

BUSINESS COMMUNICATION:
THEORY AND APPLICATION

Fifth Edition

Raymond V. Lesikar

1 9 8 4

F I F T H E D I T I O N

***Business
communication***
Theory
and application

Raymond V. Lesikar, Ph.D.

NORTH TEXAS STATE UNIVERSITY



RICHARD D. IRWIN, INC.

Homewood, Illinois 60430

© RICHARD D. IRWIN, INC., 1968, 1972, 1976, 1980, and 1984

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the publisher.

ISBN 0-256-03157-6

Library of Congress Catalog Card No. 83-81771

Printed in the United States of America

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0 1 0 K 9 8 7 6 5 4

***Business
communication***
Theory
and application

Preface

Because the previous editions were so well received, this Fifth Edition of *Business Communication: Theory and Application* remains substantially in its original mold. As you would expect, however, I made some content changes. Some of these changes were dictated by movements in the field. Some were mere matters of updating. And some were other changes that I felt would improve the book.

Following the practice set in earlier revisions, I worked again to expand the applications of communication theory to everyday business communication situations. I updated the book throughout, especially by bringing in such topics as computers, word processing, and international communication. Because the area of job applications is undergoing change, I revised this part by including current approaches and style preferences.

As in earlier editions, I prepared new problems throughout—both for letters and reports. They remain the realistic and challenging business cases which I feel are best for applying and emphasizing the textbook principles. Also, I added more examples—especially in the chapters on letters.

The basic plan of the book remains unchanged. It is first to summarize communication theory and then to relate theory to applications in business. This approach is defensible. In fact, research conducted by Maxine Hart of Baylor University supports it.¹ Also, this approach answers much of the criticism the business communication field has received over the years.

The coverage of communication theory is selective. It must be so for reasons of space economy. I have chosen those topics which seem to me most helpful to the student in developing an understanding of organizational communication. As you will see, I have relied heavily on the contributions of general semantics. Very clearly, this subject matter provides a base for understanding the problems and principles of communicating in business.

Perhaps some will feel that I have oversimplified the theory material.

¹ Maxine Hart, "An Experimental Study in Teaching Business Communication Using Two Different Approaches: Theory and Application vs. Writing Approach," *The Journal of Business Communication* 17, no. 1 (Fall 1979), pp. 13–25.

Certainly it could have been covered in greater depth and with much greater sophistication. My goal, however, was to overcome the communication barriers which a discussion of “theory” typically raises in the student’s mind. Such barriers can be overcome only by clear, simplified explanation. I am confident that I have succeeded in this endeavor.

My coverage of the traditional business communication areas of correspondence, report writing, and oral communication builds from the theory presented. At the appropriate places, the theory is related to application. Because the theory applies to almost every instruction given, the more obvious relations are left to the student. To do otherwise would have a cluttering effect and would be highly repetitious. It was my hope to cover the application areas with sufficient thoroughness to permit the option of building a course primarily around this material and of using the theory parts as supplementary reading.

As in all such works as this, I am indebted to many people for their assistance. Foremost, I am indebted to those scholars who have contributed over the years to the general knowledge in the fields from which I have drawn my information. I must especially acknowledge the contributions of my dear friend and former teacher and colleague, William P. Boyd, now Professor Emeritus at The University of Texas at Austin. The effects of his teachings are liberally scattered throughout this book. Those others from whom I have borrowed directly are acknowledged at specific spots of reference in the book.

As this edition retains inputs made by others in past editions, the contributors from the past continue to deserve recognition. Standing out among these people are Jim Stull, San Jose State University; Berle Hagggleblade, California State University; James L. Godell, Northern Michigan University; and John D. Pettit, North Texas State University. I would also like to thank all those who contributed through suggestions made informally at conference meetings. In addition, a very special acknowledgment goes to Douglas Shepard, State University of New York, for his excellent assistance as editor-proofreader. All credit for the improved accuracy of this edition goes to him.

Finally, and most importantly, I acknowledge the contributions of my dear wife. Her patience, love, and understanding through countless hours of my work on writing projects deserve very special recognition.

RAYMOND V. LESIKAR

Contents

part one

Communication theory

1. The role of communication in the business organization 3

An essential to organized activity. The high frequency of communication. Communication illustrated: Dan's half hour. Main forms of organizational communication: *Internal-operational communication. Personal communication.* Communication network of the organization. Effects of changing technology. A preview to the presentation.

2. A model of the process 15

A common misconception. The communication environment: *Sign detection. Sensory limitation. Selective perception. Varying alertness and perception.* The communication process: *Reception of signals. Flow to the brain. Role of the filter. The symbolizing stage. Act of encoding.* The cycle repeated. The model and written communication: *Effects of creativity. The lag of time. Limited numbers of cycles.* The universal ingredients of human communication: *The communication environment. The filter of the mind. The encoding and decoding processes.* Some fundamental truths of communication: *Communication is imperfect. We communicate about ourselves.*

3. Perception and reality 29

Reality defined: *That which has substance. Reality without substance. The reality of events. Position relationships.* The infinity of reality: *Infinity in a sheet of paper. Limiting effects on perception. Some applications in communication.* Uniqueness in everything: *Uniqueness illustrated. Effects on perception. Applications of uniqueness in writing.* All in process: *Changes in inanimate things. Changes in the living. Error effect on perception. Changing reality and written communication.* Relative nature of perception. Truth and reality.

4. The filter of the mind 42
 A storehouse of knowledge. The role of opinions, attitudes, and beliefs: *What the terms mean. How viewpoints are formed. How viewpoints affect communication.* The influence of emotions. The filter, in summary.
5. Words and meaning 53
 Language and human progress: *The foundation of language. Classification based on similarity. Illustration: "Fido" and the "economy." Illustration: Words about "mosquito." Two basic observations.* The question of meaning: *Location in the mind. Meaning and dictionaries. Living nature of the language. Connotative and denotative meaning. Context as an aid to meaning. As the map fits the territory.*
6. Some malfunctions of communication 66
 Two-valued thinking: *The true dichotomy. The dangers involved. Value of specific reference. Applications in business writing.* Fact-inference confusion: *Necessity of inference. Effect on communication. Calculating the probabilities. Importance in business writing.* The blocked mind: *A result of opinions, attitudes, and beliefs. A result of allness. Extreme effects of the blocked mind. Unblocking the mind. Effects in business communication.* The static viewpoint: *The unstatic nature of things. The contributing factor of language. The static viewpoint in business writing.* Failure to discriminate: *Miscommunication from stereotypes. Judgments by category. Developing an awareness of differences. Discrimination failure and business writing. Miscommunication summarized.*

part two

Applications to business

7. General principles of business writing 85
 The basic principle of adaption: *The filter as the basis for adaption. The technique of adapting. Cases of adaptation.* Care in word choice: *Selecting words the reader understands. Bringing the writing to life with words. Selecting words for precise communication.* Emphasis on short sentences: *Limiting sentence content. Economizing on words. Determining emphasis in sentence design. Giving the sentences unity. Arranging sentences for clarity.* Care in paragraph design: *Giving the paragraph unity. Keeping the paragraph short. Putting topic sentences to good use. Making the paragraph move forward. A word of caution.*
8. Correspondence: The basic elements 112
 Objectives of the business letter: *The primary goal. The public relations goal of the letter.* Conversational style: *Tendency to be formal. The old "language of business." Use of "rubber stamps."* You-viewpoint: *What it is. The you-viewpoint illustrated. A point of controversy.* Accent on positive language:

Effects of words. Examples of word choice. Overall tone of courtesy: Singling out your reader. Refraining from preaching. Doing more than is expected. Avoiding anger. Showing sincerity. Technique of emphasis: Emphasis by position. Space and emphasis. Mechanical means of emphasis. Coherence in the letter: Tie-in sentences. Use of pronouns. Transitional words. A word of caution. International correspondence: Effects of culture. Two basic questions. An approach to letter problems: Determination of primary objective. Selection of direct or indirect plan. Choice in the middle ground. The plans illustrated. The structure of the letter: Selection of the words. A concluding and forward look.

9. Correspondence: Situations requiring directness 138

The routine inquiry: A question beginning. Adequate explanation. Structured questions. Goodwill in the ending. Routine inquiries illustrated. Inquiries about people: Privileged communication. Question content. Examples of personnel inquiries. Favorable responses: Situation identification. Good-news beginnings. Construction of answers. Handling negatives. Consideration of "extras." Cordiality in the close. Favorable replies illustrated. Routine acknowledgments: Acknowledgment in the beginning. Goodwill talk and resale. A friendly, forward look. Routine acknowledgments illustrated. Personnel evaluation reports: Directness in the opening. Systematic presentation of facts. The problem of fair reporting. Natural friendliness in the close. Case examples. Claim letters: Directness in spite of negativeness. Need for identifying facts. Forthright statement of what is wrong. Explanation of facts. Choice in handling the error. Doubt-removing friendliness in the close. Claim letters illustrated. Adjustment grant: Need to overcome negative impressions. Direct presentation of decision. Avoidance of negatives. Regaining lost confidence. Happiness in the close. Three case illustrations. Order letters: Clear and forthright authorization. Specific coverage of the sale. A cordial close. An order illustrated.

Letter problems—1

Routine inquiries. Favorable replies. Inquiries, prospective employees. Personnel reports. Claims. Adjustment grants. Orders.

10. Correspondence: Indirect letters 194

Refused request: Strategy development. Opening contact and setup of the plan. Presentation of the reasoning. Positive handling of the refusal. Off-subject goodwill close. Cases in refusal strategy. Adjustment refusals: Determination of basic strategy. Opening setup of the reasoning. Presentation of reasoning. Positive coverage of refusal. Off-subject closing talk. Adjustment refusals illustrated. Vague and back orders: Consideration in handling. Variations in opening possibilities. Tact in handling the delayed shipment. A pleasant ending picture. Illustrated handling of delayed order. Credit refusals: Strategy and the reason for refusal. The buffer beginning. Justification of the refusal. Tact in the refusal. A closing forward look. Cases in review.

Letter problems—2

Refused requests: *Adjustment refusals. Credit refusals. Vague and back-order acknowledgments.*

11. Correspondence: Persuasive requests and collections 228

Persuasive requests: *Determination of persuasion. Attention in the opening contact. Presentation of the persuasion. Goodwill and action in the close. Approach variations illustrated. Collection letters: A series of efforts. Determining the collection series. Early-stage efforts. The middle (discussion) stage. Last-resort letters.*

Letter problems—3

Persuasive requests. Collections: *Regal Office Furniture Company series. The Esquire Limited series. U-Pay-Less series. Valley Fruit and Vegetable Supplies, Inc., series. M & N Market Research, Inc., series.*

12. Correspondence: Sales and applications 254

Sales letters: *Value of sales writing. Need for preliminary knowledge. Determination of appeal. An approach to the subject. Some mechanical differences. The attention opening. Presentation of the sales material. Stress on the you-viewpoint. Completeness of the sale. Clearness and motion in the action. Urgency in the action. Recall of the appeal. Addition of a postscript. A study of examples. Use of a second letter in the mailing. Applications for employment: Preliminary planning. The data sheet. Letters of application. Other letters about employment.*

Letter problems—4

Sales. Applications.

13. Reports: The problem and its organization 299

An orientation to reports: *The special needs of reports. Reports defined. Determining the report purpose: The preliminary investigation. Needs for a clear statement of problem. Determination of factors. Use of subtopics in information reports. Hypotheses for problems of solution. Bases of comparison in evaluation studies. Need for subbreakdown. Gathering the information needed. Selecting the information. Organizing the report information: Preliminary steps in determining order. Need for a written outline. Patterns of report organization. The nature and extent of outlining. Organization by division. Division by conventional relationship. Combination and multiple division possibilities. Introductory and concluding sections. Wording the outline for report use.*

14. Reports: Determination of makeup 317

Overall view of content. Greater importance of the short types. Organization and content of longer reports: *The prefatory parts. The report proper.* Major differences in short and long reports: *Less need for introductory material. Predominance of direct order. More personal writing style. Less need for coherence plan.* Short forms of reports: *The short report. Letter reports. Memorandum reports.* Special report forms: *The staff report. The audit report. The technical report.*

15. Reports: Techniques of writing 365

Need for adaptation. Requirement of objectivity: *Objectivity as a basis for believability. Objectivity and the question of impersonal versus personal writing.* Logic of present-time viewpoint. Structural aids to report coherence: *The use of introductory, concluding, and summarizing sections. Communication value of transition. The role of interest in report communication.*

16. Reports: Visual communication aspects 376

Foresight in planning. Relationship of need to the plan. Preferred placement within the report. General mechanics of construction. Construction of tables. The simple bar chart. Variations of the bar chart. Pie-chart construction. Arrangement of the line chart. Design of the statistical map. Construction of the pictogram. Miscellaneous graphic aids.

Report problems

Short problems. Problems of medium length. Long problems. Subjects for library research reports: *Accounting. Business education. Labor. Finance. Management. Personnel administration. Marketing.*

17. Oral communication 486

Making formal presentations: *Consideration of personal aspects. Audience analysis. Appearance and bodily actions. Use of voice. Use of visual aids. A summary list of speaking practices. Reporting orally: A definition of oral reports. Differences between oral and written reports. Planning the oral report.* Conducting and participating in meetings: *Techniques of conducting meetings. Techniques for participating in a meeting.* Interviewing people: *Guidelines for the Interviewer. Guidelines for the interviewee.* Dictating letters and reports: *Techniques of dictating. Letter dictation illustrated.* Listening: *The inefficiency of listening. Improving your listening ability.*

Appendixes

Appendix A:	Physical presentation of reports	509
Appendix B:	Form of the business letter	525
Appendix C:	Documentation, footnotes, and the bibliography	533
Appendix D:	A guide to correctness in writing	541
Appendix E:	A general checklist for letter grading	559
Appendix F:	A grading checklist for reports	561
Appendix G:	Readability measurement	565

Index**569**

P A R T

one

Communication theory

The role of communication in the business organization

1

IF YOU ARE like most of us, you spend more time communicating than doing anything else. Probably you spend a large part of each day talking and listening. And when you are not talking or listening you are likely to be communicating in other ways—reading, writing, gesturing, drawing. Or perhaps you are just taking in information by seeing, or feeling, or smelling. All of these activities are forms of communication; and certainly you do them throughout most of your conscious moments.

Something we do so much must be important. Probably it is the most important of all our activities. It is easy to see that communication is the activity which has enabled us to develop the civilized society we know today. It is one activity which we human beings clearly do better than the other forms of life on earth; and largely it explains our dominant role. It is the activity which has enabled us to organize—to work in groups. And through organization we have been able to overcome barriers to our existence which individually we would not have been able to overcome. But there is no need to discuss further how communication contributed to the development of us human beings. Its role is obvious to us all. We need only to conclude that communication is extremely vital to our success and well-being in civilized society.

An essential to organized activity

Just as communication is vital to our existence in civilized society, it is vital to the functioning of the organizations¹ which our society has produced. In fact, we could go so far as to say that organizations exist through communication; without communication, there would be no organizations. As Herbert

¹ Throughout this work the term *organization* is used to refer to any goal-oriented group of people, such as businesses, churches, labor unions, and government agencies. Because business organizations are of primary concern to us, however, most of the illustrative material used pertains to them.

Simon expressed it, “. . . without communication there can be no organization, for there is no possibility then of the group influencing the behavior of the individual.”²

If you need proof of the importance of communication to organized activity, you need only apply your good logic to any real-life example. Take, for example, a very simple organization. It is made up of just you and one other person. Assume that this organization has an objective—one that is unfamiliar to each of you. You may even assume that both of you know what this objective is. Now, assume that both of you no longer can communicate. You cannot read; you cannot speak; you cannot write; you cannot gesture; you cannot draw. If the two of you make any progress at all, it is likely to be by individual effort. Strain your imagination as you will, there is simply no likelihood of coordinated effort resulting without communication.

Without question, communication is the ingredient which makes organization possible. It is the vehicle through which the basic management functions are carried out. Managers direct through communication; they coordinate through communication; and they staff, plan, and control through communication. Hardly an action is taken in any organization without communication leading to it.

The high frequency of communication

Just how much communicating a business organization needs depends on a number of factors. The nature of the business certainly is one. Some (such as insurance companies) have much greater need to communicate than do others (such as janitorial services). The organization plan of the company also affects the volume of communication, for much of the information flow is provided by the structure. Also, the people who make up the organization affect the volume of communication. As we shall point out later, every human being is different. Each has different communication needs and abilities. Thus, varying combinations of people will produce varying needs for communication.

Although the communication needs vary by company, people in organizations communicate more than most of us suspect. According to one generally accepted estimate, between 40 and 60 percent of the work time spent in a typical manufacturing plant involves some phase of communication. Of course, these percentages are only averages. Some employees spend much more of their time communicating. In fact, the higher up the organization structure the employee is, the more communicating he or she is likely to do. Typically, top executives spend from 75 to 95 percent of their time communicating. Unskilled laborers, on the other hand, need to communicate little to do their work.

Without question, communication is important to the business organization. Because it is important, it stands to reason that business wants its communication to be well done. But all too rarely is business satisfied with what it gets. Unfortunately, to use the often quoted words of an authority

² Herbert Simon, *Administrative Behavior*, 3d ed., Free Press, New York, 1976, p. 154.

in the field, "Of all the things business executives do, they are worst at communicating."

Communication illustrated: Dan's half hour

The role of communication in organized activities is perhaps best explained by illustration of a real situation. By design, our illustration is both detailed and scant. It is detailed because it is made up of illustrations of the minute and specific communication events which occur in business. It is scant because at best it covers only a sample of the almost infinite number of events.

For this review we could select any organization, as communication is vital to every conceivable type. Our choice is the Typical Company, manufacturer of a line of quality whatsits. The Typical Company is moderately large, with scores of departments and hundreds of workers doing a thousand and one tasks. It employs crews of salespeople who sell the manufactured whatsits to wholesalers all over the country. Like most companies in its field, Typical works to help move its products from wholesaler to retailer and from retailer to the final consumer. And it works to keep the consumer happy with the purchase. The Typical Company is indeed typical.

Our review begins with the workday of Dan D. Worker, a clerk in Typical's order department. (We could, of course, have selected any of Typical's employees.) Dan's communication activities begin each day the moment he awakens. But for our purposes we shall pick up Dan's activities as he rides to work in a car pool with three of his co-workers. Of course, Dan and the members of his car pool communicate as they travel. Obviously, communication has a social use, and riding to work is a form of social occasion for Dan and his friends.

Most of their talk is about trivial matters. They talk primarily to entertain and to while away the time. There is a joke or two, some comments about politics, a few words about a coming football game, and some raves about the new woman at the company switchboard. Such talk, of course, is of little direct concern to Typical except perhaps as the talk affects the general happiness and welfare of the company's workers.

In time, the conversation drifts to subjects more pertinent to Typical and its operations. Someone mentions a rumor about a proposed change in promotion policy. Then Dan and the others bring in their own collection of rumors, facts, and opinions on the subject. And in the process they form opinions and work up emotions concerning the Company and its policies. This communication activity has little to do with manufacturing whatsits, nor is it related to Dan's duties at Typical. But it has affected Dan's outlook, and he just might not put out very much work for Typical today or any other day. He might not trust Typical quite so much the next time the union contract problem comes up.

When the four reach the plant, the gate guard receives the message communicated by the green sticker on the windshield and waves the car through. They drive past the most convenient parking spaces, for they receive clearly the message on signs at these sites: "Reserved for the President,"