# Communicating with Technology

**A Guide for Professional Digital Interactions**

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# Contents

# Preface

Effective communication, both oral and written, is one of the most sought after skills employers desire in employees. And individuals who communicate effectively are frequently rewarded in the workplace with promotions and advancements. Usually when people think about communication we describe it as how individuals relate to one another using a common set of signs and symbols to share feelings, ideas, and thoughts with one another. However, communication isn't only about sharing information; it's about creating appropriate messages via different communication channels to obtain shared understanding among interacting people. Communication is a complicated human activity and to be an effective communicator, knowledge about the communication process, skills for interacting with others and understanding the different rules that guide human interactions in various environments is required. Therefore, to master the skills employers want in their workforce, individuals must carefully think about different factors that affect the communication process and the likelihood of success in each interaction – especially as it occurs in the workplace.

The breadth of the communication discipline coupled with the circumstances in which it occurs has produced a number of different books dedicated to the study of communication and how to effectively interact with others such as family members, friends, significant others and workplace colleagues, to name a few. Some communication topics consist of computer-mediated communication, group communication, interviewing effectively, listening, public speaking, and writing. Each of these topics is valuable and happens in our daily lives. For many of us, the majority of our day is spent at work or in a professional setting related to our career. Given the significant role that work plays in the human experience and our personal/professional identities, it is critical to understand the relationship between image and communication. In studying this relationship, it is also important to highlight another pervasive component of our lives, interpersonally and work related: technology. Technological devices have changed how we communicate and interact, perform workplace tasks and shape our professional images. Regardless of the industry or position, the ways in which employees fulfill tasks and manage relationships, involves both communication and technology.

The ability to communicate effectively in the workplace is essential for your personal and professional success. Over your career you will have a number of opportunities to participate in organizational communication exchanges. Some conversations will occur in business meetings, corporate presentations, departmental/unit gatherings, and email messages among various other communication and technology-based activities. Each interaction creates an opportunity for you to enhance or diminish the impression or professional image you wish to leave on others. Although there are a variety of different types of business communication (e.g., business writing, managerial communication, or presentation development), this text focuses on helping you to become a competent communicator when communicating digitally in professional contexts. Consequently, email, voicemail, video chat and social media, as digital forms of workplace communication, will be explored in relation to the theories of communication competency, impression management and personal branding.

Therefore the purpose of this book is to:

- Acquaint you with the theory of communication competency and what it means to be a competent communicator in a digital environment
- Familiarize you with the communication process as well as the elements and forms of communication occurring in professional settings
- Introduce you to criteria for communicating effectively in digital workplace environments and contexts
- Provide you with tips and best practices for communicating competently in the workplace when using digital channels such as voicemail, email, video chat, and social media.

*Author's Note:* Dr. Renee Robinson has over a decade of teaching experience. In her work with students the questions she most often receives concerns how to transition from the classroom to the workplace and how to use communication effectively to meet professional goals and obtain positions of interest. In response to those questions and for the opportunity and privilege of working with college students, Dr. Robinson dedicates this book to them. Her students have been a guiding source of inspiration, which made this book possible.

# 1    Understanding Communication Competency

In this chapter you will learn about:

- Communication definitions.
- Communication competency.
- Impression management.
- The characteristics employers desire in employees.
- Personal branding.

The term communication competency consists of two words: communication and competency. Before we can begin to understand what communication competency means we must first explore what communication and competency mean separately.

To many people, communication means talking. More advanced examples of communication involve two or more people exchanging their feelings, ideas and thoughts with another person. However, this description of communication is problematic due to the word *exchange*, which implies that a person's feelings, ideas or thoughts (information) are merely transmitted to another individual. In reality, people don't *transmit* information; we seek to have the information we convey to others understood. Therefore, a fundamental component of communication is the creation of *shared meaning* or the level of understanding communicators possess of the feelings, ideas and thoughts that a person conveys to them. Shared meaning is significantly influenced by what is said, how it is said and the channel used to share the information. The degree to which an individual is successful at creating a shared understanding of what was communicated to another depends upon competency. *Competency* is the required knowledge, skill or ability to perform a specific task ([dictionary.com](dictionary.com)). In this instance, communication is the specific task explored in relation to competency. Figure 1 provides some definitions of communication.

| Term | Definition | Citation |
|------|------------|----------|
| Communication is | the imparting or interchange of thoughts, opinions, or information by speech, writing, or signs | Dictionary.com |
| Communication is | the process of sharing ideas, feelings, thoughts and messages with others | Ojomo (2004) |

**Figure 1:** Communication Definitions

Now that we have a better understanding of how communication and competency are defined, let's examine what the terms mean when combined.

## 1.1    Communication Competency

Communication competence is influenced by a variety of variables. For example,

- Language (a set of shared signs and symbols used to communicate in oral or written form)
- Grammar (sentence structure, word choice, rules of effective writing and speech)
- Jargon (a language associated with an industry or specialized group)
- Culture (the attitudes, beliefs or values shared by a particular group or groups)
- Relationship rules (rules and expectations that guide relationships like those found in romantic partners or supervisor-subordinate connections)
- Channels of communication (the mechanism we use to interact)
- Social structures (the hierarchy and arrangement of people within a group or groups)
- Situation (the context and factors associated with a communication act)
- Tone (the sound and feel of an interaction or message)

Because each of these variables affects communication and the effectiveness of human interactions, communication competency varies by situation. To better understand the complexities of communication competency, let's examine how it is defined and the components associated with this communication phenomenon.

### 1.1.1    Communication Competency Defined

Communication competency is a person's ability to select communication behaviors and strategies best suited for a specific communication act (Spitzberg & Cupach 1984). Implicit within this definition of communication competency is the notion of goals or the desired effect(s) that a sender has when interacting with other individuals. Spitzberg and Cupach identified three components of interpersonal communication competency: knowledge, skills and motivation. *Knowledge* is to the amount of information a person possesses about communication. *Skills* are the ability to apply communication knowledge to a specific situation. *Motivation* is the communicator's *desire* to apply the knowledge and skills they possess about communication to a specific communication interaction. A person can possess knowledge and skills regarding communication but lack the motivation to employ that knowledge and skill. To be a competent communicator, a person must possess each aspect of communication competency: knowledge, skills and motivation. Because communication is complex communication competency is, too. For example, the communication knowledge and skills needed to deliver a public presentation are different than the communication knowledge and skills an employee needs to be an effective team member. To gain a better understanding of communication competency, some additional definitions are provided in Figure 2.

| Term | Definition | Citation |
|---|---|---|
| Communication competency | "refers to accuracy, clarity, comprehensibility, coherence, expertise, effectiveness and appropriateness" | Spitzberg (1988, p. 68) |
| Communication competency | "an impression formed about the appropriateness of another's communicative behavior" | Rubin (1985, p. 173) |
| Communication competency | "a situational ability to set realistic and appropriate goals and to maximize their achievement by using knowledge of self, other, context, and communication theory to generate adaptive communication performance" | Friedrich (1994, p. 24) |

**Figure 2:** Communication Competency Definitions

In the next chapter we will examine the elements and forms of human interaction to advance your knowledge about communication. For now, it is important to understand that communication competency varies by situation. This text focuses specifically on digital communication competencies in the workplace. The most appropriate definition of communication competency related to the digital communication situation discussed in this text is offered by Friedrich (1994); when referring to communication competency this definition will guide our examination of communicating with technology in professional settings.

> *Communication competency is a situational ability to set realistic and appropriate goals and to maximize their achievement by using knowledge of self, other, context, and communication theory to generate adaptive communication performance.*
> *Friedrich (1994, p. 24)*

As previously noted, communication competency consists of three components: knowledge, skills and motivation (Spitzberg & Cupach 1984). Communication knowledge requires us, in part, to understand ourselves as communicators. An examination of impression management will assist us in learning more about ourselves as communication interactants.

## 1.2    Impression Management

The concept of impression management was introduced by Goffman (1959) and refers to the ways individuals perform in different situations with different audiences. Because situations and audiences change, individuals possess multiple selves consisting of the authentic self, ideal self and tactical self (Goffman 1959). The *authentic self* is the self that aligns with how we see ourselves. The *ideal self* is the self that embodies what we **wish** we could be or who we wish we were. The *tactical self* is a **public image** usually viewed by others favorably. We use various presentation techniques to reveal each of our selves. For example self-disclosure and appearance management are two strategies we employee to reveal or conceal aspects of ourselves. *Self-disclosure* is the sharing of personal information with others that would not normally be known to them. Self-disclosure is discussed in greater detail in chapter 6. *Appearance management* is how we negotiate situations to communicate particular messages about ourselves that may or may not be accurate. Examples of managing appearances can be seen in our ability to control emotions in a heated discussion, the ways we dress to convey a particular socioeconomic status such as wearing a particular brand of clothing or the props we use associated with characteristics admired by others (e.g., carrying an iPad or smart phone to denote being tech savvy).

Although Goffman articulated the selves and ideas about impression, Kacmur and Carlson (1999) discussed the process of impression management and defined it as the "attempts carried out by the individuals to portray the desired images in their social networks" (as cited in Acrif, Rizvi, Abbas, Akhtar, & Imran 2011, p. 711). Norris and Porter (2011) further explained, "people interested in making positive impressions present themselves in socially desirable ways" (p. 69). After reading this section, you are probably wondering:

- what strategies do people implement to create a desired image?
- who engages in impression management?
- what is a desirable image?
- is this ethical?

In terms of strategies, Jones and Pittman (1982) noted ingratiation, self-promotion, exemplification, supplication and intimidation as some of the impression management tactics that people use when trying to control what others think of them. Figure 3 provides a definition of each tactic.

| Tactic | Definition |
|---|---|
| Ingratiation | To establish oneself in the good graces or favor of others, especially by deliberate effort (dictionary.com) |
| Self-promotion | Promotion, including advertising and publicity, of oneself effected by oneself (thefreedictionary.com) |
| Exemplification | An illustration or an example of something (dictionary.com) |
| Supplication | To make an earnest, humble petition (thefreedictionary.com) |
| Intimidation | To make timid, to fill with fear (dictionary.com) |

**Figure 3:** Impression Management Strategies and Definitions (Jones & Pittman, 1982)

To convey an image that is appropriate for a situation, everyone uses impression management. For example, organizational leaders use impression management when they seek to control what subordinates, colleagues and other stakeholders think of them (Harris, Kacmar, Zvnuska, & Shaw 2007). Employees also want to convey a credible, competent image as well as to influence their supervisors (and perhaps their performance appraisals) to elevate their standing in an organization (Gilmore & Ferris 1989; Jones, Gergen, Gumpert & Thibaut 1965; Jones & Pittman 1982; Linden & Mitchell 1988; Ralston 1985; Rao, Schmidt, & Murray 1995) that also results in their use of impression management. Regardless of organizational position and status, we all seek to manage and control the impressions we leave on others. As Goffman (1959) notes we each possess multiple selves: authentic, ideal and tactical. Louw (as cited in Norris & Porter 2011) refers to the selves as *faces* and explains that when individuals adopt an impression unlike their personal beliefs and values, the self resembles a mask. The masks can be changed to interact with various people and circumstances. These interactions create the dramatic acts that play out in our day-to-day lives and ultimately shape the impressions we leave on others (Leary as cited in Norris & Porter 2011).

Since we have a greater understanding of impression management, the tactics people use to control what others think of them and the intricacies of the selves, we need to explore the concept of the desirable self in relation to others. More specifically, how can we use communication to create the appropriate messages that align with the image we wish to convey to others and that deem us as desirable when interacting in professional digital spaces? As you will read in the next chapter the messages we share with others have a direct impact on the perception that other individuals have of us. Knowing about this relationship and the power of message construction in digital environments will help you have some control over the image you create and that image is influenced by the traits deemed desirable by others.

Identifying desirable traits sought by various people is challenging. It requires each of us to analyze and identify what others value. Since the topic of communication is vast and the meaning of communication competency broad in terms of context, this text focuses on the personal/employee traits that employers and organizations find desirable in an employee's tactical self only and aims to assist you in creating appropriate messages that reflect those values in digital interactions and spaces.

## 1.3    What do employers desire in employees?

The skills needed by an employee to meet the requirements of a specific job vary. However, according to the U.S. Department of Labor (2013), employers generally seek communication and interpersonal skills in their employees. Some additional desired skills involve problem solving and work ethic as well as teamwork and professionalism as noted in the publication *Essential Skills for Getting a Job: What Young People with Disabilities Need to Know* produced by the Office of Disability Employment Policy (2013). Specific skills were also identified in the SCANS Report, a document presented by the U.S. Department of Education National Center for Educational Statistics to the U.S. Department of Labor Employment and Training Administration in August 2000. The SCANS Report's purpose was "to document the skills and behaviors that have been identified as essential for a workforce facing the challenges of global competition in an environment of rapidly changing markets" (p. xiii). These skills are noted below in Figure 4 and can be located in the original report on page 2.

**Workplace Competencies Resources**

Allocates Time; Allocates Money;
Allocates Materials and Facility Resources; Allocates Human Resources

**Information**

Acquires and Evaluates Information; Organizes and Maintains Information; Interprets and Communicates Information;
Uses Computers to Process Information

**Interpersonal**

Participates as a Member of a Team; Teaches Others;
Serves Clients/Customers; Exercises Leadership; Negotiates to Arrive at a Decision; Works with Cultural Diversity

**Systems**

Understands Systems;
Monitors and Corrects Performance; Improves and Designs Systems

**Technology**

Selects Technology;
Applies Technology to Task;
Maintains and Troubleshoots Technology

**Foundation Skills/Basic Skills**

Reading; Writing; Arithmetic, Mathematics; Listening; Speaking

**Thinking Skills**

Creative Thinking;
Decision Making;
Problem Solving;
Seeing Things in the Mind's Eye; Knowing How to Learn; Reasoning

**Personal Qualities**

Responsibility; Self-Esteem; Social Self-Management; Integrity/Honesty

**Figure 4:** Workplace Essential Skills: Resources Related to the SCANS Competencies and Foundational Skills (see p. 2 of the original report reference ACT, INC)

As you can see from the skills noted above, communication plays a fundamental role in most of the desirable qualities outlined in the SCANS Report. Now that we identified some of the desirable traits sought by employers, how can we create a tactical image that conveys those skills? One way to go about developing an appropriate message that articulates these skills is to reflect on your personal brand. The following section of this chapter will assist you in learning about a personal brand, its components and how to establish the goals of your communication acts based on Friedrich's (1994) definition of communication competency that entails the use of goals, self knowledge, context and communication theory to inform your thinking about how you wish to develop your tactical image and communicate that image digitally.

## 1.4      Personal Branding

According to Stanton and Stanton (2013), a *personal brand* "is a perception held in someone else's mind that must be managed effectively in order to influence how an individual is viewed" (p. 81). Your personal brand is created and recreated with each interaction you have with others. This is especially true of online interactions and the different technologies you may use to interact with various communities (e.g., friends, family or co-workers). Wetsch (2012) notes that what individuals generate now [in online spaces] will become part of their online identity in the future. Personal branding consists of various types of interactions (e.g., face-to-face, online) and we will explore what this means to each of these contexts in the following chapters as it relates to the channel of communication selected to interact with another and how your personal brand should be authentic and consistent. For now, we need to consider the purpose of a personal brand.

A *personal brand* is a communication concept that allows you to differentiate yourself from others (Morgan 2011). In order to set yourself apart from similar job seekers or professionals in a given field, you need to think carefully about your authentic, ideal and tactical self. This requires a substantial amount of time to reflect on your career aspirations, personal and professional attributes and goals and the development of a personal/professional mission statement (Schawbel 2009). From a communication perspective, you must think about how your brand will be communicated in every interaction ranging from emails to voicemails to social media to video chats. This text will help you to identify the best practices associated with using these devices as well as other factors to consider when communicating across these channels.

In this chapter, we have discussed communication competency, impression management, the characteristics and traits that employers seek in employees, and personal branding. Now, let's turn our attention to building your communication competency skills by: 1) examining the communication process, elements and forms of communication; 2) exploring specific communication channels; and 3) learning how to communicate competently with technology in the workplace. The remainder of this book presents these topics.

## 1.5      Summary

In this chapter you have learned:

- There are many definitions of communication.
- The ideal purpose of communication is to establish shared meaning between interactants not to simply transmit information from one person to another.
- The amount of knowledge, skills and motivation a person possesses about communication in a given situation is referred to as communication competency.
- Communication competencies vary based upon the context of the communication act.

- Impression management consists of the authentic, ideal and tactical self and how individuals construct and negotiate the selves.
- The desirable self is most associated with the tactical self.
- Employers desire employees who possess a variety of communication skills.
- A personal brand is the message you seek to influence in other individuals' minds. It is the message you create that best articulates your tactical self.

**Key Terms**

Communication

Communication competency

Appearance management

Self-disclosure

Impression management

Authentic self

Ideal self

Tactical self

Personal brand

**Reflection to Action**

1. Identify some previous communication interactions you experienced with a colleague or friend. Recall an experience where shared meaning was not achieved. What variables contributed to the lack of understanding? What was the result? Now, recall an experience when shared meaning was achieved. What variables contributed to that understanding? What was the result of the communication interaction?

2. How do you define communication? Locate some different definitions of communication and identify how they are similar and different.

3. Describe your authentic self, ideal self and tactical self. Is there a difference between your selves? If so, how do they differ? How are they similar?

4. What image do you desire others to have of you? Select five adjectives that convey that image to others (see the Personal Branding Adjective List at the end of this text). How will you use this information to shape your tactical identity? How will these adjectives influence your communication behaviors in digital environments?

5. Research how to write a personal brand statement. What suggestions do scholars and practitioners provide? Using this information, construct a draft personal brand statement.

# 2 An Introduction to Communication: Building a Communication Competency Foundation

In this chapter you will learn about:

- The communication process and its characteristics.
- The elements of the communication process.
- The communication forms.
- The effects of communication.
- The basic communication principles.

As noted earlier, *communication* is often defined as the process of sharing your thoughts, ideas and feelings with another person with the intent of achieving shared meaning. The process of communication consists of seven elements: sender, receiver, channel, message, feedback, noise, and context (Shannon & Weaver 1949). The elements are interdependent which means that a change in one element impacts the other elements in a communication interaction. To understand how communication works, some explanation regarding the elements is needed.

## 2.1    The Communication Elements

Elements of the communication process play an important role in communicating. Understanding each element helps us to communicate more effectively and maximize our ability to express what we intend to say in a way others can share our message meaning. Your ability to increase communication competency and to create a positive tactical self depends upon the knowledge you possess about these elements.

### 2.1.1    Sender and Receiver

A communication act involves a sender and receiver. Essentially, the *sender* is the individual who conveys a thought, idea or feeling to another person, the *receiver*, using verbal or nonverbal symbols and/or signs (e.g, language, gestures). The sender is also referred to as the *encoder* or message creator. The *decoder* is another term used to refer to the receiver given their role in interpreting (decoding) messages. The sharing of messages requires that the sender and receiver occupy both roles simultaneously as they work to decode and encode messages accordingly. Senders and receivers form impressions of one another based upon the verbal and nonverbal information shared between them. The sender and receiver's frames of reference also inform how each of them will form impressions of the other. The *frame of reference* or *field of experience* refers to all of the experiences a person possesses that helps them to make a judgment about something. Figure 1 shows some of the different variables that affect how we interpret individuals and interactions when communicating and decoding messages.
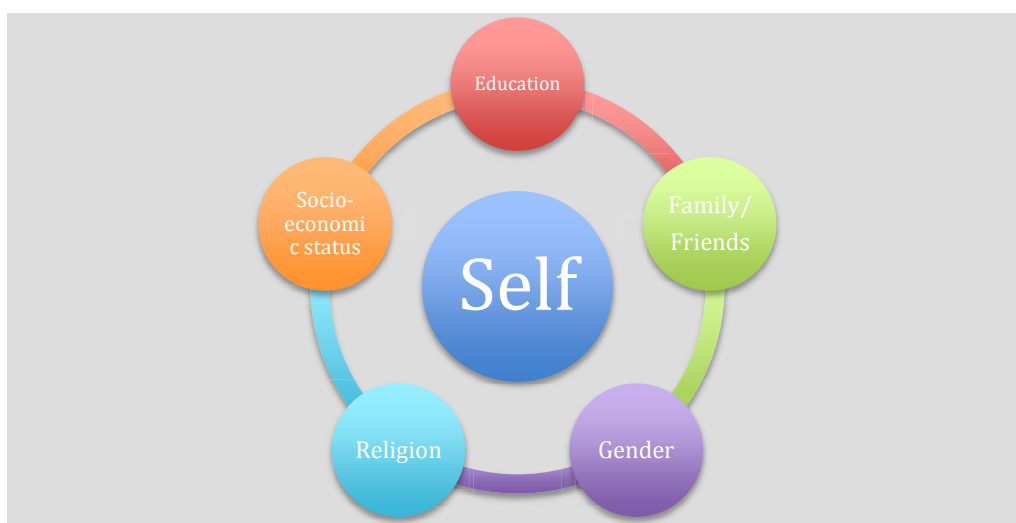


**Figure 1:** Frame of Reference Variables

Each of these variables play a part in our ability to analyze what we experience and see in the world (or perceive). As you obtain more experience in personal and professional settings the more information you consider about a situation based on those experiences and knowledge before forming an impression or making a judgment. For example, as a college student you have a different understanding of significant relationships than when you did as a child. Chances are you now have a different understanding of work, professions and careers than you did just a few years ago. Your ability to identify a person's frame of reference along with the image you wish to convey based upon what is deemed desirable in a specific situation will influence whether or not you are successful in meeting your goal.

### 2.1.2    Message

The message is the idea, feeling or thought that a sender conveys to the receiver. The message can be articulated verbally, using words and language, or nonverbally, using signs and symbols. Some examples of nonverbal messages include body movements, eye contact, facial expressions, or gestures. Other nonverbal messages involve color, space and status symbols such as the cars we drive, the clothes we wear or the way in which we arrange or decorate our office or home spaces. Another type of nonverbal communication is referred to as paralinguistics. Some paralinguistic examples are vocal cues such as *um, ah, er* or rate of speech. These vocal cues influence a person's credibility and image. Messages are essential components to the image we create in others' minds. Consequently, it is important to attend to your verbal and nonverbal messages when interacting with others.

### 2.1.3    Channel

The *channel* is the mechanism the sender uses to communicate a message to a receiver. There are a variety of channels in which senders and receivers can share information. Some channels include face-to-face interaction such a conversation between you and your colleague at work. However, other channels of communication involve computing devices and software such as Facebook, documents like letters or print media, and television broadcasting. This text focuses specifically on workplace communication via digital interactions. Consequently, we will explore email, voicemail, video chat, and social media tools as communication channels to enhance your communication competencies hopefully resulting in your ability to create desirable professional impressions and an effective personal brand.

### 2.1.4 Feedback

The messages conveyed from a receiver to a sender that acknowledges receipt of the sender's message is referred to as *feedback*. Like the sender's messages, the receiver's communication can be verbal or nonverbal. It can also be positive/supportive/constructive or negative/critical/destructive. For instance, constructive feedback consists of messages that acknowledge and demonstrate understanding of the sender's message and his/her thoughts or feelings and is underscored by empathy and sensitivity to how a sender 'feels'. However, destructive feedback lacks empathy and often attacks, disaffirms or disregards a sender's message resulting in the sender feeling unheard or unimportant. The type of feedback a sender receives has much to do with the impression the receiver has of the sender.

### 2.1.5 Noise

Anything impeding the receiver's ability to hear, obtain or understand a sender's message is *noise*. Noise can be physical, physiological or psychological. *Physical noise* occurs in the place where the communication act happens (e.g., a face-to-face meeting, online chat or telephone). *Physiological noise* is the distraction(s) we encounter when confronted with a physiological phenomena such as fatigue, hunger or illness. When challenged by issues related to daydreaming, self-esteem or the way we think others may view us, we are experiencing *psychological noise*. Using an example, let's explore how noise impacts the communication process of two coworkers.

*You and a colleague are in a face-to-face lunch meeting at a nearby restaurant discussing how to present your team project to your supervisor. Sitting adjacent to your table is a group of four people who are talking loudly. You are distracted from your colleague due to this physical noise. Meanwhile, the waiter brings your food and you realize you ordered the wrong item. While your colleague is sharing her ideas about the project, you are unable to concentrate on her message due to the fact that you are hungry and now have ordered the wrong entrée. During the lunch meeting you are hesitant to share your real thoughts about the presentation because they are not in agreement with your colleague's ideas. You are worried about what your co-worker will think of you. This noise distraction is psychological because it impacts your thinking about your relationship to your colleague and how her thoughts about you affect your self-perception.*

We all experience noise when interacting with others. However, it is important to recognize when it occurs and to identify some ways to help us overcome that noise so that we are able to communicate more effectively. Figure 2 provides some suggestions for overcoming noise.

| Types of Noise | Some Strategies for Dealing with Noise |
|---|---|
| Physical Noise | • Identify you are experiencing noise.<br>• Share with your fellow communicator that you are having challenges communicating due to the physical environment.<br>• Look for alternate locations to resolve the noise. |
| Physiological Noise | • Recognize that you are experiencing the noise.<br>• Identify what is causing the distraction.<br>• Advise your fellow communicator that you need a moment to address the matter.<br>• Reinvest in the conversation and focus. |
| Psychological Noise | • Recognize that you are mentally disengaged from the communication act.<br>• Remind yourself of your role as a co-communicator.<br>• Remove the distractions from your mind by focusing on the communicator and his/her message.<br>• Repeat, paraphrase or take notes on the sender's message. |

**Figure 2:** Potential Strategies for Overcoming Noise

### 2.1.6    Context

Every communication interaction occurs in a context. There are four contexts: cultural, physical, socio-psychological, and temporal. The *cultural context* refers to the (predominately) shared attitudes, beliefs, feelings, rituals and values of the communication participants. The *physical context* is the actual space or place in which the communication act occurs. The *socio-psychological context* refers to the relationship between the sender and the receiver (e.g., is the person you are interacting with your supervisor or co-worker?) and the *temporal context* or the time of the communication act. We'll use the previous example of you and your co-worker's lunch meeting to explore the different contexts.

*The individuals involved in the communication act dictate the cultural context. For simplicity sake, we'll assume you and your colleague are both Americans resulting in a communication interaction governed primarily by western beliefs and value systems. The physical context is a face-to-face lunch meeting at a restaurant. The socio-psychological context describes your relationship to the person with whom you are interacting; you are co-workers. The temporal context is mid-day given you are meeting over lunch.*

A summary of the communication elements is displayed in Figure 3.

| Element | Definition |
|---|---|
| Sender | Individual who conveys a message |
| Receiver | Individual who receives the sender's message |
| Channel | The method in which the message is conveyed |
| Message | Content the sender conveys to the receiver |
| Feedback | Messages sent from the receiver to the sender in response to a message |
| Noise | Anything experienced by the sender and/or the receiver that impedes the receipt of a message |
| Context | The circumstances involved in a specific communication act |

**Figure 3:** Element Summary Chart

One of the most important things to remember about context is that it plays a significant role in defining the desirable traits required of participants in a specific situation. Desirable traits are defined by the rules associated with a context. Consequently, context shapes the impression others have of you.

To help you picture the communication elements at work, a version of Shannon and Weaver's (1949) communication process model representing element interaction is depicted in Figure 4.
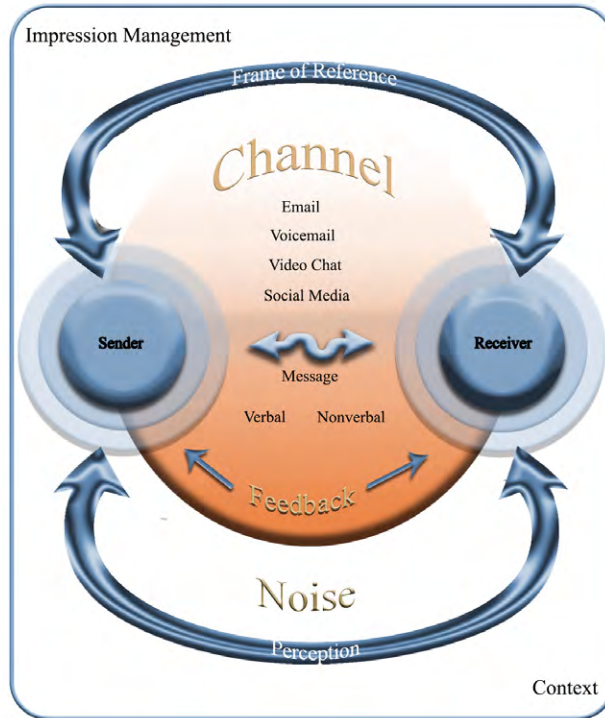
**Figure 4:** Author's reinterpretation of Shannon & Weaver's (1949) Communication Process Model
Applied to Impression Management and Digital Environments

## 2.2     Communication Forms

Since communication occurs in a variety of contexts, there are many different forms. Just as there are seven elements of the communication process, there are also seven basic forms of communication interactions. These forms consist of:

- Intrapersonal communication
- Interpersonal communication
- Group communication
- Organizational communication
- Computer-mediated communication
- Mass communication
- Public address communication

*Intrapersonal communication* occurs when you experience self-talk. When you write a journal, blog or memo to a colleague at work, intrapersonal communication is occurring. Other examples of intrapersonal communication involve your self-conversation about a co-worker as you talk with him/her about a work matter or the way in which you talk to yourself prior to a big presentation at an office meeting.

*Interpersonal communication* is interacting and conversing with another person. Interpersonal communication can be face-to-face, via email or phone. Regardless of the channel, if you are interacting with one or two additional people it is referred to as interpersonal communication.

*Group communication* involves communication and interaction with small groups. Normally group communication consists of 3–15 people who are interacting about a shared goal or purpose. Some examples of group communication consist of department meetings, office gatherings or unit training sessions. Like interpersonal communication, group communication can occur face-to-face or digitally via video chat or other group collaborative tools such as Google docs.

*Organizational communication* is communication that occurs in an organizational setting. An organization is typically a hierarchically managed system consisting of different levels of workers that possesses a mission. Communication within an organization involves the sharing and conveying of information to and between organizational leaders, managers and employees. Organizational communication can occur in face-to-face settings like meetings or in written documents like handbooks and memos. It also occurs digitally via email, social media and video chats.

*Computer mediated communication* is any communication act that uses a computing device to interact with another person or group. Some examples of computer-mediated communication are emailing co-workers, interacting with your project team via Facebook, or using Google+ to prepare your team's presentation.

*Mass communication* refers to messages sent from an individual, group or organization via mass means such as newspapers, radio, television, YouTube or similar channels. Mass communication channels reach hundreds, thousands or even millions of receivers.

*Public address* is communicating in a face-to-face environment with many people. It is most often thought of as delivering a public speech. Some examples of public address are business presentations to clients, the President of the United States delivering the State of the Union speech or a CEO presenting an executive summary to his/her board. Technology is altering how we view public address; this is best seen in tools such as Youtube.com or video chat software like Skype or Google Hangout.

## 2.3     Communication Effects

We've all been in situations where we have said things that we should not have said, shared them with people we should not have shared them with, or communicated something at the wrong time. The outcomes of these situations are typically not positive in our interpersonal lives. In the workplace, these kinds of actions can cost you financially, legally and professionally. An understanding of the communication process, its elements and forms are critical in today's workplace. Communication is complicated and being an effective communicator is not easy. Given the elements of the communication process, the interdependent nature of the relationship between those elements and the different ways and places that communication can occur concerning verbal, nonverbal and computer mediated messaging, careful planning must occur prior to workplace interactions. If the wrong channel, place or time is selected to convey a [wrong] message to an unintended receiver, the effects can be detrimental to your organization and to your image and brand. In addition to the elements and forms of communication, here are a few additional principals to remember:

| Principle | Explanation |
|---|---|
| Communication is irreversible. | Once you've communicated a message, there is no getting it back. |
| Communication is unavoidable. | No matter how hard you try, you cannot *not* communicate. |
| Communication is unrepeatable. | The communication elements are interdependent; a change in one element impacts the communication process resulting in communication interactions being unrepeatable. |
| Meanings are in people. | We each have different connotative meanings associated with words and symbols along with different life experiences that shape our frames of references resulting in meanings formulated by decoders that may not agree with a sender's message. |

**Figure 5:** Principles of Communication

## 2.4 Summary

In this chapter you have learned:

- Communication is a process consisting of seven interdependent elements.
- The elements of the communication process are the sender, receiver, message, channel, feedback, noise and context.
- The forms of communication are intrapersonal communication, interpersonal communication, group communication, organizational communication, computer-mediated communication, mass communication and public address.
- The elements and the appropriate selection of channels, messaging and context significantly impact the outcomes or effects of a communication act.
- Communication is irreversible, unavoidable, and unrepeatable.
- Message senders should exercise caution in formulating messages because meanings are in the receiver.
- Communication choices impact a person's image and one way to effectively deal with impression management is to advance your communication competency.

**Key Terms**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Sender | Intrapersonal Communication | Verbal Messages |
| Receiver | Interpersonal Communication | Nonverbal Messages |
| Message | Group Communication | Types of Contexts |
| Channel | Organizational Communication | Types of Channels |
| Feedback | Computer-mediated Communication | |
| Noise | Mass Communication | |
| Context | Public Address | |

**Reflection to Action**

1. Consider a conversation you had today. Identify the seven elements of the communication process and the form of communication that occurred.

2. Reflect on a communication interaction you recently experienced that resulted in an unwanted outcome. Identify the communication elements and forms of communication. What communication mistake occurred that led to the undesired effect?

3. Re-examine the communication principles. Recall a time when you or someone you know experienced a negative effect for each of the principles noted in this chapter.

4. Create a personal growth plan consisting of how you will use the information learned in this chapter to improve your communication interactions with others.

# 3   Communicating Competently via Email

In this chapter you will learn about:

- Communication competency in the specific context of email.
- How to apply the communication model to email.
- The components of an email.
- Common email mistakes.
- How your image and personal brand is affected by email communication.

The previous chapters of this text have introduced you to the theories of communication competency, impression management and personal branding. You have also become familiar with various communication elements and forms. Now that you have an understanding of the foundations of communication, this chapter helps you to use that information to develop your communication competency skills and abilities in a specific context: email. To begin the process, Figure 1 summarizes the theories that you have learned thus far:

Communication competency "a situational ability to set realistic and appropriate goals and to maximize their achievement by using knowledge of self, other, context and communication theory to generate adaptive communication performance."

(Friedrich 1994, p24)

Impression management refers to the ways in which individuals perform in differnet situations and with different audiences. There are three selves: authentic, ideal and tactical (Goffman 1959). Your professional image relates to the tactical self.

Personal brand "is a perception held in someone else's mind that must be managed effectively in order to influence how an individual is viewed" (Stanton & Stanton 2013, p81).

**Figure 1:** Theoretical Summary

## 3.1      What is email?

Email is a form of computer-mediated communication that permits a sender and a receiver to share messages between computing devices. Some of the most common email providers consist of Outlook. com, Yahoo! Mail and Google's Gmail. Brownlow (2012) noted a lack of 'uniform statistics' to account for email users by providers (e.g., by Google or Outlook.com specifically). However, the 2011 Pew Internet and American Life Project noted that 92% of US adults who use the Internet did so to send and receive email; in 2013, this email figure had decreased to 88%. The Radicati Group, A Technology Market Research Firm, has also examined email use and produced the *Email Statistics Report, 2011–2015* documenting some interesting information regarding current and projected email statistics worldwide. For example, they estimated that there were 3.1 billion email accounts in 2011 (projecting 4.1 billion by 2015). Figure 2 represents the global use associated with the 2011 estimate.
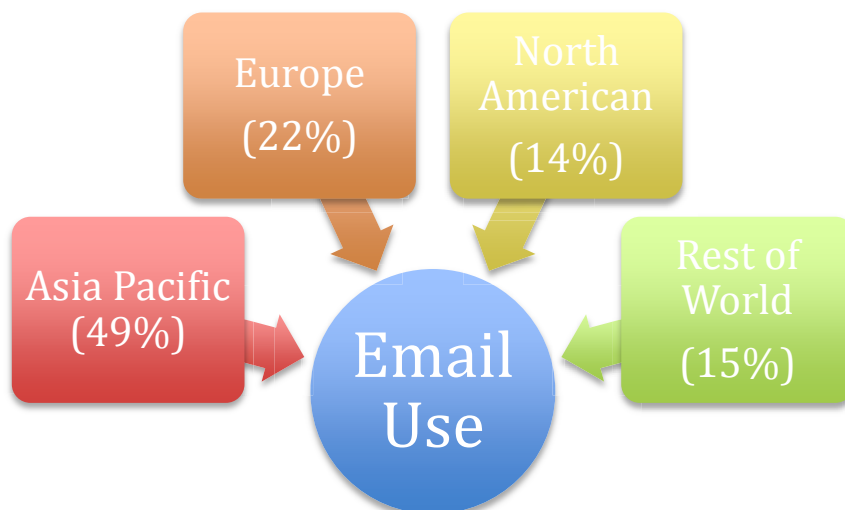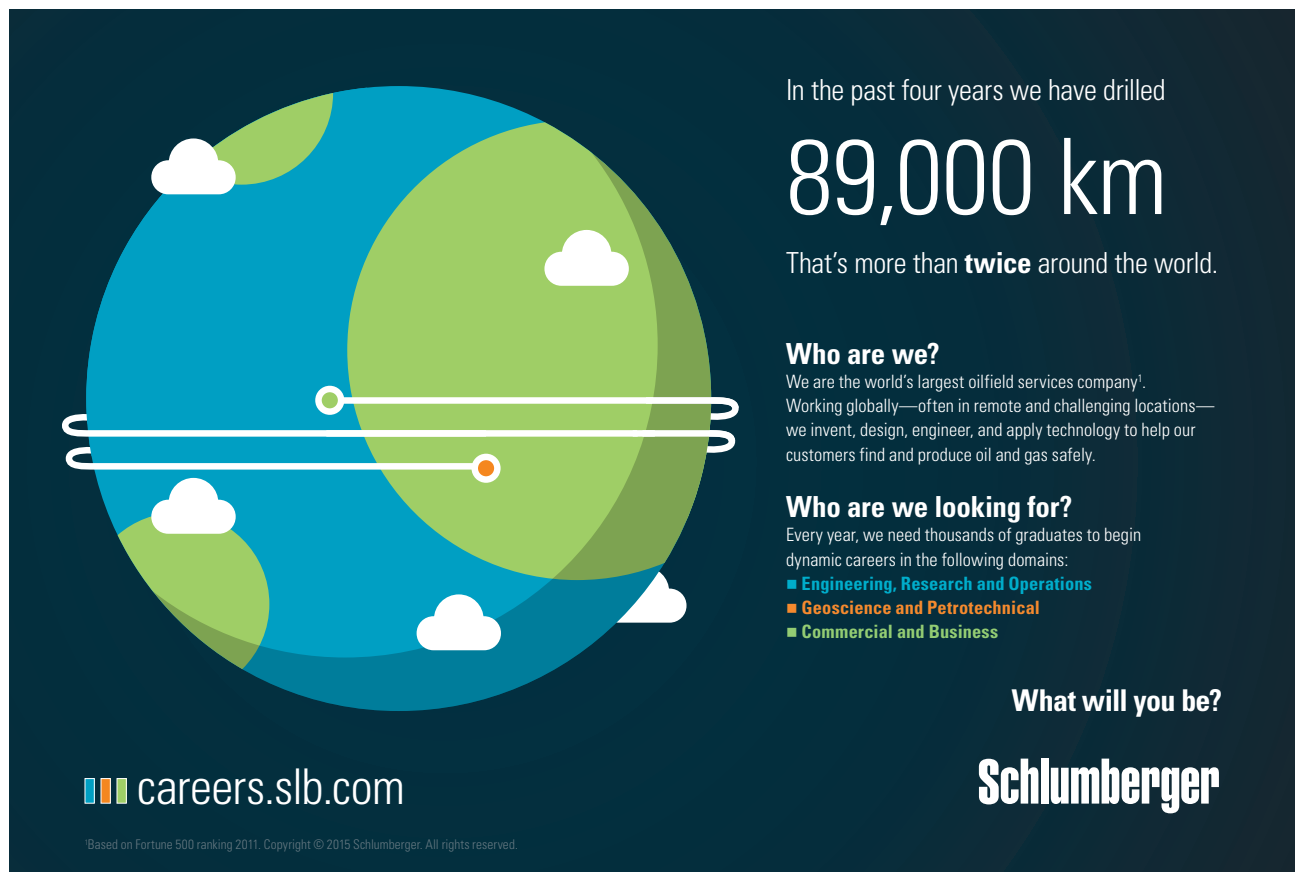


**Figure 2:** Geography and Email Use (The Radicati Group, *Email Statistics Report, 2011–2015*)

Of these email statistics, consumers (75%) occupy a larger percentage of email users than corporate accounts (25%). However, The Radicati Group projects that corporate email accounts will increase in the coming years, mainly due to technological advancements. The organization also notes that corporate email users send and receive around 105 messages daily. Although we don't necessarily know the number of users per provider, we do know that email is one of the primary ways in which we communicate today and we know that email usage is believed to be on the decrease due to other kinds of emerging communication tools such as IM, text messaging and social media. Even though there appears to be a decrease in email usage, there is a projected increase of corporate adopted email (The Radicati Group), which will continue to make it one of the most utilized channels of human interaction in the workplace. Given this trend, it is all the more important for you to learn how to use it competently and effectively.

## 3.2    Uses of Email

Email is used for a variety of interpersonal and organizational reasons ranging from staying in touch with friends and family to communicating with companies of interest or an individual's workplace. For most organizations, email is a preferred channel of communication for a variety of reasons. For example, email allows the sender to send messages to one or more audience members, is inexpensive and fast (no postage needed), and easier to organize, store and retrieve current and previous messages for organizational documentation and record keeping purposes. Consequently, organizations may use email to convey internal information to employees, market goods or services to others, or to build or maintain a customer/client base. As an employee or job seeker, you will find yourself using email frequently to communicate with various individuals for different reasons. Below is a list of some potential ways in which you will probably use email:

- To apply for a job
- To network
- To communicate with your supervisor about directives, projects and tasks
- To communicate with your coworkers about group projects or meetings
- To communicate with your subordinates about directives or employee evaluations
- To communicate with your customers/clients regarding new products and services or problem solving their concerns

Because you will likely use email daily, this section of the text focuses specifically on the factors you should consider as you author and construct email communiqués for the various audiences with whom you will interact in the workplace.

## 3.3     Email and the Communication Process

As a form of computer-mediated communication, it is especially important to think about a variety of factors associated with the communication process when composing an email. As you recall, there are seven elements of the communication process. These elements are restated in Figure 3 as they relate to email as a channel of communication.

| Element | Definition |
|---|---|
| Sender | Individual who conveys a message – Email creator. |
| Receiver | Individual who receives the sender's email message. |
| Channel [Computer-mediated and Email] | The method in which the message is conveyed – Email. |
| Message | Content the sender conveys to the receiver in the email but also refers to email structure as well as what is communicated explicitly and implicitly. |
| Feedback | Messages sent from the receiver to the sender in response to a message. |
| Noise | Anything experienced by the sender and/or the receiver that impedes the receipt of a message (e.g., missing context clues or email directed to Junk folder). |
| Context | The circumstances involved in the email act (e.g., time, culture, relationship to sender/receiver). |

**Figure 3:** Communication Elements and Application to Email

When composing an email, as the sender, you must determine what you wish to say and to whom you intend to convey it. Because you will communicate via email with different people for different reasons and at various stages of your career, the information contained here is designed to assist you in creating a set of criteria for *general consideration* when engaging in email construction aimed at helping you to create and maintain the image and personal brand you wish to possess.

As a form of human communication, the primary purpose of an email *should* be to share a specific message with a specific audience with the intent of obtaining shared meaning between the sender and receiver. It is imperative that the email creator recognizes the elements of the communication process, how they function in email exchanges and how they can use those exchanges to craft an image they want others to have of them. To begin this process, a *competent communicator* will examine a message in relation to his/her audience. Each of the elements in a communication act should be carefully analyzed independently to assure clarity and intent; however, because the communication elements are involved in an interdependent relationship (meaning if one element is changed it impacts the other elements), they must always be considered in relation to one another as well. Consequently, with email, the message should always be created with an audience/receiver in mind while considering the limitations and strengths of a channel (email).

To appear competent and represent the skills that future or potential employers desire (e.g., critical thinking, interpersonal communication, team interaction, technological skills – revisit the SCANS Report for a comprehensive list), you should exercise caution when interacting with others via email. Email communication provides an opportunity for you to call attention to your interpersonal and written communication skills. The interactions you have with others will create and recreate the impression that individuals have of you and are a communication outcome of your communication competency level. Therefore, you will need to consider how you present yourself in email interactions just as you would other kinds of communication exchanges. This will require you to consider some additional variables beyond those identified in the communication process and its elements.

### 3.3.1 Email Variables of Consideration

One of the most important factors to remember when crafting an email is that the receiver must rely completely on text to understand the sender's message. Because email interaction lacks face-to-face communication, there are fewer nonverbal cues (e.g., body language, facial expressions, pitch or tone of voice to name a few) to assist the receiver in comprehending what the sender wishes to convey. Consequently, the receiver relies upon the verbal message content to interpret meaning only. This interpretation is influenced by chronemics (when the email was sent), email clarity, email domain, font and theme choices, subject lines and user names to name only a few. There are a variety of other factors that influence how a message can be understood as well. However, this section of the text identifies some of the most important variables to consider when crafting your email messages.

Language and the rules and syntax that govern it are especially important when communicating via email. The choices we make about language as well as the signs and symbols used when authoring an email say a great deal about the sender as well as his/her personality and/or personal qualities. It also says something about how an author views or perceives the audience. For example, when communicating with a potential employer or workplace colleague or supervisor, it is unwise to use inappropriate emoticons, language or slang. In the workplace, the tactical self is on display as opposed to the authentic self or the self that is known by your friends and family. Another language-related factor of consideration involves jargon or the specialized language associated with an industry. An email author's ability to use the jargon of the profession demonstrates his or her level of understanding of the industry to which he/she belongs and conveys an image that is competent, informed and educated about the profession at hand. Always be mindful of word choices as the meanings of those words (as well as the perception a receiver has of a sender) lie in the recipient of the message.

Organizational hierarchy and social structure is another area of consideration when crafting an email message. Organizational hierarchy and structure refers to how an organization is arranged and how power and titles relate to the hierarchy. For instance, most organizations consist of three levels (or more) of worker types: leadership, management and employees. The relationship of these employees is typically represented in an organizational chart like the one in Figure 4.
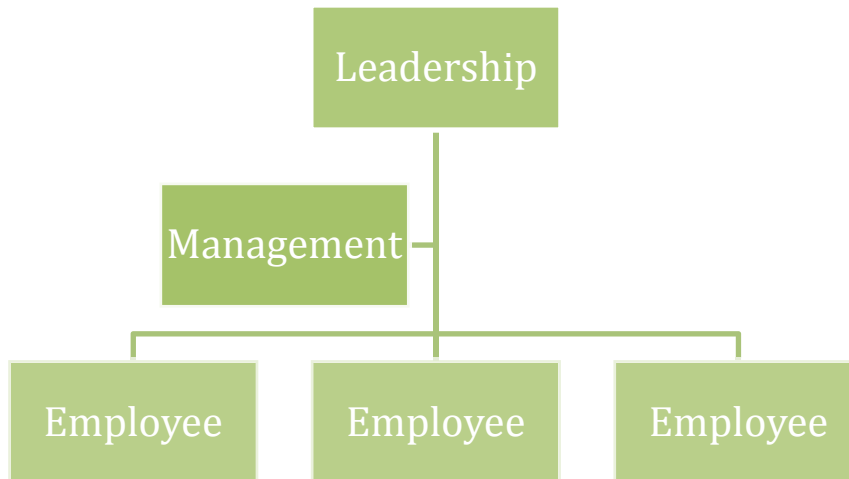
**Figure 4:** Organizational Structure

All organizations have some variation of this structure. Consequently it is important to know how employees (like you) relate to other organizational members. For instance, is the person you are emailing your potential employer, supervisor or subordinate? Social structure is also created by the power associated with leaders and managers. For example, if a leader's image and communicator style (Norton 1983) is perceived to be accessible, open and warm, it is likely the organization will reflect his/her personality traits in the way it communicates internally and externally. However, if the leader is cold, closed and unresponsive, the organization is also likely to reflect communication patterns resembling this type of leader or manager. These communication patterns and rules manifest in an organization's degree of communication formality. One way that formality is expressed is how employees refer to one another. For example, do workers call their supervisor or one another by first name or title and last name? When authoring an email, be sure to consider the structure and degree of formality required of the workplace and the person occupying a particular organizational position. Obtaining this information may take a bit of research via observation or inquiry but it is most valuable in aiding you in email composition as well as gaining understanding of the workplace context. It will also help you to be better perceived by the colleague with whom you are interacting.

The last thing to consider before hitting send is appropriateness or what is suitable or acceptable for a specific situation. Workplace emails vary in their purposes and topics; therefore it is important to think about what appropriate means in a specific situation. In workplace email interactions, appropriateness may be divided into three broad categories: content, tone and use. *Content* is the specific message or topics articulated in the communiqué. The content consists of the language used to present or discuss the topics as well as the tone of the content. Ober (1995) defined *tone* as, "in writing refers to the writer's attitude toward the reader and the subject of the message. The overall tone of a written message affects the reader just as one's tone of voice affects the listener in everyday exchanges" (p. 88). *Use* refers to how email is used to interact with others; it also entails organizational procedures and rules for interacting at work. For example, many organizations have an email use policy or a set of guidelines that articulate how and when email is to be used as well as what kinds of content an email can contain. Prior to constructing and sending an email, it is important to know an organization's email communication policies and practices. For now, here are some general behaviors and/or topics that you should avoid when interacting with others via email:

- Conveying some types of bad news (e.g., initial announcements about downsizing or reductions in force)
- Firing or demoting a subordinate
- Gossiping about colleagues
- Hostile words (e.g., ageist, racist or sexist language)
- Reprimanding employees
- Sending spam or forwarding chain emails, hoaxes or supervisor messages intended to be confidential
- Use of humor or inappropriate jokes

Now that we have discussed language, jargon and syntax as well as organizational structure and appropriateness in terms of content, tone and use, let's now examine another key aspect to communicating competently with email: the components of an email.

## 3.4    Components of an email

An effective email consists of several basic components that each fulfills a specific purpose. Figure 5 provides a screen capture of an email so you can recall where the components are located.
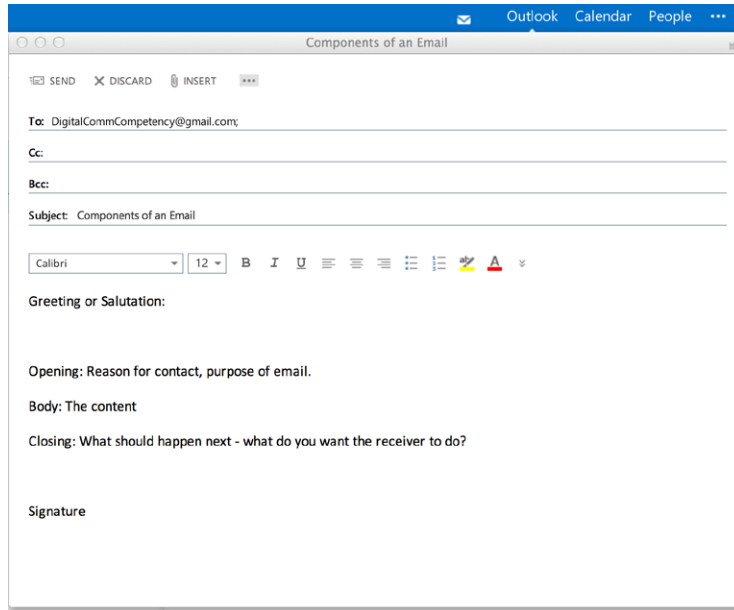
**Figure 5:** Email Components

The purpose of these components along with some recommendations for using them is located below in Figure 6.

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| Component | Purpose | Recommendations |
|---|---|---|
| To: | Contains the email address of the intended recipient. | Keep contacts in your address book and their email addresses updated frequently. |
| Cc: | Copy – permits the inclusion of other people on an email exchange. | Only include relevant individuals in an email exchange. Think carefully about why others should be included in the conversation. |
| Bcc: | Blind Copy – permits people to be included in an email exchange without other recipients knowing the individual(s) were included. | Use this function seldom and consider why you want a recipient included that others do not know about. Question your intent and purpose as well as the ethics of including people without disclosing their involvement to others. |
| Subject: | The email topic and purpose. | Use very clear subject headings so the recipient can identify the email topic. |
| Greeting: | Salutation | Use according to organizational structure (e.g., Mr. Mrs., Title or first name) and to establish rapport with the recipient. |
| Opening: | Explains what the email is about. | Should be one to two sentences contextualizing the message. |
| Body: | Contains the main elements of the message. | Email messages should be brief. They should provide enough information for the recipient to respond. |
| Closing: | States what you want the recipient to do. | Should include follow-up steps such as when to provide feedback and how that should be done. |
| Signature: | Includes your contact information and closing line such as *sincerely, regards or best*. | Your name, place of employment, title, physical address, office phone and cell phone (if appropriate) should be included in the signature. |

**Figure 6:** Email Components, Purpose and Recommendations

In addition to these email components, special attention should be given to a sender's user name as well as color and font use along with attachments. Regarding user names, when establishing an email account for personal or professional use (outside of the one provided for you at work), be mindful of the user name you select. As a professional, your user name should be appropriate and if possible associated with your actual name. Avoid using insensitive language as well as nick names or slang in the user name, too. In terms of color use, be mindful of what colors (if any) to include in an email message. This is especially important when interacting with individuals of different cultures as color means different things to different groups. Pay special attention to email themes and the colors or font styles associated with them as well. Communication involves the receiver of a message to decode that message. The decoding process is complicated and the receiver will use all of the message components and features to form an impression of your message. The impression may be incorrect and result in your message being ineffective or your image/brand misunderstood. To further advance your ability to create and maintain the impression and brand you desire, Figure 7 outlines *some* common email mistakes related to the communication elements.

| Element | Mistake |
|---|---|
| Sender | • Violating the competencies associated with effective email communiqués, in general.<br>• Forwarding unrelated emails to others.<br>• Including or omitting people who should/shouldn't be in the exchange.<br>• Including your signature repeatedly in an ongoing exchange.<br>• Using Bcc and Cc too often.<br>• Insensitivity to culture (e.g., color, language, theme, time or context) |
| Receiver | • Failing to read an entire message before responding or thinking about its contents.<br>• Assuming the message is a personal attack.<br>• Committing the same errors associated with senders above. |
| Channel [EMAIL] | • Conveying information that should not be in an email.<br>• Assuming email is private.<br>• Over reliance on email to communicate. |
| Message | • Failing to read an entire message before sending or responding to it.<br>• No greeting.<br>• Message lacks clarity.<br>• Message is too lengthy or too short.<br>• Inappropriate grammar, jargon, language.<br>• Not proofreading.<br>• Inappropriately named subject lines.<br>• Misnamed attachments.<br>• Forgetting the attachment or sending a wrong attachment. |
| Feedback | • Not requesting feedback specifically.<br>• Not specifying timelines for feedback.<br>• Expecting others to respond quickly. |
| Noise | • Emailing when emotional or angry.<br>• Misinterpreting the tone of an email.<br>• Inappropriate use of color, emoticons, font or graphics. |
| Context | • Violating the company email policy.<br>• Not divulging entire email message or sharing information to contextualize the email.<br>• Tone and content are too informal; no attention to social or hierarchal structure. |

**Figure 7:** Common Email Mistakes Categorized by Communication Element

## 3.5          Impression management, Personal Branding and Email

Constructing and reconstructing your impression and personal brand is challenging. Each email interaction you have enhances or diminishes how you wish to be perceived. The careful construction of your email messages demonstrate the analytical and critical thinking skills as well as the communication abilities that employers and potential employers want in their employees. As noted in chapter 2's communication principles, communication is irreversible, unavoidable, unrepeatable and meanings are in people. Email as a channel of communication provides a unique message opportunity that allows a message to be copied, pasted and sent to recipients that you may not have wanted to receive it. Furthermore, because email lacks some nonverbal cues due to no face-to-face interaction, there is an increased chance that miscommunication will occur. Knowing the information outlined in this chapter should assist you in creating appropriate email communiqués that help you to manage the impression you want others to have of you.

## 3.6    Summary

In this chapter you have learned:

- Email is a form of computer-mediated communication that permits a sender and a receiver to share messages between computing devices.
- Email use in corporate settings continues to increase.
- Email is used for a variety of reasons in the workplace.
- The communication elements and process applies to email interactions.
- When communicating via email, it is especially important to attend to the language, content, organizational hierarchy and social structure as well as the appropriateness of a message in a workplace context.
- The components of an email consist of: To, Cc, Bcc, Subject, Greeting, Opening, Body, Closing and Signature.
- Email use also requires the sender to attend to matters related to color, font type and attachments.
- There are a variety of mistakes that senders make when communicating via email.
- Each email interaction you have creates and recreates the impression that others have of you as well as the brand you wish to possess.

**Key Terms**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Email | Content | Email components |
| Email Provider | Use | |
| Organizational Structure | Tone | |
| Jargon | User Name | |
| Appropriateness | Attachment | |

**Reflection to Action**

1. Examine the email account you communicate with for professional interactions. Respond to the following questions:
   a) What is your user name?
   b) Do you have a signature? What information is included in it or missing from it?
2. What are some of the challenges you have encountered with email? How might you use the information presented in this chapter to resolve those challenges?
3. Locate an email you recently sent to a potential employer. Reflecting on the information presented in this chapter, does the email convey the image you want the recipient to have of you? If not, what would you do differently to manage your impression?
4. Identify the elements of the communication process in the email you selected to review in the previous question. What were the organizational contexts you considered or should have considered before sending the email? Knowing what you know now about organizational structure, what changes would you make to the email message?

# 4    Communicating Competently via Voicemail

In this chapter you will learn about:

- Communication competency in the specific context of voicemail.
- How to apply the communication model to voicemail.
- Voicemail as a speech act.
- The structure, content and components of a voicemail.
- Common voicemail mistakes.
- How your image and personal brand is affected by voicemail communication.

The previous chapters of this text have introduced you to the theories of communication competency, impression management and personal branding. You have also become familiar with various communication elements and forms and how that information applies to email communiqués. This chapter helps you to advance your communication competency skills and abilities in the specific context of voicemail. Consequently, we will explore the tactical self and the messages created for office/smart phone channels of communication in professional contexts. Figure 1 restates the theories that you have learned thus far:
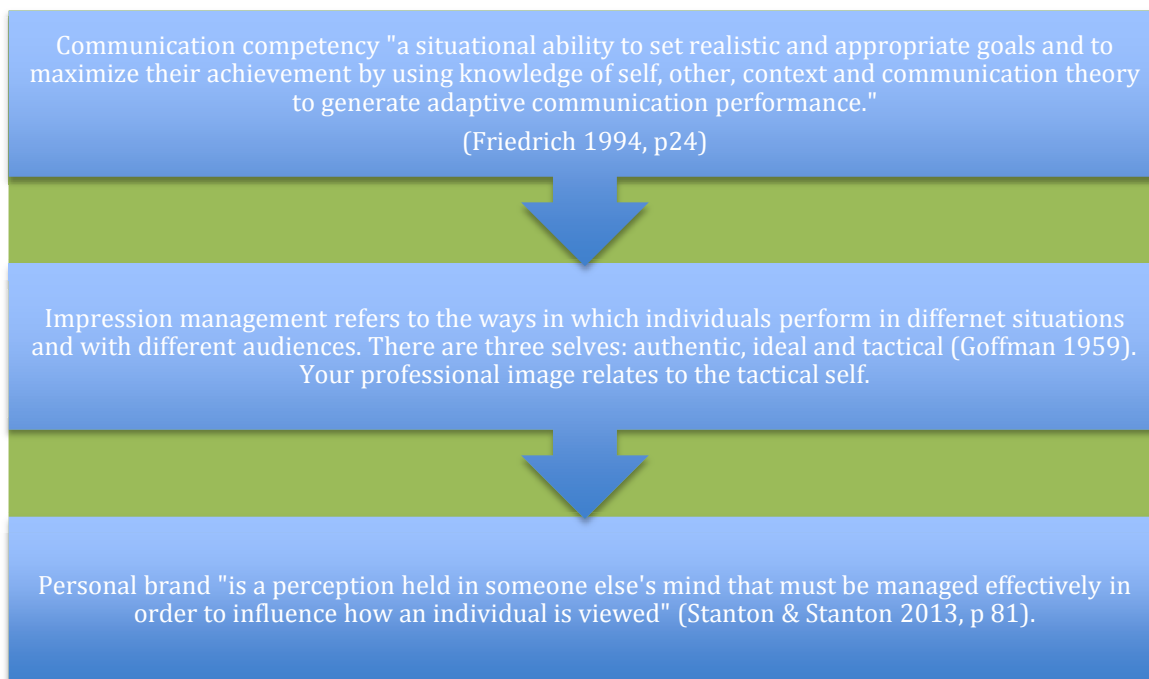


**Figure 1:** Theoretical Summary Revisited

## 4.1      What is voicemail?

Voicemail, also referred to voice message, is a form of digital communication that permits the sender of a message to audio (and now video) record a message for an intended receiver. Voice messages are typically left on office phones as well as cell/smart phones. Voicemail can also be created using apps, such as AudioMemo or Notes, and sent as an attachment to an email message. You will find that this information is easily applied to other kinds of voice messaging options involving apps, too.

## 4.2      Uses of Voicemail

Like email, voicemail is used for a variety of interpersonal and organizational reasons. For example, organizations utilize voicemail to convey internal information to employees, market goods or services to different stakeholders, or to build or maintain a customer/client base. As an employee or job seeker, you will find yourself using voicemail frequently to communicate with different individuals. Below is a list of some potential ways in which you will probably use voicemail:

- To follow a job lead or to follow-up on an application regarding a position of interest
- To return phone calls or provide feedback to inquiries
- To network
- To communicate with your supervisor about projects or tasks
- To communicate with your coworkers about meetings or team goals
- To communicate with your subordinates about inquiries or recommendations they have
- To communicate with your customers/clients regarding new products or services or problem solving their concerns in a *more* personal way than email

Because you will likely engage in voicemail use daily, this section of the text focuses specifically on the factors you should consider as you create and record voicemail messages for the various audiences with whom you will interact.

## 4.3      Voicemail and the Communication Process

While email allows you to express your message in a text-based, computer-mediated channel, voicemail incorporates your actual voice in the message development, delivery and recording of what you want to convey to the receiver when he/she is not readily available to communicate with you. Consequently, in the workplace, it is often perceived to be a more personal channel of human interaction than email. As with all communication acts, you should carefully consider the communication process and its elements. Figure 2 restates the communication elements as they relate specifically to voicemail messages.

| Element | Definition |
|---|---|
| Sender | Individual who creates and records the voicemail message(s). |
| Receiver | Individual who is intended to receive the sender's voice message. |
| Channel [Phone] | The method in which the message is conveyed – Phone. |
| Message | Content the sender conveys to the receiver as well as the delivery of the message. |
| Feedback [can occur via different channels such as email, phone or face-to-face interaction as directed in the voice message] | Messages sent from the receiver of the voice message to the sender in response to the voicemail. |
| Noise | Anything experienced by the sender and/or the receiver that impedes the receipt of a message (e.g., reception, disconnected call, sender speech patterns) |
| Context | The circumstances involved in the voice message act. |

**Figure 2:** Communication Elements Applied to Voicemail

As the sender and composer of a voice message, you must determine what you wish to say to the receiver **before** leaving the voicemail. Part of that preparation involves you continuing to think about the image and impression you wish to leave on another. As previously noted, employers' desire employees who possess strong interpersonal and oral communication abilities. Voice messages provide an opportunity for individuals to demonstrate their oral communication competencies as well as their ability to summarize content in a meaningful way that prompts the receiver to respond to the sender and his/her message.

Like email, the primary purpose of voicemail should be to create shared meaning between the sender and the receiver. Consequently, the sender must consider the message content and receiver simultaneously as well as the channel. To represent the skills valued by future or potential employers, it is important to exercise caution when interacting with others via voicemail. Like email and other communication acts, this will require you to consider different variables in addition to the communication elements.

### 4.3.1    Voicemail Variables of Consideration

As mentioned in chapter 3, when sending email, it is important to consider message appropriateness in relation to language, rules, syntax, and organizational structure. As a voice message encoder, these considerations are important as well. In addition to these variables, Sittig-Rolf (2005) also suggests attending to the amount of information a voicemail contains along with the purpose of the message as it pertains to the recipient. The amount of information refers specifically to the length of a voicemail message while the purpose of the message pertains to how the subject of the voicemail relates to the recipient. Typically, voicemail messages should be 60-75 seconds in length and contain information pertinent to obtaining a return call to the message originator. The ability to obtain a return call is directly connected to the sender's ability to articulate how the subject of the call relates to the voicemail recipient and why they may need to respond. If the recipient doesn't understand how the call is important to them then it is unlikely the goal of the voicemail will be met. Consequently, the voicemail should always demonstrate sensitivity to time and relationships.

To accomplish this goal, it is useful to view the voicemail as a speech act. Examining the voice message from an informative (slightly persuasive) speech presentation perspective allows us to identify some helpful practices that can easily make for a successful voicemail message. For example, a successful speech, regardless of purpose (e.g., informative, persuasive, special occasion) consists of structure, content and delivery. *Structure* refers to the speech components. *Content* refers to the message and *delivery* relates to the verbal and nonverbal cues used to convey and support the message associated with the content.

The structure of a speech consists of the introduction, body and conclusion. The *introduction* is designed to garner audience attention, build rapport with the audience, and to preview the presentation. The *body* refers to the topic of the speech act. It contains the main points and ideas that need to be expressed or explained to the audience. The *conclusion* summarizes the main ideas, calls to action the audience and leaves the receivers with something to remember or consider. The *content* of a speech consists of main ideas expressed using verbal and nonverbal signs and symbols. The content is also supported by evidence and facts that are carefully organized into a message that is easily understood by the audience. Because speech presentations are typically oral and audiences are seldom able to replay the speech act, it is important that the message be concise, organized and well delivered. Unlike a speech, voicemail can be replayed; however, time is of the essence in organizational settings and many individuals don't have the luxury of replaying a message more than once to understand the relevancy of the message or what is required of them. Consequently, you should aim for a message being understood the first (and likely only) time it will be accessed. *Delivery* involves verbal and nonverbal cues. These cues are made up of vocal patterns and qualities as well as the paralinguistic cues (vocal slurs like *um*, *ah*, *er* or sarcasm and tone) a speaker incorporates, intentionally or unintentionally, into the spoken message of the content. Structure, content and delivery also apply to the voicemail.

### 4.3.1.1 Voicemail Structure and Content

An effective voicemail consists of five basic components that each fulfills a specific purpose: greeting, contact information, subject, relationship of topic to recipient, and closing. Figure 3 provides information regarding these components along with their purpose and some recommendations for how to use them effectively. Component content is also provided.

| Component | Purpose | Recommendations |
|---|---|---|
| Greeting | To build rapport and convey to the recipient who you are. | Keep greeting brief and concise. |
| Your contact information | To covey to the receiver how you can be reached for subsequent interactions. | Include your contact information twice – once at the beginning of a message and once at the end of a message. |
| Subject of call | What the voicemail is regarding. | Exercise conciseness, clarity and organization. |
| Relationship of the subject to the recipient | To explain how the subject of the call relates to the recipient. | Be specific in explaining the relationship of the subject to the receiver. The recipient must know how the topic relates to them if you wish to have a return call. |
| Closing | States what you want the recipient to do as a result of your call. | Should include follow-up steps such as when to provide feedback and how that should be shared. |

**Figure 3:** Voicemail Components, Purpose and Recommendations

**4.3.1.2  Speaker Delivery of Voicemail Messages**

A sender's ability to present a message effectively plays a fundamental role in 1) if the message will be returned and 2) the way that the sender is perceived by the message recipient. There are many variables that impact how an audience ascertains the effectiveness of a speaker's delivery. Some of these variables consist of the speaker's:

- Articulation – movement of speech organs in sound making
- Enunciation – clarity of pronunciation
- Pitch – vocal highness or lowness
- Rate – speech speed; how fast or slow a person talks
- Vocal energy – refers to the degree of personality or animation that is conveyed in a person's voice
- Volume – speech loudness

Additional variables related to voicemails also involve background noise (where you were when you left the voicemail), technical difficulties (such as poor cell/phone reception or faulty equipment), and timing (leaving a message after hours or on a Sunday); these variables are usually associated with questionable choices made by the sender of a message and can result in the recipient possessing a negative perception about the sender. Consequently, when communicating via voicemail, speak clearly, and slowly while conveying energy in your voice. Also be mindful of volume (don't speak too loudly or softly) and pitch when delivering your message. Furthermore be aware of when you place a call along with the location from which you are calling. In communication, the message decoder uses all of the verbal and nonverbal cues available to him/her to interpret a message and to reach conclusions about the sender.

To further advance your understanding of how to leave effective voicemails, Figure 4 outlines some common mistakes made using this channel of communication.

Component errors: No greeting, contact information, subject information or closing

Message errors: content lacks clarity and organization;  too lengthy; incorrect language/grammar/jargon; inappropriate tone or degree of formality

Delivery errors: articulation, enunciation, clarity

Technology errors: poor reception; dropped/blocked calls; incorrect use

Context errors: failure to understand organizational structure; lacks knowledge of who to contact; incorrect channel to communicate; poor timing; generated call from a location impacting call quality

**Figure 4:** Common Voicemail Errors

## 4.4    Impression management, Personal Branding and Voicemail

Voicemail communication allows a sender to convey a message to a receiver via phone technology. Voicemail provides senders with an opportunity to highlight communication skills associated with oral communication competencies such as speech delivery and content organization. In preparing for voicemail communication, think carefully about the image and impression you desire others to have of you. In addition, consider how that image aligns with your personal brand. Because voicemail relies on an encoder's voice to send a message via phone, the speaker is able to use his/her voice to convey a level of professionalism (via enunciation, language choice and message organization) and persona. These interactions shape the perceptions and impressions that the voicemail recipient has of the encoder. Using the information outlined in this chapter should help you to enhance the likelihood of your ability to form favorable impressions in the recipients of your future voice messages.

## 4.5    Summary

In this chapter you have learned:

- Voicemail is a form of digital communication that permits a sender and a receiver to share messages via phone systems.
- In the workplace, voicemail is usually considered more personal than email.
- Voicemail is used frequently in workplace environments and for a variety of reasons.
- The communication elements and process apply to voicemail interactions.
- When communicating via voicemail, it is important to plan the message you wish to leave for a recipient ahead of time.
- A voicemail creator should attend to language, content, organizational structure and message appropriateness when crafting a message.
- Unlike email, voicemails require the sender to construct an abbreviated informative speech that depends upon vocal delivery.
- Voicemail encoders should be mindful of vocal qualities such as articulation and enunciation as well as message organization and structure.
- The components of a voicemail consist of: greeting, contact information, subject, recipient's relationship to subject, and closing.
- There are a variety of mistakes that senders make when communicating via voicemail.
- Each voicemail interaction you have creates and recreates the impression that others have of you as well as the brand you wish to possess.

**Key Terms**

| | |
|---|---|
| Voicemail | Volume |
| Articulation | Informative Speech |
| Enunciation | Content |
| Pitch | Delivery |
| Rate | |

**Reflection to Action**

1. Access your voicemails. Listen carefully to a message you recently received. Based on the information outlined in this chapter, analyze the message. Did it adhere to the recommendations provided here? How would you improve the message? What advice would you provide the voicemail sender?

2. Create a voicemail based on the following information:
   a) You and your team are working on a project for a company client. Your team discovers there is an error in the executive summary your supervisor is presenting to the client later in the week. Using the information learned in this segment, craft an effective voicemail message to your supervisor.
   b) Record the message on your phone.
   c) Play the message and listen to it carefully. Did you adhere to the recommendations provided in this chapter? On a scale of 1–5 (1 being best), how would you rank the content, delivery, and vocal quality of your message? What were the best parts of the message? What were the least effective parts of the message?

3. For future professional endeavors involving voicemail, describe the process you will use to construct those voicemails.

# 5 Communicating Competently via Video Chat

In this chapter you will learn about:

- Communication competency in the specific context of the video chat.
- How to apply the communication model to the video chat.
- Media richness and social presence regarding channels of communication.
- Common video chat mistakes.
- How your image and personal brand is affected by video chat communication.

The previous chapters of this text have introduced you to the theories of communication competency, impression management and personal branding. You have also become familiar with various communication elements and forms and how that information applies to email communiqués and voicemails. This chapter helps you to advance your communication competency skills and abilities in the specific context of the video chat. Figure 1 restates the theories that you have learned thus far:

Communication competency "a situational ability to set realistic and appropriate goals and to maximize their achievement by using knowledge of self, other, context and communication theory to generate adaptive communication performance."
(Friedrich 1994, p24)

Impression management refers to the ways in which individuals perform in differnet situations and with different audiences. There are three selves: authentic, ideal and tactical (Goffman 1959). Your professional image relates to the tactical self.

Personal brand "is a perception held in someone else's mind that must be managed effectively in order to influence how an individual is viewed" (Stanton & Stanton 2013, p81).

**Figure 1:** Theoretical Summary Revisited

## 5.1    What is a video chat?

Video chats are a form of computer-mediated communication that permits a "live connection between people in separate locations for the purpose of communication, usually involving audio and often text as well as video" (see http://searchmobilecomputing.techtarget.com/definition/videoconference). Common videoconferencing or chat tools are Facetime, Google Hangouts and Skype. Video chats can occur between two people or very large groups depending upon the video chat platform. Furthermore, this channel of communication allows for many different kinds messages, verbal and nonverbal, to be shared between a sender and a receiver via the computer or a mobile device. Due to its complexity, the communication competencies needed to interact effectively with others, craft a desirable impression and convey a professional brand are also greater.

## 5.2      Uses of Video Chat

Like email and voicemail, video chat is used for a variety of interpersonal and organizational reasons. For example, organizations utilize video chats to conduct job interviews, convey internal information to employees via office meetings or training, and to interact with geographically separated corporate offices or global partners (for a specific example of videoconferencing uses and experiences, visit http:// www.informationweek.com/smb/network/4-uses-for-videoconferencing-beyond-cutt/231000624). As an employee or job seeker, you will likely find yourself using video chat software for the reasons noted above. However, some additional examples of how you might use video chats to communicate with other professionals is below:

- To network with professional organizations or industry leaders
- To communicate with your supervisor or colleagues about work projects or tasks
- To communicate with your customers/clients regarding new products or services or problem solving their concerns in an even more personal way than that of email or phone

This section of the text focuses specifically on the factors that you should consider when communicating via videoconference and with various audiences. Because videoconferencing is more complex than the other channels of communication we have discussed thus far, the communication process requires some additional explanation.

## 5.3      Video Chat and the Communication Process

Although all communication interactions consist of the communication elements, communication channels vary in their ability to provide nonverbal messages and prompt feedback to senders and receivers. Variations in these two communication elements are described in terms of the media richness theory (MRT) that refers to the degree of nonverbal cues and immediate feedback responses that a communication channel permits (Daft & Lengel 1984; Daft & MacIntosh 1981; Daft & Weick 1984). To better understand the MRT let's examine the channels of communication that we have explored thus far.

As previously explained, email allows you to express your message in a text-based, computer-mediated channel. However, this channel lacks some nonverbal cues (e.g., facial expressions, gestures) and while at times can provide prompt feedback, that feedback is not always immediate and can be delayed due to other variables (e.g., access to email, timing, internet connection). Voicemail (and phone use) incorporates a sender's voice into the communication act of delivering the message. Consequently, it provides more nonverbal messages via vocal cues than that of email and may provide greater feedback responses due to phone access. Yet, voicemails still lack visually detected nonverbal cues resulting in it being a less media rich channel than video chatting. Because videoconferencing can include text, audio and video messages that provide a great amount of nonverbal communication cues to recipients and due to those messages providing immediate feedback, it is a much more media rich communication channel for the sender and receiver. Essentially, media richness influences the recipient's perception of a sender's presence. This connection is referred to as social presence theory (SPT), which describes "the degree to which a medium conveys the psychological perception that other people are physically present and suggests that media that are capable of providing a greater sense of intimacy and immediacy will be perceived as having a greater degree of social presence" (Short et al. as cited in Kupritz & Cowell 2011, p. 58). This conclusion is reached based on the relationship between nonverbal signals such as gestures, eye contact, and facial communication that are connected to how an individual perceives intimacy and immediacy (Short et al. 1976). Therefore, the more verbal and nonverbal messages that a decoder receives may result in creating sender social presence. Social presence is conveyed through channels that permit more types of sender messages to be shared with a recipient. Consequently, when applying SPT to email we discover that as a channel of communication, email lacks media richness resulting in less social presence. When examining voicemail and phone calls via MRT and SPT in relation to email, voicemail has greater media richness resulting in greater levels of sender social presence. However, the communication channel that has the greatest media richness and creates the greatest social presence is video chatting due to its ability to send multiple and various verbal and nonverbal messages immediately thereby creating intimacy. Figure 2 restates the communication elements as they relate specifically to videoconferencing interactions.

| Element | Definition |
|---------|------------|
| Sender/Receiver | Individuals interacting in the videoconference. |
| Channel [Vide chat] | The method in which the message is conveyed – verbally and nonverbally through text, audio and video via video chat. |
| Message | Verbal and nonverbal content the sender and receiver convey to one another (intentionally and unintentionally). |
| Feedback | Messages sent between the senders and receivers involved in the videoconference through text, audio and video (intentionally and unintentionally). |
| Noise | Anything experienced by the sender and/or the receiver that impedes the receipt/decoding of a message (e.g., reception, disconnected conference/chat, participant speech patterns, technical issues or facial expressions/eye contact among others). |
| Context | The circumstances involved in the videoconference act (e.g., time, location technology devices used). |

**Figure 2:** Communication Elements Applied to Video Chat

As a video chat participant, a significant amount of planning must occur before engaging in the interaction. As with the other channels of communication presented in this text, contemplation about the impression you wish to leave along with the personal brand desired is required. Due to the media richness of videoconferencing, you can demonstrate a variety of skills that employer's desire. Some of these competencies consist of interpersonal and oral communication abilities, critical thinking and spontaneous interaction skills, written communication expertise and technological proficiency, to name a few. Your ability to showcase these skills is contingent upon your level of preparedness for the video chat interaction.

Like email and voicemail, the primary purpose of videoconferencing should be to create shared meaning between the sender and the receiver. Consequently, the sender must consider the message content and receiver simultaneously as well as the capabilities of the channel. This will require you to consider different variables in addition to the communication elements discussed throughout the text.

### 5.3.1    Video Chat Variables of Considerations

Some of the communication competencies required of effective email and voicemail construction also apply to videoconferences. For example, video chat participants need to consider, message appropriateness in relation to language, rules, syntax, and organizational hierarchy as well as message content, structure, and the delivery of a text or oral presentation. Because more communication cues (intentional and unintentional) can be conveyed via the videoconference, there is a need to identify and control for potential signs and symbols (cues) that might be misunderstood in a video chat exchange. Some of these communication variables include the communication technology involved in the interaction as well as specific nonverbal communication cues related to attire, eye contact, facial and body expressions, and the videoconference location/space captured in the interaction.

#### 5.3.1.1  Technology Considerations

There are a variety of options to select from regarding videoconference technology. Some of these video chat tools consist of Skype, Facetime, Google Hangouts, and Windows Live. When selecting a videoconference tool, accessibility and navigational ease should be considered. Accessibility refers to compatibility, or whether or not the videoconference software can be used on more than one kind of digital device. For instance, Skype and Google Hangouts are very accessible and compatible videoconferencing tools because they can be used on PC and Apple devices equipped with camera capabilities. However, Facetime is not highly accessible or compatible because it is Apple product friendly (e.g., iPad, iPhone, Mac computers) only. Video chatting can also be provided by a business that specializes in organizational needs such as digital interactions or meetings (e.g., FedEx Kinkos). Although a variety of individuals and companies hire such businesses, our focus here is primarily on the video chat platforms you can access from your home or work computer systems and the communication variables that need consideration when using this communication channel.

### 5.3.1.2  Account Set-Up

After selecting a video chat tool, a user account must be established which requires a user name and password. As suggested in the chapter regarding email, a user name should be professional and refrain from containing slang, profanity or other inappropriate language. If possible, the user name should contain your name or some variation of it. Ideally the user name should match your personal/professional email account user name for branding purposes and ease of contact by individuals desiring to interact with you.

Once the account and user name is established, obtaining familiarity with the video chat software is needed. Most videoconferencing software permits users to communicate via instant messaging or chat features (text based), video chat (text, audio, video based), audio chat (audio based) and screen share (permits the user to share his/her desktop with a participant). Videoconferencing software is also available for most mobile devices. For example, Skype can be used on any device with a camera ranging from a laptop (PC and Mac) to a computer to a smart phone or tablet. Depending upon the device used to video chat, a mic/headset, speakers or a stronger Internet connection may be required to enhance your communication experience. For professional interactions, a laptop or computer should be used to conduct the videoconference as opposed to a digital device like a smart phone. Phones rely on cell towers and reception is inconsistent and unreliable in many locations. Consequently, using the phone to conduct a video chat creates significant noise for the videoconference participants. For example, some of this noise manifests as frozen screens, a lag time between the delivery of audio and video, and dropped calls. To increase the likelihood of a successful and effective videoconference, use the computer or laptop to conduct professional interactions and rehearse using the video chat software. This will allow you to have a more polished presence as well as a more favorable presentation.

### 5.3.1.3  Nonverbal Communication Considerations when Video Chatting

As discussed in chapter 2, communication without words is referred to as nonverbal communication. You have already learned about one type of nonverbal communication message in chapter 4 pertaining to voicemails: *paralinguistics* or vocal qualities such as rate, pitch, and volume. There are a variety of different nonverbal communication channels and types. Some of these are noted below:

- Artifactual communication – messages that objects convey (e.g., clothing, décor)
- Chronemics – refers to the way that time influences communication and the perceptions that others have of time
- Facial expression – messages sent via facial movements and emotion
- Haptics – messages sent by touch
- Kinesics – messages sent via body movement and gestures
- Occulesics –messages communicated through or by the eyes
- Proxemics – messages conveyed through using space and location

Although there are many different nonverbal communication forms that convey many different messages, eye contact, facial expressions, gestures, and kinesics, as well as artifactual communication play fundamental roles in articulating your impression and personal brand in video chatting contexts. The media richness of the videoconference allows for various human communication behaviors to be captured by the camera/webcam. Although this makes for a very personal communication exchange, it is important to remember one of the communication principles learned in chapter 2: meanings are in people. This principle highlights the fact that meanings assigned to the messages we send reside in the recipients of those messages. Therefore, it is especially important for participants to attend to their body and face as well as attire and space when interacting via videoconference.

**5.3.1.3.1      Body and Facial Communication**

We communicate much of how we feel and what we think through our body movements, eyes, and facial expressions. When interacting with others in pursuit of shared meaning, we attend more to a person's nonverbal cues than their verbal ones. Although a sender may express his or her message in words, the way those words are said, the tone of the expression (vocal cues), the body movements (e.g., such as slouching) and facial expression (e.g., smile or smirk) tell us how to interpret the spoken message. Consequently, when we interact with others, we listen to verbal messages and we visually survey the sender's body, eyes and facial expressions to understand what the sender means. Awareness of these communication behaviors is important for videoconference interactions.

Beyond helping people to achieve understanding, body language, eye contact, and facial expressions regulate conversational interaction via turn taking. Conversational turns are the signals an encoder and decoder send one another to express his/her desire to speak. Eye contact, a gesture (such as hand raising) or leaning in toward the speaker in response to something said, convey to the sender that the recipient now wants to assume the speaking role in an interaction. In addition to turn taking cues, eye contact is linked to whether or not a recipient is listening to the statements of the sender. Consequently, eye movements like glancing around a room, engaging in tasks outside of the video chat or closed eyes convey to the sender that the recipient is disinterested and lacks connection to the sender. However, when eye contact and facial expressions are used with awareness and intention, they are able to create immediacy, rapport and intimacy between the sender and receiver. The nonverbal body and facial movements that increase a positive social presence translate into the receiver possessing positive perceptions of the encoder. These positive perceptions are then linked to the kinds of employee qualities that employers seek in their workplaces.

### 5.3.1.3.2 Attire

One of the first things we notice about another person is their attire. Clothing is a type of artifactual communication that conveys many different messages. For example, attire is linked to a person's personality, level of professionalism, social class, social intelligence and social status. We reach a number of conclusions about people based on what they wear and how they wear it. Meaning is assigned to brands, colors and style of clothing. Because meanings lie in the recipient of a message, it is important for you to consider the industry to which you belong, the culture of the organization in which you work or are applying/interviewing, and the dress code policies of a company. Because videoconferencing permits nonverbal messages, like attire, to be received, it is important to dress professionally for all interactions. Furthermore, attending to attire color is also helpful as some colors do not look good in video contexts. Consequently, it is recommended to select colors that look good on you, on camera and against the background of the videoconference environment.

### 5.3.1.3.3 Space and Communication

When contemplating issues of space and video chatting, three video concerns emerge: headroom (camera position), lighting and background space. Headroom refers to the position of your head in relation to the camera's frame. To ensure a favorable video appearance, position the camera so your head is not:

- too close to the top of the video frame
- too far away from the top of the video frame
- too close to the camera resulting in a close-up that you may not want
- too far away from the camera resulting in an image that you may not want

After adjusting the camera, you should also check the lighting in the videoconference space. Lighting plays a fundamental role in helping you to present your best image. Consequently, you will want to explore adding or removing lamps, turning on/off overhead lighting and/or using natural lighting to capture the most favorable image you can convey on camera.

Once you have addressed the camera and lighting, scan your video chat environment. Special attention should be given to the camera (or your) background. The background can easily become communication noise if it possesses any of the following:

- inappropriate images
- clothing
- plants or images that appear to extend from your head or upper body
- items that don't belong in the space or seem unrelated
- clutter
- disorganization

When working with the videoconference background, consider staging it. Create a space that accents you and your image. This requires you to be thoughtful of artifacts, color and placement. Extend the brand you wish to have personally to the background. Remember, you want to leave an impression that leaves the recipient(s) talking about you for the right reasons – your skills and abilities. You don't want to be the topic of conversation for the wrong reasons.

To ensure the camera, lighting and background space is appropriate and acceptable, a camera check is required to test for headroom, lighting quality in relation to your position and the background to ascertain what images will be captured via video. Don't be surprised if you need to rework the space a few times to create the image you desire. Consequently, you will want to prepare well ahead of the scheduled videoconferencing time.

### 5.3.2    Common Video Chat Mistakes

To further advance your understanding of how to participate in effective video chats, Figure 3 outlines some common mistakes made when using this channel of communication.

**Figure 3:** Common Video Chat Errors

## 5.4     Impression management, Personal Branding and Video Chats

Video chatting, as a communication channel, is high in media richness and provides greater social presence for the individuals engaged in a communication act. This communication advantage can also increase the likelihood of your ability to convey the impression you seek to leave in others. However, with media richness and social presence comes increased communication complexity that also increases the communication competences that interactants need to effectively engage in various professional exchanges. For example, to create a positive impression on others and to reflect the professional brand desired, the video chat participant must attend to several verbal and nonverbal communication behaviors. These cues consist of vocal qualities (e.g., rate, pitch and volume), text and content components (e.g., writing, structure, organization, clarity) and nonverbal communication (e.g., artifacts, attire, space). Video chatting also requires the encoder to have a greater understanding of the communication process as it relates to media richness and social presence. There are many advantages to communicating with various stakeholders via video chats. Using the information outlined in this chapter should help you to enhance the likelihood of your ability to communicate effectively and professionally in videoconference environments.

## 5.5     Summary

In this chapter you have learned:

- Video chatting is a form of digital communication used in organizational settings that permits a sender and a receiver to share messages via text, audio and video simultaneously.
- Video chatting is more media rich than email and phone/voicemail and creates more social presence for interactants.
- The communication elements and process apply to videoconference interactions.
- A video chat participant should attend to language, content, organizational structure and message appropriateness when communicating with others.
- A videoconference encoder should be mindful of vocal qualities such as articulation and enunciation as well as message organization and structure.
- A video chat participant should give special attention to the technological aspects of the channel of communication.
- A videoconference participant should critically assess nonverbal cues such as attire, body language and eye contact as well as the background and space captured in the video chat camera.
- There are a variety of mistakes that senders make when communicating via video chat.
- Each videoconference interaction you have creates and recreates the impression that others have of you as well as the brand you wish to possess.

**Key Terms**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Video chat/videoconference | Google Hangouts | Gestures |
| Media richness theory | Facetime | Artifact communication |
| Social presence theory | Occulesics | Haptics |
| Skype | Kinesics | Chronemics |

**Reflection to Action**

1. Create a video chat account. Make arrangements to interact with a friend or colleague using this channel of communication.

2. While engaging in the videoconference experience, take notes regarding the following:

   a) Video chat software used, the user names, the tools used in the exchange, the nonverbal behaviors you noted in your colleague, the nonverbal behaviors you noted in yourself as well as other areas of interest to you during the conversation.

   b) Based on the information outlined in this chapter, analyze the messages in the videoconference. Did it adhere to the recommendations provided here? How would you improve the video chat experience? What advice would you provide your partner?

3. For future professional endeavors involving video chats, describe the process you will use to prepare for this channel of communication and interaction.

# 6   Communicating Competently via Social Media

In this chapter you will learn about:

- Communication competency in the context of social media.
- Types of social media.
- How to apply the communication model to social media.
- Self-disclosure and social media.
- LinkedIn™ as a professional social media channel.
- How your image and personal brand is affected by social media.

The previous chapters of this text have introduced you to the theories of communication competency, impression management and personal branding as well as the theories of media richness and social presence. You have also become familiar with various communication elements and forms and how that information applies to email communiqués, voicemails, and videoconferencing. This chapter helps you to advance your communication competency skills and abilities in the context of social media. Figure 1 restates the theories that you have learned thus far:

Communication competency "a situational ability to set realistic and appropriate goals and to maximize their achievement by using knowledge of self, other, context and communication theory to generate adaptive communication performance."
(Friedrich 1994 p24)

Impression management refers to the ways in which individuals perform in differnet situations and with different audiences. There are three selves: authentic, ideal and tactical (Goffman 1959). Your professional image relates to the tactical self.

Personal brand "is a perception held in someone else's mind that must be managed effectively in order to influence how an individual is viewed" (Stanton & Stanton 2013, p81).

Media richness refers to the degree of nonverbal cues and immediate feedback responses that a communication channel permits.
(Daft & Lengel 1984)

Social presence theory posits that some communication channels are more capable of providing intimacy and immediacy than others. These channels create the perception that a sender is physically present (Short et al. as cited in Kupritz & Cowell 2011).

**Figure 1:** Theoretical Summary Revisited

## 6.1     What is social media?

Social media is a computer-mediated form of communication that allows a sender to interact with multiple potential recipients of a message via a website. Encoders can share text, video and audio based messages with, one or many, decoders and form communities of individuals they choose to interact with regularly and for various reasons. There are several different social media sites. Some examples of these sites include Facebook, LinkedIn™, Twitter, and Google+ among many others. Social media users can (and often do) belong to multiple social media sites and link those sites to each other to enhance and grow their communities and connections. Regardless of the site, the primary purpose of social media is to build relationships. Because social media is built upon communities and networking concepts, users can build their relationships not only quickly but exponentially. Although social media is not examined from a logistical or technical perspective here, in relation to the topic of communication competency, you should acquaint yourself with this information to enhance your own skill set. Instead, here, social media is examined through the lens of message construction, self-disclosure and context regarding how to develop the impression you wish to create.

## 6.2     Uses of Social Media

Like email, voicemail and video chat, social media is used for a variety of interpersonal and organizational reasons. Previously social media was viewed primarily as a personal/interpersonal channel of communication (e.g., a tool to share information with friends and family); however, organizations have begun to use social media to interact with clients and customers, build community through outreach (e.g., friends and fans) and market their products and services through name recognition. In addition, organizations are using social media to recruit employees. Roberts & Roach (2009) reported that HR personnel were using social networking sites to reference check for potential job candidates. This has influenced the development of other social media sites providing individuals with opportunities to build professional networking communities.

An example of a professional networking site is LinkedIn™; its purpose is to provide a professional networking opportunity for users to share career-based skills and abilities with other professionals and potential employers. Currently, there are over 238,000,000 LinkedIn™ members (http://press.linkedin.com/about). As a result of sites like LinkedIn™, HR personnel are now using social media sites to identify candidates they are interested in hiring (Campbell 2010). For example, Jobvite (2010 as cited in Wetsch 2012) reported that "95% of all companies will perform a social media search of a potential employee and 70% of employers admit to rejecting candidates based on the information that they found on their search" (p. 32).

Bullhorn Reach (2013), a division of the software recruiting company Bullhorn, has conducted additional research regarding how HR personnel [Bullhorn Recruiters] utilize social media to recruit potential employees and job candidates. The organization produced the *2013 North American Social Recruiting Activity Report: Understanding Social Media Use in Recruiting*, based on the survey responses of more than 160,000 Bullhorn recruiter participants (33% were North American). The report revealed that organizational recruiters were "relying heavily on LinkedIn™" (p. 3) and of the social media sites Facebook, LinkedIn™ and Twitter, "LinkedIn™ received more views than jobs posted on Twitter and Facebook put together" (p. 3). Bullhorn Reach also noted that recruiters' use of LinkedIn™ has increased since 2011. For example, in 2011, 48% of recruiters used LinkedIn™ as opposed to 64% of recruiters in 2012. In 2013, 97% of recruiters report using LinkedIn™. Additionally, few recruiters were connected to all three social media networks (approximately 12%).

As an employee or job seeker, you will likely find yourself using a professional social networking site to promote your abilities, competencies, experiences and skills to potential employers and colleagues. If social media is used appropriately then users are presented with a variety of opportunities (Decarie 2010). However, if job seekers don't use social media they are at a disadvantage in securing employment (Wetsch 2012). Furthermore, there are also negative implications for users who inappropriately use social media and communication (e.g., as seen by the data reported by Jovite 2010). Consequently, the way in which an individual communicates with social media significantly impacts the user's ability to advance professionally. This difficulty is encountered due to a lack of communication competency skills that led to the formation of an impression that was unfavorable to others. Given the significant use of LinkedIn™ as a professional tool for social networking in relation to recruiting employees, some communication suggestions for LinkedIn™ profiles are provided later in this chapter. However, the concepts and information presented here also apply to other social networking sites. Since recruiters and organizational hiring professionals frequently Google or perform an Internet search on a potential job candidate, it is strongly recommended that you apply the material presented here to the other social media sites you utilize as well.

## 6.3     Social Media and the Communication Process

As previously noted, all communication interactions consist of the communication elements; however, the effectiveness of communication is contingent upon the effectiveness of the channel selected and the competencies of the sender. We've learned that channels vary in their ability to provide feedback as well as to convey verbal and nonverbal messages. An additional area of difference concerns the receiver and/ or the number of receivers that can be involved in a communication interaction. For example, if using voicemail, it is likely that you (the sender) will send a message to one receiver. If using email, you can send the same message to one or several recipients. However, if communicating with social media, the number of recipients (who are actually in your network or potential network) who can obtain a message is a far greater number of people than the channels previously examined. Furthermore, a message may not be sent to a receiver(s) intentionally. For example, social media sites allow users to be followed or searched. In these instances, the user did not email or directly contact a potential message recipient about their social media profile/site. Regardless, a message was still conveyed to a viewer based on the content of the user's site. Therefore, social media, as a communication channel, is different from other channels of communication due to audience/recipient size as well as the user's ability to be followed and/ or searched. Consequently, this section of the text focuses on user profiles as opposed to others aspects of social media. When networking on social media sites thinking about the communication process and the implications of communication acts continues to be important. Figure 2 restates the communication elements as they relate to social media interactions.

| Element | Definition |
|---|---|
| Sender/Receiver | Individuals, groups or communities interacting in the social media site(s). |
| Channel [computer-mediated and social media] | The method in which the message is conveyed – verbally and nonverbally via social media. (e.g., text, video, photographs through Facebook, Twitter or LinkedIn™, among others). |
| Message | Verbal and nonverbal content the sender(s) and receiver(s) convey to one another and their communities or network members. |
| Feedback | Messages sent between the senders and receivers involved in the social media (e.g., posts, endorsements, recommendations, tags). |
| Noise | Anything experienced by the sender and/or the receiver that impedes the receipt or decoding of a message. |
| Context | The circumstances involved in the social media act (e.g., site, message, intent). |

**Figure 2:** Communication Elements Applied to Social Media

When discussing social media here, special consideration is given to message construction and amount of information as well as the channel of communication. Therefore, as a communicator, you must carefully consider how you will use the power of social media to create the impression you want others to have of you (particularly by way of user profiles). This will require a communication strategy and goal. As with the other channels of communication presented in this text, contemplation about the impression you wish to leave along with the personal brand desired is required. Social media allows you to illustrate the skills employers desire in employees. As previously noted, some of these skills consist of interpersonal aptitude, written and oral communication abilities, critical thinking skills and technological competencies, to name a few. If done correctly, social media can help you to develop the image you want. This will require you to consider different variables in addition to the communication elements and theories you've learned until now.

### 6.3.1    Social Media Variables of Consideration

Some of the communication competencies required of effective email, voicemail construction and video chats (if posting video to your site) also apply to social media. For example, a social media user must consider, message appropriateness in relation to language, rules, syntax, and organizational structure as well as message content, length, and delivery based upon the social media tools you wish to utilize. As with any communication channel, there are some variables to consider that impact the effectiveness of that channel. For social media, self-disclosure is one of the primary variables of concern given its role in job seeking and HR searches aimed at increasing candidate pools as well as reference checking. Consequently, self-disclosure, who discloses, when and why disclosure occurs along with the implications of self-disclosure are discussed next.

#### 6.3.1.1  Self-disclosure

*Self-disclosure* is the communication act of a sender sharing personal and professional information about him/herself with a recipient. The message conveyed is not typically known by the other person and requires the sender to divulge private information to the receiver. Self-disclosure is influenced by a variety of factors related to your personality and individual characteristics. These characteristics determine how likely it is that self-disclosure will occur. For example, research by McCroskey and Wheeless (1976) reveals that people who are very sociable and extroverted are more likely to disclose more information to others than people who are less sociable and more introverted. It appears that people who are confident in their communication abilities as well as who they are as a person are more comfortable self-disclosing than people who are less confident.

Other personal variables that influence self-disclosure are culture and gender. Culture dictates the rules regarding how individuals interact in societies. Those rules are shaped by a group's attitudes, beliefs and values about men and women (masculinity, feminity), context, power and individualism or collectivism. Barnlund (1989) and Hall and Hall (1987) note that cultures that value masculine qualities tend to view disclosure as a weakness resulting in less self-disclosure occurring and Sprecher (1987) found that women disclose more information than men do.

In terms of the communication elements, the message recipient as well as the channel used to communicate also influence whether or not a sender self-discloses information to a recipient. For example:

- self-disclosure occurs more in small groups than large ones.
- it is more likely that a sender will disclose more information to a recipient(s) that he/she likes (Derlega, Winstead, Wong & Greenspan 1987).
- if the receiver trusts the person to whom he/she is going to self-disclose to then more disclosure will likely occur (Wheeless & Grotz 1977).
- if an individual discloses to a recipient, it is likely the recipient will reciprocate and self-disclose accordingly (Berg & Archer 1983).
- the topic/message content influences whether or not disclosure occurs.
- the communication channel influences self-disclosure; it is more likely that people will disclose information online than in other communication channels (Suler 2004; Levine 2000; Joinson 2001)

**6.3.1.2 Self-disclosure and Computer-Mediated Communication: The Online Disinhibition Effect**

The *online disinhibition effect* is a communication phenomenon that refers to the "things that people say and do in cyberspace that they normally wouldn't do in the face-to-face world" (Suler 2004, p. 321). Suler identifies six factors that influence the online disinhibition effect: anonymity, invisibility, asynchronicity, solipsistic introjection, dissociative imagination, and minimization of status and authority. Figure 3 defines these terms according to Suler's (2004) research and social media use.

Anonymity - user names and profile information doesn't reveal with whom you are interacting.

Invisibility - online, text-based evironments lack physical presence; communicators can't see each other; lurkers can also exist.

Asynchonicity - much online interaction doesn't occur at the same time.

Solipsistic Introjection - personal boundaries get blurred due to missing nonverbal cues leading to the sender creating a persona/character for the other user.

Disassociatieve Imagination - online presence is separate from real identity.

Minimalization of Status and Authority - authority is diminished due to lack of nonverbal cues that are associated to it (e.g., symbols/attire).

**Figure 3:** Factors Influencing the Online Disinhibition Effect (Suler 2004)

Pertaining to the online disinhibition effect, Levine (2000) and Joinson (2001) reported that self-disclosure occurs more quickly and at higher levels of intimacy online than it does in face-to-face environments. Consequently, when engaging in social media use, be mindful of how these factors may impact you as a communicator. For example, when interacting online, it's very likely that a person doesn't *really* know with whom they are interacting. This is compounded by the fact that much of our online community engagement still occurs in isolation (e.g., you access your social media site from home, phone or office physically separated from those you are communicating with in the site) resulting in our never being physically present with the online group/person we are engaging. Because we lack nonverbal communication cues and most social media (text based) sites lack media richness, we assign attributes and characteristics to the people we communicate with online. Thereby creating an online identity for our self and those we interact with in cyberspace. This impacts our judgment about communication behaviors in online spaces and can result in inappropriate messages to various users regardless of their organizational position or status.

### 6.3.1.3  Social Media Self-Disclosures

While online, people self-disclose information to others via multiple verbal and nonverbal messages. Below is a list of some of the ways in which individual's divulge information about themselves through their user profile or accounts when using social media:

- User name/name
- Contact Information
- Language used
- Information included in a site such as college attended, degrees possessed, résumé, skills, work experiences, or hobbies and special interests
- Groups or communities a user belongs to
- Photographs
- Images/Logos
- Groups or people followed
- Posted messages
- Frequency of posts
- Endorsements and recommendations
- Personal information (e.g., such as relationship status)

Social media, as a communication channel, is less media rich resulting in less social presence for its users. Consequently, users look for various verbal and nonverbal clues to help them interpret what another social media user is communicating. Viewer attention turns to photographs and images as well as groups followed and endorsements/recommendations possessed by a user to create that communicator's identity. Because we disclose information about ourselves so easily, naturally, and unknowingly, it is especially important that social media users have a heightened sensitivity about how they communicate online, what they communicate and the ways in which these isolated interactions, missing nonverbal cues, and time impact the communication process and interpretation of messages by others. When a user (e.g. HR recruiter) reviews social media content about others (e.g., potential job candidate), meanings are assigned to those messages based upon the viewer's frame of reference (chapter 2) in relation to the self-disclosures on the user's profile. Consequently, given that meanings reside in people, understanding the factors associated with the online disinhibition effect can assist you in preventing miscommunication between you and others. In social media exchanges, the interpretations and impressions you form of other individuals as well as how others interpret and form impressions about you are impacted by the factors discussed above.

## 6.4     Communicating Competently on LinkedIn™

To further advance your understanding of communicating with social media, Figure 4 outlines some suggestions for communicating more effectively with LinkedIn™.

Select an appropriate user name.

Create a complete profile with keywords.

Frequently change and update your profile

Include a photograph of you and images that reflect the impressions you want others to have of you.

Select people and groups you wish to follow carefully. Who and what you follow communicates something about you to others.

Request and include endorsements, recommendations and evidence of your skills.  Be mindful of who you solicit endorsements and recommendations from. Be honest about your skills and evidence.

Respond to others respectfully and thoughtfully.

**Figure 4:** Suggestions for Communicating via LinkedIn™

## 6.5    Impression management, Personal Branding and Social Media

Social media, as a communication channel, allows for users to interact in a network or community of individuals with similar interests. This communication advantage can also increase the likelihood of your ability to convey the impression you seek to form in others. Consequently, with this form of communication comes increased communication complexity that also increases the communication competences interactants need to effectively engage in various professional online exchanges. To create a positive impression on others and to reflect the professional brand you desire, you must attend to several verbal and nonverbal communication behaviors. These cues consist of language choices, writing and tone as well as photographs, images, endorsements and recommendations. In addition to these variables, attention must be given to the artifacts that support a user's skill set and effective key words that generate interest in an individual when recruiters search for potential candidates. The user must also be aware of the factors associated with the online disinhibition effect and self-disclosure to enhance the likelihood that they are communicating with who they intend to and sharing appropriate information with another while also understanding that the online presence created is not separate from their real world identity. There are many advantages to communicating with social media given the networking capability and the use of this tool by organizational recruiters. However, there are some disadvantages that may result in your inability to obtain employment or professional advancement due to inappropriate or misunderstood content. Using the information outlined in this chapter should help you to enhance the likelihood of your ability to communicate effectively and professionally in social media contexts.

## 6.6    Summary

In this chapter you have learned:

- Social media is a form of digital communication used in interpersonal and organizational settings that permits a sender to interact with multiple receivers, in a network or community, to share messages via text, audio and video.
- Three of the most common social media sites are Facebook, LinkedIn™ and Twitter.
- Recruiters examine social media sites to identify potential candidates of interest for employment as well as to reference check individuals.
- The communication elements and process apply to social media interactions.
- A social media user should be aware of the online disinhibition effect and self-disclosure.
- There are a variety of mistakes that senders make when communicating via social media.
- Each social media message you generate creates and recreates the impression that others have of you as well as the brand you wish to possess today and tomorrow.

**Key Terms**

| | |
|---|---|
| Social Media | Twitter |
| Facebook | Self-disclosure |
| LinkedIn™ | Disinhibition effect |

**Reflection to Action**

1. Locate two LinkedIn™ users and examine their profiles. While examining the user profiles, take notes regarding the following:

    a) The kinds of information the user included.

    b) The skills listed.

    c) Professional and volunteer experiences posted.

    d) The kind of information omitted.

2. Did the LinkedIn™ user adhere to the information presented in this chapter? If not, what suggestions would you give him/her?

3. Establish a LinkedIn™ account (assuming you don't have one) and apply the content outlined in this chapter.

4. Google or Bing yourself to see what information is revealed. What did you find?

5. If you have social media accounts, do they reflect the professional image and impression you want others to have of you? If not, what do you plan to do about that?

6. For future professional endeavors involving social media, describe the process you will use to prepare for this channel of communication and interaction.

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## Communication Elements Checklist

**Prior to communicating with others in professional contexts, consider the element checklist below.**

| Element | Questions to consider: | Questions to consider: | Questions to consider: | Questions to consider: |
|---------|------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|
| Sender | Who is your audience? | Are they male or female? Age? Education level? Frame of reference? | Is the recipient your supervisor/ subordinate/ customer/new contact? | |
| Channel | What channel will you use to carry your message? | Why this channel? Is it the most appropriate? | Does the channel permit sharing with others? | What are the strengths and limitations of the channel? |
| Message | What is the purpose of the message? | Is the message suitable for this channel? | Is the message confidential? | What is your level of self-disclosure? |
| Receiver | Who is your audience? | Is it one or more people? | Do you imagine the message being shared with others? | How is what you are conveying related to the receiver? |
| Feedback | Do you need feedback? | Have you requested feedback? | Did you include how and when you desire feedback? | |
| Noise | Are you distracted physically? | Are you distracted physiologically? | Are you distracted psychologically? | What are the specific factors creating this noise? |
| Context | What is the time you plan to communicate? | In what location do you plan interact? | What's the relationship between you and the receiver? | Are there any cultural differences you should be aware of? |

**Personal Branding: Identify the adjectives that align with the impression you want others to have of you.**

Accepting
Accessible
Accomplished
Accountable
Achieving
Active
Adaptable
Altruistic
Ambitious
Approachable
Articulate
Artistic
Balanced
Beautiful
Bold
Brainy
Brave
Bright
Business-like
Capable
Caring
Charismatic
Charitable Cognizant
Coherent Committed
Communicative Competent
Confident
Conscientious
Considerate
Contributive
Courteous
Dedicated Deliberate
Dependable
Determined
Diplomatic
Disciplined
Distinctive
Distinguished
Diverse
Driven
Dynamic

Earnest
Educated
Effective
Efficient
Energetic
Engaging
Enthusiastic
Ethical
Excellent Exceptional
Experienced
Fair
Faithful
Flexible
Focused
Forthright
Generous
Genuine
Helpful
Honest
Honorable
Industrious
Informative Informed
Innovative
Inquisitive Insightful
Intellectual
Intelligent
Knowledgeable
a Leader
Levelheaded
Magnanimous
Meticulous
Mindful
Moral
Motivated Motivating
Multi-disciplined
Noble
Observant
Open-minded
Optimal
Optimistic

Organized
Participative
Passionate
Perceptive
Persistent Pioneering
Polished
Positive
Powerful
Prepared Productive
Professional
Proficient
Progressive
Quality
Reliable
Rational
Reliable
Reputable
Resourceful
Responsive
Seasoned
Self-sufficient
Service-oriented
Sincere
Skillful
Smart
Sociable
Sophisticated
Stylish
Successful
Supportive
Tactful
Thoughtful
Trustworthy
Understanding
Valuable
Versatile
Visionary
Well-spoken
Wise

## Personal Branding Planning Document

**Responding to the list of questions below will assist you in developing your personal brand.**

1. What do you wish to accomplish professionally?
   a) What industry do you wish to enter?
   b) What kind of position do you wish to obtain?
   c) What sort of title are you pursuing?
2. What kind of education do you need to secure such a position?
3. What kind of skills do you need to be successful in this kind of work?
4. What kind of work or volunteer experiences do you need to obtain this kind of position?
5. What skills do you currently possess that align with the position?
6. Create a professional growth plan that contains the following elements:
   a) a vision statement regarding your future
   b) an education and skill plan for gaining these necessary aspects of the job
   c) a list of the current abilities and skills you possess
7. In terms of marketability and impression management, what impressions and perceptions do you wish to leave on others? HINT: Consider using the personal branding adjective list to assist you.
8. How will you use communication to create the tactical self-image you desire?
9. What communication skills do you need to develop to effectively launch the image you desire into your personal brand?

## Email Checklist

1. Does your email contain the following components?

| Component | Check Point 1 |
|---|---|
| To: | Is there a recipient?<br>Is the email address correct? |
| Cc: Copy | In addition to the initial recipient, are there any other individuals impacted by the email subject? Should they be included here? |
| Bcc: Blind Copy | Is there someone who should be blind copied on this email exchange? For example, should your supervisor be included? Have you Bcc'd someone who should not be included? |
| Subject: Email Topic | Is the email subject clearly stated? Is your name needed or a reference number required? |
| Greeting: Salutation | Does your email contain an appropriate greeting? Did you include a formal title? First name? |
| Opening: | Did you explain what the email is regarding? Why you are writing? Or how the topic is important to the reader? |
| Body: | Is the body comprehensive? Is it clear? Does it contain the main elements of the message? Is it an appropriate length – too long, too short? |
| Closing: | Does the email include information that directs the reader as to what should happen next? Is feedback required? |
| Signature: | Is your signature included? Your name and contact information? |

2. If an attachment is required, did you:
   a) Include the correct attachment?
   b) Appropriately name it so the receiver knows what the attachment pertains to?
   c) Refer to the attachment in the email message?
3. Is your email appropriate?
   a) Is the language appropriate?
   b) Is the tone appropriate?
   c) Did you comply with the email policies in your work place or related context?
   d) Does the email content and tone match the organizational structure?
4. Does the message reflect the impression you wish to leave on others?

## Voicemail Checklist

1. Prior to leaving a voicemail, did you…
   a) Consider the organizational structure?
   b) Consider who the recipient is?
   c) Verify you are contacting the correct person?
   d) Identify the purpose of the message? The goals you wish to obtain?
   e) Outline or write out your voicemail message?
   f) Rehearse your message at least twice before phoning?

2.  Does your voicemail contain?

| Component | Purpose |
|---|---|
| Greeting | A brief salutation to build rapport and convey to the recipient who you are. |
| Your contact information | Did you include your contact information at the beginning and end of the message? |
| Subject of call | Was the subject of the call conveyed to the recipient in a clear and concise way? |
| Relationship of the subject to the recipient | Did you explain why the topic is important or pertinent to the recipient? |
| Closing | Did you include your contact information again as well as what you want the recipient to do? |

3.  Did you pay special attention to the appropriateness of the message, content, language, and tone?
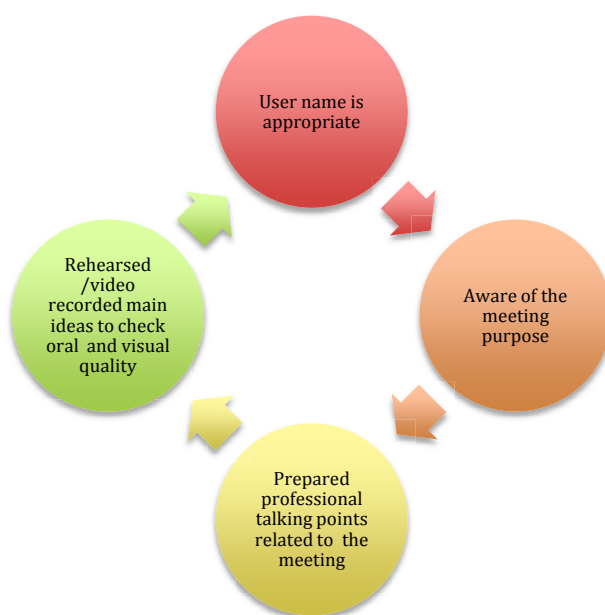
4.  Does the message reflect the impression you wish to leave on others?

## Video Chat Preparation Checklist

**Technology Checklist**

| | |
|---|---|
| Internet Access | |
| Connectivity Speed | |
| Mic/Audio Works | |
| Camera Angle | |
| Appropriate Device (mobile device vs. laptop/computer) | |
| Familiar with videoconferencing software | |

**Message Checklist**

**Nonverbal Message Preparation**

1. Have you examined the aspects of the environment that will be seen in the camera? Did you create an organized and clean space in the camera's view?
2. Did you remove objects and distractions from the immediate area to minimize the risk of doing other things while in the video chat?
3. Have you rehearsed/monitored your body movements and facial expressions to increase your awareness of how you communicate with these nonverbal body channels online?
4. Are you dressed professionally?

## LinkedIn™ Checklist

Did you select an appropriate user name?

Is your profile complete?
Are your keywords effective?

Do you frequently change and update your profile? How often?

Does your profile have a photograph of you? Is it a professional image?  What other graphics are included?

What groups/people do you follow? What's their reputation?

Does your profile include endorsements, recommendations and evidence of your skills?

Is the information on your site spell checked, grammatically correct and accurate?