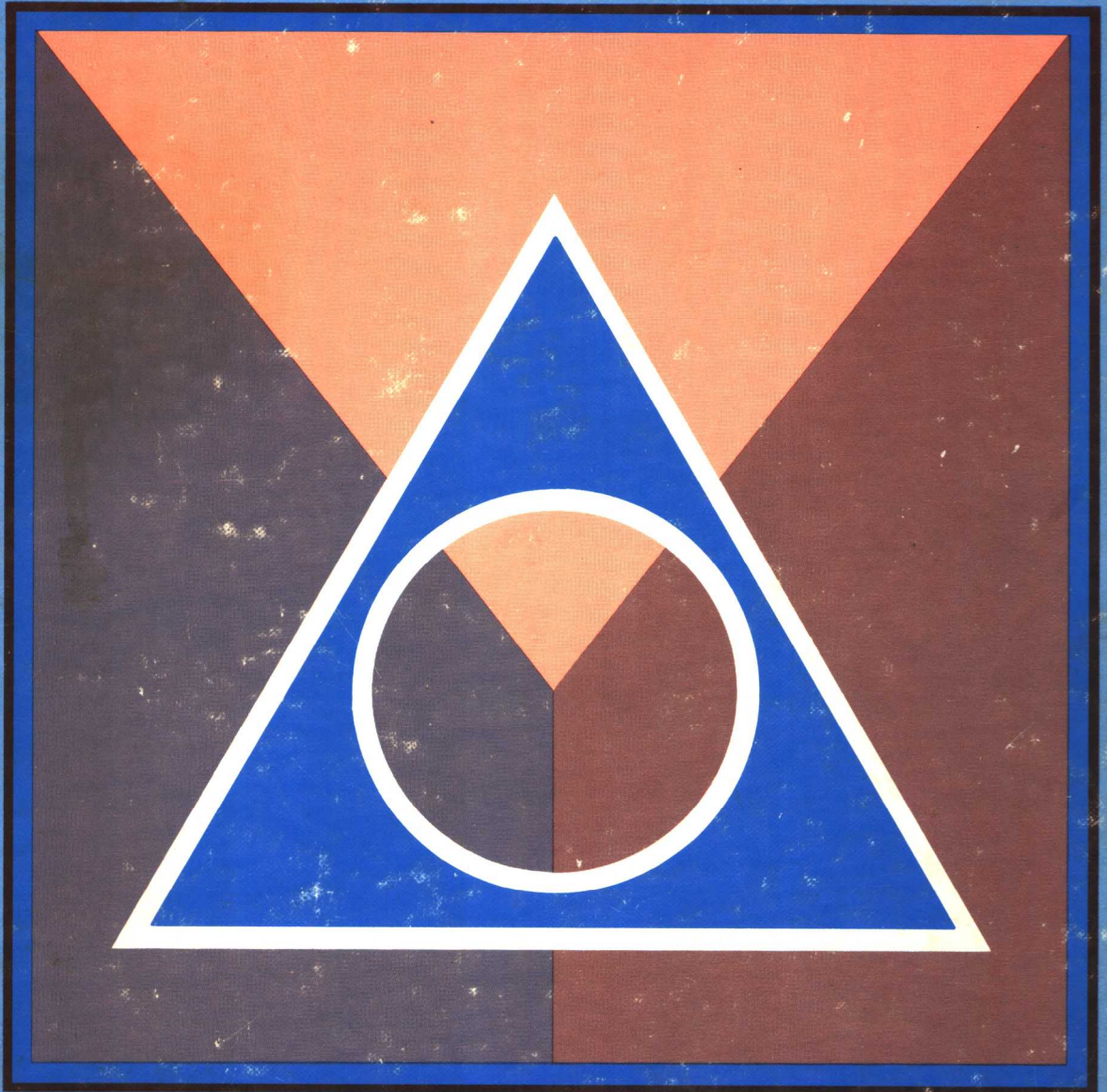


# **MANAGERIAL COMMUNICATION**

## **A STRATEGIC APPROACH**



**LARRY R. SMELTZER**

**JOHN L. WALTMAN**

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# Foreword

The notion that good management requires the manager to have good communication skills is undoubtedly true. We have been told that we live in an Age of Communication, and we are all schooled to fear the dreaded "communication breakdown." Unfortunately, these phrases have been often overused, sometimes misused, and their relevance to the business of management has been diminished.

One of the problems is that "communication" refers to many different kinds of processes—some more and some less relevant to the managerial process. Mass communication, interpersonal communication, and even communication engineering have established disciplines of their own. The fact is that communication skills and an understanding of the managerial communication process become increasingly more important to the manager all the time. Managerial communication clearly deserves to be examined and developed as a body of knowledge of its own. It is fortunate for managers that the synthesis has begun.

What we commonly call management can more descriptively be called management change. The effective manager is able to bring about change in activities that require it and to discourage change where change would be harmful. Case study after case study contains examples of managers who have been successful in either bringing about necessary and creative change or discouraging dangerous change. Sadly, just as many case studies describe the failure of managers to manage change. The business environment exhibits more change and volatility every day. Look no further than the recent activity in the money markets for proof of this.

To manage change effectively, the manager must be able to express clearly ideas and decisions in both written and verbal form. The clear, concise letter and memo and the oral presentation are still the primary vehicles of idea expression that need to be mastered. Fortunately, these are the skills traditionally taught to prospective managers in the classroom.

However, this perspective of the managerial communicator as the source of a message is incomplete. The appropriateness of a message is equally as important as its clarity and conciseness. The clear and concise memo that ignores the prevailing managerial climate and the culture of the organization that is its context can be less effective than a clumsy memo that is sensitive to the organizational environment.

Developing a keen sensitivity to the organizational climate and culture involves critically important skills that can be addressed solely by viewing the manager as a receiver of messages as well as a source of them.

Certainly, many of these skills can be learned and polished only by doing. A fair number of them, such as the listening skill, can be honed in the classroom setting.

In a broader context, the modern view of managerial communication takes a holistic view of the manager. The manager's mind is a machine that should always be learning to manage change more effectively. Since change occurs at an accelerating pace, the manager is continually challenged to make his machine work better. Traditional views of managerial communication focused on the importance of the manager's ability to control the output of his machine. The modern view adds to that perspective a focus on the manager's ability to control the input. The machine must be fueled properly, or it will not work.

As prospective managers, you are entering a world where dealing effectively with complexity and change is your greatest challenge and your greatest problem. Use every communication tool that works—you will need them all.

**Jack Wrather**

*Chairman of the Board and  
President, Wrather Corporation  
Los Angeles*

# PREFACE

We hear increasingly that American business and industry suffer from a decrease in productivity, that individual pride in workmanship is not what it used to be, and that employees do not have the commitment to the organization they once did. These statements may or may not be true, but most managers will agree: the business environment is changing. The professional manager faces new demands.

Clearly, as products and services become more complicated and organizations more complex, the need for professionalism among managers increases. We have written this book to help practicing and aspiring managers develop their communication skills so that they may meet the challenges facing them.

## VALUE OF COMMUNICATION

No doubt exists that communication is a critical part of the total body of management knowledge. In his now classic book, *The Functions of the Executive*, Barnard defined executive functions as "first, to provide the system of communication; second, to promote the securing of essential efforts; and, third, to formulate and define purpose."<sup>1</sup>

Although this statement was written some 45 years ago, subsequent research has repeatedly verified the importance of managerial communication. For instance, a survey of the presidents of 100 of the largest corporations in the United States found that 96 percent believed that a "definite relationship" exists between managerial communication and employee productivity.<sup>2</sup> Numerous studies in a wide variety of organizations have substantiated the importance of this relationship.<sup>3</sup>

Not only is communication important, but practicing managers recognize its importance. A large number of newly promoted executives were recently asked, "If you assume that the study of business administration best prepares a young person for a career in general management, how important are the following courses as part of that preparation?" They selected business communication—oral and written—as "very important" more often than any of 13 other courses.<sup>4</sup> Because of the importance of communication, extensive research has sought to determine the type of skills necessary for effective managerial communication. The conclusion is that managers need to:

1. Develop practical skills for task/work group participation and management.

2. Develop a meaningful personal communication style.
3. Develop practical skills in writing responses to various communication demands in varied channels.
4. Develop technical oral reporting, interviewing, and interpersonal communication skills.<sup>5</sup>

## DEVELOPING COMMUNICATION SKILLS

How can this book help managers to develop those necessary communication skills? Willard Bennett's comments on professionalism were important when we initially conceived this book's orientation. According to Bennett,

Rather than learning rules for handling fixed situations, the professional must be familiar with the total body of collected knowledge bearing on his field in order that he may be able to develop out of the framework of that information the solution best suited to the problem of the moment. . . . Important to any profession is insight and keen analytical ability; a facility for seeing events in proper perspective, for comprehending the meaning of facts, judging their relative significance and reaching intelligent conclusions.<sup>6</sup>

The purpose of this book, then, is to acquaint the reader with the knowledge in the field of managerial communication and to develop solutions best suited to the problems at hand. The ability to develop solutions results from keen analytical ability, a facility for seeing events in the proper perspective. In other words, an understanding of the body of knowledge is not enough; the knowledge must be applied. We believe that application requires managers to communicate in a creative and intelligent manner—a strategic manner.

To meet this end, we designed this book on the premise that creativity is extremely important for successful managerial communication; furthermore, we assumed that what is generally referred to as "intelligence" is essentially creative and effective communication. Creativity is the ability to think in an unhabitual way; as William James stated in 1890, "Genius in truth means little more than the faculty of perceiving in an unhabitual way."<sup>7</sup> The opposite of a creative manager is one who operates in a mindless manner. Managers communicate in a mindless manner when they respond to the environment without considering its potentially novel elements and rely on old distinctions rather than creating new categories. Mindlessness leads to routine communications.<sup>8</sup>

We hope to develop managers who communicate creatively rather than routinely. To that end, we include numerous cases from a variety of situations to promote creative communication strategies on the part of the readers. Each case provides a different problem, so routine responses

will not suffice. Discussion questions are provided for this same reason: to stimulate creative solutions.

This book, then, will help to develop managers who communicate in a creative manner by understanding and strategically applying appropriate concepts. When they meet this goal, these managers will also communicate intelligently.

Bennett's statement on professionalism said that a professional must reach intelligent decisions. We designed this book to help managers make these decisions. The concept of intelligence encompasses three areas: practical problem-solving ability, verbal ability, and social competence.<sup>9</sup>

We include topics related to each of these three general areas to help practicing and aspiring managers communicate intelligently.

## **THE DESIGN OF MANAGERIAL COMMUNICATION: A STRATEGIC APPROACH**

This book is designed to help develop professional strategic communication. Most chapters are followed by case studies, generally written by practicing managers. These cases provide an opportunity for readers to see how the concepts can be applied creatively.

The first two chapters, critical to the remainder of the text, provide a general framework for applying the many principles discussed in the remaining 14 chapters. We use the term "analytical" frequently throughout the book. To be creative and act in an intelligent manner, a manager cannot apply habitual communication strategies, but rather must strategically analyze the total situation at hand.

After the first two chapters, each chapter discusses a specific communication area of concern to a manager. Written communication is an integral part of a manager's job whether preparing memos, performance standards, departmental procedures, policy statements, or reports. Since dictation is a procedure that managers can use to save time and money in the writing process, it is detailed when reviewing the components of written communication. Many aspects of dictation are similar to communicating on the telephone, so we combine these two topics in the same chapter.

Listening is a basic element in the interpersonal communication process, so it is presented in a separate chapter. Motivation of peers, subordinates, and supervisors is always a concern of managers, so the text details a motivational model and shows how the model can be applied through strategic communication. Because every manager is involved in performance reviews, selection interviews, discipline, and counseling, these topics follow coverage of the basic interview process.

Managers can spend as much as 20 percent of their time involved in

some kind of conflict. Furthermore, negotiations are important when establishing salary levels, attempting to gain budget allocations, establishing prices, and reviewing performance goals. Consequently, conflict and negotiations are each discussed in separate chapters.

All managers conduct and attend meetings. These meetings represent a complex communication situation and can be costly and time consuming. At the same time, they can result in important decisions; thus, we devote a chapter to running an effective meeting. Managers frequently give oral presentations, which can be a source of tremendous anxiety for a manager. These presentations are also a critical means of exchanging information, so this topic is extensively reviewed.

Communication plays an important role in the management of time. Poor communication results in errors and the inefficient use of time. Even good communication can be a pervasive activity and consume an inordinate amount of the manager's time. Work stress and communication are also related. We explore these relationships and how communication helps to resolve the resultant problems in a separate chapter.

Technology has had and will continue to have a profound impact on managerial communication. Video, audio, and computer conferences, as well as word processing, and executive work stations are all important technological advancements that managers must understand; consequently, we discuss these in detail in the final chapter.

In Appendix 1, we provide a discussion on the legal components of managerial communication. We also give a longer case that integrates many of the different topics discussed throughout the book (Appendix 2). Finally, we provide additional samples of written communication (Appendix 3).

Upon completion of this text, the reader should be more analytical, less inclined to act in a habitual manner when communicating, and have made significant progress toward becoming a manager who communicates strategically.

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

As stated earlier, the purpose of this book is to help aspiring and practicing managers become familiar with the knowledge in the field of managerial communications so that they can develop solutions best suited to the problem at hand. Meeting this complex purpose could not have been done without the support of many true professionals. Although it would be impossible to recognize them all by name, we extend sincere appreciation to the many people who have been influential.

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**Larry R. Smeltzer**  
**John L. Waltman**

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## **Chapter 1**

# **The Managerial Communication Process**

Bill Waters just returned from a two-day university-sponsored seminar on current management techniques where topics such as cost control, performance improvement, and computer technology were discussed. But it seemed that references to communication accompanied every topic. The speaker used such phrases as "open lines of communication," "mutual understanding," and "open-door policy" throughout the seminar.

This emphasis concerned Bill. During his last performance review he learned that a key to advancement in the company was communication and that he needed improvement in this area. He was hoping that the management seminar would help, but, once again, he heard only about the importance of communication. What precisely does he need to know about communication? It seemed obvious to him that he would not be able to improve unless he could study the basic process of communication.

Bill decided to ask his manager to explain what she considered to be the most important elements of communication. After all, Bill's manager had said that he needed the improvement. Unfortunately, the only explanation Bill got was that he should consider the other person's point of view and that continuous effort is required to be an effective communicator.

How would you explain the communication process to subordinates as you asked them to improve their communication skills. What are the most important elements of the communication process that the person should consider when developing communication skills?

## 2 The Basis of Managerial Communication

More than 75 percent of a manager's time is spent communicating. Considering the amount of information for which a manager has responsibility, this is not surprising.<sup>1</sup> No doubt exists that effective communication is the key to planning, leading, organizing, and controlling the resources of the organization to achieve its stated objective.

Communication, the essential process that managers use to plan, lead, organize, and control, is not easy. Another person understands a manager's message based on the receiver's perception and interpretation of the message. The process becomes more complex when a group of people receives the message because of the variety of perceptions and interpretations possible when communicating with more than one person.

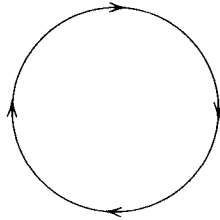
In the communication process, symbols, such as words or gestures, comprise messages, and understanding first rests on a common meaning or frame of reference for those symbols. When sending a message, a manager may have clearly in mind the meaning of the symbols selected, but, if someone receiving the message attributes a different meaning, an accurate understanding of the message will not take place. The process is complicated even more because the meanings of symbols not only differ between people but change as the experiences of the people involved change.

In this chapter we examine those aspects of the process of exchanging symbols that relate to managerial communications, and we analyze the human factors that aid or hinder understanding. To achieve this goal, we examine an infinity model of managerial communication, followed by a discussion of six factors that affect the process. The ability to communicate in this model is determined by competence in using mutually understood symbols. If all parties give mutual meaning to the words, and have similar frames of reference, effective communication and mutual understanding will develop.

### **THE INFINITY MODEL OF MANAGERIAL COMMUNICATION**

The foundation for the model of the flow of communication is a circle. The circle is appropriate because communication is a continuous two-way process between people. The flow goes not just from one person to another, but it returns to the point of origin. The message may be modified as a result of the flow from one point to another (see Figure 1-1).

When a manager sends a message to another person who responds back to the manager, one transaction has taken place. Communication may be made up of one or many such transactions and need not always include words. In fact, when someone says "hello" to you, and you nod in return, a transaction has occurred.



**FIGURE 1-1**  
The Infinity Model

Most communication experiences must involve numerous transactions for understanding to occur. Furthermore, two people usually need to interact several times with each other and modify the message until understanding is reached; thus, the term “infinity” is used. This process may break down or at least falter if either person stops trying to understand or prematurely assumes that the other person understands. People must be sure they understand each other before communication is successful.

Thus, managers communicate *with* someone, rather than *to* someone, as the circle symbolizes. A true communication experience requires the involvement of two individuals until they both understand one another. It may require an indefinitely large number of communication interactions, in some situations, or a finite number, in others. Consider an example in which a manager chairs a decision-making meeting. A participant may ask a question; the manager responds. The participant requests clarification; the manager provides another, more elaborate clarification. The participant still looks puzzled. Consequently, the leader asks the participant to describe what is confusing him. Clearly, understanding is seldom achieved with one interaction.

## **FOUR ELEMENTS THAT MAKE THE COMMUNICATION MODEL WORK**

The four elements of the model needed to develop an effective communication transaction are channel, encoding, decoding, and feedback.

### **Channel**

The channel is simply the method used to transport the message from one person to another. The type of channel used depends on the message and the approach used to send the message. A sudden angry gesture, such as a fist pounding on the desk, uses sight and sound as the channels. A poster with a picture showing a recommended safe behavior uses sight only, whereas a dictated message relies on the channel of sound.