

## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After studying this chapter, you will be able to

- 1 Define *communication*, and explain the importance of effective business communication.
- 2 Explain what it means to communicate as a professional in a business context.
- 3 Describe the communication process model, and explain how social media are changing the nature of business communication.
- 4 Outline the challenges and opportunities of mobile communication in business.
- 5 Define *ethics*, explain the difference between an ethical dilemma and an ethical lapse, and list six guidelines for making ethical communication choices.
- 6 Explain how cultural diversity affects business communication, and describe the steps you can take to communicate more effectively across cultural boundaries.
- 7 List four general guidelines for using communication technology effectively.
- 8 Identify six related skills that you will have the opportunity to develop as you work on your communication skills in this course.

### MyLab Business Communication

★ If your instructor is using MyLab Business Communication, visit [www.pearson.com/mylab/business-communication](http://www.pearson.com/mylab/business-communication).

## COMMUNICATION MATTERS . . .

“Writing, communication skills, and organizational skills are scarce everywhere. These skills are in demand across nearly every occupation—and in nearly every occupation they’re being requested far more than you’d expect based on standard job profiles. Even fields like IT and engineering want people who can write.”  
— *The Human Factor: The Hard Time Employers Have Finding Soft Skills*, Burning Glass Technologies

Burning Glass Technologies continually studies the job market, using artificial intelligence to figure out what skills employers are looking for and comparing those with the skills that job seekers have to offer. After analyzing millions of job openings across a wide range of industries, one conclusion jumped out: Today’s employers are looking for people who know how to communicate. In every profession except two, communication skills are the most-requested qualification (and in those two professions, they ranked second).<sup>1</sup>

What does this mean to you? It means that no matter what career path you might follow, improving your communication skills will give you a significant competitive edge in the job market. And you’ve come to the right place: This course is designed to help you develop the skills that will help you get ahead.



Burning Glass applies artificial intelligence to the challenges of matching employer need with employee skill sets.

## Why Communication Is the Most Important Business Skill

**1 LEARNING OBJECTIVE**  
Define *communication*, and explain the importance of effective business communication.

**Communication** is the process of transferring information and meaning between *senders* and *receivers* using one or more media and communication channels. The essence of communication is sharing—providing data, information, insights, and inspiration in an exchange that benefits both you and the people with whom you are communicating.<sup>2</sup> As Figure 1.1 illustrates, this sharing can happen in a variety of ways, including a simple and successful transfer of information, a negotiation in which the sender and receiver arrive at an agreed-upon meaning, and unsuccessful attempts in which the receiver creates a different message than the one the sender intended.

You will invest a lot of time and energy in this course developing your communication skills, so it's fair to ask whether it will be worthwhile. This section outlines the many ways in which good communication skills are critical for your career and for any company you join or launch.

Ambition and great ideas aren't enough; you need to be able to communicate with people in order to succeed in business.

If you work as a freelancer or independent contractor, you will need communication skills to “sell yourself” into each new opportunity.

### COMMUNICATION IS IMPORTANT TO YOUR CAREER

You can have the greatest plans and ideas in the world, but they usually aren't much good to your company or your career if you can't express them clearly and persuasively. Some jobs, such as sales and customer support, are primarily about communicating. In fields such as engineering or finance, you often need to share complex ideas with executives, customers, and colleagues, and your ability to connect with people outside your field can be as important as your technical expertise. If you have the entrepreneurial urge, you will need to communicate with a wide range of audiences, from investors, bankers, and government regulators to employees, customers, and business partners.

The changing nature of employment is putting new pressure on communication skills, too. Companies such as Uber and Lyft are the most visible in the *gig economy*, where independent contractors work without many of the advantages or the disadvantages of regular employment. Many other companies now supplement their permanent workforces with independent contractors in a variety of business and technical fields who are brought on for a short period or even just a single project. Chances are you will spend some of your career as one of these freelancers, working without the support network that an established company environment provides. You may need to “sell yourself” into each new contract, and you will need to communicate successfully in a wide range of work situations and take full responsibility for your career growth and success.

If you launch a company or move into an executive role in an existing organization, you can expect communication to consume the majority of your time. Top executives spend most of their workdays communicating, and businesspeople who can't communicate well don't stand much chance of reaching the top.

#### REAL-TIME UPDATES

LEARN MORE BY VISITING THIS WEBSITE

Check out the cutting edge of business communication

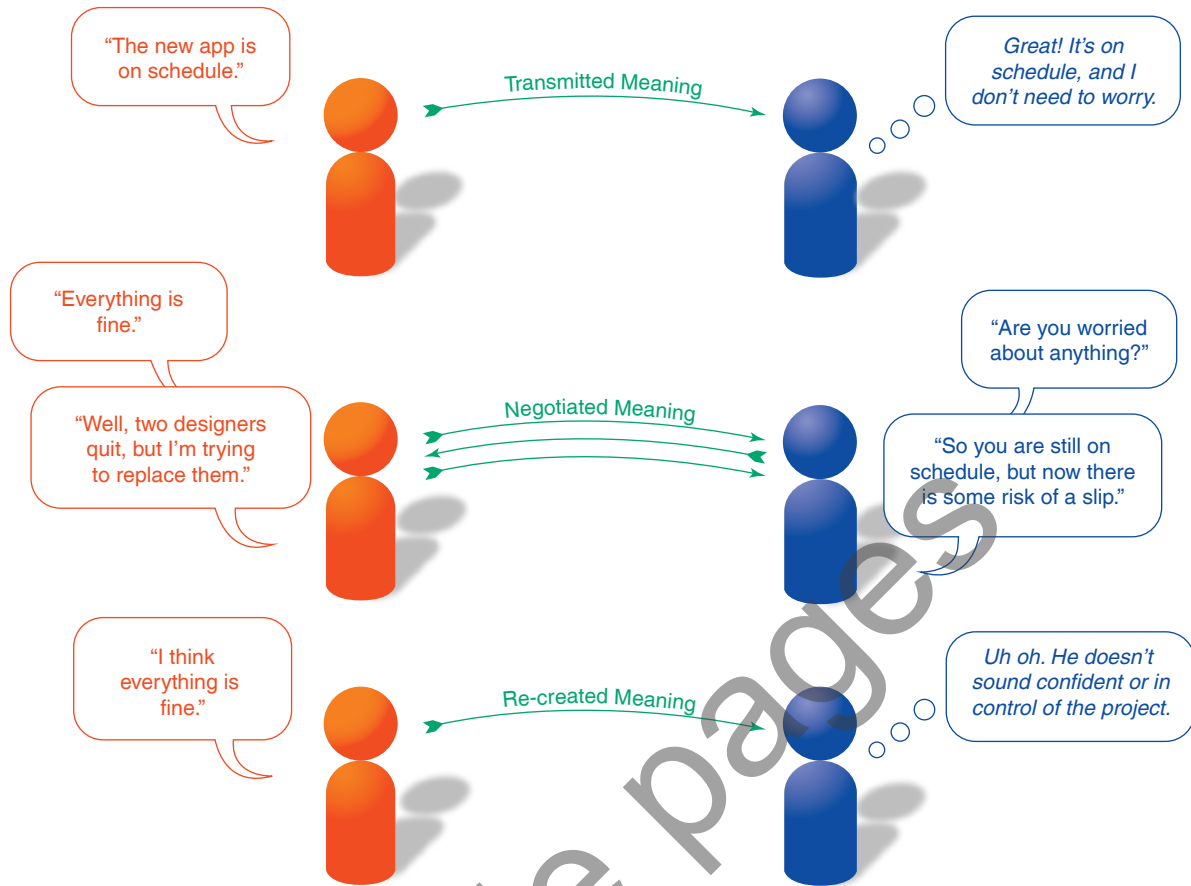
This Pinterest board created by the authors highlights some of the most important changes taking place in the field of business communication. Go to [real-timeupdates.com/bce8](http://real-timeupdates.com/bce8) and select Learn More in the Students section.

Effective communication is critical to virtually every aspect of business.

### COMMUNICATION IS IMPORTANT TO YOUR COMPANY

Aside from the personal benefits, communication should be important to you because it is important to your company. Effective communication helps businesses in numerous ways, by promoting<sup>3</sup>

- A stronger sense of trust between individuals and organizations
- Closer ties with important communities in the marketplace
- Opportunities to influence conversations, perceptions, and trends
- Increased productivity and faster problem solving
- Better financial results and higher return for investors
- Earlier warning of potential problems, from rising business costs to critical safety issues



**Figure 1.1** Sharing Information

These three exchanges between a software project manager (*left*) and his boss (*right*) illustrate the variety of ways in which information is shared between senders and receivers. In the top exchange, the sender's meaning is transmitted intact to the receiver, who accepts what the sender says at face value. In the middle exchange, the sender and receiver negotiate the meaning by discussing the situation. The negotiated meaning is that everything is fine so far, but the risk of a schedule slip is now higher than it was before. In the bottom exchange, the receiver has a negative emotional reaction to the word *think*, and as a result creates her own meaning—that everything probably is *not* fine, in spite of what the sender says.

- Stronger decision making based on timely, reliable information
- Clearer and more persuasive marketing messages
- Greater engagement of employees with their work, leading to higher employee satisfaction and lower employee turnover

## WHAT MAKES BUSINESS COMMUNICATION EFFECTIVE?

Effective communication strengthens the connections between a company and all of its **stakeholders**, those groups affected in some way by the company's actions: customers, employees, shareholders, suppliers, neighbors, the community, the nation, and the world as a whole.<sup>4</sup> To make your communication efforts as effective as possible, focus on making them practical, factual, concise, clear, and persuasive:

- **Provide practical information.** Give recipients useful information, whether it's to help them perform a desired action or understand a new company policy.
- **Give facts rather than vague impressions.** Use concrete language, specific detail, and information that is clear, convincing, accurate, and ethical. Even when an opinion is called for, present compelling evidence to support your conclusion.

Effective messages are practical, factual, concise, clear, and persuasive.

- **Present information in a concise, efficient manner.** Concise messages show respect for people's time, and they increase the chances of a positive response.
- **Clarify expectations and responsibilities.** Craft messages to generate a specific response from a specific audience. When appropriate, clearly state what you expect from readers or listeners or what you can do for them.
- **Offer compelling, persuasive arguments and recommendations.** Show your readers precisely how they will benefit by responding to your message the way you want them to.

Keep these five characteristics in mind as you review the ineffective and effective versions of the message in Figure 1.2.

## Communicating as a Professional

**2 LEARNING OBJECTIVE**  
Explain what it means to communicate as a professional in a business context.

You've been communicating your entire life, of course, but if you don't have a lot of work experience yet, meeting the expectations of a professional environment might require some adjustment. A good place to start is to consider what it means to be a professional. **Professionalism** is the quality of performing at a high level and conducting oneself with purpose and pride. It means doing more than putting in the hours and collecting a paycheck; true professionals go beyond minimum expectations and commit to making meaningful contributions. Professionalism can be broken down into six distinct traits: striving to excel, being dependable and accountable, being a team player, demonstrating a sense of etiquette, making ethical decisions, and maintaining a positive outlook (see Figure 1.3 on page 42).

A key message to glean from Figure 1.3 is how much these elements of professionalism depend on effective communication. For example, to be a team player, you have to be able to collaborate, resolve conflicts, and interact with a wide variety of personalities. Without strong communication skills, you won't be able to perform to your potential—and others won't recognize you as the professional you'd like to be.

This section offers a brief look at the skills that employers will expect you to have, the nature of communication in an organizational environment, and the importance of adopting an audience-centered approach.

### UNDERSTANDING WHAT EMPLOYERS EXPECT FROM YOU

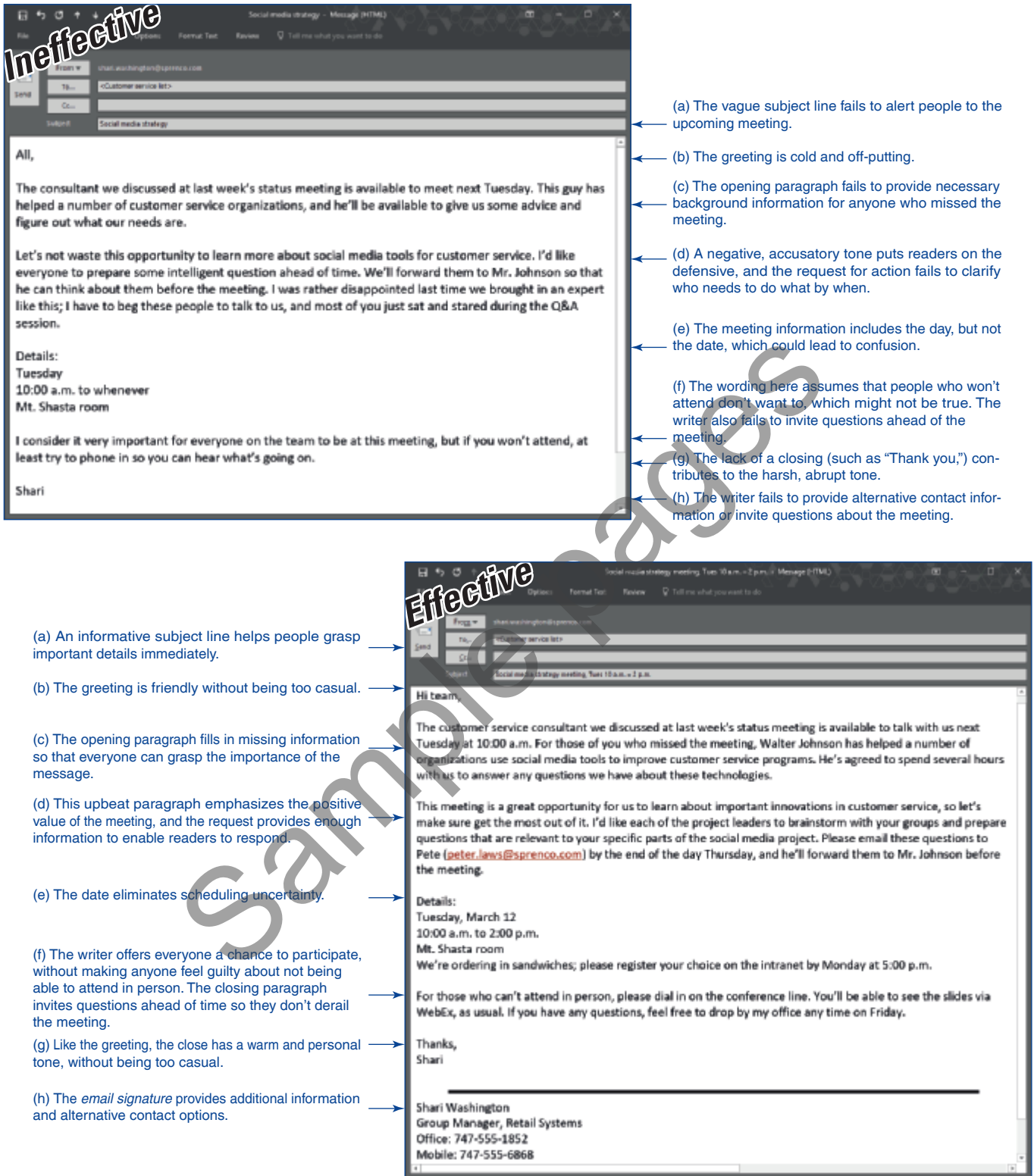
Today's employers expect you to be competent at a wide range of communication tasks. Fortunately, the skills employers expect from you are the same skills that will help you advance in your career:<sup>5</sup>

- Recognizing information needs, using efficient search techniques to locate reliable sources of information, and using gathered information ethically; this collection of skills is often referred to as *digital information fluency*<sup>6</sup>
- Organizing ideas and information logically and completely
- Expressing ideas and information coherently and persuasively
- Actively listening to others
- Communicating effectively with people from diverse backgrounds and experiences
- Using communication technologies effectively and efficiently
- Following accepted standards of grammar, spelling, and other aspects of high-quality writing and speaking
- Communicating in a civilized manner that reflects contemporary expectations of business etiquette, even when dealing with indifferent or hostile audiences
- Communicating ethically, even when choices aren't crystal clear
- Managing your time wisely and using resources efficiently
- Using **critical thinking**, which is the ability to evaluate evidence completely and objectively in order to form logical conclusions and make sound recommendations

You'll have the opportunity to practice these skills throughout this course, but don't stop there. Successful professionals continue to hone communication skills throughout their careers.

Communication is an essential part of being a successful professional.

Employers expect you to have a broad set of communication skills, and you can practice all of these skills in this course.



**Figure 1.2 Effective Professional Communication**

At first glance, the top email message here looks like a reasonable attempt at communicating with the members of a project team. However, compare it with the bottom version by referencing the notes lettered (a) through (h) to see just how many problems the original message really has.

Source: Windows 10, Microsoft Corporation



**Figure 1.3 Elements of Professionalism**

To be respected as a true professional, develop these six qualities.

## COMMUNICATING IN AN ORGANIZATIONAL CONTEXT

Every company has a formal communication network, where messages follow the lines of command in the organization structure.

Every company has also has an informal communication network—all the communication that takes place outside the formal network.

In addition to having the proper skills, you need to learn how to apply those skills in the business environment, which can be quite different from your social and scholastic environments. Every organization has a *formal* communication network in which ideas and information flow along the lines of command in the company's organization structure. When managers inform their subordinates about new company policies or sales representatives submit travel reports, they are using the formal communication network. This flow of "official" information—downward, upward, and horizontally throughout the organization—keeps all the parts of a company connected and functioning smoothly.

Every organization also has an *informal* communication network, often referred to as the *grapevine* or the *rumor mill*, which encompasses all the "unofficial" communication that occurs outside the formal network. Some of this informal communication takes place naturally when employees interact on the job and in social settings, and some of it takes place when the formal network doesn't provide information that employees want. In fact, the limitations of formal communication networks helped spur the growth of social media in the business environment. Communication in the informal network is healthy and important, because the formal network can't always capture and share all the information that helps people do their jobs. However, if a workplace is rife with rumors and company gossip, this could be a sign that the formal network is not functioning effectively.

## ADOPTING AN AUDIENCE-CENTERED APPROACH

Focus on the needs of your audiences to make your messages more effective.

An **audience-centered approach** involves understanding and respecting the members of your audience and making every effort to get your message across in a way that is meaningful to them. This approach is also known as adopting the "you" attitude, in contrast to messages


that are about “me.” Learn as much as possible about the biases, education, age, status, style, and personal and professional concerns of your receivers. If you're addressing people you don't know and you're unable to find out more about them, try to envision yourself in their position using common sense and imagination. This ability to relate to the needs of others is a key part of *emotional intelligence*, a combination of emotional and social skills widely considered to be a vital characteristic of successful managers and leaders. The more you know about the people you're communicating with, the easier it will be to concentrate on their needs—which, in turn, will make it easier for them to hear your message, understand it, and respond positively.

A vital element of audience-centered communication is *etiquette*, the expected norms of behavior in any particular situation. In today's hectic, competitive world, etiquette might seem a quaint and outdated notion. However, the way you conduct yourself and interact with others can have a profound influence on your company's success and your career. When executives hire and promote you, they expect your behavior to protect the company's reputation. The more you understand such expectations, the better chance you have of avoiding career-damaging mistakes. The principles of etiquette discussed in Chapter 2 will help you communicate with an audience-centered approach in a variety of business settings.

Respect, courtesy, and common sense will help you avoid etiquette mistakes.

**REAL-TIME UPDATES**

LEARN MORE BY WATCHING THIS VIDEO



**The fundamentals of emotional intelligence**

Understand the five elements that make up this essential quality for business success. Go to [real-timeupdates.com/bce8](http://real-timeupdates.com/bce8) and select Learn More in the Students section.

## Exploring the Communication Process

Even with the best intentions, communication efforts can fail. Fortunately, by understanding communication as a process with distinct steps, you can improve the odds that your messages will reach their intended audiences and produce their intended effects. This section explores the communication process in two stages: first by following a message from one sender to one receiver in the basic communication model, and then by expanding on that approach with multiple messages and participants in the social communication model.

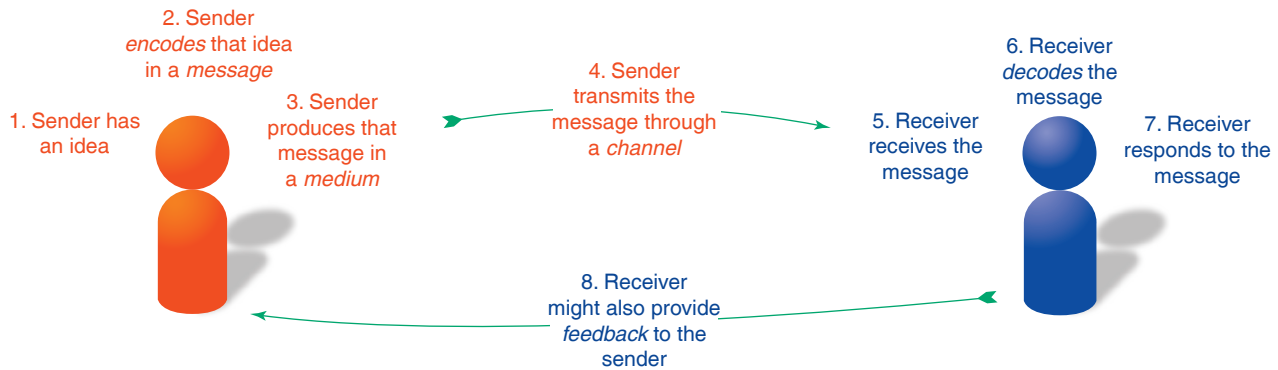
**3 LEARNING OBJECTIVE**  
Describe the communication process model, and explain how social media are changing the nature of business communication.

### THE BASIC COMMUNICATION MODEL

Many variations of the communication process model exist, but these eight steps provide a practical overview (see Figure 1.4 on the next page):

1. **The sender has an idea.** Whether a communication effort will ultimately be effective starts right here and depends on the nature of the idea and the motivation for sending it. For example, if your motivation is to offer a solution to a problem, you have a better chance of crafting a successful message than if your motivation is merely to complain about the problem.
2. **The sender encodes the idea as a message.** When someone puts an idea into a **message**, he or she is **encoding** it, or expressing it in words or images. Much of the focus of this course is on developing the skills needed to successfully encode your ideas into effective messages.
3. **The sender produces the message in a transmittable medium.** With the appropriate message to express an idea, the sender now needs a **communication medium** to present that message to the intended receiver. To update your boss on the status of a project, for instance, you might have several media options at your disposal, from a phone call to an instant message to a slideshow presentation. Each medium has its own strengths and weaknesses, which you'll learn more about in Chapter 3.
4. **The sender transmits the message through a channel.** As technology continues to increase the number of media options, it continues to provide new **communication channels** senders can use to transmit their messages. The distinction between medium and channel can get a bit murky, but think of the medium as the *form* a message takes (written versus spoken, for example) and the channel as the

The communication process starts with a sender having an idea and then encoding the idea into a message that can be transferred to a receiver.



**Figure 1.4 The Basic Communication Process**

This eight-step model is a simplified view of how communication works in real life; understanding this basic model is vital to improving your communication skills.

Decoding is a complex process; receivers often extract different meanings from messages than the meanings that senders intended.

system used to *deliver* the message (email versus a printed letter for a written message, for example).

5. **The intended audience receives the message.** If the channel functions properly, the message reaches its intended audience. However, mere arrival is not enough. For a message to truly be received, the recipient has to *sense* the presence of a message, *select* it from all the other messages clamoring for attention, and *perceive* it as an actual message (as opposed to random noise).<sup>7</sup>
6. **The receiver decodes the message.** After a message is received, the receiver needs to extract the idea from the message, a step known as **decoding**. Even well-crafted, well-intentioned communication efforts can fail at this stage because extracting meaning is a highly personal process that is influenced by culture, experience, learning and thinking styles, hopes, fears, and even temporary moods. As you saw in Figure 1.1, receivers sometimes decode the same meaning the sender intended, but sometimes they can decode—or re-create—entirely different meanings. Moreover, receivers tend to extract the meaning they *expect* to get from a message, even if it's the opposite of what the sender intended.<sup>8</sup>
7. **The receiver responds to the message.** In most instances, senders want to accomplish more than simply delivering information. They often want receivers to respond in particular ways, whether it's to invest millions of dollars in a new business venture or to accept management's explanation for why the company can't afford to give employee bonuses this year. Whether a receiver responds as the sender hopes depends on the receiver (a) *remembering* the message long enough to act on it, (b) being *able* to act on it, and (c) being *motivated* to respond.
8. **The receiver provides feedback.** If a mechanism is available for them to do so, receivers can “close the loop” in the communication process by giving **feedback** that helps the sender evaluate the effectiveness of the communication effort. Feedback can be verbal (using written or spoken words), nonverbal (using gestures, facial expressions, or other signals), or both. Just like the original message, however, this feedback from the receiver also needs to be decoded carefully. A smile, for example, can have many different meanings.

Considering the complexity of this process—and the barriers and distractions that often stand between sender and receiver—it should come as no surprise that communication efforts frequently fail to achieve the sender's objective. Fortunately, the better you understand the process, the more successful you'll be.

## THE SOCIAL COMMUNICATION MODEL

The basic model presented in Figure 1.4 illustrates how a single idea moves from one sender to one receiver. In a larger sense, it also helps represent the traditional model of much business communication, which was primarily defined by a *publishing* or *broadcasting* mindset. A company issued carefully scripted messages to an external mass audience that often had



few options for responding to those messages or initiating messages of their own. Customers and other interested parties had few ways to connect with one another to ask questions, share information, or offer support. Internal communication tended to follow the same “we talk, you listen” model, with upper managers issuing directives to lower-level supervisors and employees.

However, a variety of recent innovations have enabled and inspired a new approach to business communication. In contrast to the publishing mindset, this **social communication model** is interactive, conversational, and usually open to all who wish to participate. Audience members are no longer passive recipients of messages but active participants in a conversation. Social media have given customers and other stakeholders a voice they did not have in the past. And businesses are listening to that voice. In fact, one of the most common uses of social media among U.S. businesses is monitoring online discussions about a company and its brands.<sup>9</sup> Inside companies, social media make it easier for employees to voice concerns and frustrations, increasing the chances that managers will address problems that are getting in the way of people doing their jobs.<sup>10</sup>

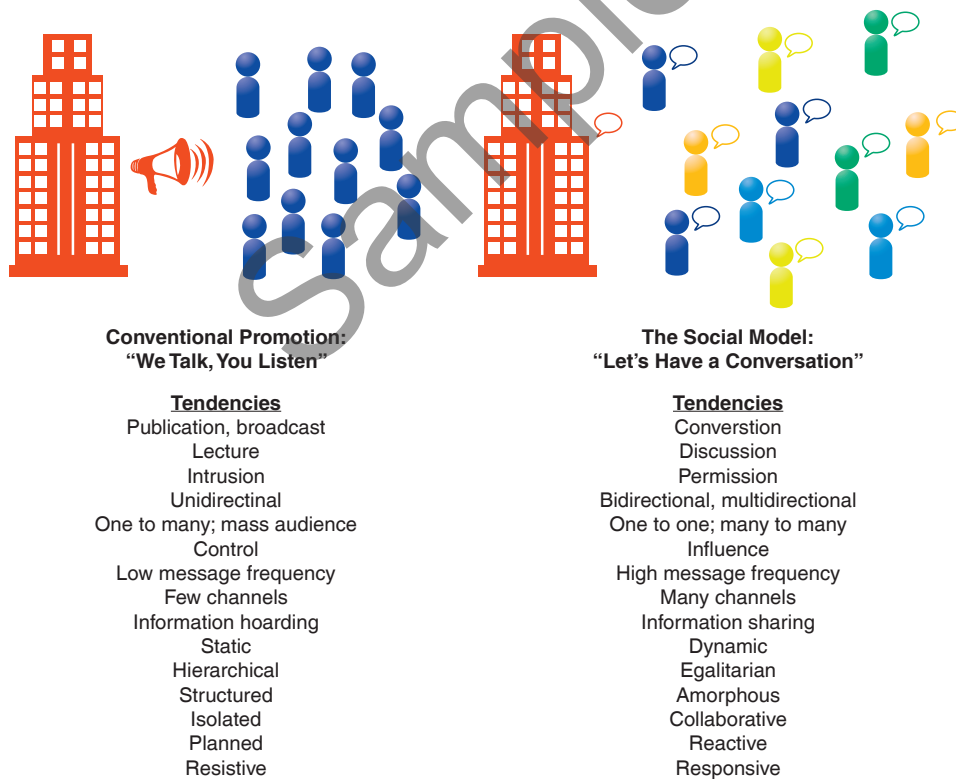
Instead of transmitting a fixed message, a sender in a social media environment initiates a conversation by sharing valuable information. This information is often revised and reshaped by the web of participants as they share it and comment on it. People can add to it or take pieces from it, depending on their needs and interests. Figure 1.5 lists the significant differences between traditional and social models of business communication.

The social communication model offers many advantages, but it has a number of disadvantages as well. Potential problems include information overload, a lower level of engagement with tasks and other people, fragmented attention, information security risks, reduced productivity, and the difficulty of maintaining a healthy boundary between personal and professional lives.<sup>11</sup> All business professionals and managers need to choose and use digital tools wisely to control the flow of information they receive.

Of course, no company, no matter how enthusiastically it embraces the social communication model, is going to be run as a club in which everyone has a say in every business

The social communication model is interactive, conversational, and usually open to all who wish to participate.

Social media tools present some potential disadvantages that managers and employees need to consider.



**Figure 1.5 The Social Communication Model**

The social communication model differs from conventional communication strategies and practices in a number of significant ways. You’re probably already an accomplished user of many social media tools, and this experience will help you on the job.

matter. Instead, a hybrid approach is emerging in which some communications (such as strategic plans and policy documents) follow the traditional approach, while others (such as project management updates and customer support messages) follow the social model.

You can learn more about business uses of social media in Chapter 6.

## The Mobile Revolution

**4** **LEARNING OBJECTIVE**  
Outline the challenges and opportunities of mobile communication in business.

As much of a game changer as social media have been, some experts predict that mobile communication will change the nature of business and business communication even more.<sup>12</sup> This section offers a high-level view of the mobile revolution, and you'll see coverage of specific topics integrated throughout the book—everything from collaborative writing and research to presentations and job-search strategies.

### THE RISE OF MOBILE AS A BUSINESS COMMUNICATION PLATFORM

With mobile devices everywhere you look these days, it probably comes as no surprise that media consumption on smartphones has skyrocketed in recent years, even as digital media consumption on computers continues to drop.<sup>13</sup> More than half of all Internet access now occurs via mobile devices, primarily smartphones.<sup>14</sup>

Moreover, this shift isn't just about consumer usage and entertainment. For a growing number of companies, mobile has become an essential part of the digital workplace. And rather than being an accessory to or an extension of a traditional work computer, in many cases mobile devices serve as the primary "hubs" that connect employees to the various parts of the company's information networks.<sup>15</sup>

Business mobile communication involves many of the same communication tools that you probably use now for messaging, social networking, researching, and writing. In addition, thousands of business-focused apps assist users with everything from presentations to project management to financial reporting. Many of these apps are either communication focused or have significant communication features, all designed to help employees stay connected no matter where their work takes them. For example, with Rockwell Automation's Factory Talk TeamONE app, teams can collaborate to diagnose problems on a production line, using the app's measurement capabilities to acquire data from machinery and then using its communication tools to collaborate on the troubleshooting process.<sup>16</sup>

This shift is significant for a number of reasons, one of which is that smartphones have become intensely personal devices in ways that PCs never did. For many users, the connection is so intense they may feel a sense of panic when they don't have frequent access to their phones.<sup>17</sup> When people are closely attached to their phones, day and night, they are more closely connected to all the information sources, conversations, and networks that those phones can connect to. As a result, mobile communication can start to resemble a continuous stream of conversations that never quite end, which influences the way businesses need to interact with their stakeholders. If *wearable technologies* become mainstream devices, they will contribute even more to this shift in behaviors (see Figure 1.6).

Mobile devices are taking over as the primary communication platform for many business professionals.

Professionals use many of the same mobile communication tools you use now, along with thousands of business-focused mobile apps.



**Figure 1.6** Wearable Technology

Smartwatches and other wearable mobile devices offer intriguing possibilities for business communication. The Uno Noteband incorporates Spritz speed-reading technology that makes it easier to read message content quickly. Source: Used by permission of Uno Inc.

The parallels between social media and mobile communication are striking: Both sets of technologies change the nature of communication, alter the relationships between senders and receivers, create opportunities as well as challenges, and force business professionals to hone new skills. In fact, much of the rise in social communication can be attributed to the connectivity made possible by mobile devices. Companies that work to understand and embrace mobile, both internally and externally, stand the best chance of capitalizing on this monumental shift in the way people communicate.

## HOW MOBILE TECHNOLOGIES ARE CHANGING BUSINESS COMMUNICATION

The rise of mobile communication has some obvious implications, starting with the challenges of writing and reading on small screens. Documents that are easy to read on paper or on large screens can become quite difficult to read on a smartphone—and the more difficult the reading experience, the more likely that readers will misinterpret the message or simply stop reading.

However, device size and portability are only the most obvious differences. Just as with social media, the changes brought about by mobile go far deeper than the technology itself. Mobile alters the way people communicate, which has profound implications for virtually every aspect of business communication.

Social media pioneer Nicco Mele coined the term *radical connectivity* to describe “the breathtaking ability to send vast amounts of data instantly, constantly, and globally.”<sup>18</sup> Mobile plays a major and ever-expanding role in this phenomenon by keeping people connected 24/7, wherever they may be. People who’ve grown up with mobile communication technology expect to have immediate access to information and the ability to stay connected to their various social and business networks.<sup>19</sup>

Here are the most significant ways mobile technology is changing the practice of business communication:

- Constant connectivity is a mixed blessing. As with social media, mobile connectivity can blur the boundaries between personal and professional time and space, preventing people from fully disengaging from work during personal and family time. On the other hand, it can give employees more flexibility to meet their personal and professional obligations.<sup>20</sup> In this regard, mobile plays an important role in efforts to reduce operating costs through telecommuting and other nontraditional work models.<sup>21</sup>
- The physical layouts of mobile devices present challenges for creating and consuming content, whether it’s typing an email message or watching a training video.
- Mobile users are often multitasking—roughly half of mobile phone usage happens while people are walking, for instance—so they can’t give full attention to the information on their screens.<sup>22</sup> Moreover, mobile use often occurs in environments with multiple distractions and other barriers to successful communication.
- Mobile communication, particularly text messaging, has put pressure on traditional standards of grammar, punctuation, and writing in general. Chapter 4 has more on this topic.
- Mobile devices can serve as sensory and cognitive extensions.<sup>23</sup> For example, they can help people experience more of their environment (such as augmented reality apps that superimpose information on a live camera view) and have instant access to information without relying on faulty and limited human memory. The addition of *location-aware content*, such as facility maps and property information, enhances the mobile experience.
- Mobile devices create a host of security and privacy concerns, for end users and corporate technology managers alike.<sup>24</sup> Companies are wrestling with the “bring your own device” or “BYOD” phenomenon, in which employees want to be able to access company networks and files with their personal smartphones and tablets, both in



### REAL-TIME UPDATES

LEARN MORE BY WATCHING THESE PRESENTATIONS

#### Exploring the potential of wearable technologies

Will wearable technologies influence business and business communication? These presentations explore the potential. Go to [real-timeupdates.com/bce8](http://real-timeupdates.com/bce8) and select Learn More in the Students section.

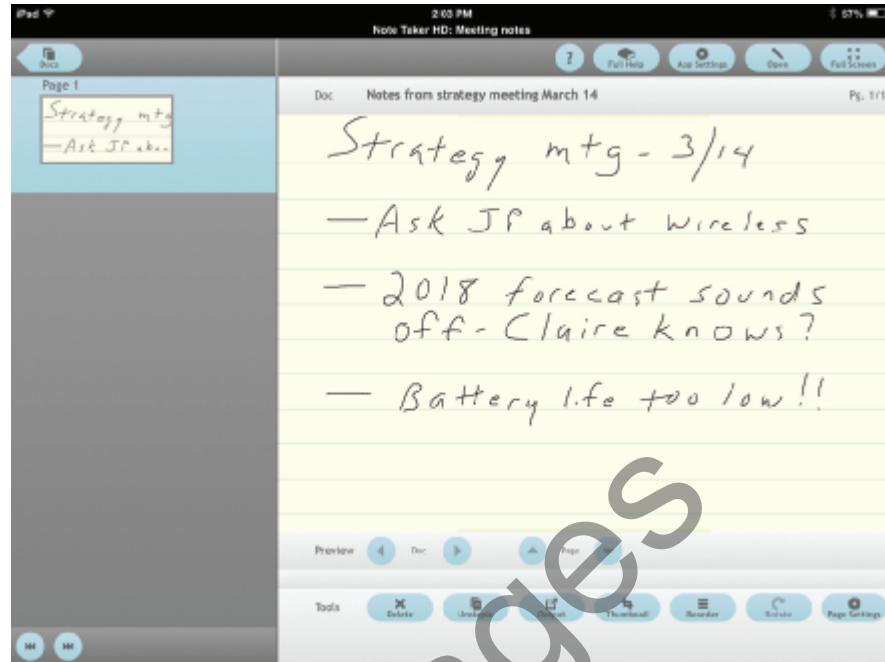
### MOBILE APP

**Pocket** collects online content you’d like to read or view later and syncs it across your mobile devices.

People who’ve grown up with mobile connectivity expect to have immediate access to the information they need as consumers or employees.

Constant connectivity is a mixed blessing: You can work from anywhere at any time, but it’s more difficult to disconnect from work and recharge yourself.

Mobile devices in the workplace create a variety of security and privacy concerns that companies must address.



**Figure 1.7 Mobile Communication Tools**

Mobile technologies offer multiple ways to improve communication and other key business processes. For example, note-taking apps such as Note Taker HD offer an easy and unobtrusive way to take notes during meetings, site visits, and other business functions.

Source: Software Garden, Inc.

the office and away from it. However, these devices don't always have the rigorous security controls that corporate networks need, and employees don't always use the devices in secure ways.

- Mobile tools can enhance productivity and collaboration by making it easier for employees to stay connected and giving them access to information and work tasks during idle time in the workday or while traveling.<sup>25</sup>
- Mobile apps can assist in a wide variety of business tasks, from research to presentations<sup>26</sup> (see Figure 1.7). Companies aren't restricted to commercially available apps, either. With digital publishing tools, companies can create custom apps with content and capabilities geared specifically for their customers or employees.<sup>27</sup>
- Mobile connectivity can accelerate decision making and problem solving by putting the right information in the hands of the right people at the right time. For example, if the participants in a decision-making meeting need more information, they can often do the necessary research on the spot.<sup>28</sup> Mobile communication also makes it easier to quickly tap into pockets of expertise within a company.<sup>29</sup> Customer service can be improved by making sure technicians and other workers always have the information they need right at hand.<sup>30</sup> Companies can also respond and communicate faster during crises.<sup>31</sup>
- With interactivity designed to take advantage of the capabilities of mobile devices (including cameras, accelerometers, compasses, and GPS), companies can create more engaging experiences for customers and other users.<sup>32</sup>

The mobile revolution complicates business communication in some ways, but it can enhance communication in many ways if done thoughtfully. You'll read more about mobile in the chapters ahead.

**5 LEARNING OBJECTIVE**  
Define *ethics*, explain the difference between an ethical dilemma and an ethical lapse, and list six guidelines for making ethical communication choices.

## Committing to Ethical Communication

**Ethics** are the accepted principles of conduct that govern behavior within a society. Ethical behavior is a companywide concern, but because communication efforts are the public face of a company, they are subjected to particularly rigorous scrutiny from regulators,

legislators, investors, consumer groups, environmental groups, labor organizations, and anyone else affected by business activities. **Ethical communication** includes all relevant information, is true in every sense, and is not deceptive in any way. In contrast, unethical communication can distort the truth or manipulate audiences in a variety of ways. Examples of unethical communication include<sup>33</sup>

- **Plagiarism.** Plagiarism is presenting someone else's words or other creative product as your own. Note that plagiarism can be illegal if it violates a **copyright**, which is a form of legal protection for the expression of creative ideas.<sup>34</sup>
- **Omitting essential information.** Information is essential if your audience needs it to make an intelligent, objective decision.
- **Selective misquoting.** Distorting or hiding the true intent of someone else's words is unethical.
- **Misrepresenting numbers.** Statistics and other data can be unethically manipulated by increasing or decreasing numbers, exaggerating visual differences, altering statistics, or omitting numeric data.
- **Distorting visuals.** Images can be manipulated in unethical ways, such as making a product seem bigger than it really is or changing the scale of graphs and charts to exaggerate or conceal differences.
- **Failing to respect privacy or information security needs.** Failing to respect the privacy of others or failing to adequately protect information entrusted to your care can also be considered unethical (and is sometimes illegal).
- **Coercing people to give positive online reviews.** Deleting negative reviews or telling customers that can post only positive reviews is unethical.
- **Failing to disclose financially beneficial relationships.** For instance, it is unethical for bloggers not to disclose that they have been paid to review or have otherwise benefited from reviewing products on their blogs.

Ethical communication avoids deception and provides the information audiences need.

The widespread use of social media has increased the attention given to the issue of **transparency**, which in this context refers to a sense of openness, of giving all participants in a conversation access to the information they need in order to accurately process the messages they are receiving.

Transparency involves giving audiences access to the information they need to make effective decisions.

In addition to the information itself, audiences deserve to know when they are being marketed to and who is behind the messages they read or hear. Two important concerns in this regard are *native advertising* and *stealth marketing*. Native advertising, also known as *sponsored content*, is advertising material that is designed to look like regular news stories, articles, or social media posts. The U.S. Federal Trade Commission (FTC) requires companies to label such material as sponsored content if it is likely to mislead consumers into thinking it is "anything other than an ad."<sup>35</sup> Industry groups such as the Word of Mouth Marketing Association and the Interactive Advertising Bureau give their members specific guidelines to help prevent consumer confusion.<sup>36</sup>

Native advertising and stealth marketing are unethical if the intended targets of these messages are not informed about the true promotional nature of the communication.

Stealth marketing is the practice of promoting companies and products without making it clear to the audience that marketing activity is taking place. For example, "street team" marketing, in which team members promote goods and services to their friends and members of the public in exchange for prizes or other compensation, is unethical if team members don't disclose the fact that they are affiliated with a company and are being rewarded for their efforts. Such practices also violate FTC advertising guidelines.<sup>37</sup>



**REAL-TIME UPDATES**

LEARN MORE BY VISITING THIS WEBSITE

**Ethical guidelines for word-of-mouth marketing**

The Word of Mouth Marketing Association advises its members on how to use social media marketing ethically. Go to [real-time updates.com/bce8](https://real-timeupdates.com/bce8) and select Learn More in the Students section.

## DISTINGUISHING ETHICAL DILEMMAS FROM ETHICAL LAPSES

Some ethical questions are easy to recognize and resolve, but others are not. Deciding what is ethical in complex business situations is not always easy. An **ethical dilemma** involves choosing among alternatives that aren't clear-cut. Perhaps two conflicting

If you must choose between two ethical alternatives, you are facing an ethical dilemma.

**MOBILE APP**

The **PRSA Ethics** app is a mobile version of the Public Relations Society of America's code of ethics.

If you choose an alternative that is unethical, you have committed an ethical lapse.

Responsible employers establish clear ethical guidelines for their employees to follow.

If company ethics policies don't cover a specific situation, you can ask yourself a number of questions in order to make an ethical choice.

alternatives are both ethical and valid, or perhaps the alternatives lie somewhere in the gray area between clearly right and clearly wrong. Every company has responsibilities to multiple groups of people inside and outside the firm, and those various groups often have competing interests. For instance, employees generally want higher wages and more benefits, but investors who have risked their money in the company want management to keep costs low so that profits are strong enough to drive up the stock price. Both sides have a valid ethical position.

In contrast, an **ethical lapse** is a clearly unethical choice. With both internal and external communication efforts, the pressure to produce results or justify decisions can make unethical communication a tempting choice. Telling a potential customer you can complete a project by a certain date when you know you can't is simply dishonest, even if you need the contract to save your career or your company. There is no ethical dilemma here.

## MAKING ETHICAL CHOICES

Ensuring ethical business communication requires three elements: ethical individuals, ethical company leadership, and the appropriate policies and structures to support ethical decision making.<sup>38</sup> Many companies establish an explicit ethics policy using a written **code of ethics** to help employees determine what is acceptable. Showing employees that the company is serious about ethical behavior is also vital.

Even the best codes and policies can't address every unique situation, however. If you find yourself in a situation in which the law or a code of ethics can't guide you, answer the following questions:<sup>39</sup>

- Have you defined the situation fairly and accurately?
- What is your intention in communicating this message?
- What impact will this message have on the people who receive it or who might be affected by it?
- Will the message achieve the greatest possible good while doing the least possible harm?
- Will the assumptions you've made change over time? That is, will a decision that seems ethical now seem unethical in the future?
- Are you comfortable with your decision? Would you be embarrassed if it were spread across the Internet? Think about a person you admire and ask yourself what he or she would think of your decision.

If you ever have doubts about the legal ramifications of a message you intend to distribute, ask for guidance from your company's legal department.

**REAL-TIME UPDATES**

LEARN MORE BY VISITING THIS WEBSITE

**Guidelines for trouble-free blogging**

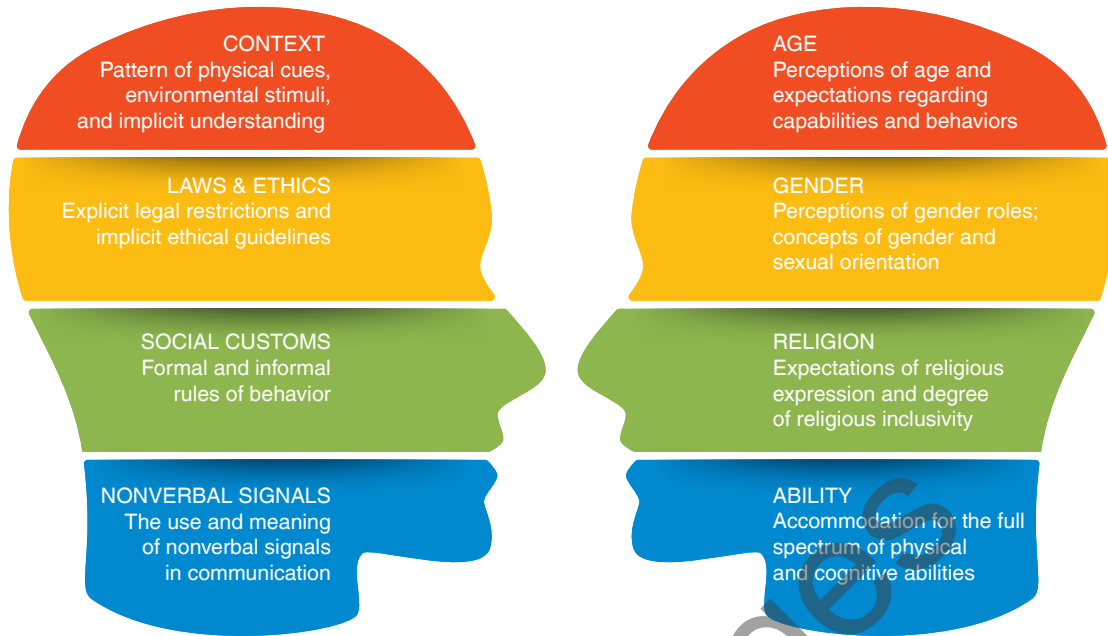
The Electronic Frontier Foundation offers a free *Legal Guide for Bloggers*. Go to [real-timeupdates.com/bce8](http://real-timeupdates.com/bce8) and select Learn More in the Students section.

**6 LEARNING OBJECTIVE** Explain how cultural diversity affects business communication, and describe the steps you can take to communicate more effectively across cultural boundaries.

## Communicating in a World of Diversity

Throughout your career, you will interact with people from a variety of cultures, people who differ in race, age, gender, sexual orientation, national and regional attitudes and beliefs, family structure, religion, native language, physical and cognitive abilities, life experience, and educational background (see Figure 1.8). Although the concept is often narrowly framed in terms of ethnic background, a broader and more useful definition of **diversity** includes "all the characteristics and experiences that define each of us as individuals."<sup>40</sup> Some aspects of diversity, such as race and age, are inherent. Others, such as work history, language, religion, cultural immersion, and education, are acquired through life experience.<sup>41</sup> Together, these characteristics and experiences can have a profound effect on the way businesspeople communicate.

This section looks at the advantages and challenges of a diverse workforce from a communication perspective, examines key differences among cultures, and offers advice for communicating across cultures.



**Figure 1.8 Major Dimensions of Cultural Diversity**

Here are eight of the most significant variables that define any culture and can create differences between cultures.  
 Source: Seamuss/Shutterstock

### THE ADVANTAGES AND CHALLENGES OF A DIVERSE WORKFORCE

Smart business leaders recognize the competitive advantages of a diverse workforce that offers a broader spectrum of viewpoints and ideas, helps companies understand and identify with diverse markets, and enables companies to benefit from a wider range of employee talents. Numerous studies show a correlation between company performance and workforce diversity.<sup>42</sup>

For all their benefits, diverse workforces and markets do present some communication challenges, and understanding the effect of culture on communication is essential. **Culture** is a shared system of symbols, beliefs, attitudes, values, expectations, and norms for behavior. You are a member of several cultures, in fact, based on your national origin, religious beliefs, age, and other factors.

Culture influences the way people perceive the world and respond to others, which naturally affects the way they communicate as both senders and receivers. These influences operate on such a fundamental level that people often don't even recognize the influence of culture on their beliefs and behaviors.<sup>43</sup>

This subconscious effect of culture can create friction because it leads people to assume that everybody thinks and feels the way they do. For example, in a comparison of the 10 most important values in three cultures, people from the United States had no values in common with people from Japanese or Arab cultures.<sup>44</sup>

The first step to making sure cultural differences don't impede communication is recognizing key factors that distinguish one culture from another. **Cultural competency** is an appreciation for cultural differences that affect communication and the ability to adjust one's communication style to ensure that efforts to send and receive messages across cultural boundaries are successful. It requires a combination of attitude, knowledge, and skills.<sup>45</sup>

Diverse workforces can improve decision making and innovation by bringing a broader range of viewpoints to the table.

Diverse workforces offer numerous benefits, but they pose some communication challenges as well.

Cultural influences can have a profound effect on communication.

**REAL-TIME UPDATES**  
 LEARN MORE BY VISITING THIS WEBSITE

**Looking for jobs at diversity-minded companies?**

DiversityWorking.com connects job searchers with companies that recognize the value of diverse workforces. Go to [real-time updates.com/bce8](https://real-timeupdates.com/bce8) and select Learn More in the Students section.

Cultural competency includes an appreciation for cultural differences and the ability to adjust one's communication habits to accommodate these differences.