Second Edition

BUSINESS COMMUNICATION

Rethinking your professional practice for the post-digital age

Peter Hartley and Peter Chatterton
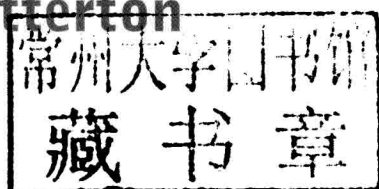
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Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

LONDON AND NEW YORK
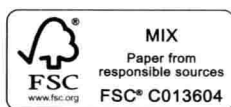
Business Communication
Second edition

Effective communication in business and commercial organisations is critical, as organisations have to become more competitive and effective to sustain commercial success.

This thoroughly revamped new edition distils the principles of effective communication and applies them to organisations operating in the digital world. Techniques and processes detailed in the book include planning and preparing written communication, effective structures in documents, diverse writing styles, managing face-to-face interactions, using visual aids, delivering presentations and organising effective meetings. In every case the authors consider the potential of new technology to improve and support communication.

With helpful pedagogical features designed to aid international students, this new edition of a popular text will continue to aid business and management students for years to come.

Peter Hartley is an independent consultant and visiting professor at Edge Hill University, UK.

Peter Chatterton is an independent consultant and academic who works with universities, government departments/agencies and businesses on programmes of innovation and change.

eRESOURCES A range of further resources for this book is available at
www.routledge.com/cw/9780415640282

Much more than a book, this is an interactive guide to allow you not only to enhance your practice as a communicator in the digital age, it also enables you to assess the impact that new communication technologies, such as videoconferencing and texting, can have on your organisation and its culture. As such, it opens up a whole set of new possibilities for all leaders to update and improve their effectiveness in an increasingly crucial area.

Phil Radcliff, Associate Fellow,
Henley Business School, UK

The authors successfully provide practical ideas and advice on improving business communications, emphasising the importance of context in an environment of rapid technological change. Its structure and content reflect a deep understanding of communications and of the potential of 'new' technologies. It will be of great benefit to multiple audiences seeking to develop their careers.

Peter Bullen, Emeritus Professor,
University of Hertfordshire, UK

I am responsible at the institution I work at for internal communications. Our staff and students say they receive too much communication but then say they don't know about anything. Fundamentally different approaches to getting key information across are needed and this book provides much food for thought that I believe will help in developing practical solutions to making communication in the business context more effective.

Gunter Saunders, Professor,
The University of Westminster, UK

*This book is dedicated to
the memory of Clive Bruckmann
who co-authored the first edition
of this book.*

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Acknowledgements

FROM PETER HARTLEY

To Jasmine, Jenson and Jackson; to Alexander and Gregor; and to Phoebe – the next generation of communicators. Hopefully, they will all do it better than I ever could.

FROM PETER CHATTERTON

To Tim Berners-Lee for creating the World Wide Web that has given us so many new opportunities to support open communications – long may he succeed in his mission to keep the Internet open and neutral.

FROM BOTH OF US

We would like to thank *all* our former and current colleagues and students, too numerous to mention individually, who have inspired our thinking.

We thank the staff at Routledge for their considerable patience and unqualified support.

Contents

Introduction

Our book is designed to help you to reflect on and improve the way you communicate in modern business and professional settings.

We are confident it will help you if you can tick at least one of the following boxes:

- undergraduate or postgraduate student aiming for a career in business or a professional context;
- undergraduate or postgraduate student with ambitions to work for yourself and/or assemble a portfolio career;
- working in an organisation in the early stages of your career;
- have been working in organisations for some years and wanting to refresh your ideas on 'good communication';
- managing a team in an organisation;
- wondering how new technology is reshaping business communication and thinking about how you need to respond.

We have also developed a website to give you:

- updated comments and suggestions on the use of specific technologies for communication;
- further comments, links and sources for each chapter, organised under the same subheadings as this printed text;
- the opportunity to engage directly with us and with other readers.

Technology is changing so fast that no book can guarantee to be completely up to date. So make sure you check the website if you are following up specific ideas from the book.

DO WE NEED ANOTHER BOOK ON BUSINESS COMMUNICATION?

Yes, for five reasons:

1   *The increasing pace of change*. Although the bookshelves in many libraries are already groaning with the weight of existing texts, so much has changed in the last five years

that we do need fresh approaches *and* we need to make sure that established principles still apply. In terms of the ways we work as individuals, the most important changes have been in the social and economic climate and in the ways we use computer technology. Analysing the economic changes in detail is beyond the scope of this book but we will pay attention to the economic and social context in which organisations operate as this obviously influences their communication.

2 *The impact of new computer technology.* We will emphasise the potential of new technology – e.g. mobile devices such as smartphones and tablets – devices which now contain more processing power and memory than the desktop PCs which we used in our younger days. And these devices are enabling significant changes in our social and economic behaviour. But there are also significant differences in different parts of the world. For example, which country is widely acknowledged as the 'world leader in high-tech mobile money'? Our answer is on the website.

3 *The need to review and revise basic principles.* There are some fundamental principles of communication which you will find in virtually every textbook on communication, but do these need refining or updating in the light of new technology? For example, we emphasise the notion of 'audience'. This used to be easier to define – nowadays we need to consider that *anything* you say in public or at a meeting could be on the Internet in a matter of minutes thanks to Twitter. You *always* have to operate on the basis that you are talking to multiple audiences, as there will be particular subgroups in any audience, but now you also have to consider that some of these will not be in the room. As a speaker or workshop leader, this gives you both challenges and new opportunities. A number of organisations (and educational institutions) are now capitalising on this by using what is called the 'back-channel' to increase the dialogue between speakers and audience. This can be done using specialised systems such as the 'clickers' that are now used by many colleges and higher education institutions, but you can also use Internet systems such as Poll Everywhere, which allows anyone in the audience to contribute with a suitable laptop, tablet or mobile phone. Or you can take advantage of the fact that most if not all of your audience in the room will have access to Twitter or other chat media.

4 *Information and communication overload.* The notion of information overload is not new but the growth of new communication channels has made this problem much more serious.

5 *Online media are not the 'answer to everything'.* The marketing and retailing of books has changed significantly over the last few years and all publishers are having to review their online presence and activity. We did consider moving this text to online media. In the end, we decided on a combination of book plus online support. This combination still offers some advantages in terms of flexibility and access, although we may not be able to say that with quite the same conviction in a few years' time. Experts and forecasters agree that ebooks will expand significantly but differ on how much and/or the different rates of expansion across the globe.

OUR AIMS

We will offer you suggestions and techniques to improve the way you communicate.

Communication is complex and always affected by the social context so we *cannot* offer you a definitive approach which will always work (beware any books or courses which do offer this!). We can offer you approaches and techniques which will increase your chances of success.

We will analyse how people communicate within business and professional organisations, and how this communication is changing. We focus on commercial organisations but the main ideas and principles also apply to non-commercial and voluntary sectors, and to small, medium and large enterprises (SMEs).

We focus on communication by individuals and groups within and across the organisation and do not say much about external communication (advertising, public relations, etc.). However, all the principles we discuss can be applied to both internal and external communication. For example, we emphasise the importance of understanding how different audiences may have very different perspectives on the same message; we emphasise the importance of clear language; and we emphasise the importance of careful planning and a clear strategy in formal communication.

WHY 'RETHINKING' BUSINESS COMMUNICATION?

The business world has changed dramatically since we wrote the first version of this book, back in 2000. Apart from the global economic crisis, advances in technology have brought fundamental change in the ways we live and work. Consider the following headlines which we paraphrased from radio and news broadcasts over a couple of days in spring 2014 – none of these headlines would have made sense to early readers of our first edition and most would have probably created confusion only five years ago:

- Man turns experience in social tweeting into professional career.
- Crowd-sourced maps save lives in crisis situations.
- Google offers 'right to forget' form.
- Are 3D printed houses the future?
- How WhatsApp beat Facebook.

All of these stories have important implications for business and professional communication and activity. How many did you recognise? See the website for further details of these stories and their background.

Among the most important trends are the following.

The growth of mobile computing

Industrial experts in 2012 forecasted that Internet traffic would 'grow four-fold over the next four years' with this dramatic expansion fuelled by the growth of mobile computing. Many people in business can and do now work virtually anywhere, given a laptop and an

Internet connection. This means that they can also be contacted through email or text at any time, day or night. And this is having significant impact on office structures and facilities, leading to the claim that younger generations of business workers do not attach the same status or importance to individual office spaces as previous generations.

The rise of social media

Many business organisations are now taking social media like Facebook and Twitter very seriously as they recognise opportunities for new relationships with their customers and their staff. An indication of this change is recent trends in television advertising, especially around major holidays – the focus is not to sell products directly as in previous years but to persuade the audience to go to the relevant website where the 'real' promotion of the product is located. The growing sales of televisions with built-in Internet connections is likely to force further changes in approaches to advertising. This is an example of what has been called the 'Internet of things' where Internet connections are built into devices to enable data communications and new facilities.

The growth of social media has also seen a corresponding growth in people's willingness to share much of their lives online. Does this mean that we have to modify our approach to personal relationships?

But not everything has changed

While we have experienced dramatic change, we must also consider important principles which have not changed. To start the debate on this, we will revisit two examples which we used in 2000:

■ In a business speech, Gerald Ratner described some of his company's cheaper jewellery products as 'crap' and suggested that others would not last as long as a supermarket sandwich. He did not anticipate reports in the national press the following day. Although the immediate effect on sales was actually positive – customers went looking for cheap bargains – the publicity had created an image which the company could not counteract when the economy dipped – people did not want to buy gifts from a store which now had a reputation for 'cheap rubbish'. Within months, the sales had slumped and the company never recovered. The irony was that Ratner had used these remarks before in speeches and had been quoted in the financial press, but this time the comments made the front pages in the popular papers. As he later reflected: 'Because of one ill-judged joke, 25,000 people lost their jobs' (quoted in *Tibballs*, 1999, p. 192).

In the next few years, the phrase 'doing a Ratner' became a popular description of a chief executive or senior manager making an ill-judged comment with damaging consequences, and other examples were publicised. Ratner did manage to 'rise again' through a new company and you will find him on YouTube commenting on his experience and publicising his book on the subject. Needless to say, he now has a website and Facebook page.

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