

SIXTH EDITION

Ronald B. Adler
Jeanne Marquardt Elmhorst



COMMUNICATING AT WORK

Principles and Practices for Business
and the Professions

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Santa Barbara City College

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COMMUNICATING AT WORK: PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICES FOR BUSINESS AND THE PROFESSIONS

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Preface

How important is communication at work? Ask anyone who has on-the-job experience, and the answer is almost guaranteed to be the same: Excellent communication skills are essential for a successful, satisfying career. *Communicating at Work* provides a practical introduction to the principles and skills of effective communication in business and professional settings. The book shows what makes some on-the-job communication effective and some ineffective, or even destructive. More importantly, it gives readers tools for becoming better communicators themselves, focusing on the types of interaction most common in business and other organizations.

The book is aimed at helping all career-minded readers. Novices to the business world will be introduced to skills they will need for on-the-job success. Readers who have ample job experience, but recognize that there is always potential for communicating more effectively should also find useful tips and tools.

FEATURES OF THE NEW EDITION

This edition, which reflects changes in scholarship and business practices that have occurred in recent years, offers expanded coverage of technology and cultural diversity.

Technology: The growth of computer-mediated communication has led to expanded treatment of choosing the optimal communication channel (Chapter 1), of “virtual teams” (Chapter 8), and electronic meetings (Chapter 9). In each chapter, “On The Web” boxes highlight resources available for readers on the Internet.

Cultural Diversity: Because business is increasingly a global enterprise, the emphasis on cultural influences on styles of interaction receives special treatment, most prominently in Chapter 2, but also throughout the book.

As in previous editions, this text continues to feature helpful aids to learning in each chapter:

- “Career Tip” boxes, new to this edition, offer concise advice to boost effectiveness in special communication situations.
- Coverage of ethical issues in the workplace has been expanded in the “Ethical Challenges” boxes.
- “Invitation to Insight” probes help readers apply concepts from the text to the everyday world of work.
- “Skill Builder” exercises provide numerous opportunities for students to practice and improve their communication skills.
- Key Terms appear at the end of each chapter.
- The Appendix offers examples of business correspondence.

RESOURCES FOR INSTRUCTORS

This edition of *Communicating at Work* offers the widest array of instructional resources in its field. They include:

- A dedicated World Wide Web site at <http://www.mhhe.com/socscience/comm/adler/>, which offers up-to-date links to the constantly growing number of sites with useful information and advice for business communicators. Since some links listed in “On The Web” in the text are likely to change, this site, with regular updates, will help readers locate the resources they are seeking.
- A revised Instructor’s Manual and Test Bank provides a wealth of teaching strategies, resources for professors and students, and examination questions.
- Computerized Testing Software (In Windows and Macintosh formats) makes it easy to create examinations from the

bank of existing questions, as well as allowing instructors to add new ones of their own.

- PowerPoint slides of key information from the book allow instructors to present lecture material in computer-generated format.
- An Instructor's CD-ROM contains the instructor's manual, testbank, and PowerPoint on one convenient disk for Windows.
- A videotape provides a series of scenarios of common types of business and professional interaction for analysis.
- World Wide Web courseware using McGraw-Hill's Learning Architecture (MHLA) and acclaimed TopClass software enables instructors to offer some—or even all of their instruction in on-line, Web-based format. This complete package, available for student purchase, contains on-line instruction and testing. Both e-mail and group conferencing capabilities allow professors and students to engage in classwide discussions, and for students to work with one another in “virtual teams.”

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Ronald B. Adler
 Jeanne M. Elmhorst

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PART ONE

Basics of Business and
Professional Communication

chapter

1

COMMUNICATING AT WORK

Chapter Outline

- The Importance of Communication
- The Nature of Communication
 - The Process of Communication
 - Communication Principles
- Using Communication Networks
 - Formal Communication Networks
 - Informal Communication Networks
- Choosing the Optimal Communication Channel
- Face-to-Face Communication
 - Teleconferencing
 - Telephone and Voice Mail
 - Written Communication
 - Which Channel to Use
- Summary
- Key Terms
- Resources
- Activities



THE IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNICATION

Virtually everyone communicates at work. No matter what the field, and no matter how much you know about your job, specialized knowledge alone isn't enough to guarantee success; communication skills are also vital. Table 1-1 summarizes the results of one survey in which 500 managers in a wide range of industries including retail, manufacturing, service, and finance ranked the importance of various factors in hiring decisions. Oral communication skills topped the list.¹ Other surveys produce similar results. In one typical study, 1,000 U.S. managers ranked the ability to communicate well ahead of important attributes such as technical competence, work experience, academic background, and recommendations.² Additional research validates the importance of communication-related skills including working on teams, teaching others, serving customers, leading, negotiating, working with cultural diversity, interviewing, listening, conducting meetings, and resolving conflicts.³

Subscribers to the *Harvard Business Review* rated "the ability to communicate" the most important factor in making an executive "promotable," more important than ambition, education, and capacity for hard work.⁴ Research spanning several decades has consistently ranked communication skills as crucial for managers.⁵ One 20-year study that followed the progress of Stanford University MBAs revealed that the most successful graduates (as measured by both career advancement and salary) shared personality traits that distinguish good communicators: a desire to persuade, an interest in talking and working with other people, and an outgoing, ascendant personality. As students, these achievers developed their communication skills by choosing courses in areas such as persuasion, selling ideas, negotiation, and other forms of speaking.⁶

Although the need for face-to-face communication skills may seem less important in today's high-tech world, the opposite is true. In one survey, over 90 percent of the personnel officials at 500 U.S. businesses stated that increased communication skills

Table 1-1 Importance of Competencies in Hiring Decisions

Rank/Order	Factors/Skills Evaluated
1	Oral communication
2	Self-motivation
3	Problem-solving
4	Decision-making
5	Leadership
6	Human relations
7	Teamwork
8	Work experience
9	Time management
10	Personal appearance
11	Written communication
12	Academic performance
13	Creativity
14	Delegation
15	Multilingual ability

Source: Jeanne D. Maes, Teresa G. Weldy, and Marjorie L. Icenogle, "Oral Communication Competency in the Workplace," *Journal of Business Communication* 34 (January 1997), pp. 67-80.

are needed for success in the 21st century.⁷ Without human skills, technology will overwhelm an organization. Columbia University researchers discovered that, in the changing workplace, computers and other kinds of sophisticated equipment are now performing routine jobs, leaving workers to handle the human challenges of improving the organization and responding to customers—tasks heavily dependent on the ability to communicate well with others.⁸ After studying the needs of four Silicon Valley manufacturing firms, educational psychologist Russell Rumberger discovered that what employees needed was "oral literacy—the ability to communicate, to work in teams, and to shift rapidly as the work changed."⁹

Most successful people recognize the role communication skills have played in their career. In a survey of college graduates in a wide variety of fields, most respondents said that communication was vital to their job success. Most, in fact, said that communication skills were more important than the major subject they had studied in college.¹⁰ In one survey of business school alumni, oral communication skills were judged as "mandatory" or "very important" by 100 percent of the respondents—every person who replied.¹¹

The importance of communication is not surprising when you consider the staggering amount of time people spend communicating on the job. One study, based on responses from over 1,000 employees at *Fortune* 1000 companies found that workers send and receive an average of 178 messages each day via telephone, e-mail, faxes, pagers, and face-to-face communication.¹² Some experts have estimated that the average business executive spends 75 to 80 percent of the time communicating—about 45 minutes out of every hour.¹³