Strategic Management Communication *for* Leaders

5th edition

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About the Author

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She conducted research and has delivered dozens of conference papers on intercultural communication, rhetoric, cultural studies, and business communication pedagogy and published articles on intercultural communication in groups, leadership, and place-based identity. She is currently the editor of *Business and Professional Communication Quarter* and has been the editor of the *International Journal of Business Communication*, a contributing editor of BCOM (Cengage Learning), co-editor of a volume of research entitled *Discourse Perspectives on Organizational Communication* (Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2011), and co-author of *Leadership Talk: A Discourse Approach to Leader Emergence* (Business Expert Press, 2014). She is a member of the Association of Business Communication, Management Communication Association.

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Strategic Management Communication for Leaders is based upon an alternative theoretical foundation grounded in theory but with connections to communication in the world of business. The text is unique in the business communication discipline in that it shows students how various business courses are related and highlights strategic communication as a practice that is applicable to all business situations regardless of the discipline, department, or organizational level at which it takes place. Unlike many other business communication texts, it also looks at communication not only as the practice of individuals but also has an organizational concern.

Other unique aspects of *Strategic Management Communication for Leaders* include its spotlight on strategy formulation while making a clear distinction between strategic and tactical elements of communication. Because strategic issues are more difficult to understand and internalize as such, they are treated in an in-depth manner before providing the discussion of tactics as they apply to differing contexts and channels of communication. Internalizing the strategic considerations will enable readers to logically make appropriate tactical choices without having to set them all to memory.

Another novel aspect of *Strategic Business Communication for Leaders* is its focus on leadership, both at the theoretical and practical level. That is, the text integrates discussions of leadership theory and practice aimed at meeting the needs and the abilities of its key audiences — advanced undergraduate and graduate students and the organizations that will employ them. Opportunities for leadership communication practice is provided through the inclusion of two types of case studies in each chapter. The opening case study is intended to look at communication practices at the individual level, while closing cases look at communication from the organizational level. This ability to work at both the micro and macro level of communication within an organization is a necessity for effective leaders and managers.

With all of these unique elements combined, the result is this textbook, which provides comprehensive coverage of the critical elements of business, management, and corporate communications in a compact, highly readable format.

Help students succeed in the business world with the features found in **Strategic Management Communication for Leaders!**

brief table of contents

Part 1

Strategic Elements of Business Communication

Part 1 provides an in-depth discussion of the steps in the strategic formulation of business communication applicable to all communication contexts. The steps in the process are drawn from rhetorical theory but include discussions of other communication contexts, as appropriate. These contexts include interpersonal, organizational, and group communication.

(Part 2 of the text discusses the tactics to be implemented in differing communication contexts: writing, presentations, group and teamwork, employment, and organizational communication.)

In many business communication texts, the focus of discussion is primarily on tactics, presenting them as the "rules" of message formulation. This approach, though, requires memorization of the rules and thus can be difficult to internalize if the rules are not consistently practiced. For this reason, this text initially focuses on developing an in-depth understanding of the strategic elements of message formation as this understanding makes it easier to then logically deduce the appropriate tactical moves.

This text thus assumes that communication is more of an art that depends upon analysis of the contextual elements of any communication situation. It is an art that requires foundational knowledge, observational skills, critical thinking and assessment, and a willingness to "work without a net." This latter idea simply means that no one right answer generally exists in many communication situations (unlike many other business disciplines) and thus one must build the needed skill base and subsequent level of confidence to master a strategic approach to messaging.

Without developing the meta-skill of strategic thinking and analysis, communication becomes more rule-bound and focused on the details, much like a copy editor approaches his or her work. This approach thus risks losing sight of the strategic, "big picture" perspective needed to be an inspirational and visionary leader.

part opener — the book is divided into two parts, plus an appendix section. Each part opener gives a short description of the chapters and their content.

Chapter **2**

Foundations of Communication

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After reading this chapter, you will be able to

- Approach communication from a more sophisticated perspective, one that underscores the importance of a strategic yet ethical approach.
- Understand the process of perception, how it affects the way we interpret information, and its importance in developing a strategic approach.
- Understand the importance of self-awareness as a foundational element of effective communication and its connection to understanding others, a key element of a strategic approach.
- Identify some of the obstacles to strategic and ethical communication, including how perception can affect the way we think and our ability to gather, analyze, and evaluate information (i.e., the critical-thinking process that is imperative for strategic communication).

learning outcomes
summarize what you will learn in each chapter

opening case study
focuses on "micro" communication skills, developing communication understanding at a personal level

The Case of Horizon Resorts

After working in Austria for more than ten years with great success as an event planner for Horizon Resorts, Theresa's company moved her to Jordan. She received no training prior to this transfer regarding how to manage the intercultural differences she might encounter. And indeed she did encounter them; although her new manager was Austrian like herself, all of her subordinates and most of her peers were Jordanian.

One of the first differences that emerged was how her Jordanian peers treated their subordinates. Orders were given in a very direct manner, and if the work was not completed in an adequate way, they would shout at and even threaten their employees.

Theresa was well regarded in her native Austria for being a polite and respectful boss. Her subordinates appreciated her relationship-building skills, the way she treated them as equals, and how she always took into consideration their ideas and remarks.

After airing her concerns with her manager, she received his reply: "Most Jordanians won't work unless you treat them in an authoritarian manner." Not satisfied with this response, Theresa decided to continue using her usual egalitarian management style. When she held her first meeting with direct reports and asked them to express their ideas for possible events to organize in the future, everyone remained silent. When she tested them by throwing out some mediocre ideas, they supported them without further discussion. Future meetings had the same result—no one ever showed any initiative.

Another difference Theresa encountered was that after providing instructions to her subordinates, they failed to complete the work. She discovered this was because she did not continuously check up on the workers to ensure they were completing their tasks. It thus became apparent to her that assuming they would take personal responsibility was an error on her part. She also discovered that her friendly approach was interpreted as weakness. She was the boss and was expected to have the ideas and to ensure they were carried out.

Case Questions

1. What unexplored assumptions about the social reality at Horizon Resorts may have contributed to the situation that Theresa now faces?

2. How might differing perceptions of the situation by those involved have contributed to the creation of this situation?

3. What are the implicit understandings of those involved in this situation regarding how communication works, that is, their preferred communication model? How might understanding and applying a different, more accurate communication model help to avoid or minimize this situation?

4. What is or should be leadership's or management's role? Who solves, or should solve, these problems and how?

sample pages

key term

key terms and phrases are highlighted in the text and pulled out into the margin with a short definition

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The dialogic model differs from the earlier models of communication, particularly the information transfer and strategy as control models, in which other people are sometimes viewed as objects to be acted upon, communicated to, ordered, and controlled.[13] (Figure 2-3 compares the four models of communication discussed in this section.) In contrast, the dialogic model perceives others as *interdependent* partners capable and deserving of their own voice to influence the organizational dialogue. The dialogic model thus is considered an index of the ethical level of communication to the degree that participants in communication display the attributes of dialogue.[14]

Figure 2-3 Comparison of Four Models of Communication

Model of Communication	Primary Characteristics	Disadvantages
Information Transfer	Transmissional	Lacks recognition of barriers to communication and what the other brings to the interaction
Transactional Process	Simultaneous interpretation	Focuses on achieving shared meaning without due recognition of contested domain of organizations
Strategic Control	Control the environment	Can evolve to manipulation and deception of others
Dialogic	Recognition of the other and plurality of interpretation	Challenging to cope with the complexity of social realities

Even though this recognition of our interdependence with others may seem like commonsense in terms of our understanding, it may not as easily be practiced. That's because people in the United States tend to have an individualistic perspective in which the focus is on looking out for and valorizing the self rather than focusing on the well-being of the group, a more collectivist orientation.

plurality
The recognition that there are multiple different interpretations of any situation and that no one communicator can control all these interpretations.

Another reason that the dialogic model is potentially most useful has to do with the changes in the business environment due to the process of globalization. Thus, **plurality** often exists within these organizations. Plurality means that there are always multiple interpretations of any situation and that no one person can control those interpretations, try as he or she might. Recognition of the reality of plurality requires that we be open or willing to listen to the voices and opinions of others if there is any hope of achieving something approaching shared understanding. In the workplace, attempting to move toward shared understanding is, of course, important if we are to achieve organizational and personal goals and demonstrate our full leadership potential.

Responsible Communication

One ethical problem that is exposed by the dialogic model of communication is what is termed *moral exclusion*. According to Susan Opotow (1990), moral exclusion occurs when the application of moral values, rules, and fairness is not considered necessary for particular individuals or groups. The practice of moral exclusion results in individuals being perceived as nonentities, expendable, or undeserving. The result is that harming such individuals becomes acceptable, appropriate, or just. One glaring example of moral exclusion is some U.S. policy makers' inferences that all Muslim people are potential terrorists. The error of this assumption can be made clear through a simple syllogism: all Christians are potential terrorists.

Persons who are morally excluded are thus denied their rights, dignity, and autonomy. In her analysis, Opotow identifies several dozen ways in which moral exclusion is manifested; of those, many involve communication and language use. For example, showing your belief in your superiority or the superiority of your group by making unflattering comparisons to other individuals or groups is one manifestation of moral exclusion. Another example of language use to morally exclude others is by characterizing them as lower life forms or as inferior beings. Other examples of moral exclusion include:

- placing the blame for any harm on the victim;
- justifying harmful acts by claiming that the morally condemnable acts committed by "the enemy" are worse;
- misrepresenting harmful behaviors by masking or conferring respectability on them through the use of neutral, positive, technical, or euphemistic terms to describe them; and
- justifying harmful behavior by claiming that everyone is doing it or that it is an isolated case.

Question for Thought
Can you think of recent examples in the news of the use of moral exclusion? In these examples, how has moral exclusion been used to manipulate meaning for others?

Responsible Communication feature presents an ethical situation related to the main focus of each chapter

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or may emerge from a group of employees. In the latter case, they have the opportunity to [influence] others beyond their formal authority in an organization and this influence comes in large part [from the] ability to communicate well. This can be more clearly seen in the following table that illustrates t[he] **power bases** that arise in organizations and groups.[11]

Table 1-1 French and Raven's Six Bases of Power

Base	Definition
Reward power	The capability of controlling the distribution of rewards given or offered the target
Coercive power	The capacity to threaten and punish those who do not comply with requests or d[emands]
Legitimate power	Authority that derives from the power holder's legitimate right to require and dem[and] obedience.
Referent power	Influence based on the target's identification with, attraction to, or respect for the power holder.
Expert power	Influence based on the target's belief that the power holder possesses superior skills and abilities.
Informational power	Influence based on the potential use of informational resources, including rational argument, persuasion, or factual data.

Source: French and Raven (1959).

Of the bases of power listed in Table 1-1, the first three are typically conferred on an individual by an institution or organization. They are the types of power that managers often have been given or what have been called *position power*. But, as the table indicates, they are not the only bases of power. Leaders have the opportunity to influence others through the last three types shown in the table: referent, expert, and informational power. In other words, leaders can influence others through their credibility, relationships, knowledge, and expertise. This is called *personal power*, or the influence a leader derives from being seen by others as likable and knowledgeable. As we will discuss later in this book, our communication behaviors help us to establish our credibility with others as well as build positive, productive relationships. In fact, leadership can be viewed as being a multidirectional influence relationship as compared with management, which is a unidirectional authority relationship.[12] The changes in organizational realities discussed earlier, particularly those that require employees to interact with one other, often unfamiliar individuals, both within and outside of the organization, cope with constant change, and integrate different systems that may mutually affect one another.[13] In this type of setting, leadership may depend less on individual, heroic actions, our common stereotype of a leader, and more on relational behaviors.[14] Such activities include creating an effective team: "Activities intended to construct the social reality of team by creating an environment where positive outcomes of relational interactions can be realized."[15] (The concept of social construction of reality is explained next.)

Through communication we also express and demonstrate our knowledge base and expertise, important aspects of leadership influence. Interestingly, studies have shown that power demonstrated through expertise and knowledge have the strongest correlation with performance and satisfaction, whereas the use of coercive power is the least effective reason for compliance and has negative correlations with organizational effectiveness.

Critical Thinking

Identify a situation in which differences in power exist between the communicators. How do these differences affect the rules or expectations regarding how communication occurs in that situation? Have you seen instances where people failed to heed those rules or expectations? What was the outcome?

Leaders also differ from managers in another important way. The overriding function for management is to provide order and consistency in organizations, whereas the primary function of leaders is to produce change and movement.[16] Leaders change the way people think about what is possible[17] and they do so primarily through by shaping behaviors and framing reality and change communicatively.[18] Table 1-2

Critical Thinking feature encourages more in-depth thought, analysis, and application of the materials presented in each chapter

Summary

The concept of strategy originated with the military and has been adapted to business applications. Formulating strategy involves looking at the overall picture of an organization, including its goals, and formulating a plan to achieve those goals. In terms of communication, strategy may be applied at the personal as well as the organizational level. In other words, individuals may analyze organizational situations and formulate communication strategies for achieving their personal goals; they may also look at organizational situations and formulate communication strategies for achieving organizational goals. Tactics are then selected to enact that strategic plan.

Becoming a strategic communicator has become more important with recent trends in the business world. One trend is the process of globalization, which has created a more competitive business environment as well as the need to work with people and organizations from other cultures. Leadership has become more important because it is through the process of influencing others that many of these tasks are accomplished. In this post-pandemic age, companies are grappling with the increased use of technology and digitalization, particularly with the recent emergence of programs and systems using artificial intelligence. In addition, our understanding of the process of communication has become more sophisticated. We now know that communication is not simply the task of transferring information. Because of our differences, we interpret information in different ways, thus messages may become distorted or misunderstood. Communication in the workplace is also multipurpose: We must maintain and often continually enhance our credibility or self-image if we are to successfully influence others. This is accomplished not only through our oral and written messages, but also through our nonverbal practices. Lastly, the power of language to create our social realities is finally getting the recognition it deserves. From a leadership perspective, this understanding provides opportunities to shape others' understanding of organizations and their activities.

Discussion Questions

1. Name and discuss the three reasons why a strategic approach to communication is particularly important today.

2. What is the difference between strategy and tactics?

3. Describe the difference between a manager and a leader. What are the differences in the types of power that they generally hold? Why do these differences make a strategic approach to communication important or useful?

4. In your own words, describe the meaning of the term *social construction of reality*. What are some examples of social constructions that you are commonly exposed to or accept?

5. What is the meaning of *plurality*? What effect does this understanding have on the way that you communicate with others if you wish to be successful in that communication?

Applications

1. Conduct research on the effects of globalization on organizations, focusing on communication issues. Write a report that summarizes your findings and provide recommendations to today's leaders and managers in terms of best communication practices.

2. Conduct research on leadership and communication. Write a report in which you summarize your findings and set goals for yourself in terms of the leadership communication skills you would like to improve

or enhance. A well-written goal should be specific, measurable, attainable, and time bound. An example is "I will create a communication strategy to persuade my boss to promote me to man[...] implement it successfully."

3. Conduct research on how a[...] used in today's workplace. V[...] benefits? What potential pit[...] to be aware of and try to avo[...]

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end-of-chapter exercises

discussion questions and applications (or assignments) found at the end of each chapter to further support understanding

end-of-chapter case study

focuses on "macro" communication skills or those applied at the organizational level

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Uber: A Case Study of Sexual Harassment and Its Impact on Company Reputation

Introduction

Susan Fowler joined Uber's engineering team with excitement. But soon after starting her training, Fowler received inappropriate messages over the company chat from a manager describing his open relationship and his desire to acquire new sexual partners. Made extremely uncomfortable by these messages, Fowler took screenshots and sent them to the Human Resources (HR) department. Fowler was disappointed when HR told her it would not move forward with any actions because it was the alleged perpetrator's first offense and he was an excellent performer. In addition, Fowler was told she could switch teams to avoid interacting with him or she could stay on his team, suck it up, and receive a poor performance review. Despite her expertise, Fowler switched teams to avoid discomfort at work.

Several months went by and Fowler became accustomed to her new sector. In that timeframe, she met more women at the company who had fallen victim to the same manager and Uber's HR department. However, after this discovery, when the group of women all decided to schedule meetings with HR, they were told that the manager had never been reported before and the other women had nothing bad to say about him. In an era where diversity is emphasized within company cultures, Fowler began at Uber when the company makeup was only 25 percent female. Just 15 months later when Fowler left the company, she reported, "Out of 150 engineers in the SRE [Site Reliability Engineering] teams, only three percent were women." Ultimately, the sexual harassment scandal at Uber made national headlines and damaged Uber's reputation.

Company Background

It was on a snowy Paris evening in 2008 when Travis Kalanick and Garrett Camp encountered trouble getting a cab. This incident sparked the idea of getting a ride at the tap of a button. And in 2009, Uber was born.

What started out as a mobile app to request private drivers in limited metropolitan areas has grown into so much more. With the mission to bring transportation to everyone, everywhere, In 2023, Uber completed 9.44 billion trips in 90 countries, although most occurred in the U.S. and Canada.

Uber has also forever changed the global logistics of the industry by expanding its services to carpooling and food and freight delivery with the launches of uberPOOL, Uber Eats, and Uber Freight, as well as the first-ever self-driving car public pilot for riders in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

Uber's efforts in various forms of on-demand transportation benefit everyone. For its drivers, the Uber app is a new, flexible way to earn monetary income. And for riders and cities, local economies, access to transportation, and street safety are improved.

Discussion Of The Problem

Uber has faced many issues with their internal communications in their history. The exposure of Uber's company culture came from the blog post written by former Uber engineer Susan Fowler, where she documented the rampant sexual harassment that occurred and the lack of action by HR. Despite always providing evidence of inappropriate communication, HR sided against Fowler, reasoning that her supervisor was a high performer and it wouldn't feel comfortable disciplining him. With only three percent of its engineers being women, it is especially alarming for Uber to have garnered more than 215 harassment claims, including those for discrimination, bullying, and sexual harassment. Especially concerning is the fact that then-Uber board member Arianna Huffington and HR chief Liane Hornsey both said there was no systemic sexual harassment besides Fowler's case, even though Uber had investigated these claims.

After Fowler's story went public, multiple past and present Uber employees came forward to speak out about their own experiences of sexual harassment at the company. In investigations of Uber's culture conducted by Mike Isaac, his reports illustrate the troubling communications issues that run rampant in Uber's company culture. Workplace harassment has been brought up many times by former employees of Uber, yet senior leadership did nothing to resolve these issues.

Conclusion

Susan Fowler was the first one who came out and reported the problem she experienced at the company. HR failed to take any actions and as a result other women were harassed by the same manager in the company. This situation resulted in negative press for the company, potentially affecting the organization's reputation. Furthermore, employees felt unsafe as they thought they could not rely on HR to handle problems of sexual harassment. Rules and regulations in a company should be equally enforced in order to maintain trust and harmony. Therefore, Uber should create policies and procedures that ensure future issues are properly handled so that its reputation is not harmed further.

Discussion Questions

1. When the news of alleged sexual discrimination practices became public, how should Uber have responded to this crisis? Be specific in identifying all the audiences and media it might have used to address the situation.

2. How would you characterize the organizational culture of Uber at the time of this incident? To avoid damaging messages in the future, what steps would you suggest to Uber to instill organizational culture change?

comprehensive, yet compact

The text covers all the communication topics that are relevant and critical for successful business, management, and corporate communications — written, oral presentation, interpersonal, and small group communication as well as planning and implementing communication plans for internal and external organizational audiences — in a compact, readable format.

integrated, comprehensive approach to strategic message formulation

The text provides a comprehensive discussion of the steps of strategy formulation that can be used for any communication context: written, oral presentations, interpersonal, small group, or organizational communications.

supplements as an added teaching resource

- Instructor Manual (by chapter)
- PowerPoint files (linked to Instructor Manual)
- Test Bank files

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