

BUSINESS & MANAGERIAL COMMUNICATION

NEW PERSPECTIVES

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PREFACE

Sixteen authors collaborated on this book. We all believed that communication was central to our work, but we represented a variety of management specialties and we had different perspectives. Through a process of learning from one another, we began to find the links between our ideas about communication. These points of connection finally became the book's central themes.

We wanted to develop a comprehensive account of communication within organizations and to provide a model for interpreting what writers and speakers do. Our consulting work testified to the diversity of communication in business. We believed that the impersonal "transportation" models (which describe senders encoding a message that travels over noisy channels to be decoded by a receiver) short-changed the complex reality of business communication. To address this problem, we developed a theoretical framework that would account for differences in communication in different companies. We considered it essential that many often overlooked factors—such as the size and structure of the company, its technology, its corporate culture, and the legal environment in which it operates—be incorporated into an understanding of business communication.

We also wanted to help students develop strong communication skills. The first three parts of this book emphasize a core of communication skills, such as defining the situation and participants' roles, analyzing complex audiences, managing long-term relationships, creating communication strategies, generating and organizing ideas, planning meetings, creating graphics, tailoring styles, and designing appropriate page layouts. From our point of view, fundamentals consist not only of words, sentences, and paragraphs, but also of situations that account for so many differences and the collectively understood means of handling them.

The section called "Communicating in Special Situations" responds to global changes that have increased the importance of international communication and personal career management. The emergence of new democracies and the consolidation of the European Economic Community make it imperative that students be aware of intercultural and international communication challenges; meeting these challenges is the focus of two chapters. Changing career patterns also force students to learn how to direct their own careers. The Job Search chapter helps students with the various communications needed in finding the right job; it also contains a special feature on résumé preferences in other countries.

The set of chapters called "Specialists' Perspectives" focuses on communications requiring knowledge or special skills in marketing, finance, performance evaluation, accounting, strategic planning, real estate, or consulting. These chapters help students develop an insider's understanding of how experts in various business specialties apply their knowledge. Some of the authors commented that they were writing the chapter they wished their students had read before writing papers.

Each business specialty or discipline interprets situations in particular ways because of its own assumptions, definitions, and procedures. These differences result from the ethos or standards taught in professional schools and partly from the cultures that develop in departments or groups that share common tasks and problems. Sometimes the preferred communication styles of these specialists may even interfere with communication beyond their own groups. Some accountants have been accused of "speaking in footnotes," and some lawyers are charged with "writing legalese." When appropriately used, however, the tech-

niques of analysis, argument, and problem solving developed in special disciplines can be crucial to a company's success.

The book's final section features perspectives from executives from a variety of firms. Their accounts of situations in their businesses, the strategies followed, and the communications required describe the authentic challenges that communications must address—product decisions, international agreements, human relations, rapid business expansions, starting a new venture, keeping in touch with clients, and forging a company identity. Their views convincingly illustrate concepts presented in other chapters.

Business and Managerial Communication: New Perspectives differs from many others in its emphasis on the importance of analyzing the specific communication context of an organization. While particular communication skills such as graphics, organizing, or style may be studied independently, they must be used strategically in specific contexts. This book brings together the resources for systematically developing business savvy and for understanding how to communicate special knowledge.

This book is organized so it can be used effectively in a variety of ways. Instructors may choose chapters to suit the educational levels and experiences of their students, and different course plans have been suggested. Chapters include a range of assignments, so students who have more educational or business experience, such as MBA students, will have opportunities to try more challenging assignments. At the same time, other assignments require no more technical knowledge than that discussed in the chapter.

We also hope that this book will offer many benefits for business communication instructors. First, we want this book to make the value of communication courses readily apparent to the communication instructors' colleagues. Second, we want students to recognize clearly the relationship between their work in business communication and what they are learning in their other courses, so

that instructors will enjoy greater student interest and cooperation. Third, we hope to advance the discussion of the role of communication in business disciplines.

We would like to thank those colleagues who were kind enough to review some or all of our manuscript. They are W. Clark Ford, Middle Tennessee State University; F. Lynn Galbraith, Rutgers University—The State University of New Jersey; Robert D. Gieselman, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign; John H. Hagge, Iowa State University; Melinda Kramer, Purdue University; Brenda M. Larkin, Louisiana State University; Lee Odell, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute; Jone M. Rymer, Wayne State University; and Jeremiah J. Sullivan, University of Washington.

In addition, we owe thanks to many other people for making this collaborative book project possible. Reviewers Jone Rymer, Bob Gieselman, and Lee Odell provided thoughtful commentaries that helped us address the key problems of teaching people who are not already members of a discourse community how to find their place in an organization. The core approach in Chapters 1 through 5 owes much to their suggestions. Deborah Barrett also provided a useful outside perspective on the core chapters.

During their respective tenures, the deans of the Jesse H. Jones Graduate School of Administration at Rice University, Francis D. Tuggle and Benjamin Bailar, and associate deans, Wil Uecker and Duane Windsor, integrated communication as a subject throughout the school's MBA curriculum. They thereby fostered much of the collaboration that led to our chapters in the Specialists' Perspectives section. The Jones School has also generously supported this project through a reduced teaching load for the senior author and through the expert help of staff members Dru Vail and Suzanna Ramos.

Producing a text with so many new features took courage and foresight from the decision makers at Harcourt Brace Jovanovich. We clearly broke the

safe “80/20 Rule” of 80 percent old material, 20 percent new. We thank William Barnett, Marlane Miriello, Marcus Boggs, Thomas Thompson, and Karen Allanson for their support for this project. We owe the cover to Steve Lux, design chief at HBJ. John Wright, world’s best agent, gave us crucial advice. Cece Munson coordinated the extraordinarily complex production process.

Our enthusiastic coauthors and consulting clients were generous in supplying materials from companies and helping develop cases for teaching. Their examples and feedback enabled us to test and confirm insights about differences in communication scenarios at various firms. Jeannine Klein, Fiona Tolhurst, and Amy Barber assisted with proofreading, indexing, and question writing

for the instructors’ manual—which, on a project of this size, are formidable and important tasks.

Our encouraging and patient families enabled us to devote hundreds of hours to this project. We declare special gratitude to them: George P. Jones; Robert Burnside; Melba and David Nicholson; Michael, Nicholas, and Drew Steffey; Robert Eddy; Frank, Gladys, and Lorinda Driskill; Jason Hadley; and Bob Phillips. As always, the faults that remain with this book we claim as our own.

Linda Driskill

June Ferrill

Marda Steffey

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