of these stages, most draw from the model proposed by Bruce Tuckman (1965). This model, shown in Figure 11.1, specifies the usual order of the phases of group development as a cycle, and allows us to predict several stages we can anticipate as we join a new group.

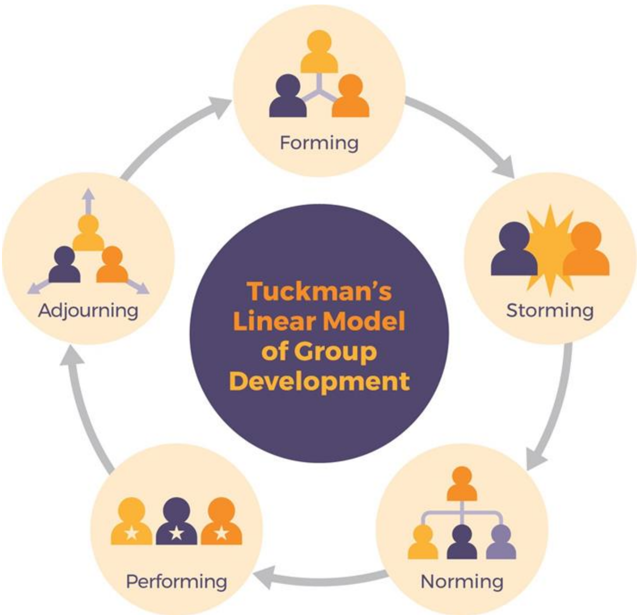


Figure 11.1 Tuckman's Linear Model of group development.

Tuckman (1965) describes the five stages as follows:

- **Forming:** Members come together, learn about each other, and determine the purpose of the group.
- **Storming:** Members engage in more direct communication and get to know each other. Conflicts between group members will often arise during this stage.
- **Norming:** Members establish spoken or unspoken rules about how they communicate and work. Status, rank, and roles in the group are established.
- **Performing:** Members fulfill their purpose and reach their goal.
- **Adjourning:** Members leave the group

Tuckman begins with the **forming stage** as the initiation of group formation. This stage is also called the **orientation stage** because individual group members come to know each other. Group members, who are new to each other and can't predict each other's behaviour, can be expected to experience the stress of uncertainty. Uncertainty theory states that humans choose to know more about others with whom they have interactions in order to reduce or resolve the anxiety associated with the unknown (Berger & Calabrese, 1975; Berger, 1986; Gudykunst, 1995). The more we know about others and become accustomed to how they communicate, the better we can predict how they will interact with us in future contexts. If you learn that Monday mornings are never a good time for your supervisor, you quickly learn to schedule meetings later in the week.

If you don't know someone very well, it is easy to offend. Each group member brings to the group a set of experiences, combined with education and a self-concept. You won't be able to read this information on a nametag, but instead you will only come to know it through time and interaction. Since the possibility of overlapping and competing viewpoints and perspectives exists, the group will experience a storming stage, a time of struggles as the members themselves sort out their differences. There may be more than one way to solve the problem or task at hand, and some group members may prefer one strategy over another. Some members of the group may be more senior to the organization, and members may treat them differently.

Some group members may be at a similar level to you but may be uncertain about everyone's talents, skills, roles, and self-perceptions. The wise business communicator will anticipate the storming stage and help facilitate opportunities for the members to resolve uncertainty before the group's work commences. There may be challenges for leadership, and conflicting viewpoints. A clear definition of the purpose and mission of the group can help the members focus their energies. Interaction prior to the first meeting can help reduce uncertainty.

The norming stage is where the group establishes norms, or informal rules, for behaviour and interaction. Who speaks first? Who takes notes? Who is creative, who is visual, and who is detail-oriented? Sometimes job titles and functions speak for themselves, but human beings are complex. We are not simply a list of job functions, and in the dynamic marketplace of today's business environment you will often find that people have talents and skills well beyond their "official" role or task. Drawing on these strengths can make the group more effective.

The **norming stage** is marked by less division and more collaboration. The level of anxiety associated with interaction is generally reduced, making for a more positive work climate that promotes listening. When people feel less threatened and their needs are met, they are more likely to focus their complete attention on the purpose of the group. Tensions are reduced when the normative expectations are known, and the degree to which a manager can describe these at the outset can reduce the amount of time the group remains in uncertainty. Group members generally express more satisfaction with clear expectations and are more inclined to participate.

Ultimately, the purpose of a work group is performance, and the preceding stages lead to the **performing stage**, in which the group accomplishes its mandate, fulfills its purpose, and reaches its goals. To facilitate performance, group members can't skip the initiation of getting to know each other or the sorting out of roles and norms, but they can try to focus on performance with clear expectations from the moment the group is formed. Productivity is often how we measure success in business and industry, and the group has to produce. Outcome assessments may have been built into the system from the beginning to serve as a benchmark for success. If the goal is to create a community where competition pushes each member to perform, individual highlights may serve your needs, but if you want a group to solve a problem or address a challenge, you have to promote group cohesion.

In the **adjourning stage**, members leave the group. The group may cease to exist or it may be transformed with new members and a new set of goals. Like life, the group process is normal, and mixed emotions are to be expected. A wise manager anticipates this stage and facilitates the separation with skill and ease. We often close this process with a ritual marking its passing. The ritual may be as formal as an award or as informal as a “thank you” or a verbal acknowledgement of a job well done. It is important not to forget that groups can reach the adjourning stage without having achieved success. Some businesses go bankrupt, some departments are closed, and some individuals lose their positions after a group fails to perform.

Adjournment can come suddenly and unexpectedly, or gradually and piece by piece. Either way, a skilled business communicator will be prepared and recognize it as part of the classic group life cycle.

3.4.2 Life Cycle of Member Roles

Just as groups go through a life cycle when they form and eventually adjourn, so the group members fulfil different roles during this life cycle. These roles, proposed by Richard Moreland and John Levine (1982), are summarized in Table 11.1.

Table 11.1 Life Cycle of Member Roles

Potential Member	Curiosity and interest
New Member	Joined the group but still an outsider and unknown
Full Member	Knows the “rules” and is looked to for leadership
Divergent Member	Focuses on differences
Marginal Member	No longer involved
Ex-Member	No longer considered a member

Using Abe as an example, the following is a group member life cycle description:

Stage 1: Abe graduated from her MBA program and is working as a financial analyst. She has decided that she would like to know more about the Chartered Financial Analyst (CFA) designation. She has contacted the CFA Institute and reached out to members in her company to discuss what the process is like to become a CFA.

At this stage, Abe is a potential member. She is not a member of the institute yet.

Stage 2: Abe reviews the requirements on becoming a CFA member, and registers as a CFA candidate. She writes the exams and is currently completing her work experience portion of the requirements. She is not yet a full member, but is enrolled in the institute while she completes her work experience. She attends events with her local CFA society to network, and learn. She finds it overwhelming as she is unfamiliar with the rules, information, and members of the society.

As a new group member, your level of acceptance will increase as you begin learning the groups' rules, spoken and unspoken (Fisher, 1970). You will gradually move from the potential member role to the role of new group member as you learn to fit into the group.

Stage 3: Over time Abe completes her work experience requirements, and becomes a full member. As she completes projects, and works with others she learns more about the profession and membership responsibilities, she is no longer considered a "newbie". Full members enjoy knowing the rules and customs, and can even create new rules. New group members look to full members for leadership and guidance.

Stages 4 & 5: Abe sometimes disagrees with other CFA members at her organization or in her society on different approaches to projects. As there are many ways to approach a project, there are bound to be differences in perspectives. Expressing different views can cause conflict and may even interfere with communication. When this type of tension arises, divergent group members pull back, contribute less, and start to see themselves as separate from the group. Divergent group members have less eye contact, seek out each other's opinion less frequently, and listen defensively. In the beginning of the process, you felt a sense of belonging, but now you don't. Marginal group members start to look outside the group for their interpersonal needs.

Stage 6: Abe works alongside another CFA member named Sue who seems to always have a different perspective than Abe on how to create reports for management. Abe likes to use technology to make the job go faster, but Sue is uncomfortable with technology and would rather do it all by hand. After several years of working together, Sue has decided to retire from her job and from the CFA Institute to pursue other interests.

Some members at this stage can overcome differences and stay in the group for years; or move on to other groups. As a skilled business communicator, you will recognize the signs of divergence, just as you have anticipated the storming stage, and do your best to facilitate success.

3.4.3 Positive and Negative Member Roles

Source: pixabay.com

If someone in your group always makes everyone laugh, that can be a distinct asset when the news is less than positive. At times when you have to get work done, however, the class clown may become a distraction. Notions of positive and negative will often depend on the context when discussing groups. Table 11.2 “Positive Roles” and Table 11.3 “Negative Roles” list both positive and negative roles people sometimes play in a group setting (Beene & Sheets, 1948; McLean, 2005).

Table 11.2 Positive Roles.

Initiator-Coordinator	Suggests new ideas of new ways of looking at the problem
Elaborator	Builds on ideas and provides examples
Coordinator	Brings ideas, information, and suggestions together
Evaluator-Critic	Evaluates ideas and provides constructive criticism
Recorder	Records ideas, examples, suggestions, and critiques

Now that you’ve reviewed positive and negative group member roles, you may examine another perspective. While some personality traits and behaviours may negatively influence groups, some traits can be positive or negative depending on the context.

Just as the class clown can have a positive effect in lifting spirits or a negative effect in distracting members, a dominator may be exactly what is needed for quick action. An emergency physician doesn't have time to ask all the group members in the emergency unit how they feel about a course of action; instead, a self- directed approach based on training and experience may be necessary. In contrast, a teacher may ask students their opinions about a change in the format of class; in this situation, the role of coordinator or elaborator is more appropriate than that of dominator.

The group is together because they have a purpose or goal, and normally they are capable of more than any one individual member could be on their own, so it would be inefficient to hinder that progress. But a blocker, who cuts off collaboration, does just that. If a group member interrupts another and presents a viewpoint or information that suggests a different course of action, the point may be well taken and serve the collaborative process. But if that same group member repeatedly engages in blocking behaviour, then the behaviour becomes a problem. A skilled business communicator will learn to recognize the difference, even when positive and negative situations and roles aren't completely clear.

3.5 GROUP PROBLEM SOLVING

The problem-solving process involves thoughts, discussions, actions, and decisions that occur from the first consideration of a problematic situation to the goal. The problems that groups face are varied, but some common problems include budgeting funds, raising funds, planning events, addressing customer or citizen complaints, creating or adapting products or services to fit needs, supporting members, and raising aware- ness about issues or causes.

While there are many ways to approach a problem, the American educational philosopher John Dewey's reflective thinking sequence has stood the test of time. This seven-step process (Adler, 1996) has produced positive results and serves as a handy organizational structure. If you are member of a group that needs to solve a problem and don't know where to start, consider the seven simple steps illustrated in figure 11.2 below:

Figure 11.2. Problem solving process.

3.5.1 Define the Problem

If you don't know what the problem is, how do you know you can solve it? Defining the problem allows the group to set boundaries of what the problem is and what it is not and to begin to formalize a description or definition of the scope, size, or extent of the challenge the group will address. A problem that is too broadly defined can overwhelm the group. If the problem is too narrowly defined, important information will be missed or ignored.

In the following example, there is a web-based company called Favourites that needs to increase its customer base and ultimately sales. A problem-solving group has been formed, and they start by formulating a working definition of the problem.

Example problems:

Too broad: "Sales are off, our numbers are down, and we need more customers."

More precise: "Sales have been slipping incrementally for six of the past nine months and are significantly lower than a seasonally adjusted comparison to last year. Overall, this loss represents a 4.5% reduction in sales from the same time last year. However, when we break it down by product category, sales of our nonedible products have seen a modest but steady increase, while sales of edibles account for the drop off and we need to halt the decline."

3.5.2 Analyze the Problem

The problem-solving group Kevin, Mariah, and Suri analyse the problem and begin to gather information to learn more. The problem is complex and requires more than one area of expertise. Why do nonedible products continue selling well? What is it about the edibles that is turning customers off?

Kevin is responsible for customer resource management. He is involved with the customer from the point of initial contact through purchase and delivery. Most of the interface is automated in the form of an online “basket model,” where photographs and product descriptions are accompanied by “buy it” buttons. He is available during normal working business hours for live chat and voice chat if needed, and customers are invited to request additional information. Most Favourites customers do not access this service, but Kevin is kept quite busy, as he also handles returns and complaints. Because Kevin believes that superior service retains customers while attracting new ones, he is always interested in better ways to serve the customer.

Looking at edibles and nonedibles, he will study the cycle of customer service and see if there are any common points—from the main webpage, through the catalog, to the purchase process, and to returns—at which customers abandon the sale. He has existing customer feedback loops with end-of-sale surveys, but most customers decline to take the survey and there is currently no incentive to participate.

Mariah is responsible for products and purchasing. She wants to offer the best products at the lowest price, and to offer new products that are unusual, rare, or exotic. She regularly adds new products to the Favourites catalog and culls underperformers. Right now she has the data on every product and its sales history, but it is a challenge to represent it. She will analyze current sales data and produce a report that specifically identifies how each product—edible and nonedible—is performing. She wants to highlight “winners” and “losers” but also recognizes that today’s “losers” may be the hit of tomorrow. It is hard to predict constantly changing tastes and preferences, but that is part of her job. It’s not all science, and it’s not all art. She has to have an eye for what will catch on tomorrow while continuing to provide what is hot today.

Suri is responsible for data management at Favourites. She gathers, analyzes, and presents information gathered from the supply chain, sales, and marketing. She works with vendors to make sure products are available when needed, makes sales predictions based on past sales history, and assesses the effectiveness of marketing campaigns.

The problem-solving group members already have certain information on hand. They know that customer retention is one contributing factor. Attracting new customers is a constant goal, but they are aware of the well-known principle that it takes more effort to attract new customers than to keep existing ones. Thus, it is important to ensure a quality customer service experience for existing customers and encourage them to refer friends. The group needs to determine how to promote this favourable customer behaviour.

Another contributing factor seems to be that customers often abandon the shopping cart before completing a purchase, especially when purchasing edibles. The group members need to learn more about why this is happening.

3.5.3 Establish Criteria

Establishing the criteria for a solution is the next step. At this point, information is coming in from diverse perspectives, and each group member has contributed information from their perspective, even though there may be several points of overlap.

Kevin: Customers who complete the postsale survey indicate that they want to know (1) what is the estimated time of delivery, (2) why a specific item was not in stock and when it will be available, and (3) why their order sometimes arrives with less than a complete order, with some items back-ordered, without prior notification.

He notes that a very small percentage of customers complete the postsale survey, and the results are far from scientific. He also notes that it appears the interface is not capable of cross-checking inventory to provide immediate information concerning back orders, so that the customer “buys it” only to learn several days later that it was not in stock. This seems to be especially problematic for edible products, because people may tend to order them for special occasions like birthdays and anniversaries. But we don’t really know this for sure because of the low participation in the postsale survey.

Mariah: There are four edible products that frequently sell out. So far, we haven’t been able to boost the appeal of other edibles so that people would order them as a second choice when these sales leaders aren’t available. We also have several rare, exotic products that are slow movers. They have potential, but currently are underperformers.

Suri: We know from a postal code analysis that most of our customers are from a few specific geographic areas associated with above-average incomes. We have very few credit cards declined, and the average sale is over $100. Shipping costs represent on average 8 percent of the total sales cost. We do not have sufficient information to produce a customer profile. There is no specific point in the purchase process where basket abandonment tends to happen; it happens fairly uniformly at all steps.

3.5.4 Consider Possible Solutions to the Problem

The group has listened to each other and now starts to brainstorm ways to address the challenges they have addressed while focusing resources on those solutions that are more likely to produce results.

Kevin: Is it possible for our programmers to create a cross-index feature, linking the product desired with a report of how many are in stock? I’d like the customer to know right away whether it is in stock, or how long they may have to wait. As another idea, is it possible to add incentives to the purchase cycle that won’t negatively impact our overall profit? I’m thinking a small volume discount on multiple items, or perhaps free shipping over a specific dollar amount.

Mariah: I recommend we hold a focus group where customers can sample our edible products and tell us what they like best and why. When the best sellers are sold out, could we offer a discount on related products to provide an instant alternative? We might also cull the underperforming products with a liquidation sale to generate interest.

Suri: If we want to know more about our customers, we need to give them an incentive to complete the postsale survey. How about a 5 percent off coupon code for the next purchase to get them to return and to help us better identify our customer base? We may also want to build in a customer referral rewards program, but it all takes better data in to get results out. We should also explore the supply side of the business by getting a more reliable supply of the leading products and trying to get discounts that are more advantageous from our suppliers, especially in the edible category.

3.5.5 Decide on a Solution

Kevin, Mariah, and Suri may want to implement all the solution strategies, but they do not have the resources to do them all. They'll complete a cost-benefit analysis, which ranks each solution according to its probable impact.

3.5.6 Implement the Solution

Kevin is faced with the challenge of designing the computer interface without incurring unacceptable costs. He strongly believes that the interface will pay for itself within the first year—or, to put it more bluntly, that Favourites' declining sales will get worse if the website does not have this feature soon. He asks to meet with top management to get budget approval and secures their agreement, on one condition: he must negotiate a compensation schedule with the information technology consultants that includes delayed compensation in the form of bonuses after the feature has been up and running successfully for six months.

Mariah knows that searching for alternative products is a never-ending process, but it takes time and the company needs results. She decides to invest time evaluating products that competing companies currently offer, especially in the edible category, on the theory that customers who find their desired items sold out on the Favourites website may have been buying alternative products elsewhere instead of choosing an alternative from Favourites' product lines.

Suri decides to approach the vendors of the four frequently sold-out products and ask point blank, "What would it take to get you to produce these items more reliably in greater quantities?" By opening the channel of communication with these vendors, she is able to motivate them to make modifications that will improve the reliability and quantity. She also approaches the vendors of the less popular products with a request for better discounts in return for their cooperation in developing and test-marketing new products.

3.5.7 Follow Up on the Solution

Kevin: After several beta tests, the cross-index feature was implemented and has been in place for thirty days. Now customers see either “in stock” or “available [mo/da/yr]” in the shopping basket. As expected, Kevin notes a decrease in the number of chat and phone inquiries to the effect of, “Will this item arrive before my wife’s birthday?” However, he notes an increase in inquiries asking, “Why isn’t this item in stock?” It is difficult to tell whether customer satisfaction is higher overall.

Mariah: In exploring the merchandise available from competing merchants, she got several ideas for modifying Favourites’ product line to offer more flavors and other variations on popular edibles. Working with vendors, she found that these modifications cost very little. Within the first thirty days of adding these items to the product line, sales are up. Mariah believes these additions also serve to enhance the Favourites brand identity, but she has no data to back this up.

Suri: So far, the vendors supplying the four top-selling edibles have fulfilled their promise of increasing quantity and reliability. However, three of the four items have still sold out, raising the question of whether Favourites needs to bring in one or more additional vendors to produce these items. Of the vendors with which Favourites asked to negotiate better discounts, some refused, and two of these were “stolen” by a competing merchant so that they no longer sell to Favourites. In addition, one of the vendors that agreed to give a better discount was unexpectedly forced to cease operations for several weeks because of a fire.

This scenario allows us to see that the problem may have several dimensions as well as solutions, that resources can be limited, and not every solution is successful. Even though the problem is not immediately resolved, the group problem-solving pattern and communication among the group members serves as a useful guide through the problem-solving process.

3.6 TEAMWORK AND LEADERSHIP

Two important aspects of group communication—especially in the business environment—are teamwork and leadership. You will work in a team and at some point may be called on to lead. You may emerge to that role as the group recognizes your specific skill set in relation to the task, or you may be appointed to a position of responsibility for yourself and others. Your communication skills will be your foundation for success as a member and as a leader. Listen and seek to understand both the task and your group members as you become involved with the new effort. Have confidence in yourself and inspire the trust of others. Know that leading and following are both integral aspects of effective teamwork.

3.6.1 Teamwork

Teams are a form of a group normally dedicated to production or problem-solving. Teams can often achieve higher levels of performance than individuals because of the combined energies and talents of the members. Collaboration can produce motivation and creativity that may not be present in single-contractor projects. Individuals also have a sense of belonging to the group, and the range of views and diversity can energize the process, helping address creative blocks and stalemates. By involving members of the team in decision making, and calling upon each member's area of contribution, teams can produce positive results.

Source: Pixabay.com

Teamwork is not without its challenges. The work itself may prove a challenge as members juggle competing assignments and personal commitments. The work may also be compromised if team members are expected to conform and pressured to go along with a procedure, plan, or product that they themselves have not developed. Groupthink, or the tendency to accept the group's ideas and actions in spite of individual concerns, can also compromise the process and reduce efficiency. Personalities and competition can play a role in a team's failure to produce.

We can recognize that people want to belong to a successful team, and celebrating incremental gain can focus the attention on the project and its goals. Members will be more willing to express thoughts and opinions, and follow through with actions, when they perceive that they are an important part of the team. By failing to include all the team members, valuable insights may be lost in the rush to judgment or production. Making time for planning, and giving each member time to study, reflect, and contribute can allow them to gain valuable insights from each other, and may make them more likely to contribute information that challenges the status quo. Unconventional or "devil's advocate" thinking may prove insightful and serve to challenge the process in a positive way, improving the production of the team. Respect for divergent views can encourage open discussion.

John Thill and Courtland Bovee (2002) provide a valuable list to consider when setting up a team as follows:

- Select team members wisely
- Select a responsible leader
- Promote cooperation
- Clarify goals
- Elicit commitment
- Clarify responsibilities
- Instill prompt action
- Apply technology
- Ensure technological compatibility
- Provide prompt feedback

Group dynamics involve the interactions and processes of a team and influence the degree to which mem- bers feel a part of the goal and mission. A team with a strong identity can prove to be a powerful force, but it requires time and commitment. A team that exerts too much control over individual members can run the risk of reducing creative interactions and encourage tunnel vision. A team that exerts too little control, with attention to process and areas of specific responsibility, may not be productive. The balance between motivation and encouragement, and control and influence, is challenging as team members represent diverse viewpoints and approaches to the problem. A skilled business communicator creates a positive team by first selecting members based on their areas of skill and expertise, but attention to their style of communication is also warranted. Individuals that typically work alone or tend to be introverted may need additional encouragement to participate. Extroverts may need to be encouraged to listen to others and not dominate the conversation.

3.6.2 Leadership

Leadership is one of the most studied aspects of group communication. Scholars in business, communication, psychology, and many other fields have written extensively about the qualities of leaders, theories of leadership, and how to build leadership skills. It's important to point out that although a group may have only one official leader, other group members play important leadership roles. Making this distinction also helps us differentiate between leaders and leadership (Hargie, 2011). The leader is a group role that is associated with a high-status position and may be formally or informally recognized by group members. Leadership is a complex of beliefs, communication patterns, and behaviours that influence the functioning of a group and move a group toward the completion of its task. A person in the role of leader may provide no or poor leadership. Likewise, a person who is not recognized as a "leader" in title can provide excellent leadership.

3.6.3 Leadership Styles

Given the large amount of research done on leadership, it is not surprising that there are several different ways to define or categorize leadership styles. In general, effective leaders do not fit solely into one style in any of the following classifications. Instead, they are able to adapt their leadership style to fit the relational and situational context (Wood, 1977).

One common way to study leadership style is to make a distinction among autocratic, democratic, and laissez-faire leaders (Lewin, Lippitt, & White, 1939). These leadership styles can be described as follows:

- Autocratic leaders set policies and make decisions primarily on their own, taking advantage of the power present in their title or status to set the agenda for the group.
- Democratic leaders facilitate group discussion and like to take input from all members before making a decision.
- Laissez-faire leaders take a “hands-off” approach, preferring to give group members freedom to reach and implement their own decisions.

Thomas Harris and John Sherblom (1999) specifically note three leadership styles that characterize the modern business or organization, and reflect our modern economy. We are not born leaders but may become them if the context or environment requires our skill set. A leader-as-technician role often occurs when we have skills that others do not. If you can fix the copy machine at the office, your leadership and ability to get it running again are prized and sought-after skills. You may instruct others on how to load the paper or how to change the toner, and even though your pay grade may not reflect this leadership role, you are looked to by the group as a leader within that context. Technical skills, from Internet technology to facilities maintenance, may experience moments where their particular area of knowledge is required to solve a problem. Their leadership will be in demand.

The leader-as-conductor involves a central role of bringing people together for a common goal. In the common analogy, a conductor leads an orchestra and integrates the specialized skills and sounds of the various components the musical group comprises. In the same way, a leader who conducts may set a vision, create benchmarks, and collaborate with a group as they interpret a set script. Whether it is a beautiful movement in music or a group of teams that comes together to address a common challenge, the leader-as-conductor keeps the time and tempo of the group.

Coaches are often discussed in business-related books as models of leadership for good reason. A leader-as-coach combines many of the talents and skills we’ve discussed here, serving as a teacher, motivator, and keeper of the goals of the group. A coach may be autocratic at times, give pointed direction without input from the group, and stand on the side lines while the players do what they’ve been trained to do and make the points. The coach may look out for the group and defend it against bad calls, and may motivate players with words of encouragement. Coaches are teachers, motivators, and keepers of the goals of the group.

Coaches serve to redirect the attention and energy of the individuals to the overall goals of the group. We can recognize some of the behaviors of coaches, but what specific traits have a positive influence on the group? Thomas Peters and Nancy Austin (1985) identify five important traits that produce results:

1. Orientation and education
2. Nurturing and encouragement
3. Assessment and correction
4. Listening and counselling
5. Establishing group emphasis

3.7 LET US SUM UP

Returning to Abe's story from the beginning of this chapter, as a leader on the technology side of her team's work, how might she share what she knows without overwhelming other team members? What type of leadership style would help Abe have a positive impact on her team's success implementing the new software required for Financial Analysts?

3.8 FURTHER READING

- National Research Council Canada. Management Competencies (including Teamwork and Communica- tion) https://www.nrc-cnrc.gc.ca/eng/careers/behavioural_competencies/management_teamwork.html
- Government of Canada: Teamwork and Cooperation https://www.canada.ca/en/revenue-agency/corpo- rate/careers-cra/information-moved/cra-competencies-standardized-assessment-tools/canada-rev- enue-agency-competencies-april-2016/teamwork-cooperation.html

3.9 ASSIGNMENTS

1. Define groups and teams.
2. Identify the typical stages in the life cycle of a group.
3. Describe types of group members and group member roles.
4. Describe teamwork and how to overcome challenges to group success.
5. Describe leadership styles and there likely influence on followers.

Unit 4: DIGITAL MEDIA AND COMMUNICATIONS

4

Unit Structure

4.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After studying this unit student should be able to:

- Evolution of Digital Media
- Social Media
- Online Engagement
- Your Digital Footprint

4.2 INTRODUCTION

In the last 20 years, online and digital media has grown in leaps and bounds to become a fixture in the daily life of most people in Canada. Prior to the turn of the century, traditional media, which consisted of mainly print, radio, and television/movies, was limited to a few places and had a somewhat limited presence in lives and societies. For example, in the 20th century radio and television grew to become features in the home.

Movies were primarily enjoyed in theatres until VCRs and DVD players brought them into homes. The closest thing to a portable mass medium in the 20th century was reading a book or paper on a commute to and from work.

Digital media in the 21st century are more personal and more social than traditional media. A small device that fits in your pocket has the ability to connect you with the world, from anywhere and at any time. It has changed the way you communicate and in particular the way you approach communication in business. In this chapter, you will learn more about the evolution of digital media, consider how people engage with digital media, and how you can begin to use digital media as a business professional.

4.3 DIGITAL AND SOCIAL MEDIA

Digital media, as described in this chapter, couldn't exist without the move from analog to digital technology, as all the types of new media you will learn about are digitally based (Siapera, 2012). Digital media are composed of and/or are designed to read numerical codes (hence the root word 'digit'). The most commonly used system of numbers is binary code, which converts information into a series of 0s and

1s. This shared code system means that any machine that can decode (read) binary code can make sense of, store, and replay the information. Analog media are created by encoding information onto a physical object that must then be paired with another device capable of reading that specific code. In terms of physicality, ana- log media are a combination of mechanical and physical parts, while digital media can be completely electronic and have no physicality; think of an MP3 music file, for example. To make recordings using traditional media technology, grooves were carved into vinyl to make records or changes were made in the electromagnetic signature of ribbon or tape to make cassette tapes. Each of these physical objects must be paired with a specific device, such as a record player or a cassette deck, to be able to decode and listen to the music.

Digital media changed how most people collect and listen to music. Now music files are stored electronically and can be played on many different platforms, including tablets, computers, and smartphones. Many people who came of age in the digital revolution are now so used to having digital music that the notion of a physical music collection is completely foreign to them.

Analogue media like videocassette recorders (VCRs) are only compatible with specific media objects that have been physically encoded with information.

VCR Detail is in the public domain

In news coverage and academic scholarship, you will see several different terms used when discussing digi- tal media. Other terms used include new media, online media, social media, and personal media. In this chapter these items will be combined and referred to as digital media.

Digital media and technology are now changing faster than ever before. In short, what is new today may not be considered new in a week. Despite the rapid changes in technology, the multiplatform compatibility of much of digital media paradoxically allows for some stability.

Key to digital media is the notion of **technological convergence**. The on-going digitalization of traditional media allows them to circulate freely and be read/accessed/played by many digital media platforms with- out the need for conversion (Siapera, 2012). This multi-platform compatibility is relatively new. In the past, each type of media had a corresponding platform. For example, you couldn’t play records in an eight-track cassette tape player or a VHS tape in a DVD player. In the past, the human eye was the encoding and decoding device needed to engage with analog forms of print media. In the present you can read this textbook in print, on a computer, or on an e-reader, tablet, smartphone, or other handheld device. Another characteristic of new media is the blurring of lines between producers and consumers, as individual users now have a more personal relationship with their media.

4.3.1 Social Media

Media and mass media have long been discussed as a unifying force. The shared experiences of the Russia- Canada hockey series in 1972, or following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, were facilitated through media. Digital media, in particular, is characterized by its connectivity. In the past, a large audience was connected to the same radio or television broadcast, newspaper story, book, or movie via a one-way communication channel sent from one place to many. Today, digital media connects mass media outlets to people and allows people to connect back to them via the internet. Technology has allowed for mediated social interaction since the days of the telegraph, but these connections were not at the mass level they are today. Personalities such as Drake and Justin Bieber, and organizations like the Toronto Blue Jays or the CBC can reach millions of people with just one tweet. Social media doesn’t just allow for connection; it allows us more control over the quality and degree of connection that we maintain with others (Siapera, 2012).

The most influential part of the new web is **social networking sites (SNSs),** which allow users to build a public or semi-public profile, create a network of connections to other people, and view other people's profiles and networks of connections (Boyd & Ellison, 2008). Although SNSs have existed for over a decade, earlier iterations such as Friendster and MySpace have given way to the giant that is Facebook. Facebook, as of April 2018, has more than 2.23 billion users worldwide (Statista, 2018). More specific SNSs, like LinkedIn, focus on professional networking. The ability to self-publish information, likes/dislikes, status updates, profiles, and links allows people to craft their own life narrative and share it with other people. Likewise, users can follow the narratives of others in their network as they are constructed. The degree to which we engage with others' narratives varies based on the closeness of the relationship and situational factors, but SNSs are used to sustain strong, moderate, and weak ties with others (Richardson & Hessey, 2009).

Social media enable interactivity between individuals that share a social network and also allow people to broadcast or 'narrowcast' their activities and interests.

You might conceptualize social media in another way—through the idea of collaboration and sharing rather than just through interpersonal connection and interaction. The growth of open source publishing and Creative Commons licensing also presents a challenge to traditional media outlets and corporations and copy-rights. Open source publishing first appeared most notably with software programs. The idea was that the users could improve on openly available computer programs and codes and then the new versions, some- times called derivatives, would be made available again to the community. Crowdsourcing refers more to the idea stage of development where people from various perspectives and positions offer proposals or information to solve a problem or create something new (Brabham, 2008). This type of open access and free collaboration helps encourage participation and improve creativity through the synergy created by bringing together different perspectives and has been referred to as the biggest shift in innovation since the Indus- trial Revolution (Kaufman, 2008).

4.4 ONLINE ENGAGEMENT

The key differentiating factor between traditional and digital media is the ability to interact, or engage with the communicator, and others in a community. Think back to the basic process of communication: the messenger (encoder) sends a message through a medium, which is received and decoded by an audience. In traditional media, the process was primarily one-way. In digital media, users have the ability to interact and respond to the message — in other words, they can 'engage' with the message and messenger.

But why are people drawn to digital communication? For the answers to this question, you might consider Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, which provides you with an understanding of the motivation that might be behind online engagement. Although engaging online doesn't really satisfy physiological or safety needs, it certainly speaks to the other categories in the hierarchy as see in Figure 12.1 below:

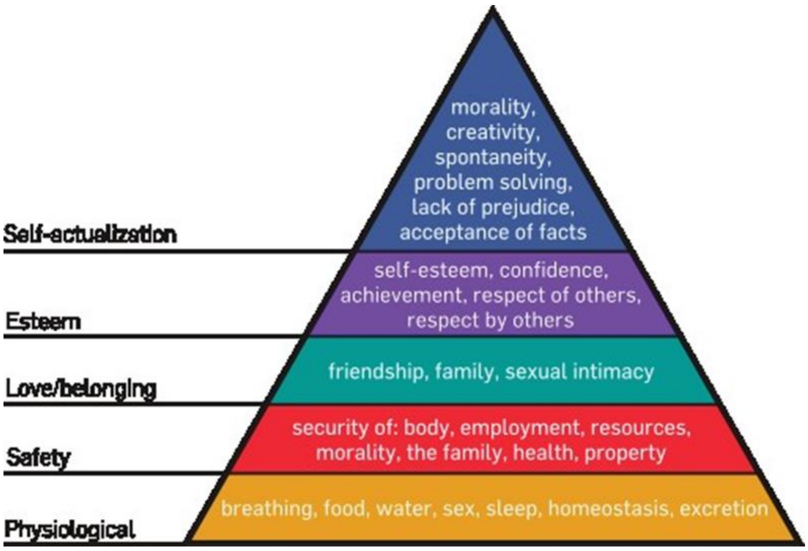
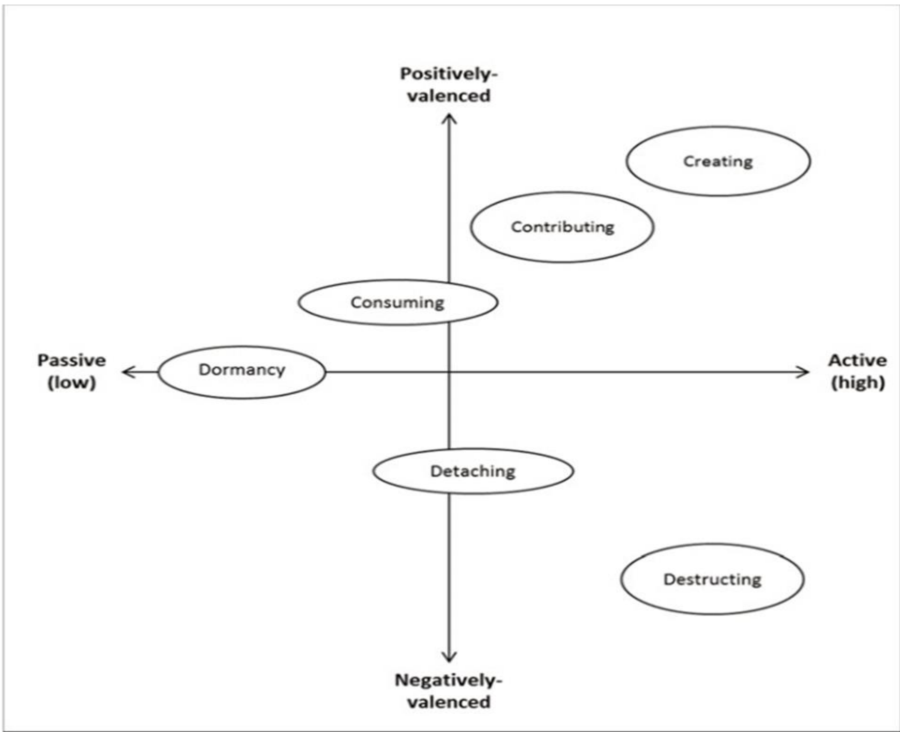


Figure 12.1. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. Illustration by Factoryjoe is shared with a CC BY-SA 3.0 license Examples from social and digital media paradigms:

- Love and belongingness needs: engaging online can provide a tremendous feeling of being accepted. Online communities grow friendships, intimacy and a feeling of affiliation.
- Esteem needs: Engagement from friends, colleagues and even strangers can feed the desire to improve one's reputation or gain respect.
- Self-actualization needs: Digital media is full of examples of people who are working to realize their personal potential, "to become everything one is capable of becoming" (Maslow, 1987, p. 64).

4.4.1 Social Media Engagement Behaviour Typologies

New research is emerging to explore how and why users engage online, particularly in business. A study by Dolan, Conduit, Fahy and Goodman (2015) broke down customer (user) experiences with social media, based on intensity of activity (low/passive to high/active), and the valence, or emotional force, of the contributions (negative to positive). Figure 1 from the authors' work below provides a visual demonstration.



Social Media Engagement Behaviour Construct

Co-creation: this is the highest level on the matrix, in which users are earning, sharing, advocating, socializing and co-developing. They are actively collaborating and developing content and engaging with others.

Positive contribution: users are engaging with content and others, but not necessarily adding content. They may ‘like’ posts, repost, mark as a ‘favourite’ or post a positive comment.

Consumption: this is a passive form on engagement, where users are reading and watching, primarily using social media as a source of information.

Dormancy: these users may have previously been engaged online, but may occasionally be described as ‘lurkers’. They make no contributions nor do they engage online. They have passively disengaged.

Detachment: detached users have actively disengaged with a social media platform, person or brand. They will ‘unlike’ or adjust settings so they do not see information or content.

Negative Contribution: users will make negative active comments to try and influence others to change their feelings or opinions about a brand, subject, person or platform. Negative contributors are often seen posting comments on news articles that will contradict or slander the author (known as ‘trolls’).

Co-Destruction: users will create new negative content with the aim of diminishing the reputation, trust or value of a person/brand/platform. For example, videos or posts created to highlight negative attributes of a politician would be considered co-destructive.

You may notice your own behaviour patterns listed here — and noted that your behaviours change based on multiple factors. As a business professional, you will have to consider your own behaviour type(s), and how you might encourage others to actively and positively contribute to your own brand, organization or company.

4.5 Your Digital Footprint

It used to be that applying for a job was fairly simple: send in a resume, write a cover letter, and call a few references to make sure they will say positive things. However, there is a new step that is now a common part of this application process—hiding (or at least cleaning up) your virtual self, or your ‘digital footprint’.

The ubiquity of digital media allows anyone to easily start developing an online persona from as early as birth. Although this footprint may not accurately reflect the individual, it may be one of the first things a stranger sees. Those online photos may not look bad to friends and family, but your online digital footprint may be a hiring manager's first impression of you as a prospective employee. Someone in charge of hiring could search the internet for information on you even before calling references.

First impressions are an important thing to keep in mind when making an online persona professionally acceptable. Your presence online can be the equivalent of your first words to a brand-new acquaintance.

While it's possible to deactivate your social media accounts, once something is online, it's impossible to delete it completely. Photos, videos and posts will likely outlive you. As a business professional, you'll need to begin to carefully curate what you post online, and what has already been posted.

This doesn't mean you should delete everything: in fact, employers and clients want to see that you have interests and connections outside of work. However, be aware that their first impression of you may be digital – you'll want to put your best 'foot' forward!

5 Ways to Improve your Digital Footprint

- Google yourself. This is the best way to see what a potential employer or contact will see first, if they decide to do a search on you.
- Edit you own posts, including photos, video and multimedia. Content that involves drugs, alcohol, illegal activities, strong political views, or any other controversial activity should be removed.
- Ask friends and family who have posted controversial content to take it down.
- Set up professional accounts on one or more platforms, such as LinkedIn. This will increase the chances of employers/clients seeing your professional side first, and is an inexpensive way to build your professional network.
- Keep it positive with future posts and contributions. That will greatly reduce the chances that you will post something that could get you into trouble down the road.

4.6 LET US SUM UP

Digital media in the 21st century are more personal and more social than traditional media. A small device that fits in your pocket has the ability to connect you with the world, from anywhere and at any time. It has changed the way you communicate and in particular the way you approach communication in business. In this chapter, you will learn more about the evolution of digital media, consider how people engage with digital media, and how you can begin to use digital media as a business professional.

4.7 FURTHER READING

- Social Media Etiquette Rules for Business https://blog.hootsuite.com/social-media-etiquette-rules-for- business/
- The State of Digital Literacy in Canada (2017). The Brookfield Institute report http://brookfieldinstitute.ca/wp-ontent/uploads/2017/04/BrookfieldInstitute_State-of-Digital-Literacy-in-Canada_LiteratureRe- view.pdf

4.8 ASSIGNMENTS

1. Trace the evolution of online and digital media.
2. Discuss how digital and online media are more personal and social than traditional media.
3. Identify social media engagement behaviour types.
4. Explore ways to use digital communication as a business professional.

Block-4

Technical Writing Skills

Unit 1: TECHNICAL WRITING

1

Unit Structure

1.1. Learning Objectives

1.2. Introduction

1.3. Key concept: problem-solving approach to communications tasks

1.4. Communication as solution

1.5. Let us sum up

1.6. Further Reading

1.7. Assignment

1.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After studying this unit student should be able to:

- Understand what technical writing is, why its important, and what it looks like
- Apply a "problem-solving" approach to communications tasks, starting by learning how to fully define the problem before looking for solutions
- Recognize the main conventions and characteristics of technical writing, and how they differ from other forms, such as academic and journalistic writing
- Understand the importance of defining the "rhetorical situation" in which you are communicating
- Apply what you have learned so far by examining
- Appreciate the complexity and iterative nature of a writing process in determining what writing process works best for you.

1.2 INTRODUCTION

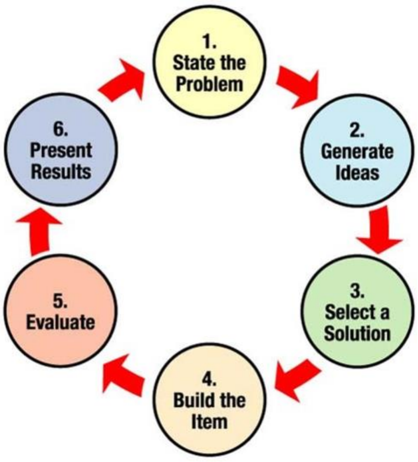
When you hear the term "technical communication," what comes to mind? Perhaps you think of scientific reports, specifications, instructions, software documentation, or technical manuals. And you would be correct. However, technical communication is so much more than that. Technical Writing is a genre of non-fiction writing that encompasses not only technical materials such as manuals, instructions, specifications, and software documentation, but it also includes writing produced in day-to-day business operations such as correspondence, proposals, internal communications, media releases, and many kinds of reports. It includes the communication of specialized technical information, whether relating to computers and scientific instruments, or the intricacies of meditation. And because oral and visual presentations are such an important part of professional life, technical communication also encompasses these as well.

1.3 PROBLEM-SOLVING APPROACH TO COMMUNICATIONS TASKS

In the workplace, many of the communications tasks you perform are designed to solve a problem or improve a situation. Whether you are doing work for a client, for your employer, with your team, or for someone else, you will typically use some sort of design process to tackle and solve the problem. A clearly-articulated design process provides you with a clear, step-by-step plan for finding the best solution for your situation.

Take a moment to search the Internet for the term “design process” and look at “images.” You will find many variations. Have a look at several of them and see if you can find a common pattern.

One commonality you will likely find in examining other people’s design process diagrams is this: the first step in designing any solution is to clearly define the problem. Figure 1.1.1 shows NASA’s basic design process. Think about the kind of communication that each step of this process might entail.



You cannot begin to work on solutions until you have a clear definition of the problem and goals you want to achieve. This critical first stage of the design process requires that you effectively communicate with the “client” or whoever has the “problem” that needs solving. Poor communication at this stage can derail a project from the start.

For our purposes, we will use Barry Hyman’s Problem Formulation model to clearly define a problem. Hyman’s Problem Formulation model consists of 4 elements:

1. Need Statement: recognizes and describes the need for a solution or improvement to an “unsatisfactory situation.” It answers the questions, “what is wrong with the way things are currently? What is unsatisfactory about it? What negative effects does this situation cause?” You may need to do research and supply data to quantify the negative effects.
2. Goal Statement: describes what the improved situation would look like once a solution has been implemented. The goal statement defines the scope of your search for a solution. At this point, do not describe your solution, only the goal that any proposed solution should achieve. The broader you make your goal, the more numerous and varied the solution can be; a narrowly focused goal limits the number and variety of possible solutions.
3. Objectives: define measurable, specific outcomes that any feasible solution should optimize (aspects you can use to “grade” the effectiveness of the

solution). Objectives provide you with ways to quantifiably measure how well any solution will solve the problem; ideally, they will allow you to compare multiple solutions and figure out which one is most effective (which one gets the highest score on meeting the objectives?).

4. Constraints: define the limits that any feasible solution must adhere to in order to be acceptable (pass/fail conditions, range limits, etc.). The key word here is must — constraints are the "go/no go" conditions that determine whether a solution is acceptable or not. These often include budget and time limits, as well as legal, safety and regulatory requirements.

1.4 COMMUNICATION AS SOLUTION

This model can apply to a communications task as well as more physical design tasks. Imagine your communications task as something that will solve a problem or improve a situation. Before you begin drafting this document or presentation, define the problem you want to solve with this document:

- **Understand the Need:** consider what gave rise to the need to communicate. Does someone lack sufficient information to make a decision or take a position on an issue? Did someone request information? Is there some unsatisfactory situation that needs to be remedied by communicating with your audience? What specifically is unsatisfactory about it? Consider your audience. For example
  - *A potential client lacks sufficient information on whether the solution I have proposed to solve the client's problem will be feasible, affordable, and effective.*
  - *My instructor lacks sufficient examples of my written work to assign a grade for how well I met the course learning objectives.*
- **Establish a Goal:** consider your purpose in writing. What do you want your reader to do, think, or know? Do you want your reader to make a decision? Change their opinion or behaviour? Follow a course of action? What is your desired outcome? And what form and style of communication will best lead to that outcome? For example
  - *Provide the client with enough information, in an effective and readable format, to make a decision (ideally, to hire you to build the solution for the problem).*
  - *Provide my instructor with samples of my writing that demonstrate my achievement of the course learning objectives (provide relevant and complete*

information in a professionally appropriate format, using evidence-based argument; earn an A+ grade on the assignment.)

- **Define Objectives:** consider the specifics of your message and your audience to determine what criteria you should meet. What form should it take? What content elements will you need to include? What kind of research will be required? What information does your audience want/need? What do they already know?
    - *Review the client's RFP to see what specific objectives it lists.*
    - *Review the Technical Report Grading Rubric to determine specific requirements and objectives that will be graded by your instructor.*
- **Identify Constraints:** what are the pass/fail conditions of this document? Consider your rhetorical situation. What conditions exist that present barriers or challenges to communication? How can you address them? For example, how much time is your audience willing to spend on this? What format and style do they require? How long can you make your document or presentation? How much time do you have to create it? Do you have a deadline? A Style Guide you must follow? A template you can use? (e.g., word limit, due date, pass/fail criteria such as avoiding plagiarism, etc.)

1.5 LET US SUM UP

1.6 FURTHER READING

1. NASA design process." NASA STEM Engagement [Online]. Available: https://www.nasa.gov/audience/ foreducators/best/index.html.Used for educational and noncommercial purposes.
2. B. Hyman, "Ch. 2: Problem formulation," in Fundamentals of Engineering Design, Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2002, pp. 40-54.

1.7 ASSIGNMENTS

Unit 2: PROFESSIONAL STYLE

2

Unit Structure

2.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After studying this unit student should be able to:

- Understand how to take a reader-centred approach (rather than a writer- centred one) that focuses on knowing your audience and writing specifically to meet their needs.
- Review and practice techniques to make your writing more precise and concise.
- Understand how to use rhetoric in a professional context, avoiding logical fallacies and inappropriate marketing language.
- Recognize how to choose strong verbs as the “engines” that drive efficient and effective sentences; revise passages to improve concision and flow.

2.2 INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapter, we defined technical writing as a “transactional” and primarily “problem- solving” genre and described some of the key conventions and considerations technical writers must keep in mind. In this chapter, we will look more deeply into the style of writing expected of this genre.

2.3 READER-CENTRED WRITING

Writing can be conceptualized as writer-centred or reader-centred. Things like diaries and journals are primarily writer-centred, in that they are written for the benefit of the writer. Your schoolwork may also have been somewhat writer-centred, in that often your goal was to “show what you know” and thereby “get a good grade.” Technical communications require that you shift this mind set and write for the benefit of your reader—or design the content and structure of your communication for your “user.” This mind set should be informed by an understanding of your audience. Use these guidelines and ask yourself the following questions:

- Who is my target audience? Are they internal or external readers? Upstream, downstream or lateral from you? Do I have multiple readers?
- What is their perspectives on the topic, on me, and on the document I will write? What are they expecting to do with the document? What is the document meant to accomplish? Why has it been requested? What is my role and relationship to my readers? What does the reader need to know? Already know? What does my reader NOT need to have explained?

- What is my goal or purpose in writing to these readers? What am I trying to communicate? What do I want them to do as a result of reading this document? How can I plan the content to meet my readers' needs?
- What is my reader's goal? Why does this audience want or need to read this document?

Getting a clear understanding of your audience is important in communicating effectively. It also enables you to imagine your audience as you write and revise. Keep asking yourself whether what you have said would be clear to your audience. How could you say it better?

2.3.1 Professional Tone

"Tone" refers to the attitude that a document conveys towards the topic and/or the reader. You have likely read something that sounded angry, or optimistic, or humorous, or cynical, or enthusiastic. These words characterize the tone. Technical communication tends to avoid displaying an obvious emotion, and instead strives for a neutral tone.

Tone is created through word choice (diction), word order (syntax), sentence construction, and viewpoint. Consider a piece of academic writing that you may have read. It creates a formal tone through its use of specialized terminology, sophisticated vocabulary, complex sentence structures, and third person voice. This style suits the genre because it is directed at experts and scholars in the field, and seeks to convey complex information densely and objectively, with an emphasis on reason, logic, and evidence.

Now consider a piece of business writing that you may have read. The tone may be slightly less formal but not colloquial. The language is direct and plain, and the sentences are shorter and more straightforward. It may make use of the second person ("you"). This style suits business writing because it is directed at colleagues, management, or clients who are seeking information clearly and quickly and who may need to take action on it.

2.3.2 Writing Constructively

Striking the appropriate tone involves understanding your purpose, context, and audience. It also involves an understanding that workplaces are often hierarchical, and that cooperation and teamwork are required. Therefore, it is important to consider how you want your reader to feel, and what may make your reader feel that way. Your goal is to write constructively, which means to use positive phrasing to convey your message to your reader. Table 2.1.1 illustrates the differences between destructive/negative and constructive/positive feelings the reader may experience as a result of the tone used in a document.

TABLE 2.1.1 Differences between destructive/negative and constructive/positive

Negative	**Constructive**
misunderstood	understood
outraged	conciliatory
disgusted	pleased
guilty	capable
belittled	empowered
patronized	respected
defensive	proud
chastised	valued
humiliated	honoured
excluded	a sense of belonging
resentment	contentment

Considering how your reader may feel after reading your document is an important part of revision. Did your tone come across like you hoped it would? Could it be misconstrued? Often this is where peer reviewing can be helpful. Asking a colleague to review your document before sending it off to its intended audience is a common professional practice.

Sometimes, you will need to communicate information that is unpleasant, such as delivering bad news or rejecting a request. Communicating constructively is possible—and arguably even more important—in these situations. Regardless of message, how can you ensure you are communicating constructively?

- **Adopt an adult-to-adult approach:** that is to say, avoid talking down to your reader in a patronizing tone, and likewise avoid sounding petulant or unwilling to take responsibility. Aim to communicate respectfully, responsibly, confidently, and cooperatively — as one responsible adult to another.
- **Be courteous:** focus on the reader as much as possible. Use “you” unless it results in blaming (one effective use of passive verbs is to avoid assigning blame: “mistakes were made”). Use traditionally accepted forms of courtesy and politeness. Use gender-neutral phrasing and plural forms, unless you are referring to a specific person and you know their gender.
- **Focus on the positive:** emphasize what you can do rather than what you can’t. Try to avoid negative wording and phrasing (no, not, never, none, isn’t, can’t, don’t, etc.). Focus on what can be improved.
- **Be genuine:** apologize if you have made a mistake. Take responsibility and promise to do better. Be authentic in your expression. Avoid sounding like marketing material (ad-speak). Make reasonable claims that can be backed with evidence.

Writer-Centred (I, we)	**Reader-Centred (you)**
If I can answer any questions, I’ll be happy to do so.	If you have any questions, please ask.
We shipped the order this morning.	Your order was shipped this morning.
I’m happy to report that …	You’ll be glad to know that …

Consider the following perspectives:

Negative Phrasing	Constructive Phrasing
We cannot process your claim because the necessaryforms have not been completed	Your claim can be processed as soon as we receive thenecessary forms
We do not take phone calls after 3:00pm on Fridays	*You try …*
We closed your case because we never received theinformation requested in our letter of April …	

2.3.3 Communicating with Precision

So far we have discussed the importance of writing with the reader in mind; of striking the right tone for your audience, message, and purpose; of writing constructively; and of writing persuasively. Now we move onto the actual writing itself. Two key characteristics of professional technical communication are that it is precise and concise. This precision and concision must be evident at all levels, from the overall document, to paragraphing, to sentence structure to word choice, and even to punctuation. Every word or phrase should have a distinct and useful purpose. If it doesn't, cut it or revise.

The 7 Cs of Professional Writing

The 7 C's are simply seven words that begin with C that characterize strong professional style. Applying the 7 C's of professional communication will result in writing that is

- **Clear**
- **Coherent**
- **Concise**
- **Concrete**
- **Correct**
- **Complete**
- **Courteous.**

CLEAR writing involves knowing what you want to say before you say it because often a lack of clarity comes from unclear thinking or poor planning; this, unfortunately, leads to confused or annoyed readers. Clear writing conveys the purpose of the document immediately to the reader; it matches vocabulary to the audience, avoiding jargon and unnecessary technical or obscure language while at the same time being precise. In clarifying your ideas, ensure that each sentence conveys one idea, and that each paragraph thoroughly develops one unified concept.

COHERENT writing ensures that the reader can easily follow your ideas and your train of thought. One idea should lead logically into the next through the use of transitional words and phrases, structural markers, planned repetition, sentences with clear subjects, headings that are clear, and effective and parallel lists. Writing that lacks coherence often sounds "choppy" and ideas seem disconnected or incomplete. Coherently connecting ideas is like building bridges between islands of thought so the reader can easily move from one idea to the next.

CONCISE writing uses the least words possible to convey the most meaning while still maintaining clarity. Avoid unnecessary padding, awkward phrasing, overuse of "to be" forms (is, are, was, were, am, be, being), long preposition strings, vagueness, unnecessary repetition and redundancy. Use active verbs whenever possible, and take the time to choose a single word rather than a long phrase or clichéd expression. Think of your word count like a budget; be cost effective by making sure every word you choose does effective work for you. Cut a word, save a buck! As William Zinsser asserts, "the secret of good writing is to strip every sentence to its cleanest components."1

CONCRETE writing involves using specific, precise language to paint a picture for your readers so that they can more easily understand your ideas. If you have to explain an abstract concept or idea, try to use examples, analogies, and precise language to illustrate it. Use measurable descriptors whenever possible; avoid vague terms like "big" or "good." Try to get your readers to "see" your ideas by using specific terms and descriptions.

CORRECT writing uses standard English punctuation, sentence structure, usage, and grammar. Being correct also means providing accurate information, as well as using the right document type and form for the task.

COMPLETE writing includes all requested information and answers all relevant questions. The more concrete and specific you are, the more likely your document will be complete as well. Review your checklist of specifications before submitting your document to its intended reader.

COURTEOUS writing entails designing a reader-friendly, easy-to-read document; using tactful language and appropriate modes of addressing the audience; and avoiding potentially offensive terminology, usage, and tone. As we have discussed in an early section, without courtesy you cannot be constructive.

In some cases, some of these might come into conflict: what if being too concise results in a tone that sounds terse, or an idea that seems incomplete? Figure 2.2.1 illustrates one method of putting all the 7Cs together

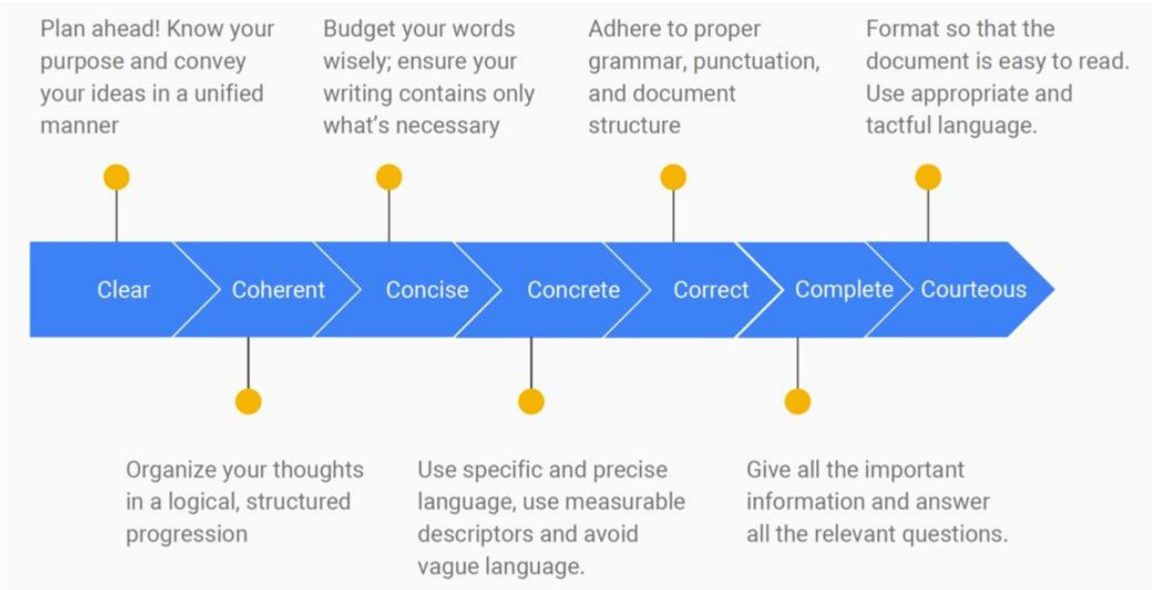


Figure 2.2.1 Putting all the 7Cs together 2 [Image description]

Be mindful of the tradeoffs, and always give priority to being clear: writing that lacks clarity cannot be understood and therefore cannot achieve its purpose. Writing that adheres to the 7 C's helps to establish your credibility as a technical professional.

2.3.4 Sentence Variety and Length

While variety makes for interesting writing, too much of it can also reduce clarity and precision. Technical writing tends to use simple sentence structures more often than the other types. That said, simple does not necessarily mean “simplistic,” short, or lacking in density. Remember that in grammatical terms, simple just means that it has one main clause (one subject and one predicate). You can still convey quite a bit of concrete information in a simple sentence.

The other consideration for precise writing is length. Your sentences should vary in length just as they can vary in type. However, you want to avoid having too many long sentences because they take longer to read and are often more complex. That is appropriate in academic writing but less so in technical writing. The goal is to aim for an average of around 20 to 30 words per sentence. Reserve the short sentences for main points and use longer sentences for supporting points that clarify or explain cause and effect relationships. If you feel the sentence is too long, break it into two sentences. You do not want your reader to have to read a sentence twice to understand it. If you make compound or complex sentences, ensure that you use appropriate coordinating or subordinating strategies to make the relationship between clauses perfectly clear.

2.3.5 Precise Wording

Technical writing is precise writing. Vague, overly general, hyperbolic or subjective/ambiguous terms are simply not appropriate in this genre. You do not want to choose words and phrasing that could be interpreted in more than one way. Choose words that most precisely, concisely, and accurately convey your point. Below are some guidelines and examples to follow for using precise wording.

1. Replace abstract nouns with verbs.

Verbs, more than nouns, help convey ideas concisely, so where possible, avoid using nouns derived from verbs. Often these abstract nouns end in –tion and –ment. See examples in the following chart.

Abstract Noun	Verb
acquisition	acquire
analysis	analyze
recommendation	recommend
observation	observe
application	apply

confirmation	confirm
development	develop
ability	able, can
assessment	assess

2. Prefer short words to long words and phrases.

The goal is to communicate directly and plainly so use short, direct words whenever possible. In other words, don't use long words or phrases when short ones will do. Write to express, not impress.

Long	**Short**
cognizant; be cognizant of	aware, know
commence; commencement	begin, beginning
utilize; utilization	use (v), use (n)
inquire; make an inquiry	ask
finalize; finalization	complete, end
afford an opportunity to	permit, allow
at this point in time	now, currently
due to the fact that	because, due to
has the ability to	can

3. Avoid clichés.

Clichés are expressions that you have probably heard and used hundreds of times. They are over-used expressions that have largely lost their meaning and impact.

Clichés	**Alternatives**
as plain as day	plainly, obvious, clear
ballpark figure	about, approximately
few and far between	rare, infrequent
needless to say	of course, obviously
last but not least	finally, lastly
as far as___is concerned	?

4. Avoid cluttered constructions.

This category includes redundancies, repetitions, and “there is/are” and “it is” constructions.

Redundancies		
combine/join ~~together~~	fill ~~completely~~	unite ~~as one~~
finish ~~entirely~~	refer/return/revert ~~back~~ to	emphasize/stress ~~strongly~~
examine (closely)	~~suddenly~~ interrupt	~~better/further~~ enhance
~~eventually~~ evolve ~~over time~~	~~strictly~~ forbid	rely/depend ~~heavily~~
plan ~~ahead~~	~~harshly~~ condemn	protest ~~against~~
~~completely~~ surround ~~on all sides~~	estimate/approximate ~~roughly~~	gather/assemble ~~together~~
~~clearly~~ articulate	~~carefully~~ consider	~~successfully~~ prove
~~future~~ plan	~~mutual~~ agreement	years ~~of age~~
in ~~actual~~ fact	~~positive~~ benefits	~~end~~ result/product

5. Use accurate wording.

Sometimes this requires more words instead of fewer, so do not sacrifice clarity for concision. Make sure your words convey the meaning you intend. Avoid using words that have several possible meanings; do not leave room for ambiguity or alternate interpretations of your ideas. Keep in mind that readers of technical writing tend to choose literal meanings, so avoid figurative language that might be confusing (for example, using the word “decent” to describe something you like or think is good). Separate facts from opinions by using phrases like “we recommend,” “we believe,” or “in our opinion.” Use consistent terminology rather than looking for synonyms that may be less precise.

Qualify statements that need qualifying, especially if there is possibility for misinterpretation. Do not overstate through the use of absolutes and intensifiers. Avoid overusing intensifiers like “extremely,” and avoid absolutes like “never, always, all, none” as these are almost never accurate. Remember Obiwan Kenobi’s warning:

“Only a Sith deals in absolutes.”3

We tend to overuse qualifiers and intensifiers, so below are some that you should be aware of and consider whether you are using them effectively.

Overused Intensifiers					
absolutely	actually	assuredly	certainly	clearly	completely
considerably	definitely	effectively	extremely	fundamentally	drastically
highly	in fact	incredibly	inevitably	indeed	interestingly
markedly	naturally	of course	particularly	significantly	surely
totally	utterly	very	really	remarkably	tremendously

For a comprehensive list of words and phrases that should be used with caution, see Kim Blank's "Wordiness, Wordiness, Wordiness List."

6. Use the active voice.

The active voice emphasizes the person/thing doing the action in a sentence. For example, The outfielder throws the ball. The subject, "outfielder" actively performs the action of the verb "throw." The passive voice emphasizes the recipient of the action. In other words, something is being done to something by somebody: The ball was thrown (by the outfielder). Passive constructions are generally wordier and often leave out the person/thing doing the action.

Active	**Passive**
S →V →O	**S ←V ←O**
Subject → actively does the action of the verb → tothe object of the sentence	Subject ← passively receives the action of the verb ←from the object
Subject → acts → on object	Subject ← is acted upon ← by the object

While the passive voice has a place—particularly if you want to emphasize the receiver of an action as the subject of the sentence, or the action itself, or you want to avoid using first person—its overuse results in writing that is wordy, vague, and stuffy. When possible, use the active voice to convey who or what performs the action of the verb.

Precise writing encapsulates many of the 7 C's; it is clear, concise, concrete, and correct. But it is also accurate and active. To write precisely and apply the 7 C's, it is important to look critically at your sentences, perhaps in a way you may not have done before. You need to consider the design of those sentences, from the words to the phrases to the clauses, to ensure that you are communicating your message effectively.

2.4 WRITING TO PERSUADE

Sometimes, you may want to persuade your reader to take a particular action or position on an issue. To be effective, you should consider the following elements of persuasion, often referred to as Rhetorical Appeals. The ancient Greek words are ethos, pathos, logos, and kairos. These concepts are still critical in rhetoric studies today (see Figure 2.3.1):

- Ethos – Appeal to Credibility/Authority: this element of persuasion involves establishing your credibility, expertise, or authority to be making the argument. What experience or expertise do you have? What knowledge or skills do you possess? What's your role within the organization, and/or in relation to the reader? Why should the reader trust you as a reliable, knowledgeable, authoritative, and ethical source of information?
- Pathos – Appeal to Emotion/Interest/Values: this element involves appealing to the emotions, values, and/or interests of the reader. How does your proposal benefit them? Why should they care about it? How does it relate to the goals of the organization? How can you build "common ground" with your reader? What will make your reader feel "good" about your project? How can you evoke emotions such as pride or outrage?
- Logos – Appeal to Reason/Logic: this element involves grounding your argument in logic, reason, and evidence. What evidence supports your claims? On what facts and data is your reasoning based? Arguments grounded in reason and evidence are often considered the strongest. Government organizations and companies alike generally like to make "evidence- based decisions."
- Kairos – Appeal to Timeliness/Appropriateness: using this appeal means being aware of what is appropriate and timely in a given rhetorical situation. Sometimes, a well-crafted argument can fail because it comes at the wrong time.

Kairos involves knowing what is “in” or “hot” right now, what is an important topic or issue, and how best to discuss it; knowing when it is the “right time” to broach a topic or propose an idea; knowing how to use the appropriate tone, level of formality and decorum for the specific situation.

Finding the appropriate blend of appeals is critical to making a successful argument; consider that when making your case, you often have to “win both hearts and minds”—so you’ll need to appeal to both emotions and logic, do whatever you can to show the reader that you are a trustworthy source of information, and present your argument at the most opportune time. In addition to these elements, you should also be mindful of the word choice and tone so that you are presenting a persuasive argument that is also constructive and conveys the appropriate tone for your intended audience, message, and purpose.

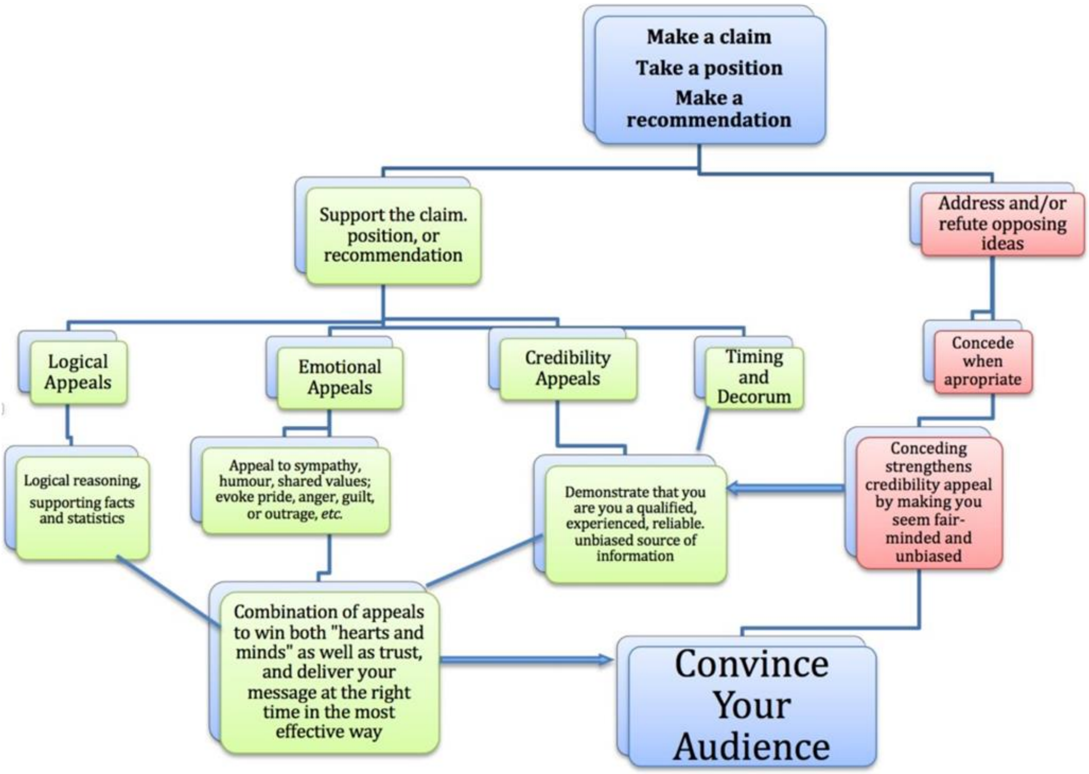


Figure 2.3.1 Using the rhetorical appeals to convince and audience [Image description]

2.4.1 Avoiding Ad-Speak

“Ad-speak” refers to the kind of language often used in advertisements. Its aim is to convince consumers to buy something, whether they need it or not, hopefully without thinking too much about it. Because we hear this kind of rhetoric all the time, it easily becomes habit to use it ourselves. We must break this habit when communicating in professional contexts.

Ad-Speak tends to use strategies such as

- Emotional manipulation
- Logical fallacies
- Hyperbole
- Exaggeration or dishonesty
- Vague claims
- Incomplete or cherry-picked data
- Biased viewpoints
- Hired actors rather than professionals or experts as spokespeople.

As a student in a professionalizing program learning the specialized skills and developing the sense of social obligation needed to become a trusted professional, you should avoid using “sensational” language characteristic of marketing languge. Instead, when trying to persuade your reader, make sure you use quantifiable, measurable descriptors and objective language in your writing. You cannot determine how many units of “excellence” something has, or its quantifiable amount of “awesomeness,” “fantastic-ness,” or “extraordinariness.” Describing something as “incredible” literally means it’s unbelievable. So avoid using these kinds of words shown in Figure 2.3.2.

Figure 2.3.2 Ad-Speak Word Cloud.

Find measurable terms like “efficiency” (in time or energy use), “effectiveness” at fulfilling a specific task, measurable benefits and/or costs, or even “popularity” as measured by a survey.

2.4.2 Communicating Ethically

In professional writing, communicating ethically is critically important. Ethical communications involves communicating from a place of accountability, responsibility, integrity, and values. If you are communicating ethically, you are demonstrating respect for your reader, the organizations you work for and with, and the culture and context within which you work. You also foster fairness and trust through honesty. Failure to maintain integrity and ethics can result in consequences ranging from damage to reputation, loss of work, lawsuits, criminal charges, and even tragic loss of life.

This is precisely why many professional associations have guidelines that govern the ethical behavior of their membership. Two such documents that may be relevant to you are the Faculty of Engineering’s “Standards for Professional Behavior” (.pdf) and the Association of Professional Engineers and Geoscientists of BC APEGBC Code-of-Ethics (.pdf). For example, take note of the portions of the APEGBC Code of Ethics that relate specifically to ethical communication.

It is important to become familiar with these standards of practice, and to consider how they impact communication practices. Remember that you are communicating in a professional context, and that comes with responsibility. Consider the different rhetorical situations diagrammed in Figure 2.3.3, one for a marketer and one for an engineer.

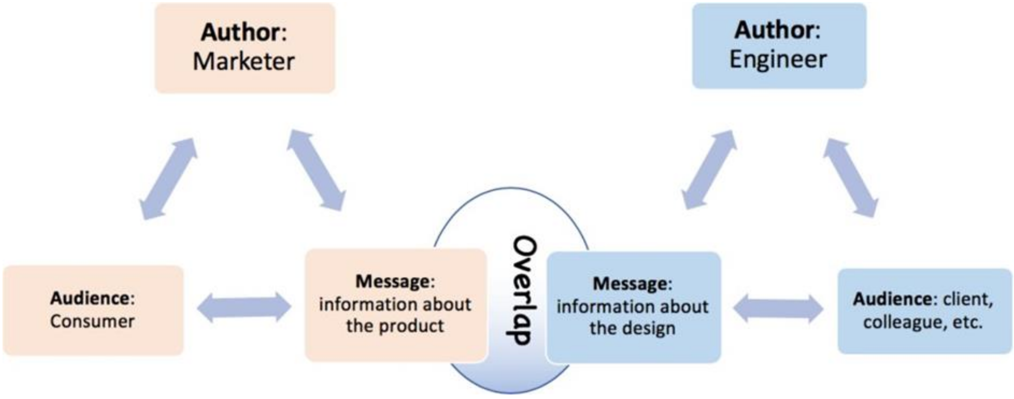


Figure 2.3.3 Comparison of the rhetorical situation for a marketer vs. an engineer. [Image Description]

Clearly, there may be some overlap, but there will also be significant differences based on the needs and expectations of the audience and the kind of message being delivered. We hear marketing language so often that it is easy to fall into the habit of using it, even when it's not appropriate. Make sure you are not using "ad-speak" when trying to persuade in a professional context.

2.5 THE IMPORTANCE OF VERBS

Much of the style advice given so far revolves around the importance of verbs. Think of your sentence as a machine, and the verb as the engine that makes the machine work. Like machines, sentences can function efficiently or inefficiently, and the use of a strong verb is one way to make them work effectively. Here are some key principles regarding the effective use of verbs in your sentences. While effective sentences may occasionally deviate from the suggestions in this list, try to follow these guidelines as often as possible:

- Keep the subject and the verb close together; avoid separating them with words or phrases that could create confusion
- Place the verb near the beginning of the sentence (and close to the subject)
- Maintain a high verb/word ratio in your sentence
- Prefer active verb constructions over passive ones
- Avoid "to be" verbs (am, is, are, was, were, being, been, be)
- Try to turn nominalizations (abstract nouns) back into verbs.

Use the verb strength chart in Table 2.4.1 as a guide to “elevate” weaker verbs (or words with implied action) in a sentence to stronger forms.

Verb Forms	Verb Strength	Examples
Command/Imperative	**STRONG**	**Maintain** the machine properly! **Write** the report!
Active Indicative* (S → V)		He **maintains** the machine regularly. She **writes** reports frequently.
Active conditional		She **would maintain** the machine **if** he would let her. He **would write** reports if he had more training.
Gerunds (_____-ing) Infinitives (to _______) (*these do not function as verbs in your sentence; actual verbs are highlighted in yellow*)		While **maintaining** the machine, he gets quite dirty. Report **writing** takes skill. It takes a lot of time **to maintain** this machine. **To write** effectively, one must get a sense of the audience.
Passive (S ← V) Passive Conditional		The machine **is maintained** by him. It **would be maintained** by her if… The report **was written** by her. Reports **would be written** by him if…
Nominalizations (*verbs turned into abstract nouns)* Participles (*nouns or adjectives that used to be verbs*)	**WEAK**	Machine **maintenance** is dirty work. A well-**maintained** machine is a thing of beauty. **Written** work must be free of errors.

While you are not likely to use the command form very often, unless you are writing instructions, the second strongest form, Active Indicative, is the one you want to use most often (say, in about 80% of your sentences).

Part of the skill of using active verbs lies in choosing the verbs that precisely describes the action you want to convey. English speakers have become somewhat lazy in choosing a small selection of verbs most of the time (to be, to do, to get, to make, to have, to put); as a result, these often-used verbs have come to have so many possible meanings that they are almost meaningless. Try looking up “make” or “have” in the dictionary; you will see pages and pages of possible meanings! Whenever possible, avoid these bland verbs and use more precise, descriptive verbs, as indicated in Table 2.4.2.

TABLE 2.4.2 Bland vs. descriptive verbs

Bland Verbs	**Descriptive Verbs**
Signal Verbs: Says States Talks about Discusses Writes	Describe the rhetorical purpose behind what the author/speaker “says”:Explains, clarifies Describes, illustrates Claims, argues, maintains Asserts, stresses, emphasizes Recommends, urges, suggests
Is, are, was, were being beenIs <u>*verb*</u>-ing	Instead of indicating what or how something “**is**,” describe what it **DOES**, bychoosing a precise, active verb. Replace progressive form (*is__ing*) with indicative form *She is describing → She describes*
Get, gets	Usually too colloquial (or passive); instead you could use more specific verbssuch as Become, acquire, obtain, receive, prepare, achieve, earn, contract, catch,understand, appreciate, *etc*.

Do, does	Avoid using the *emphatic* tense in formal writing:It *does* work → it **works**. I *do* crack when I see apostrophe errors → I **crack** when I see apostrophe errors. Instead: Perform, prepare, complete, *etc*.
Has, have Has to, have to	This verb has many potential meanings! Try to find a more specific verb that"have/has" or "has to": • She **owns** a car • They **consume/eat** a meal • The product **includes** many optional features • The process **entails** several steps Instead of "have to" try: Must, require, need, *etc*.
Make	Build, construct, erect, devise, create, design, manufacture, produce, prepare, earn, etc. Make a recommendation → recommend Make a promise → promise Make a plan → plan

2.6 LET US SUM UP

Table 2.4.3 sums up many key characteristics of effective professional style that you should try to avoid(poor style) and implement (effective style) while writing technical documents.

TABLE 2.4.3 Key characteristics of effective professional style

Poor Style	Effective Style
Low VERB/WORD ratio per sentence	High VERB/WORD ratio per sentence
Excessive 'is/are' verbs	Concrete, descriptive verbs
Excessive passive verb constructions	Active verb constructions
Abstract or vague nouns	Concrete and specific nouns
Many prepositional phrases	Few prepositional phrases
Subject and verb are separated by words or phrases	Subject and verb are close together
Verb is near the end of the sentence	Verb is near the beginning of the sentence

Main idea (subject-verb relationship) is difficult to find	Main idea is clear
Sentence must be read more than once to understand it	Meaning is clear the first time you read it
Long, rambling sentences	Precise, specific sentences

2.7 FURTHER READING

For further reading, see “Communication in the Workplace: What Can NC State Students Expect?” a study based on the responses of over 1000 professionals from various fields, including engineering, on how important business, technical and scientific communication is to their work.

2.8 ASSIGNMENTS

Unit 3: TECHNICAL WRITING

3

Unit Structure

3.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After studying this unit student should be able to:

- Understand the importance of “readability” to your technical audience, and what that looks like in technical documents.
- Understand how to use headings to organize information logically to enhance readers’ comprehension.
- Understand the rules for embedding various kinds of lists in your documents to emphasize key points and simplify text.
- Understand how to integrate various kinds of figures and tables into documents to effectively present visual data and images.
- Apply revision strategies to enhance clarity and readability.

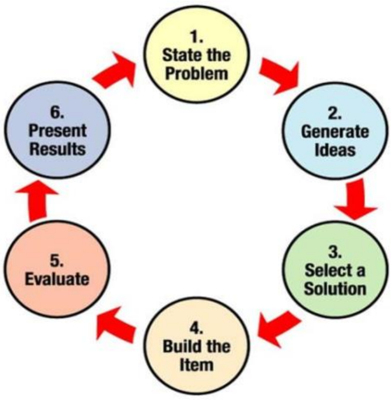
3.2 INTRODUCTION

Document design is the “nuts and bolts” of technical writing. No matter how brilliant or important the content, if it is not formatted in way that enhances readability, it will likely not receive the attention it deserves. This section includes the information on how technical writers use formatting features to optimize readability.

3.3 PROBLEM-SOLVING APPROACH TO COMMUNICATIONS TASKS

In the workplace, many of the communications tasks you perform are designed to solve a problem or improve a situation. Whether you are doing work for a client, for your employer, with your team, or for someone else, you will typically use some sort of design process to tackle and solve the problem. A clearly-articulated design process provides you with a clear, step-by-step plan for finding the best solution for your situation.

Take a moment to search the Internet for the term “design process” and look at “images.” You will find many variations. Have a look at several of them and see if you can find a common pattern.



One commonality you will likely find in examining other people’s design process diagrams is this: the first step in designing any solution is to clearly define the problem.

Figure 1.1.1 shows NASA's basic design process. Think about the kind of communication that each step of this process might entail.

You cannot begin to work on solutions until you have a clear definition of the problem and goals you want to achieve. This critical first stage of the design process requires that you effectively communicate with the "client" or whoever has the "problem" that needs solving. Poor communication at this stage can derail a project from the start.

For our purposes, we will use Barry Hyman's Problem Formulation model to clearly define a problem. Hyman's Problem Formulation model consists of 4 elements:

5. Need Statement: recognizes and describes the need for a solution or improvement to an "unsatisfactory situation." It answers the questions, "what is wrong with the way things are currently? What is unsatisfactory about it? What negative effects does this situation cause?" You may need to do research and supply data to quantify the negative effects.
6. Goal Statement: describes what the improved situation would look like once a solution has been implemented. The goal statement defines the scope of your search for a solution. At this point, do not describe your solution, only the goal that any proposed solution should achieve. The broader you make your goal, the more numerous and varied the solution can be; a narrowly focused goal limits the number and variety of possible solutions.
7. Objectives: define measurable, specific outcomes that any feasible solution should optimize (aspects you can use to "grade" the effectiveness of the solution). Objectives provide you with ways to quantifiably measure how well any solution will solve the problem; ideally, they will allow you to compare multiple solutions and figure out which one is most effective (which one gets the highest score on meeting the objectives?).
8. Constraints: define the limits that any feasible solution must adhere to in order to be acceptable (pass/fail conditions, range limits, etc.). The key word here is must — constraints are the "go/no go" conditions that determine whether a solution is acceptable or not. These often include budget and time limits, as well as legal, safety and regulatory requirements.

3.4 COMMUNICATION AS SOLUTION

This model can apply to a communications task as well as more physical design tasks. Imagine your communications task as something that will solve a problem or improve a situation. Before you begin drafting this document or presentation, define the problem you want to solve with this document:

- **Understand the Need:** consider what gave rise to the need to communicate. Does someone lack sufficient information to make a decision or take a position on an issue? Did someone request information? Is there some unsatisfactory situation that needs to be remedied by communicating with your audience? What specifically is unsatisfactory about it? Consider your audience. For example
  - *A potential client lacks sufficient information on whether the solution I have proposed to solve the client's problem will be feasible, affordable, and effective.*
  - *My instructor lacks sufficient examples of my written work to assign a grade for how well I met the course learning objectives.*
- **Establish a Goal:** consider your purpose in writing. What do you want your reader to do, think, or know? Do you want your reader to make a decision? Change their opinion or behaviour? Follow a course of action? What is your desired outcome? And what form and style of communication will best lead to that outcome? For example
  - *Provide the client with enough information, in an effective and readable format, to make a decision (ideally, to hire you to build the solution for the problem).*
  - *Provide my instructor with samples of my writing that demonstrate my achievement of the course learning objectives (provide relevant and complete information in a professionally appropriate format, using evidence-based argument; earn an A+ grade on the assignment.)*
- **Define Objectives:** consider the specifics of your message and your audience to determine what criteria you should meet. What form should it take? What content elements will you need to include? What kind of research will be required? What information does your audience want/need? What do they already know?
  - *Review the client's RFP to see what specific objectives it lists.*
  - *Review the Technical Report Grading Rubric to determine specific requirements and objectives that will be graded by your instructor.*
- **Identify Constraints:** what are the pass/fail conditions of this document? Consider your rhetorical situation. What conditions exist that present barriers or challenges to communication? How can you address them? For example, how

much time is your audience willing to spend on this? What format and style do they require? How long can you make your document or presentation? How much time do you have to create it? Do you have a deadline? A Style Guide you must follow? A template you can use? (e.g., word limit, due date, pass/fail criteria such as avoiding plagiarism, etc.)

3.5 Conventions and Characteristics

Every genre of writing has unique characteristics and rules, called conventions, that help readers classify a document as belonging to a particular genre. This also applies to film and music. Think about the last movie you saw. What type of movie was it? What about that movie gave you that impression? Did the characters wear Stetson hats, ride horses, and carry guns? Did they fly in space ships, encounter alien beings, and use futuristic technology? Those elements are typical conventions of Western and Science Fiction genres.

Non-fiction is a category that can be broken into various genres. The main genres that are relevant to us are journalism (newspaper writing), academic writing (written by scholars and published in peer reviewed academic journals or books), and technical writing. Before we get into the specific conventions that characterize technical writing, take a moment to think back to your academic writing course and list some conventions typical of journalism (popular press) and academic writing in Table 1.1.1.

TABLE 1.1.1 Identify the conventions for journalistic and academic writing

Criteria	Journalistic	Academic
Purpose		
Audience		
Writing Style		
Tone		
Structure		
Format/Formatting		
Other Features		

Like journalism and scholarly writing, technical writing also has distinct features that readers expect to see in documents that fall within this genre. These include (a) use of headings to organize information into coherent sections, (b) use of lists to present information concisely, (c) use of figures and tables to present data and information visually, and (d) use of visual design to enhance readability (all of these topics are covered in Chapter 3: Document Design). These conventions are connected to the main purposes of technical writing, which include communicating the following:

- Technical or specialized information in an accessible and usable ways
- Clear instructions on how to do something in a clear manner
- Information that advances the goals of the company or organization.

Technical documentation is intended to communicate information to the people who need it in a way that is clear and easy to read, at the right time to help make decisions and to support productivity. Designing technical communication is like designing any other product for an intended user: the ultimate goal is to make it "user friendly."

Key words here are accessible, usable, clear, goal-oriented, effective, and reader-centred. The characteristics of technical writing support these goals and concepts.

If we filled in **Table 1.1** with typical characteristics of technical writing, it might look something like **Table 1.1.2:**

TABLE 1.1.2 Conventions of technical writing

Criteria	Technical Writing
Purpose	To communicate technical and specialized information in a clear, accessible, usable manner to people who need to use it to make decisions, perform processes, or support company goals.
Audience	Varied, but can include fellow employees such as subordinates, colleagues, managers, and executives, as well as clients and other stakeholders, the general public, and even readers within the legal system.
Writing Style	Concise, clear, plain, and direct language; may include specialized terminology; typically uses short sentences and paragraphs; uses active voice; makes purpose immediately clear.
Tone	Business/professional in tone, which falls between formal and informal; mayuse first person or second person if appropriate; courteous and constructive.
Structure	Highly structured; short paragraphs; clear transitions and structural cues (headings and sub-headings) to move the reader through and direct the reader.

Format/Formatting	Can be in electronic, visual, or printed formats; may be long (reports) or short (emails, letters, memos); often uses style guides to describe required formatting features; uses headings, lists, figures and tables.
Other Features	Typically objective and neutral; ideas are evidence and data-driven; descriptors are precise and quantitative whenever possible.

3.6 Understanding the Rhetorical Situation

It is common knowledge in the workplace that no one really wants to read what you write, and even if they want to or have to read it, they will likely not read all of it. So how do you get your reader to understand what you need quickly and efficiently? Start by doing a detailed Task and Audience Analysis — make sure you understand the "rhetorical situation." Before you begin drafting a document, determine the needs of your rhetorical situation (See Figure 1.3.1).

Figure 1.3.1 The Rhetorical Situation.

The "rhetorical situation" is a term used to describe the components of any situation in which you may want to communicate, whether in written or oral form. To define a "rhetorical situation," ask yourself this question: "who is talking to whom about what, how, and why?" There are five main components:

- Purpose
- Writer
- Audience
- Message
- Context/Culture

PURPOSE refers to the why you are writing. Determining your purpose requires that you engage in Task Analysis — that is, determine what you hope to accomplish by writing this document. Ask yourself what you hope the reader(s) will do/think/decide/ or how they will behave as a result of reading the text. There are three general purposes for communication in the workplace: 1) to create a record, 2) to give or request information, and 3) to persuade.

Within those general purposes, you will find a myriad of specific purposes. For example, your purpose may be to propose an innovative solution to a specific problem. In this case, you want the reader to agree to explore the idea further, or approve funding for further research and development, which would fall under the general purpose of writing to persuade.

WRITER refers to you, the writer/creator/designer of the communication. It is important to examine your own motivation for writing and any biases, past experiences, and knowledge you bring to the writing situation. These elements will influence how you craft the message, whether positively or negatively. This examination should also include your role within the organization, as well as your position relative to your target audience.

AUDIENCE refers to your readers/listeners/viewers/users. Audience Analysis is possibly the most critical part of understanding the rhetorical situation. Consider Figure 1.3.2 below. Is your audience internal (within your company) or external (such as clients, suppliers, customers, other stakeholders)? Are they lateral to you (at the same position or level), upstream from you (management), or downstream from you (employees, subordinates)? Who is the primary audience? Who are the secondary audiences? These questions, and others, help you to create an understanding of your audience that will help you craft a message that is designed to effectively communicate specifically to them.

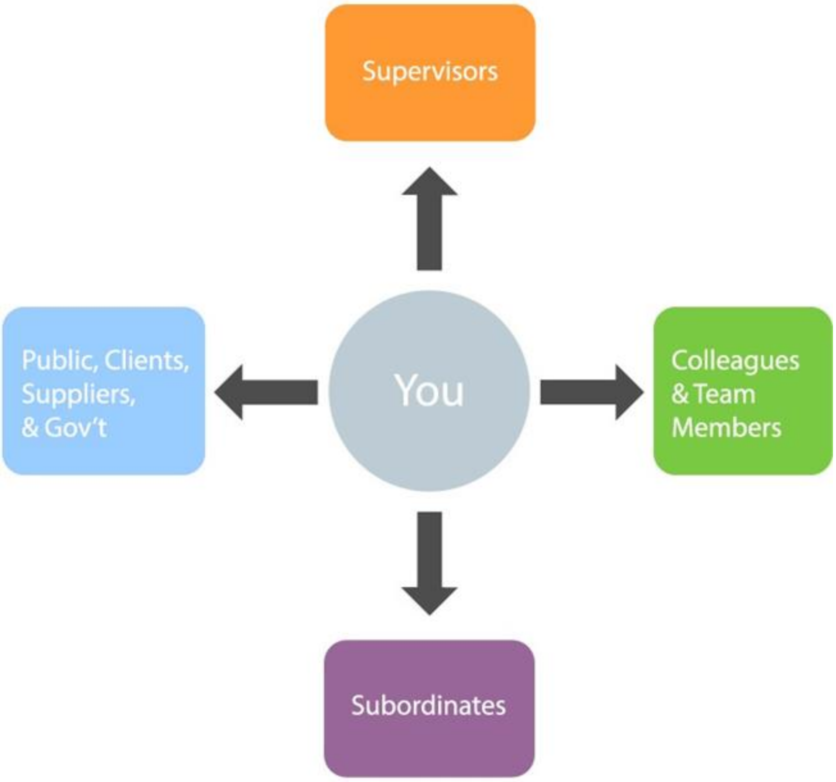


Figure 1.3.2 Understanding your relationship to your audience.

Keep in mind that your different audiences will also have a specific purpose in reading your document. Consider what their various purposes might be, and how you can best help them achieve their purpose. Considering what they are expected to do with the information you provide will help you craft your message effectively. Consider also that technical writing often has a long "life-span" – a document you write today could be filed away and reviewed months or even years down the road. Consider the needs of that audience as well.

Audience	Purpose for Reading
Executives	Make decisions
Supervising Experts/Managers	Advise decision makers; direct subordinates
Technical Experts/Co-workers	Implement decisions; advise
Lay People/Public/Clients	Become informed; choose options; make decisions

Some companies develop audience profiles to help guide their communications. This is a good exercise whenever you have something to communicate, especially if the information is complex. Here are some questions to consider as part of the audience profile:

Developing an
Audience Profile

- Who are your primary readers? (specific names and titles, or general roles)
- Are they above you in the organizational hierarchy? Lateral, subordinate? Outside of your organization?
- Who else might read this document? (secondary readers)
- Do you know what their attitude towards the topic is?
- How might cultural differences affect their expectations and interpretations?
- How much technical background do the readers have?
- How much do they already know about the topic?

MESSAGE refers to what information you want to communicate. This is the content of your document. It should be aligned to your purpose and targeted to your audience. While it is important to carefully choose what content your audience needs, it is equally critical to cut out content that your audience does not need or want. "Time is money" may be a tired old cliché, but it is important to avoid wasting your audience's time with information that is unnecessary or irrelevant to them. Your message should be professional, and expressed in an appropriate tone for the audience, purpose, and context. We will discuss aspects of using a professional style and tone in crafting your message more in Chapter 2.

CONTEXT refers to the situation that creates the need for the writing. In other words, what has happened or needs to happen that creates the need for communication? The context is influenced by timing, location, current events, and culture, which can be organizational or social. Ignoring the context for your communication could result in awkward situations, or possibly offensive ones. It will almost certainly impact your ability to clearly convey your message to your audience.

3.7 LET US SUM UP

3.8 FURTHER READING

3. NASA design process." NASA STEM Engagement [Online]. Available: https://www.nasa.gov/audience/ foreducators/best/index.html.Used for educational and noncommercial purposes.
4. B. Hyman, “Ch. 2: Problem formulation,” in Fundamentals of Engineering Design, Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2002, pp. 40-54.

3.9 ASSIGNMENTS

Unit 4: TEAMWORK AND COMMUNICATION

4

Unit Structure

4.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After studying this unit student should be able to:

- Understand how to use strategies and documents, such as Team Charters, Agendas, Minutes, and Work Logs to facilitate effective teamwork.
- Understand various models of team dynamics, and reflect on how you might apply them to help you and your team mates resolve conflicts and work productively.
- Understand the processes and strategies for writing collaboratively, and reflect on what works for your team.

4.2 INTRODUCTION

As companion reading to this chapter that offers a comprehensive discussion of how to work effectively in teams, I recommend reading the sections called "Introduction to Teamwork" and "Project Management" in Designing Engineers: An Introductory Text, by Susan McCahan et al.

4.3 TEAM PROJECT MANAGEMENT TOOLS AND STRATEGIES

Teamwork is a key component of almost any workplace, but it is essential in engineering and software development environments where you often find yourself working as part of a team on large projects. Imagine for a moment how many people must work together to designs a product like Skyrim (click here if you want to know: Skyrim development team).

It is widely accepted that team synergy and team intelligence lead to greater efficiency and better results in most situations. Why, then, are some people reluctant to engage in teamwork? Perhaps this reluctance stems from ineffective or dysfunctional teamwork experiences in the past. Often the culprit in these situations is not a "poor team player" or an "inability to get along with others." More likely it was caused by one of two things: misaligned goals or confusion over roles. For teamwork to be effective, all members of the team must understand and share the goals of the project, and all members must fully understand their roles—what is expected of them, and how they will be held accountable. An effective team leader will make sure that goals and roles are fully understood by all team members.

"Introduction to Teamwork," a section in Designing Engineers, by Susan McCahan et al. provides a detailed description of the stages of the Tuckman Team Formation model and the need for effective communications at each stage. A team, according to McCahan et al., "is a group of people who come together to work in an interrelated manner towards a common goal." They go on to differentiate a team from a group by noting that a team is connected by "a common purpose or goal and the reliance on the skills of all the members to meet the goal" 2. In other words, team members see themselves as part of a collective working towards a common goal rather than individuals working on separate tasks that may lead to an end product. In order to work effectively, team members need to communicate clearly and constructively, and learn how to deal with crises and conflicts that will inevitably arise.

Some common benefits of working in teams include increased productivity, increased innovation, and increased efficiency. Excellent teams have synergy that makes them more than simply the sum of their parts. The term "team intelligence" refers to the fact that collectively, teams have more knowledge and skill than the single individuals working separately. However, challenges can also arise when working in a team. Conflicts within a team do occur and often they begin as a result of poor communication and weak focus. Some ways to handle these challenges include the following:

- **Elect a team leader:** the team leader will act as the hub for communication and tasks. This person helps provide direction and guidance for the team. This should be someone who has earned the team's respect and who can be persuasive and tactful. This role can be rotated among team members.
- **Ensure the goal is clear:** a team is governed by the goal that everyone works to achieve. It is important that the goal is clearly understood and agreed upon by everyone on the team.
- **Establish team rules:** as a team, determine the rules by which the team will operate. These should include expectations around time, meetings, attendance, communication, decision-making, contribution, and mechanisms to warn and/or fire a team member or quit a team.

- **Assign responsibilities:** as part of the breakdown of tasks, members should be assigned responsibility for certain tasks, which means that they are the primary leads in preventing and addressing issues that come up in that area.
- **Set agendas for meetings and keep minutes:** to ensure that team meeting time is useful and achieves its purpose, plan an agenda for each meeting to help keep everyone on task. In addition, have someone take minutes to record decisions that are made. This record helps prevent repetition and ensures work actually gets done.
- **Determine the timing for tasks:** task timing involves two aspects: the duration for completing the task and the timing of the task in relation to the other tasks. Typically, tasks take longer than you think they will so it is often better to add 25% to your duration estimate. The timing of the tasks is important to figure out because some tasks can be completed concurrently, but others may have to be sequenced. Professionals often use Gantt Charts to outline these tasks and the time they will take within the overall project scale.
- **Manage communications:** if a problem arises with someone on the team, the team leader should speak privately to the person and clearly indicate what needs to change and why. The focus should be on the behaviour, not on the person's character. Issues should be dealt with quickly rather than left to deteriorate further. If this does not solve the problem, then try other approaches (See McCahan et al. "Management Strategies" for more information).

There are several tools and strategies that teams can use to improve their functioning and productivity. Some examples include using the following documents:

- **Team Charter:** outlines the rules and expectations agreed upon by the team
- **Meeting Agenda:** outlines the main points for discussion at a meeting
- **Meeting Minutes:** records the decisions and relevant discussion points for a meeting
- **Work Logs:** records the tasks and time spent for each team member
- **Status Reports:** records the completed tasks and work left to complete
- **Gantt Chart:** breaks down tasks and their estimated duration over the work period.

There are also many software programs and apps that can help teams manage projects. Students often use Google docs to work collaboratively on a document or project. The most common one used in the workplace is Microsoft Project. However, other productivity apps can be used to great effect as well. Slack, Wrike, and Asana are free popular web based options. Whatever tool you choose to use, it should be something that all members can access and understand.

4.4 MEETING DOCUMENTS: AGENDAS AND MINUTES

What happens at team meetings should be planned and recorded for future reference. Agendas and Minutes are documents that do this. A meeting also should have a chair (the person who keeps things on track) and a recorder (who records what happened and what decisions were made). The Agenda is the plan for what you want to discuss and accomplish at the meeting. It is usually made up of a list of items, sometimes with a time frame for each item.

Sample Agenda

ENGR 240 Team Meeting Agenda

Date:

Place and time: Members:

————————————————-

- Updates from each team member (progress) (5 min each)
- Develop work plan for upcoming week (15 min)
- Determine next meeting time (5 min)
- Work on Milestone 3 together (45 min)
- Matters arising

Minutes follow up on the agenda by recording what decisions were made and what important topics were discussed. One person is responsible for recording the events of the meeting, and distributing the minutes to each member (via email usually). That way, no one should forget what tasks they agreed to complete and when.

ENGR 240 Team Meeting Minutes

Thursday Feb, 15, 2016

Cle A035, 3:30-4:45

Present: Jaime, Chris, Renee Regrets: Joe (has the flu)

———————————————————-

- All team members have completed last week's work plan (Joe emailed a report, as she is sick)
- In the coming week, we plan to complete the following:

Task	**Who will do it?**
1. Interview Facilities Management contact	Renee
2. Research bike share programs	(Joe?)
3. Design a survey/questionnaire	Chris
4. Do a site visit	Jaime

- Next meeting: next Thursday Feb 21, after class
- Excellent progress during meeting; Joe will follow up on researching bike share programs.
- Meeting adjourned 4:50

4.5 WORK LOGS

Work logs are common documents used in the work place (and in your Co-op Work Terms) to keep track of what work is done, by whom, and how long it took. These can be very helpful for keeping a team on track and ensuring equitable workloads. To ensure accountability, have each team member sign off on the work log.

Date	Task Description	Assigned to	Status / Date Completed	Total Time Spent

Team signatures:

Name:____________________________________

Name:____________________________________

Name:____________________________________

Name:____________________________________

The next section reviews several **Models for Understanding Team Dynamics.**

4.6.1 Five Models for Understanding Team Dynamics

An important aspect of effective teamwork entails understanding group dynamics in terms of both team situation and individual temperament. This section reviews a variety models often applied in workplaces that can help a team perform optimally and manage crises effectively.

1. The Tuckman Team Model

"Tuckman's Stages of Group Development," proposed by psychologist Bruce Tuckman in 1965,1 is one of the most famous theories of team development. It describes four stages that teams may progress through: forming, storming, norming, and performing (a 5th stage was added later: adjourning). According to McCahan et al., the stages move from organizing to producing, and although the stages appear linear, in fact teams may move backwards depending on events that may influence the team and the communications strategies that they use. Some teams can also stall in a stage and never fully realize their potential. Figure 4.2.1 outlines these stages. Please refer to the McCahan et al. text2 for a more complete discussion.

Figure 4.2.1 The Stages of the Tuckman Model.

Note that at each stage, communication is a critical component of successfully moving to the next stage. The forming stage, when everyone is getting to know each other and are trying to make a good impression, is a good time to create a set of shared expectations, guidelines, or a Team Charter. A team forming activity is also a good idea to help build trust and get to know the various strengths and weaknesses of the team members. This is an orientation stage, on both an interpersonal and professional level, where preliminary boundaries and expectations are established.

The storming stage is the one most often characterized by group conflict and dysfunction. It is often where the preliminary expectations and boundaries are challenged as individuals learn more about each other's motivations. This coincides with the "brainstorming" stage of the design process, in which each member contributes ideas that could potentially become the focus of the project. It is also the stage where team mates learn about each other's' strengths and weaknesses, and try to determine what their roles will be in the project. Learning to harness the constructive potential of conflict and compromise in this stage is important to progressing to the next stage.

During the norming stage, if conflicts have been resolved and team mates have proved flexible, all is going well, each team member knows their role and works on their part of the project. Sometimes, people work independently in this stage, but check in with team mates frequently to make sure work flow is efficient and effective. Group cohesion ensures that everyone is responsible to the task and to each other. Problems might arise at this stage if teammates do not fully understand their role, the team expectations, or the overall goal; revisiting the forming or storming stage may be required.

Few first-time teams reach the performing stage, as this happens when teams have worked together well on several projects, have established a synergy, and have developed systems that that make projects go smoothly and efficiently. Less time is needed to form, storm and learn to norm; performing teams can move quickly and interdependently to tackling the task at hand. Adjourning and going their separate ways can often be somewhat emotional for these teams. Figure 4.2.24 depicts the trajectory of each team member during each stage.

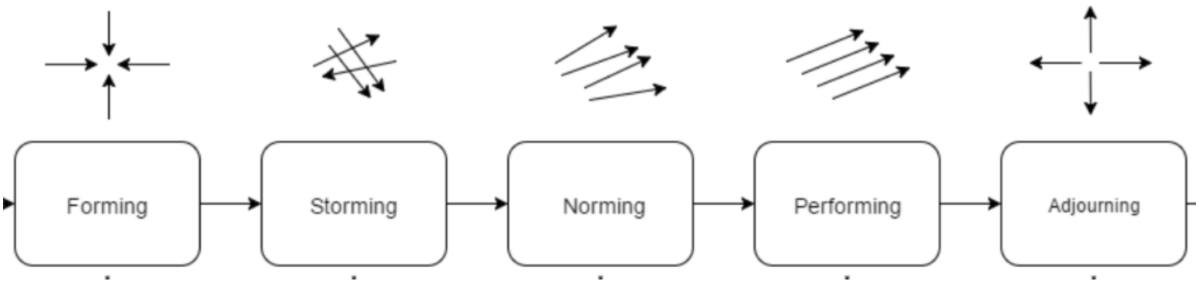


Figure 4.2.2 Trajectory of team mates during each stage of the Tuckman team formation model.

2. DISC Model

DISC theory, developed in 1928 by Dr. William Moulton Marston (who also, as it happens, created the Wonder Woman comic series!), has evolved into a useful model for conflict management as it predicts behaviours based on four key personality traits he originally described as Dominance, Inducement, Submission, and Compliance.5 The names of these four traits have been variously revised by others over the decades, so you might find different terms used in different contexts. The four general traits are now often described as (1) Dominance, (2) Influence/Inspiring(3) Steadiness/Supportive, and (4) Compliance/Conscientiousness (see Figure 4.2.3).

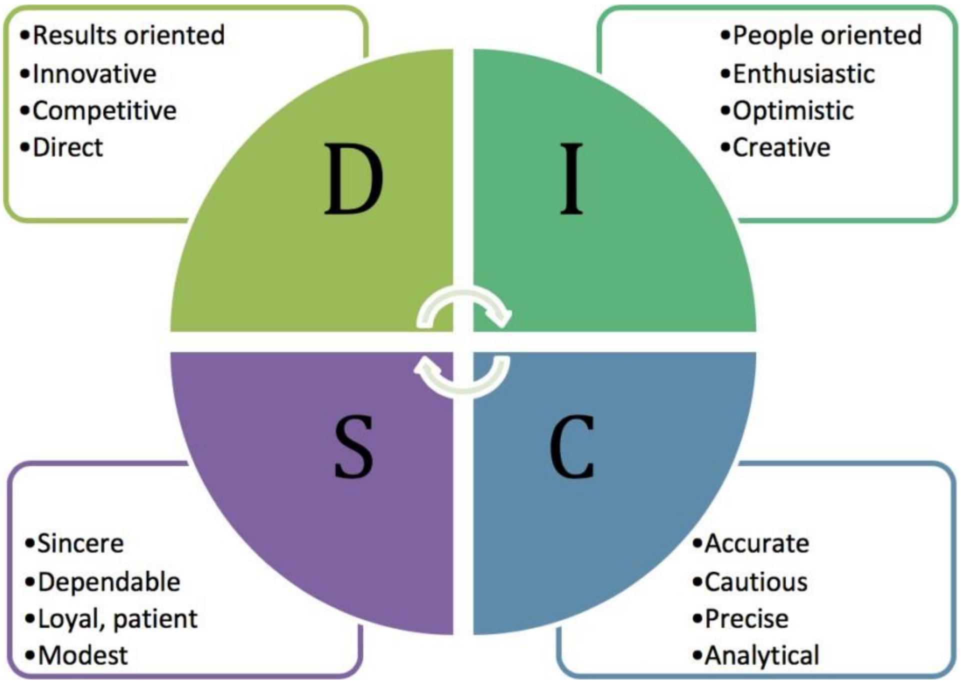


Figure 4.2.3 DISC Profile

Industries often use DISC assessments in professional contexts. Having some insight into your teammates' personality traits can help when trying to resolve conflicts. General characteristics of each trait are as follows:

- **Dominance**
  - Characteristics: direct, decisive, ego-driven, problem-solver, and risk-taker; likes new challenges and freedom from routine; driven to overcome obstacles
  - Strengths: great organizer and time manager; challenges the status quo; innovative
  - Weaknesses: can be argumentative, disrespectful of authority, and overly ambitious (taking on too much); can be blunt, stubborn, and aggressive
- **Inspiring/Influential**
  - Characteristics: enthusiastic, persuasive, optimistic, trusting, impulsive, charismatic, and emotional
  - Strengths: creative problem solver; great cheer-leader, negotiator, and peace-maker; a real "people person"

- Weaknesses: more concerned with popularity than tangible results; lacks attention to detail
- **Steady/Supportive**
  - Characteristics: reliable, predictable, friendly, good listener, team player, empathetic, easy-going, and altruistic.
  - Strengths: dependable, loyal; respects authority; has patience and empathy; good at conflict resolution; willing to compromise.
  - Weaknesses: resistant to change; sensitive to criticism; difficulty prioritizing
- **Cautious/Conscientious/Compliant**
  - Characteristics: has high standards; values precision and accuracy; analytical and systematic; even-tempered, realistic, and logical; methodical; respect for authority
  - Strengths: great information gatherer/researcher; able to define situations precisely and accurately; offers realistic perspective
  - Weaknesses: can get bogged down in details; needs clear boundaries, procedures, and methods; difficulty accepting criticism; may avoid conflict or just "give in." May be overly timid.

3. Lencioni Model

In his 2005 book, The Five Dysfunctions of a Team, Lencioni outlines five common problems teams experience that impact their effectiveness:

1. **Lack of trust:** if team members do not trust each other, they are unlikely to take risks or ask for help. A lack of trust means a low level of comfort that makes it difficult to communicate and perform effectively as a team
2. **Fear of conflict:** avoiding conflict can lead to an artificial "peace" at the expense of progress and innovation. Conflict is a normal part of team work and can be very productive if managed effectively.
3. **Lack of commitment:** team members do not commit to doing the work, do not follow through on decisions or tasks, do not meet deadlines, and let their teammates down, ultimately affecting the success of the whole project.
4. **Avoidance of accountability.**
5. **Inattention to results:** when team members focus on their own personal goals instead of project goals, they lose sight of the expected results that actually measure the success of the project. Not focusing on the results

during the process means that no one is planning how to improve those results.

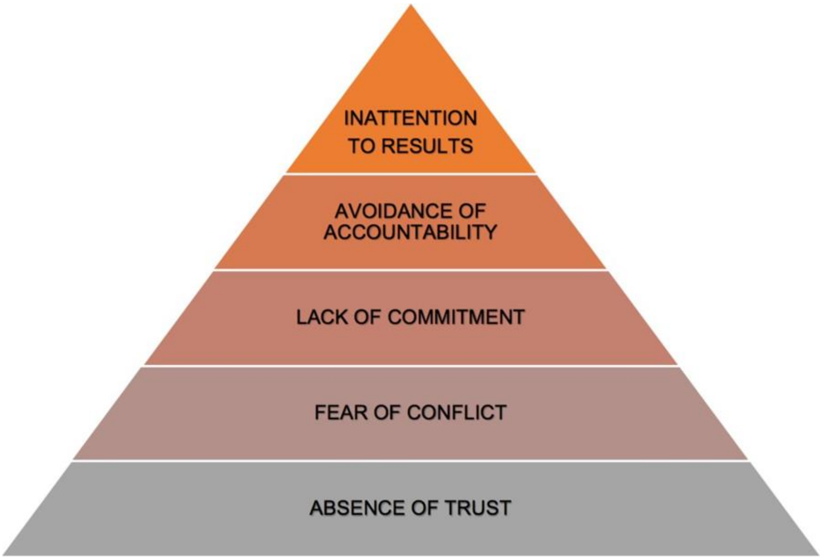


Figure 4.2.5 Lencioni Model: Five Dysfunctions of a Team

Lencioni advises tackling each dysfunction, displayed in the pyramid in Figure 4.2.5, from the bottom up. Establishing trust is a crucial first step to being able to manage conflict, achieve commitment, create accountability and focus on results.

4.6.2 Collaborative Writing

You have likely had at least one opportunity to work and write collaboratively with others, as this is an increasingly common way to work, both in school and in the workplace. The engineering design process, at least in part, entails working collaboratively to gather, organize, manage and disseminate information.This information is often carefully analyzed and used to make important decisions, so it is critical that team members collaborate effectively in managing these communications tasks.

Engineers report spending a considerable amount of their time writing, and they frequently engage in collaborative writing (CW). A recent survey asked various professionals what portion of their work week was devoted to writing, collaborative writing, and international communications.2 The results shown in Table 4.3.1 indicate that collaborative writing makes up a significant portion of overall writing tasks.

TABLE 4.3.1 Percentage of total work week that engineers and programmers report spending on communications tasks

	Engineers	Programmers
Time spent writing	35	25
Time spent planning and writing documentscollaboratively	19	12
Time spent communicating internationally (acrossnational borders)	14	18

Research has also shown that "writing in general and CW in particular have been recognized to be fundamental to most professional and academic practices in engineering."3 Figure 4.3.1 shows that engineers rate writing skills as extremely important to career advancement.

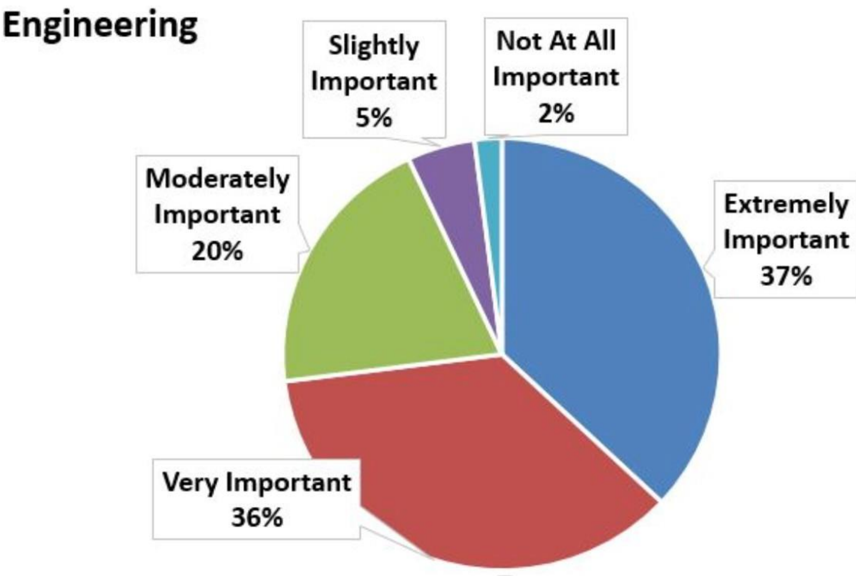


Figure 4.3.1 The importance of writing for career advancement for surveyed engineers.

Like any kind of teamwork, collaborative writing requires the entire team to be focused on a common objective; according to Lowry et al., an effective team "negotiates, coordinates, and communicates during the creation of a common document."6 The collaborative writing process, like the Tuckman team formation model, is iterative and social, meaning the team works together and moves back and forth throughout the process.

Successful collaborative writing is made easier when you understand the different strategies you can apply, how best to control the document, and the different roles people can assume. Figure 4.3.2 outlines the various activities involved at various stages of the collaborating writing process.

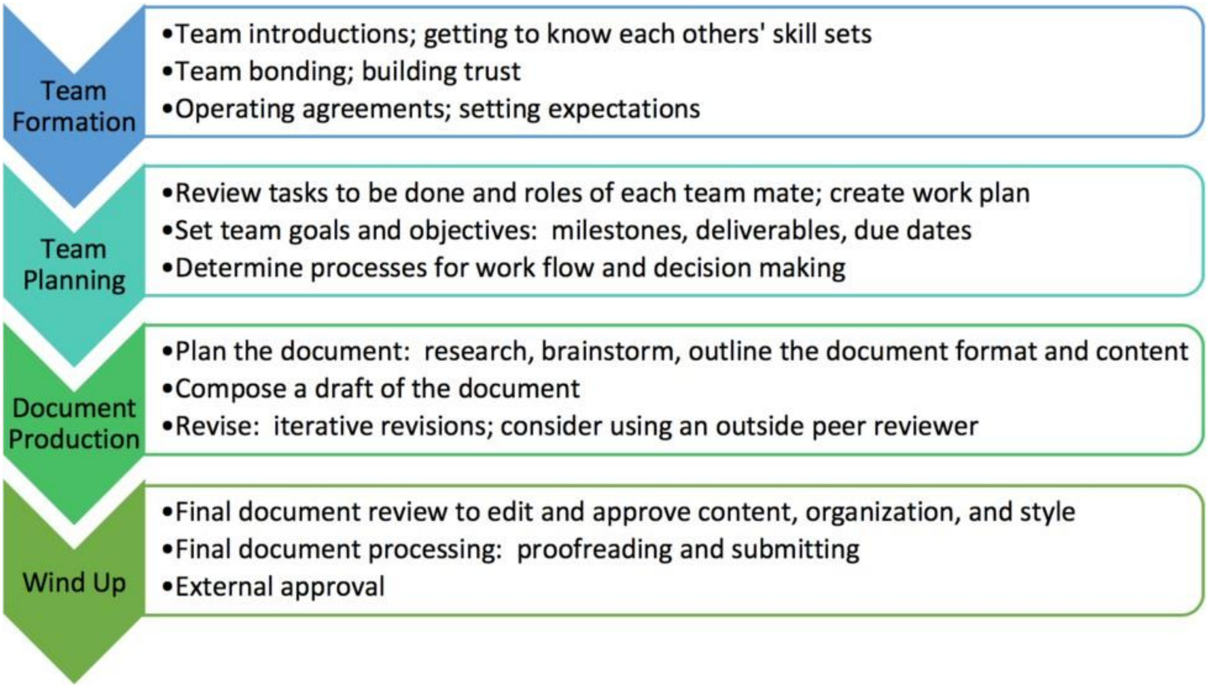


Figure 4.3.2 Collaborative writing stages [Image description]

Collaborative writing strategies are methods a team uses to coordinate the writing of a collaborative document. There are five main strategies (see Table 4.3.2), each with their advantages and disadvantages. Can you think of any other benefits or limitations?

TABLE 4.3.2 Collaborative writing strategies[7]

Writing Strategy	**When to Use**	**Pros**	**Cons**
Single-author One member writes for theentire group	For simple tasks; when littlebuy-in is needed; for small groups	Efficient; consistentstyle	May not clearly represent group’s intentions; less consensus produced
Sequential Each member is in charge ofwriting a specific part and write in sequence	For asynchronous work withpoor coordination; when it’s hard to meet often; for straightforward writing tasks; small groups	Easy to organize; simplifies planning	Can lose sense of group; subsequent writers may invalidate previous work; lack of consensus; version control issues

Parallel Writing: Horizontal Division Members are in charge ofwriting a specific part but write in parallel. Segmentsare distributed randomly.	When high volume of rapidoutput is needed; when software can support this strategy; for easily segmented, mildly complexwriting tasks; for groups with good structure and coordination; small to largegroups	Efficient; high volumeof output	Redundant work can beproduced; writers can be blind to each other'swork; stylistic differences; doesn't recognize individual talents well
Parallel Writing: Stratified Division Members are in charge ofwriting a specific part but write in parallel. Segmentsare distributed based on talents or skills.	For high volume rapid output; with supporting software; for complicated, difficult to segment tasks; when people have different talents/skills; for groups with good structure and coordination; small to largegroups	Efficient; high volume of quality output; betteruse of individual talent	Redundant work can beproduced; writers can be blind to each other'swork; stylistic differences; potential information overload
Reactive Writing Members create a documentin real time, while others review, react, and adjust to each other's changes and addition without much pre-planning or explicit coordination	Small groups; high levels ofcreativity; high levels of consensus on process and content	Can build creativityand consensus	Very hard to coordinate; versioncontrol issues

Document management reflects the approaches used to maintain version control of the document and describe who is responsible for it. Four main control modes are listed in **Table 4.3.3**, along with their pros and cons. Can you think of any more, based on your experience?

TABLE 4.3.3 Document control modes

Mode	Description	Pros	Cons
Centralized	When one person controls the document throughout theprocess.	Can be useful for maintaining group focus andwhen working toward a strictdeadline	Non-controlling members may feel a lack of ownershipor control of what goes into the document
Relay	When one person at a time isin charge but the control changes in the group	Democratic	Less efficient
Independent	When person maintains control of his/her assigned portion	Useful for remote teamsworking on distinct parts	Often requires an editor to pull it together; can reflect agroup that lacks agreement.

Shared	When everyone has simultaneous and equal privileges	Can be highly effective; non-threatening; good for groups working F2F, who meet frequently, who havehigh levels of trust	Can lead to conflict, especially in remote or lessfunctional groups

Roles refer to the different hats participants might wear, depending on the activity. **Table 4.3.4** describesseveral roles within a collaborative writing team. Which role(s) have you had in a group project? Are there ones you always seem to do? Ones that you prefer, dislike, or would like to try?

TABLE 4.3.4 Collaborative writing roles

Role	Description
Writer	A person who is responsible for writing a portion of the content
Consultant	A person who is external to the project and has no ownership or responsibility for producing content but who offers content and process-related feedback (peer reviewers outside the team;instructor)
Editor	A person who is responsible for the overall content production of the writers, and can makeboth style and content changes; typically has ownership of the content production
Reviewer	A person, internal or external, who provides specific content feedback but is not responsiblefor making changes
Team Leader	A person who is part of the team and may fully participate in authoring and reviewing thecontent, but who also leads the team through the processes, planning, rewarding, and motivating.
Facilitator	A person external to the team who leads the team through processes but doesn’t give contentrelated feedback.

4.6 LET US SUM UP

4.7 FURTHER READING

4.8 ASSIGNMENT