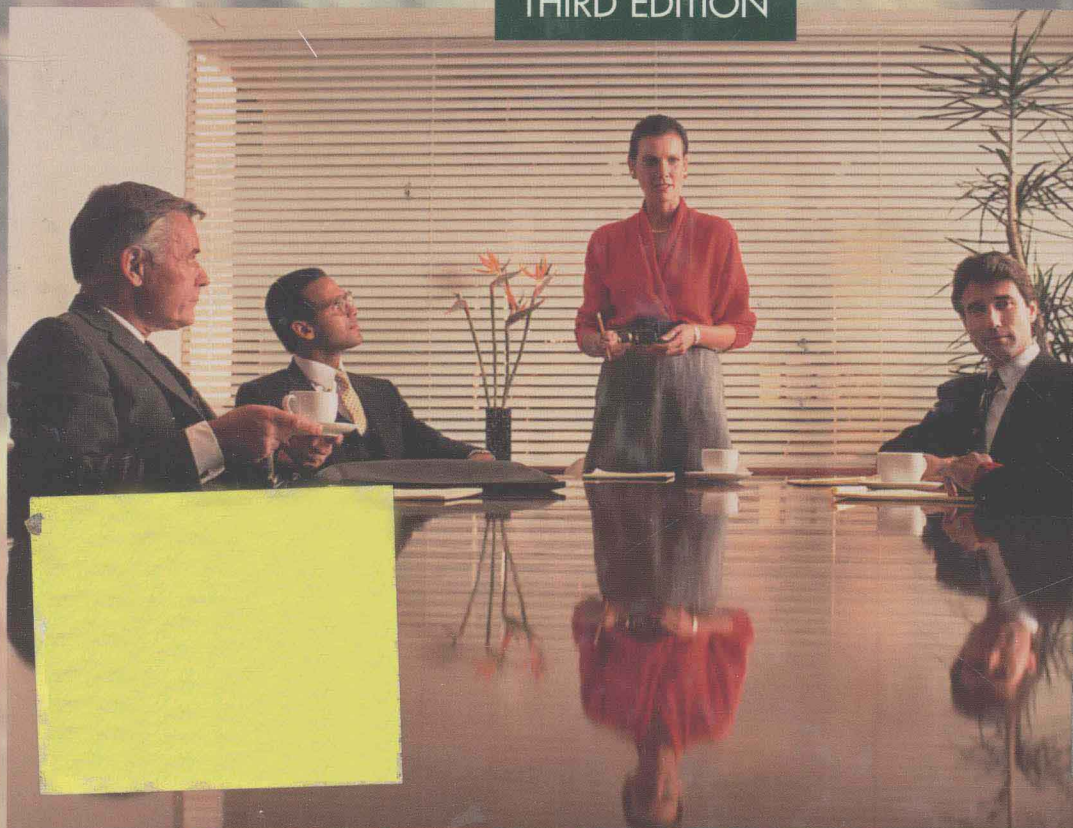


FUNDAMENTALS *of* ORGANIZATIONAL COMMUNICATION

KNOWLEDGE, SENSITIVITY, SKILLS, VALUES

THIRD EDITION



PAMELA SHOCKLEY-ZALABAK

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PAMELA SHOCKLEY-ZALABAK

University of Colorado

**Fundamentals of Organizational Communication: Knowledge,
Sensitivity, Skills, Values, Third Edition**

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Preface

Effective communication in organizations is widely considered to be necessary both for the attainment of organizational goals and for individual productivity and satisfaction. How can we respond to this emphasis on organizational communication? Is it possible to prepare for jobs in the corporations of the 1990s and 2000s, and if so, how? What communication competencies is the corporate world seeking? Even more basic, how do we begin to define what organizational communication competency is?

This text explores the development of key communication competencies for the 1990s and beyond. It is organized for an interaction of theory, practice, and analysis through an emphasis on *knowledge*, *sensitivity*, *skills*, and *values*.

Among the issues of central importance are: What constitutes communication competency? Why in this text do we broadly develop communication competencies rather than merely survey key disciplinary concepts? And what happens to key disciplinary concepts in this process?

The question of what constitutes communication competency has been a major topic in recent research. The framework I prefer is comprehensive, with four basic components—process understanding, interpersonal sensitivity, communication skills, and ethical responsibility. When applied to organizational communication, competency develops from increased understanding of the communication process; ability to sense accurately the meanings and feelings of oneself and others in the organization; improved skills in interacting, conflict management, and decision making; and finally, a well-defined sense of organizational as well as interpersonal ethics.

Why a competency-based approach? The answer is simple: Organizing material by competency components is academically relevant and important to contemporary organizations. Surveys of key concepts and issues for organizational communication develop knowledge but are not sufficient to meet the challenges of applying knowledge to participation in organizational life. Studies of corporate America have described intense informal communication as the key to excellence in the 1990s and beyond. Further, a recent major employer's survey found that accurately processing information within organizations, though necessary, was not sufficient for excellence; the surveyed employers want individuals who take personal respon-

sibility for building relationships that contribute to quality communication. The *sensitivity* and *values* components in our competency framework specifically address this need. The competency-based approach is more comprehensive than most other approaches and has as its goal the development of knowledge which, in turn, supports the development of sensitivity, skills, and values.

THE COMPETENCY FRAMEWORK

Knowledge

Knowledge is developed through presentation of theoretical concepts important to the study of organizational communication. Knowledge competencies are what we come to know about a particular field of study—in this case organizational communication. Knowledge is the learning of theory and principles. Knowledge competencies are fundamental to support our sensitivity to organizational life, to guide our skill development, and to assist us in understanding the application of ethical standards and our personal values in organizational settings. To this end, we will examine various frameworks for understanding organizational communication, communication implications of major organizational theories, and communication processes in organizations.

Sensitivity

The sensitivity competency refers to our ability to sense or become aware of a variety of organizational meanings and feelings. It is related to our ability and willingness to understand what others are feeling and doing. To develop the sensitivity component, we will study and analyze various roles and relationships within organizations. Individual sensitivity can be developed by analyzing the impact of personal behaviors in organizational settings. We will examine such situations as individuals in organizations, dyadic relationships (specifically supervisor-subordinate relationships), group processes, conflict, and leadership and management communication. Additionally, we will emphasize the importance of the sensitivity component for our increasingly diverse, multicultural, and international organizational world.

Skills

The skills component focuses on developing important analytical capabilities as well as the ability to communicate effectively in a variety of settings.

It is designed to help students develop both initiating and consuming communication skills. We will identify key organizational communication skills (e.g., decision making, problem solving, fact-finding, interviewing, and making presentations) and provide analysis and practice opportunities appropriate for each. Also, analysis opportunities provided in case studies, in-baskets (decision-making exercises based on a series of written messages), and simulations will contribute to skill development.

Values

The values component is key to the integration of knowledge, sensitivity, and skills. To understand the realities of organizational life, we must first examine how individual and organizational values or ethics can shape organizational communication behavior. We will have an opportunity to develop values and ethics through case studies that present ethical dilemmas and value issues in organizational settings. We will adopt different value positions and ethical perspectives to analyze cases, recommend courses of action, and predict outcomes.

Each chapter of this text attempts to contribute to competency development through the constant interaction of theory, practice, and analysis. Chapters are preceded by a statement of objectives and a short case study illustrating the concepts to be studied. Key terms and concepts are identified in margins, and chapters end with a concept summary and a workshop posing questions and issues in each of the competency areas—knowledge, sensitivity, skills, and values. The appendix provides additional practice and analysis opportunities.

Part I of this book is designed to develop *knowledge* through an understanding of what contributes to comprehensive communication competency and how we can understand this phenomenon called organizational communication. The chapters in Part I emphasize major organizational theories and their communication implications.

Part II is designed to develop the *sensitivity* component of communication competency. Chapters in Part II describe individuals in organizations and their intrapersonal, interpersonal, and small-group experiences. Particular emphases will be placed on the increasing diversity and multiculturalism of organizations as well as the study of conflict and leadership. Research indicates that conflict and leadership may well be the focal processes for effective communication in organizations. Texts in organizational communication frequently treat these topics mechanically, without emphasizing underlying subtleties such as organizational climate or the complex interactions of individual predispositions, strategies, and tactics. We will support our understanding of individual preferences in these crucial areas of organizational behavior by using self-assessment instruments.

Competency in the *skill* component is developed in Part III, where the various chapters identify key applications and career options for orga-

nizational communication skills and make specific suggestions for skill development.

The interaction of personal, organizational, and professional ethics and values is the subject of Part IV. The *values* component of communication competency is presented in this closing section. We place particular emphasis on how organizational values contribute to organizational culture and effectiveness.

Finally, the appendix contributes to the comprehensive development of all four competency components through an interaction of theory, practice, and analysis. Materials in the appendix are to be used as supplements to the other chapters to foster an application of learning through practical and realistic examples.

I wrote this book for four primary reasons: my research interests in organizational communication; my experiences with students who appreciate the importance of the study of organizational communication; my twenty-plus years of business experience in both the private and public sectors; and my fundamental belief that organizations and the discipline of organizational communication must undergo significant change as we approach the twenty-first century. These experiences and beliefs, when taken together, have been invaluable to me in relating theory to practice and in projecting competency needs for the future.

I am grateful for the help and support of many individuals in the development of this manuscript. My colleagues in the Communication Department at the University of Colorado at Colorado Springs and throughout the country have provided support, ideas, feedback, and contributions important to this book. Special thanks go to the individuals who have used earlier editions and whose insights guided this effort. I also want to thank the many special students at the University of Colorado at Colorado Springs who reviewed and critiqued most of the exercises, in-baskets, and cases contained in the text, and Sarah Porter, who designed the new illustrations.

On a personal note, I wrote this book with the guidance, love, and support of my family. My father and mother, Jim and Leatha Shockley, have influenced more than they will ever know a special pursuit of learning. To my husband, Charles, whose love, support, work, and encouragement have been continuous, I shall always be grateful.

This book was written for students who want to change and improve organizations, who are willing to take risks in striving for excellence, and who love and appreciate human communication. Therefore, to students (past, present, and future) and to my family (most particularly Charles and Mom and Dad), I dedicate this book.

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PART I

Organizational Communication: Theories/Assumptions/Processes

In Part I we will discuss the changing communication requirements brought about by an information-rich age. We will describe the need for communication competency in an information society, defining competency as a combination of our personal *knowledge*, *sensitivity*, *skills*, and *values*. We will explore the process nature of human communication and describe how communication can be understood in organizational settings. We will identify three major frameworks for understanding organizational communication—the functional, meaning-centered, and emerging approaches—and use these approaches to analyze communication implications from leading organizational theories.

Part I is designed to develop *knowledge* competencies in order to understand the process of communication and how that process can be observed in organizations. *Sensitivity* competencies will be developed through self-analysis and through exploring a variety of assumptions about human behavior in organizations. *Skills* will be developed and practiced through self-assessment and case studies. *Values* development will be encouraged by emphasizing the importance of communication for organizational excellence.

Part II will change our focus from the organization as a whole to individuals and how they relate to organizations. We will also identify individual competencies needed for organizational excellence. In Part III we will develop competencies for decision making and problem solving and will identify professional applications of organizational communication. Part IV will illustrate the importance of individual and organizational values and ethics for organizational communication. Finally, the Appendix contains case studies and a self-assessment instrument designed to develop communication competency by applying theory to practice and analysis opportunities.

