

Instructor Manual

Chapter 2: Understanding the Managerial Communication Process

Teaching Notes

The goal of this chapter is to convince students of the key role of communication in management. First, the chapter considers how managerial communication occurs at the intrapersonal, interpersonal, group, organizational, and intercultural levels.

Next, the chapter describes the factors that affect the managerial communication process. A model is presented of the strategic approach to communication that managers follow when developing messages. This “onion” model consists of three layers of variables. The text presents appropriate strategic implementation of each of these variables, summarized and illustrated in Figure 2-3.

Finally, three critical errors are identified that managers must avoid when seeking effective communication: the assumption–observation error, the failure to discriminate, and the allness error.

Questions for Class Discussion

1. *Why is the circle used as the basis for the model of strategic managerial communication? What is meant by communicating “to” someone as opposed to communicating “with” someone?*

The circle is appropriately used as the model for communication because communication is a continuous process between people. The flow goes not just from one person to another, but rather returns to the point of origin in the form of feedback.

One way communication involves communicating to someone and not with someone; it indicates a failure of the sender of a message to solicit some form of feedback from the receiver of the message. People use one-way communication because it is faster than two-way communication, it protects the speaker from contact with the receiver, and it is orderly (although often ineffective).

2. *Give an example of a communication channel. What channel is used by a restaurant to tell you the price of a meal?*

Several examples of communication channels are newspapers, television, face-to-face communication, texting, and e-mail. A channel is the medium used to transmit a message. A menu would be used in a restaurant to tell patrons the price of a meal. This is an example of written communication. When the server repeats and elaborates on the menu items, the channel becomes oral.

3. *List several words that you use all the time that others may not use or that they pronounce differently.*

Examples will vary by student because of different cultures, languages, geographical regions, ages, sexes, and so on. Interestingly, differences in diction and even pronunciation will frequently occur among neighborhoods in a city. For instance, in south St. Louis, one eats an ice cream sundae and washes one's hands in a sink, while in north St. Louis one eats an ice cream sundae and washes in a sink. St. Louisans say they live in Missouri, while citizens of Festus, some 10 miles south, say they live in Missourah.

4. *Identify some cultural differences between people who work in a hospital and a manufacturing plant that might impact their communication behavior.*

Cultural differences exist between individuals who do not share the same background, socioeconomic class, history, attitudes or experiences. Therefore, it is quite reasonable to assert that people who work in a hospital will have cultural differences from those who work in a manufacturing plant. The work environment plays a significant part in either career, as does the difference in output from the two concerns. Another factor that influences cultural differences between manufacturing plant workers and hospital workers is the degree of status accorded to the first set of workers and denied the other. Potential impacts of these broad differences on communication patterns (between leaders and followers, between coworkers, between workers and clients/customers/patients, etc.) should be discussed.

5. *Give an example of status distorting the communication process.*

Varies, but students are often quite perceptive on this matter, particularly as a result of experiences they have had working in hourly, temporary positions.

6. *When you start to feel yourself becoming emotional at work, what are some strategies you use to keep your emotions under control?*

Varies, discussion can be quite lively and is worth pursuing; skills learned in controlling emotions will repay the effort expended. Principles of emotional intelligence (EQ) might be referred to during the discussion.

7. *Give an example of nonverbal communication that you have observed in a written message and another in an oral message.*

An example of nonverbal features in written messages is the typos and surface errors in a report. The report's author may be perceived as not particularly adept at the job, when in fact, there may simply not have been enough time to carefully proofread the report.

In oral communication, if a manager tells an employee how well he is doing his job, but walks away slowly shaking her head, the employee may get the message that his boss was not sincere with her praise.

8. *Cite several examples of critical errors in communication that you have observed. How could they have been avoided?*

Varies. With this response, the key to effective classroom discussion lies in the suggestions made in the chapter for avoiding these critical errors.

9. *Give an example of polarization that you have observed.*

Polarization implies an either/or situation. The following examples imply two distinct and separate examples with no gray area in between.

- a. Verbal polarization: "Get the report in on time or be fired."
- b. Social polarization: Wealthy/poor, popular/unpopular.
- c. Organizational polarization: Union/management, superior/subordinate.

10. *What do you consider to be the most important strategic communication decision as depicted in the strategic communication model in this chapter?*

Varies depending on the students' experiences and roles in the workplace. These differences are worth exploring, particularly regarding which layer of the model that students focus on in their comments.

Cases for Small Groups

Case 2-1: The Shroud of Technology

Ben knocked on the door of Nancy Kerr, his supervising director.

"Come in," Nancy said, and Ben entered. He was frustrated, and his demeanor reflected it.

"I need to talk to you about Stacey Burton, who works in the office beside mine," Ben said. "Ever since we rearranged the office suite about a month ago, Stacey has been coming by and standing in the door of my office, just to flirt and to chat. It interrupts my work, and I'm uncomfortable with the overt attention, especially flirtatious attention," Ben continued. "I'm also getting deluged with non-work-related e-mails from Stacey."

"Have you asked Stacey to stop?" asked Nancy.

"Well, not really. The interaction could easily be taken as office banter, if you just heard the words. It is the way Stacey gestures and speaks and looks at me that make it flirting," Ben said. "I'm really not comfortable with initiating a confrontation with Stacey and thought maybe you would be willing to say something instead."

"I'll be happy to--probably today," Nancy replied. "I'll send an e-mail now. Thanks for bringing this to my attention."

Nancy sent an e-mail to Stacey to come to her office briefly at 2:00 p.m.

At 1:55, Nancy heard a knock, and said "Come in."

A smartly dressed young man came in and sat down. "Can I help you?" Nancy asked.

"Well, you said you wanted to talk to me. What can I do for you?" he asked.

"I wanted to talk to you?" asked Nancy.

"Yes," the young man replied. "I'm Stacey Burton."

Case 2-1: Questions

1. *What assumption–observation error might be made in this scenario?*

“Stacey” is one of many first names that are androgynous. That is, both males and females have them. The students might list a few and their variant spellings, such as Corey, Gerry, Morgan, Sydney, and Michael, and exchange stories about possible misidentities and assumptions. Familiarity with a person who has a certain name will usually shape the expectation that another person with the same name will be of the same gender. This assumption is a natural psychological phenomenon.

A second assumption in this case is that Nancy assumed that the coworker who was giving Ben unwanted attention was female.

2. *To what extent did the use of technology for these message exchanges contribute to the miscommunication between Nancy and Stacey?*

E-mail is a lean channel, as the discussion in Chapter 3 about bandwidth explains. Minimal information is transmitted with e-mail. Missing are the nonverbal aspects such as gestures, movement, vocal style, and, yes, appearance.

Additionally, the intent of the sender can be ambivalent when a lean channel is used. In this case, office banter and flirting were confused.

3. *What gender stereotypes discussed in Chapter 1 apply to this case?*

In the section on gender differences in Chapter 1, it is suggested that men are more assertive than women, women show more social support and sympathy to colleagues, men and women provide different types of feedback, and women convey a different nonverbal message with the same gesture.

Further, sexual harassment is an example of a factor that affects communication between the genders at work. When some people think of sexual harassment, they think of touching or making physical advances. However, to others, sexual harassment can be an overheard ribald joke, extensive eye gaze, or even unexpected and unwelcome proximity

4. *How would you, in Nancy's shoes, handle the awkward moment and the ensuing discussion?*

Varies, but it is probably best if Nancy quickly moves on from the initial confusion without commenting on it. It's highly likely that Stacey has had this type of reaction to his name before and doesn't consider it worth making it into a big point of conversation.

Case 2-2: Developing a Brochure

Mitch Finley, a 29-year-old with a degree in finance, began working as a loan officer at a bank 2 years ago. Later, he began consulting for other businesses in financial planning. His career goal has been to begin his own business.

Recently, Finley started The Suite Thing, a development company using one of his original business ideas--the construction of two large hotel-like buildings containing suites (living room, bedroom, and kitchen) rather than single rooms.

The hotels are located in two cities that are important regional centers for the oil industry. Instead of renting the suites, he is selling them to large oil companies to meet entertainment and tax planning needs.

Finley had been using a brochure his architects had put together, but he was not pleased with its presentation. He had collected other company brochures that he liked and decided to call an advertising firm to design a new brochure and logo for his company.

In the initial meeting, Finley told the advertising representative he needed a new company logo and a brochure folder that would hold his leaflets. Most importantly, the logo and kit had to be completed as soon as possible, because time was money to him.

The advertising representative (very new on the job) acknowledged that his company could do logo and brochure layouts. The representative then asked Finley a few general questions about his two projects--what they involved, where they were located, and their surroundings. The agency rep said he would return within 1 week with his ideas.

Two and a half weeks later, Finley called the advertising agency and wanted to know if it had developed the materials. The representative came by later that afternoon with his idea. The agency's approach centered on a hard-sell theme of "Beat the Hotel Game with the Suite Thing." Finley, frustrated by the response delay and the inconsistency between the advertising agency's

offering and his own image of the project, said, “No that’s not at all what I want.” The advertising representative, taken aback, sat in silence for a time before responding in a frustrated voice, “Well, what do you see your project as being?” and reminded him of the time constraints Finley had given. Finley said he did not see hotels as his competitors, and he wanted a brochure and logo that used soft sell to introduce his idea to top-level executives as an investment.

The next day the advertising representative returned with a more conservative, soft-sell piece. Finley said, “That’s *kind of* what I want . . . but not really.”

Finley cannot understand why he did not get what he wanted the first time because “that’s their business and they should know how to do it.”

Case 2-2: Questions

1. *What are some possible causes of Finley’s communication problem? Of the advertising representative’s?*

Finley’s problems lie in his inability to get across what he wants and his inability to read feedback from others. The ad rep was equally at fault in that he did not follow through when he misunderstood Finley and in that he assumed he knew what Finley wanted.

2. *Identify how assumptions caused communication problems in this case.*

Assumptions play a large part in this case and should be thoroughly explored. This includes the ad rep’s assumptions and Finley’s assumptions that the ad rep was communicating with the same level of knowledge of the project that he possessed.

3. *What actions would you recommend to the advertising representative to assure this did not happen again?*

Most students will note that the ad rep was new and unsure of himself. Rather than admit his lack of experience and ask questions of Finley, he made the error of writing the brochure on guesswork. In the future, he needs to ask more questions of his clients and make sure the responses he receives will enable him to perform his job correctly the first time.

4. *Do you believe there is a communication deadlock? If so, what should the participants do to resolve it?*

A deadlock still exists in this case because Finley has not yet made it clear to the ad rep what exactly it is that he wants the project to be and what he expects the brochure to tell executives about his suites. This problem could be simply resolved by telling the rep why the latest brochure is still not what he wants and what changes could be made to bring it in line with his expectations.

Case 2-3: Why is Jones Changing?

The Finance Investment Company is located in Houston, Texas. The company is only 2 years old, but it has made the headlines in regional magazines as “the company to watch.” It is staffed with three investment analysts and four secretaries. The firm occupies a fairly small space with the secretaries in the front office and the analysts’ offices adjacent to the front office.

Mr. Jones, a top-notch analyst, is very unfriendly. He runs the company with an iron fist. Jones is the first one at work and the last one to leave. Promptness is his motto.

The women working in the office think the middle-aged Jones is attractive. One secretary commented to another, “I wonder what it’s like to be married to him. He’s so good looking, but he’s such a stuffed shirt. He couldn’t be that much fun to be married to.” Jones never talked to them; it seemed as if business was the only thing on his mind.

Recently, Jones began coming in late, taking long lunch hours, and leaving earlier. One of the secretaries commented, “Boy, what a change in Mr. Jones. I wonder what’s going on?” Another secretary replied, “You’re right; I’ve noticed a change in him also. He started all this about the time that new woman began working here.”

The secretaries did not like the new woman in the office. She was tall, blonde, and beautiful. She talked little, could hardly type, and knew little about computers. The other secretaries wrote her off as a “dumb blonde.”

One secretary commented to another, “Old Jonesey is not only coming in from lunch late, but lately he’s been in the best moods. He even talked to me today!” Another said, “I noticed that, and I also saw his secretary coming in the door right after he did. And a woman calls about 6 p.m. every afternoon for Mr. Jones, but he has been leaving the office at 4:30 and cannot take the call.” The other secretary said, “Well, I can put two and two together. Can’t you?”

Case 2-3: Questions

Answer each of the following questions as true (T), false (F), or questionable (?) Do not reread the story before answering the questions and do not change any of your answers.

1. *Financial Investment Company is located in Houston, Texas.*

Questionable. The text states that the Finance Investment Company is in Houston, Texas. It says nothing about whether the Financial Investment Company is in Texas or elsewhere.

2. *Financial Investment Company is the fastestgrowing company in Houston.*

Questionable. We know that they are a company to watch, but we are not told that they are the fastestgrowing company in Houston.

3. *The building has four offices.*

Questionable. We are told that the four secretaries share an office and that the three analysts each have their own office. We are even told that the firm occupies a small space, but we are not told if there are any other members in the firm, such as an owner.

4. *Jones is unfriendly.*

Questionable. Although this is stated as a fact in the first sentence of the second paragraph, some could perceive his behavior as a manifestation of shyness. Subjective evaluations are not the same as facts and cannot be verified as true or untrue.

5. *Jones is very prompt.*

Questionable. We know that his motto is promptness, but nowhere are we told that he is a prompt person himself.

6. *Jones owns the company.*

Questionable. Jones runs the company, but this does not lead to the conclusion that he owns the company. He could merely be the senior, supervising partner.

7. *Jones has an iron fist.*

Questionable. We are told that he rules with an iron fist, but does this literally mean that he has an iron fist? This is extremely doubtful.

8. *Jones is about 45 years old.*

Questionable. Jones is “middleaged.” This does not tell us his exact age.

9. *Jones is married.*

Questionable. A secretary wonders what it would be like to be married to him, and we know that a woman calls him regularly, but we do not know that this woman is his wife.

10. *Jones hired a new secretary.*

Questionable. He hired someone new who could type little and took no shorthand. She could be a secretary or a clerk or an accountant.

11. *The new secretary is a gorgeous blond.*

Questionable. Is there a difference between beautiful and gorgeous? How do we know that her hair is naturally blond?

12. *The new woman types well.*

Questionable. Maybe she isn't feeling well. Possibly she types very well at other times and is just ill or nervous, or is typing poorly for some other reason since she has been hired.

13. *Jones returns to the office in a good mood.*

Questionable. One secretary commented that Jones has been coming in from lunch lately in good moods. That is only her opinion, and it is only sometimes, even if she is correct.

14. *The secretaries in the office think that Jones is having an affair with the gorgeous blond.*

Questionable. Their gossip may lead some to believe that this statement is true, but who is to say whether they believe what they are saying or if they are saying it merely out of jealousy or spite?

15. *Jones is having lunch with his secretary.*

Questionable. Who knows for sure? Only Jones does. Others have suspected him of being at lunch with the new secretary, but no one is sure.

16. *Jones is not going home after work.*

Questionable. Someone has been calling lately at 6 p.m., but we do not have any real knowledge of who this person is or even if they are calling because Mr. Jones did not arrive at his home. The person on the phone could be calling from anywhere.

17. *A woman calls Jones every day at 6 p.m.*

Questionable. The secretary states only that someone calls every day at “about 6 p.m.,” but we have no way of knowing if they call every day at exactly 6 p.m. The secretary could also be dishonest.

18. *Jones’ wife is probably looking for him.*

Questionable. Again, how do we know that Jones has a wife? Even if Jones does have a wife, what proof do we have that she is looking for him?

19. *Jones is going through his midlife crisis.*

Questionable. No proof exists. In fact, no commonly accepted definition of the term “midlife crisis” exists.

What critical communication error is demonstrated with this exercise? Explain.

In answering these questions, all three critical communication errors are likely to be committed. First, students may confuse assumptions and observations. The details of the story come together in such a way that all but the most impartial will draw assumptions from the story. However, there are few statements in the exercise that can be given any validity at all from the evidence in the story. Clearly, we can draw from this example that it is very unsafe to assume anything.

Second, the failure to discriminate occurs here. Students need to make clear distinctions instead of overemphasizing similarities. Stereotypes about gorgeous blondes, for instance, surface quickly in this discussion.

Third, students frequently commit the allness error. If they focus on some details in the case and omit others, they are abstracting. As a result, key information is being left out of their considerations.

Case 2-4: Resigning From the TV Station

Jane Rye is a student of advertising at State University and will graduate at the end of the next term. She had a part-time job in the sales department at a local television station. When hired, Rye thought she was very lucky to have a job there, not only for the money but also for the work experience.

Pat Trent, the sales manager who hired her, was Rye's immediate supervisor. Rye was doing a very good job and received considerable support from Trent. In fact, the sales manager had nothing but praise for Rye's work when reporting to top management. Trent often told her subordinate that her work was exceptional and Trent would like to hire her on a permanent basis after graduation to head a new media research department for the station. The job seemed to promise a challenging and rewarding career.

While Rye was flattered by the offer, she was not interested in the position because she found her present job unsatisfying. However, she never told Trent her feelings about the job or the possible appointment. Because Trent had trained Rye and had promoted her to everyone, Rye had become very loyal and grateful to her sales manager. Thus, Rye thought she would betray Trent if she were to refuse the job. After 6 weeks, however, Rye decided to quit and work part time at the university, but she did not know how to approach her boss.

Rye, feeling unable to say anything unpleasant to Trent, let time pass until the day she was ready to quit to start her new job. When Rye got to work that day, the sales manager was scheduled to leave town later that morning. Rye was forced to go into Trent's office, while two other people were there discussing another matter. Trent asked Rye what she wanted, and Rye replied, "I am resigning."

The sales manager was taken completely by surprise and asked Rye why and wondered what was to be done with the project Rye was handling. Rye apologized for such short notice. Rye explained that she was taking a part-time job at the school starting tomorrow. Trent, very disappointed in her subordinate, said, "If you had told me sooner, I could have phased out the project to someone else--now I'm in a bind."

Case 2-4: Questions

1. *How should Rye have handled her resignation?*

She needed to communicate to Trent that she was not happy in her position and give her at least a 2-week notice before terminating her employment. She may now lose an important reference due to the manner in which she left her job.

2. *Where, when, and how do you think Rye should have resigned? Do you think Trent would have understood under different circumstances?*

Rye should simply have been honest with Trent. She needed to make an appointment to meet with her in her office several weeks before she planned to leave. At that time, she could have informed Trent of the causes of her job dissatisfaction. If no resolution to her problems was available, then she could have given her notice and finished in such a way that Trent could have had a replacement ready. Rye's parting would have occurred on much better terms with all parties involved feeling that they had been respected.

Trent would probably have had no difficulty understanding why Rye felt as she did if the situation had been explained honestly from the beginning.

3. *How did Trent foster Rye's reluctance to communicate?*

Trent's praise and flattery of Rye, especially to management, left Rye feeling that she would be disloyal to Trent if she were to tell her about her unhappiness with the position.

4. *What are some possible long-term repercussions of the way Rye handled her resignation?*

When Rye begins her search for a postcollege full-time position and needs to ask Trent for a reference, Trent may not remember Rye's job performance so much as the way she left Trent in the lurch.