Study Text

ICSA Certificate in Business Practice

BUSINESS COMMUNICATIONS

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ICSA
INTERNATIONAL

BUSINESS COMMUNICATIONS

ibam Certificate in Business Practice

Business Communications

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ibam

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Contents

How to Use this Study Text

All ibam study texts developed to support ibam's Certificate and Diploma in Business Practice follow a standard format and include a range of navigational, self-testing and illustrative features to help you get the most out of the text.

Each study text is divided into three main sections:

- introductory material
- the text itself, divided into parts and chapters
- additional reference material

What follows shows you how to find your way around the text and make the most of its features.

Introductory material

The ***Studying for the ibam Certificate and Diploma in Business Practice*** section gives an overview of the two programmes, how they fit into ibam's suite of qualifications, recommended study routes and guidance on the examinations. We recommend that you read this before starting on the text itself, and again as you approach revision and the examination itself.

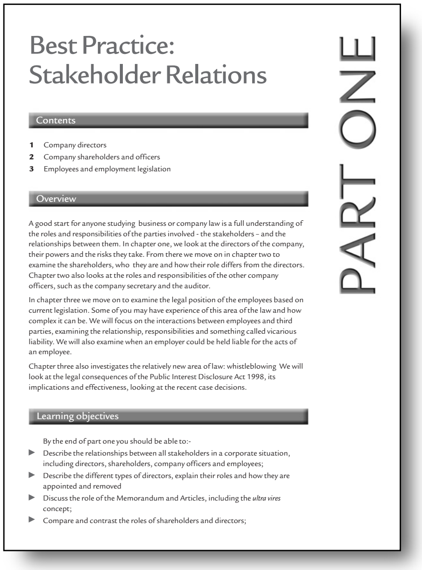
It is followed by the detailed module syllabus and an extended syllabus overview, which gives a more detailed outline of the syllabus, highlights key topics and concepts and provides guidance on how best to approach the module and guarantee success in the examination.

Where relevant, the introductory section may also include other material such as a list of acronyms or list of legal cases.

The text itself

Each text **part** opens with a list of chapters, an overview of the topics covered and learning outcomes specific to that part. This should help you break the material down into manageable sections for study.

Part openings also include a **case study** which will be used as a business scenario throughout the part to test understanding and help apply theory into practice.



Best Practice:
Stakeholder Relations

PART ONE

Contents

1 Company directors
2 Company shareholders and officers
3 Employees and employment legislation

Overview

A good start for anyone studying business or company law is a full understanding of the roles and responsibilities of the parties involved - the stakeholders – and the relationships between them. In chapter one, we look at the directors of the company, their powers and the risks they take. From there we move on in chapter two to examine the shareholders, who they are and how their role differs from the directors. Chapter two also looks at the roles and responsibilities of the other company officers, such as the company secretary and the auditor.

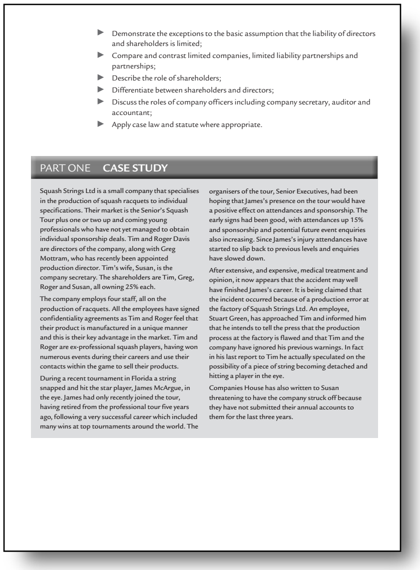
In chapter three we move on to examine the legal position of the employees based on current legislation. Some of you may have experience of this area of the law and how complex it can be. We will focus on the interactions between employees and third parties, examining the relationship, responsibilities and something called vicarious liability. We will also examine when an employer could be held liable for the acts of an employee.

Chapter three also investigates the relatively new area of law: whistleblowing We will look at the legal consequences of the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998, its implications and effectiveness, looking at the recent case decisions.

Learning objectives

By the end of part one you should be able to:-

- Describe the relationships between all stakeholders in a corporate situation, including directors, shareholders, company officers and employees;
- Describe the different types of directors, explain their roles and how they are appointed and removed
- Discuss the role of the Memorandum and Articles, including the *ultra vires* concept;
- Compare and contrast the roles of shareholders and directors;



- Demonstrate the exceptions to the basic assumption that the liability of directors and shareholders is limited;
- Compare and contrast limited companies, limited liability partnerships and partnerships;
- Describe the role of shareholders;
- Differentiate between shareholders and directors;
- Discuss the roles of company officers including company secretary, auditor and accountant;
- Apply case law and statute where appropriate.

PART ONE **CASE STUDY**

Squash Strings Ltd is a small company that specialises in the production of squash racquets to individual specifications. Their market is the Senior's Squash Tour plus one or two up and coming young professionals who have not yet managed to obtain individual sponsorship deals. Tim and Roger Davis are directors of the company, along with Greg Mottram, who has recently been appointed production director. Tim's wife, Susan, is the company secretary. The shareholders are Tim, Greg, Roger and Susan, all owning 25% each.

The company employs four staff, all on the production of racquets. All the employees have signed confidentiality agreements as Tim and Roger feel that their product is manufactured in a unique manner and this is their key advantage in the market. Tim and Roger are ex-professional squash players, having won numerous events during their careers and use their contacts within the game to sell their products.

During a recent tournament in Florida a string snapped and hit the star player, James McArgue, in the eye. James had only recently joined the tour, having retired from the professional tour five years ago, following a very successful career which included many wins at top tournaments around the world. The organisers of the tour, Senior Executives, had been hoping that James's presence on the tour would have a positive effect on attendances and sponsorship. The early signs had been good, with attendances up 15% and sponsorship and potential future event enquiries also increasing. Since James's injury attendances have started to slip back to previous levels and enquiries have slowed down.

After extensive, and expensive, medical treatment and opinion, it now appears that the accident may well have finished James's career. It is being claimed that the incident occurred because of a production error at the factory of Squash Strings Ltd. An employee, Stuart Green, has approached Tim and informed him that he intends to tell the press that the production process at the factory is flawed and that Tim and the company have ignored his previous warnings. In fact in his last report to Tim he actually speculated on the possibility of a piece of string becoming detached and hitting a player in the eye.

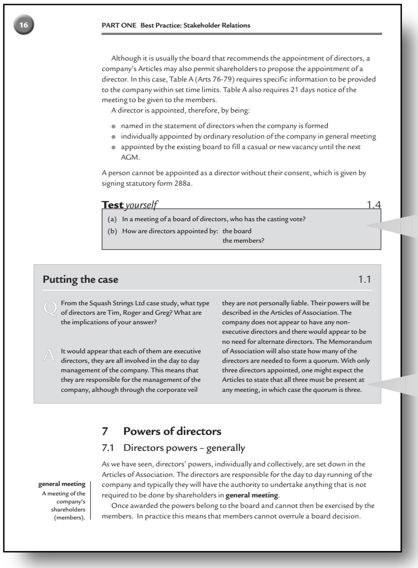
Companies House has also written to Susan threatening to have the company struck off because they have not submitted their annual accounts to them for the last three years.

Every **chapter** opens with a list of topics covered and an introduction to what follows.

Features

The text is enhanced by a range of illustrative and self- testing features to assist understanding and to help you prepare for the examinations. Each feature is presented in a standard format so that you will become familiar with how you can use them in your study.

Each chapter ends with a summary, and each part with a series of practice questions based on the kind of questions you will face in the exams. Answers to the practice questions are given at the end of the text.



16 PART ONE Best Practice: Stakeholder Relations

Although it is usually the board that recommends the appointment of directors, a company's Articles may also permit shareholders to propose the appointment of a director. In this case, Table A (Arts 76-79) requires specific information to be provided to the company within set time limits. Table A also requires 21 days notice of the meeting to be given to the members.

A director is appointed, therefore, by being:

- named in the statement of directors when the company is formed
- individually appointed by ordinary resolution of the company in general meeting
- appointed by the existing board to fill a casual or new vacancy until the next AGM.

A person cannot be appointed as a director without their consent, which is given by signing statutory form 288a.

Test *yourself* 1.4

(a) In a meeting of a board of directors, who has the casting vote?
(b) How are directors appointed by: the board / the members?

Putting the case 1.1

Q From the Squash Strings Ltd case study, what type of directors are Tim, Roger and Greg? What are the implications of your answer?

A It would appear that each of them are executive directors, they are all involved in the day to day management of the company. This means that they are responsible for the management of the company, although through the corporate veil they are not personally liable. Their powers will be described in the Articles of Association. The company does not appear to have any non-executive directors and there would appear to be no need for alternate directors. The Memorandum of Association will also state how many of the directors are needed to form a quorum. With only three directors appointed, one might expect the Articles to state that all three must be present at any meeting, in which case the quorum is three.

7 Powers of directors

7.1 Directors powers – generally

general meeting A meeting of the company's shareholders (members).

As we have seen, directors' powers, individually and collectively, are set down in the Articles of Association. The directors are responsible for the day to day running of the company and typically they will have the authority to undertake anything that is not required to be done by shareholders in **general meeting**.

Once awarded the powers belong to the board and cannot then be exercised by the members. In practice this means that members cannot overrule a board decision.

Test yourself

Short, revision-style questions to help you re-cap on core information and concepts.

Putting the case

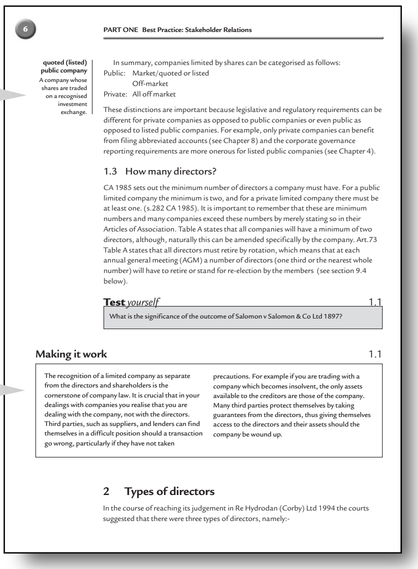
Short questions, plus answers, based on the part opening case, designed to help you apply theory to practice.

Marginal definitions

Marginal definitions explain key terms and concepts.

Making it work

Making it work examples use real-life scenarios to illustrate and bring theory to life.



6 PART ONE Best Practice: Stakeholder Relations

quoted (listed) public company A company whose shares are traded on a recognised investment exchange.

In summary, companies limited by shares can be categorised as follows:
Public: Market/quoted or listed
Off-market
Private: All off market

These distinctions are important because legislative and regulatory requirements can be different for private companies as opposed to public companies or even public as opposed to listed public companies. For example, only private companies can benefit from filing abbreviated accounts (see Chapter 8) and the corporate governance reporting requirements are more onerous for listed public companies (see Chapter 4).

1.3 How many directors?

CA 1985 sets out the minimum number of directors a company must have. For a public limited company the minimum is two, and for a private limited company there must be at least one. (s.282 CA 1985). It is important to remember that these are minimum numbers and many companies exceed these numbers by merely stating so in their Articles of Association. Table A states that all companies will have a minimum of two directors, although, naturally this can be amended specifically by the company. Art.73 Table A states that all directors must retire by rotation, which means that at each annual general meeting (AGM) a number of directors (one third or the nearest whole number) will have to retire or stand for re-election by the members (see section 9.4 below).

Test *yourself* 1.1

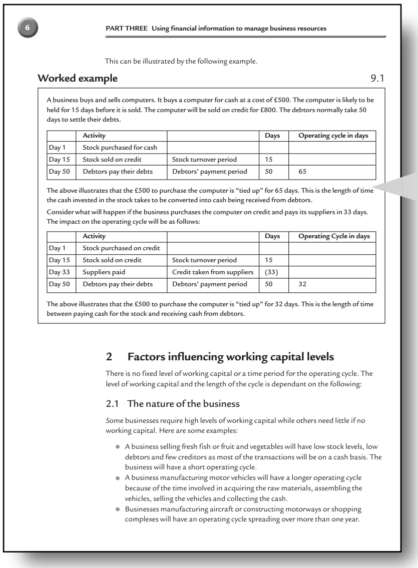
What is the significance of the outcome of Salomon v Salomon & Co Ltd 1897?

Making it work 1.1

The recognition of a limited company as separate from the directors and shareholders is the cornerstone of company law. It is crucial that in your dealings with companies you realise that you are dealing with the company, not with the directors. Third parties, such as suppliers, and lenders can find themselves in a difficult position should a transaction go wrong, particularly if they have not taken precautions. For example if you are trading with a company which becomes insolvent, the only assets available to the creditors are those of the company. Many third parties protect themselves by taking guarantees from the directors, thus giving themselves access to the directors and their assets should the company be wound up.

2 Types of directors

In the course of reaching its judgement in Re Hydrodan (Corby) Ltd 1994 the courts suggested that there were three types of directors, namely:-



6 PART THREE Using financial information to manage business resources

This can be illustrated by the following example.

Worked example 9.1

A business buys and sells computers. It buys a computer for cash at a cost of £500. The computer is likely to be held for 15 days before it is sold. The computer will be sold on credit for £800. The debtors normally take 50 days to settle their debts.

	Activity		Days	Operating cycle in days
Day 1	Stock purchased for cash			
Day 15	Stock sold on credit	Stock turnover period	15	
Day 50	Debtors pay their debts	Debtors' payment period	50	65

The above illustrates that the £500 to purchase the computer is "tied up" for 65 days. This is the length of time the cash invested in the stock takes to be converted into cash being received from debtors.

Consider what will happen if the business purchases the computer on credit and pays its suppliers in 33 days. The impact on the operating cycle will be as follows:

	Activity		Days	Operating Cycle in days
Day 1	Stock purchased on credit			
Day 15	Stock sold on credit	Stock turnover period	15	
Day 33	Suppliers paid	Credit taken from suppliers	(33)	
Day 50	Debtors pay their debts	Debtors' payment period	50	32

The above illustrates that the £500 to purchase the computer is "tied up" for 32 days. This is the length of time between paying cash for the stock and receiving cash from debtors.

2 Factors influencing working capital levels

There is no fixed level of working capital or a time period for the operating cycle. The level of working capital and the length of the cycle is dependant on the following:

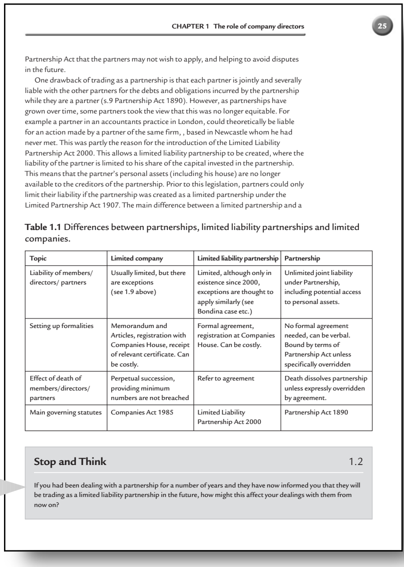
2.1 The nature of the business

Some businesses require high levels of working capital while others need little if no working capital. Here are some examples:

- A business selling fresh fish or fruit and vegetables will have low stock levels, low debtors and few creditors as most of the transactions will be on a cash basis. The business will have a short operating cycle.
- A business manufacturing motor vehicles will have a longer operating cycle because of the time involved in acquiring the raw materials, assembling the vehicles, selling the vehicles and collecting the cash.
- Businesses manufacturing aircraft or constructing motorways or shopping complexes will have an operating cycle spreading over more than one year.

Worked examples

Worked examples are crucial to an understanding of accountancy-based modules. Questions and answers allow you to work through the calculation as part of your study.



CHAPTER 1 The role of company directors 25

Partnership Act that the partners may not wish to apply, and helping to avoid disputes in the future.

One drawback of trading as a partnership is that each partner is jointly and severally liable with the other partners for the debts and obligations incurred by the partnership while they are a partner (s.9 Partnership Act 1890). However, as partnerships have grown over time, some partners took the view that this was no longer equitable. For example a partner in an accountants practice in London, could theoretically be liable for an action made by a partner of the same firm, , based in Newcastle whom he had never met. This was partly the reason for the introduction of the Limited Liability Partnership Act 2000. This allows a limited liability partnership to be created, where the liability of the partner is limited to his share of the capital invested in the partnership. This means that the partner's personal assets (including his house) are no longer available to the creditors of the partnership. Prior to this legislation, partners could only limit their liability if the partnership was created as a limited partnership under the Limited Partnership Act 1907. The main difference between a limited partnership and a

Table 1.1 Differences between partnerships, limited liability partnerships and limited companies.

Topic	Limited company	Limited liability partnership	Partnership
Liability of members/ directors/ partners	Usually limited, but there are exceptions (see 1.9 above)	Limited, although only in existence since 2000, exceptions are thought to apply similarly (see Bondina case etc.)	Unlimited joint liability under Partnership, including potential access to personal assets.
Setting up formalities	Memorandum and Articles, registration with Companies House, receipt of relevant certificate. Can be costly.	Formal agreement, registration at Companies House. Can be costly.	No formal agreement needed, can be verbal. Bound by terms of Partnership Act unless specifically overridden
Effect of death of members/directors/ partners	Perpetual succession, providing minimum numbers are not breached	Refer to agreement	Death dissolves partnership unless expressly overridden by agreement.
Main governing statutes	Companies Act 1985	Limited Liability Partnership Act 2000	Partnership Act 1890

Stop and Think 1.2

If you had been dealing with a partnership for a number of years and they have now informed you that they will be trading as a limited liability partnership in the future, how might this affect your dealings with them from now on?

Stop and Think

Stop and Think boxes encourage you to think how your own experiences or common business scenarios relate to the topic under discussion.

Reference material

The text ends with a range of additional guidance and reference materials.

In addition to answers to practice questions, the text also includes a sample examination paper and suggested answers so that you can test your understanding of the subject against what will be expected of you in the examination.

Other reference material includes a glossary of key terms and a directory of further reading and web resources.

Studying for the ibam Certificate and Diploma in Business Practice

The new ibam Certificate and Diploma in Business Practice is designed to offer students a solid foundation in the principles and practice of contemporary business management.

The programmes provide well-rounded and practical professional business qualifications for students who may already be employed or seeking employment in a range of business organisations – large companies, small businesses, public sector bodies or voluntary organisations.

The ibam Certificate and Diploma are each made up of four modules which can be studied full-time or part-time, by distance learning or self-study. The two levels provide the opportunity to earn an award from an internationally recognised professional body, which will enable you to continue your studies either through ibam, or by moving on to a further course of study, such as an honours degree.

In completing the eight modules which comprise the ibam Certificate and Diploma you are completing programmes which are broadly the equivalent of the first two years of UK three-year undergraduate degree, or a Foundation degree without the work-based component. As these are professional examinations, candidates will be expected to demonstrate knowledge, understanding and the ability to apply at least some of the knowledge acquired.

Once you have successfully passed the four modules which make up the ibam Certificate you will be entitled to use the designatory letters Cert. IBAM and after successfully completing the four modules which make up the ibam Diploma, you will be entitled to use the designatory letters Dip. IBAM.

Throughout your study of the Certificate or Diploma modules, you can rely on the integrity of the quality assurance process, predicated on more than 100 years' rigorous examinations offered with integrity by a senior international chartered body.

Themes and core concepts

You will be aware of a number of themes which are threaded through both the Certificate and the Diploma. These themes are based around:

- governance
- ethics and integrity
- best practice.

The Certificate and Diploma are designed to encourage reflective and effective business acumen delivered from an ethical standpoint. Both qualifications are structured to be of practical use in all types of business organisation, including small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), plcs, not-for-profit organisations, (NFPs), charities and local government.

Business Communications underpins all modules at Certificate and Diploma level.

The themes outlined in Business Environment (Cert) find their link in Business Law in Practice as well as in Marketing, Business Finance and Business Strategy and Planning.

Accounting for Business (Cert) is expanded in Business Finance but also in Business Law in Practice, Marketing and Business Strategy and Planning. Business Management links through to Business Strategy and Planning and Marketing. Business Environment underpins all other modules and links through to all of them.

Studying for the ibam certificate and diploma

The ibam study texts have been especially written to support candidates studying for the ibam Certificate and Diploma in Business Practice. All material within each study text for a particular module can be examined. The style of the study text draws on case studies and real-life examples to give candidates a strong feel for the practical application of relevant knowledge to the workplace. Detailed syllabus overviews included in each of the texts give advice and guidance to students regarding approaching study of each module and the particular requirements of the examination.

Recommended study routes

You can work through the modules at your own pace and in different study combinations, however we strongly recommend the following pattern:

- Certificate
  Examination Session One: Business Communications with Business Environment
  Examination Session Two: Business Management with Accounting for Business

- Diploma
  Examination Session One: Business Law in Practice with Marketing
  Examination Session Two: Business Finance with Business Strategy and Planning

Assessment

The examinations reflect the practical approach which underpins the modules. Both the Certificate and Diploma examinations contain a mix of short questions from any part of the syllabus and longer questions based on a case study which will have been issued prior to the exam.

Each examination paper is divided into two sections. Candidates can expect questions from any part of the syllabus. In section A, compulsory short-answer questions test your understanding and knowledge across the breadth of the syllabus, but not depth. You should aim to spend only a few minutes on each of these questions, and it is acceptable to give your answers in bullet points. It is not necessary in the short-answer questions to provide essay style answers.

Section B contains questions on a case study.

Certificate

The examination paper is two hours long, plus 15 minutes reading time. In Section A you are required to answer a set of compulsory questions which carry either 2 or 4 marks, making a total of 40 marks. In Section B you are required to answer two multi-part questions, each worth 30 marks, from a choice of five. Each part is worth 5, 10 or 15 marks.

Look carefully at the timing for the paper and take care that you allocate your time appropriately. You need only spend a few minutes on each of the Section A questions (2.5 minutes on a 2-mark questions and just over five minutes for 4-mark questions). In Section B we suggest you set aside approximately 35 minutes per 30-mark question as follows:

5 mark Section B question:	around 6 minutes
10 mark Section B question	around 11 minutes
15 mark Section B question	around 18 minutes

Diploma

The Diploma examinations are three hours long. Each examination comprises ten short-answer questions in Section A and three questions from a choice of five in Section B. Section A questions are worth 2 or 3 marks each. You should aim to spend around 3.5 minutes on a 2-mark question and no more than 5.5 minutes on a 3-mark question. For questions in Section B, you should allocate 45 minutes for the whole question, split as follows:

5 mark Section B questions	around 9 minutes
10 mark Section B questions	around 14 minutes
15 mark Section B questions	around 22 minutes

Tackling case studies

The case studies in Part B of the examination are based on real-life scenarios. This gives candidates the opportunity to demonstrate and apply their knowledge in business situations so that they can be assessed in as practical a manner as possible.

The case study will be available on the website six weeks before the date of the examinations to enable candidates and tuition providers to research the case study and prepare to answer on any aspect across the entire syllabus.

Additionally, the case study will be provided on the examination paper.

When accessing the case study, candidates should bear in mind that the Chief Examiner attempts to ensure that the questions based on the case study cover the whole syllabus. When faced by a case study, many students try to predict the questions which will arise. This is unwise and can add to the stress in the exam room when the questions you have prepared don't appear! A more reliable method is to consider the topics covered by the case study in relation to the study text and use this to try to identify the broad syllabus areas to which the Chief Examiner has referred. If you are familiar with and, most importantly, understand fully the study text, then you should be able to answer the questions in the case study.

It is worth remembering that the Chief Examiner has made considerable efforts in producing the case study and the questions based on it. In practice, this means that you must remember to refer to the case study in each answer to each question. The Chief Examiner is looking to see that you understand the practical implications of the material you have learned from the text and any candidate who can bring relevant experience to an answer will gain marks. The relevant experience to which you refer can have been obtained in employment or in your private life, or it could be something you have read about and can relate to this scenario. However, you must always remember to relate your experience to the scenario outlined in the case study.

In summary, examiners are looking for answers that are expressed in candidates' own words, that demonstrate understanding and apply the relevant knowledge to the question being asked. Candidates should read all questions carefully and answer all parts. Do not reproduce everything you know about a topic. Tailor your answer to the context and requirements of the question.

We hope you enjoy studying with ibam.

Good luck!

The Business Communications Syllabus

Position of the module in overall syllabus

- The 'Business Communications' module at ibam Certificate level is one of four areas of activity considered essential for those seeking a foundation level qualification in business practice.
- This module will provide a sound underpinning for the ibam Diploma level module 'Marketing'.

Aims

- This module examines the many types of communication used in business organisations and is designed to ensure that students gain an awareness of the different ways business communication is achieved and practised.
- The module starts with the theory of communication and then moves on to the workplace, where both verbal and written communication are examined. It concludes with an examination of how IT has revolutionised the ways in which we all communicate.

Learning outcomes

On successful completion of this module, candidates will be able to:

- Understand the importance of choosing the most appropriate method(s) of communication for business tasks.
- Make informed choices from a wide range of communication techniques.
- Understand the possible impact of different forms of communication in business.
- Recognise the barriers and aids to communication in an organisational context.
- Identify the most effective and appropriate communication techniques in a variety of settings such as meetings, interviews, dealing with clients, reports and press releases.
- Identify the benefits that can accrue from the use of IT, and begin to appreciate the ethical dilemmas involved in its use.

Syllabus content

Communication Theory 10%

- What is communication?
- Why do we communicate? – Need for communication. Objectives of communication.
- How do we communicate? – Process of communication. Elements of communication: sender; medium; message; recipient; feedback; channels.

- Means/methods of communication.
- Choosing appropriate communication methods.
- Effective communication.

Communication in the Workplace 15%

- Introduction.
- Organisational communications.
- Customers and clients.
- Marketing.

Oral Communication 30%

- Introduction.
- Meetings – committees, business, interviews, seminars, conferences.
- Public speaking.
- Telephone.
- Briefing/giving instructions.
- Presentations.
- Persuasion.
- Negotiations.

Written and Numeric Communication 25%

- Introduction.
- The writing process.
- Forms of written and numeric communication – business plans, reports, mission statements, letters, agendas, minutes and press releases.
- Numeric communications.
- Choosing appropriate numeric formats.
- Records management and retrieval systems.

Communication and IT 20%

- Introduction – context and IT revolution.
- Challenges and risks.
- Effects of IT.
- Benefits of IT.
- Problems of IT.
- Other – fax, mobile phones, voicemail, word processing, emails and internet.

The syllabus explained

Communication Theory 10%

- A formal definition of communication is 'the process by which information is passed between individuals and/or organisations by means of previously agreed symbols'. It is not restricted to one-to-one situations, but can take place when an individual addresses a large number of people. Nor is communication restricted to that which can be conveyed with language alone – visual signals such as body language, and noises other than the recognisable spoken word, together with tone, speed, volume and pitch, can also play a part.

- Communication is always a two-way process, whatever form it takes. The 'receiver' – the listener or reader – always supplies the 'sender' – the speaker or writer – with a response – *feedback*. Feedback tells the sender whether or not the *message* (the information, instruction, etc. the sender wishes to convey) has been received and understood.
- For successful communication to take place, the sender has to take into account a number of factors about the way the message is to be conveyed, and about the intended receiver. When a message is to be sent it has to be *encoded*. This involves choosing the appropriate 'code' or language – appropriate to the skills of the receiver, but also to the *channel* (also called *medium*) used. The channel may be subject to *noise* or interference, which reduces the quality or strength of the message. Noise can be external, such as a bad telephone line or a faint copy, or internal, such as preoccupation with something else, a bad headache or even a dislike of the sender.
- On receipt, the receiver has to *decode* or interpret the message, at which point any one of a number of *barriers* may operate, such as the message not being in the receiver's native language.

Communication in the Workplace 15%

- Before embarking on a study of the more practical aspects of the subject, it is useful to set communication for business in the context of the workplace.
- The ability to communicate at work is important, however few of us are formally trained or educated in the necessary skills. Managers, it has been found, spend up to 90% of their time talking to others, with a third of their time spent in one-to-one meetings. In any context, but especially in the business one, preparation is the key to success. Written or spoken, communication needs to be justified, planned and checked. There are differences between written and spoken communication, stemming, perhaps, from the fact that we learn to speak before we learn to write and that we learn to speak from our parents in an informal and social way, whereas we learn to write from our teachers and other educators in a formal way. Written or spoken, however, clarity of meaning is paramount.
- Much of the detail of communication theory is directly applicable when communication in the workplace is being studied. Concepts of hierarchy and authority and of organisation and governance are seen to affect the way communication is encouraged or discouraged, the way information flows, whether upwards, downwards, or both, and the presence of barriers and filters and whether there are ways to overcome them.
- The workplace context also takes into account negotiation, customer care, complaint handling and marketing research and planning, all from the viewpoint

of the way in which they need good communication practice and the effect that communication, good and bad, can have on them.

Oral Communication 30%

- Meetings are one of the most common and most effective communication methods used in business. They allow one person to communicate with several receivers in a limited time, allowing questions and feedback, which can help to clarify the message. They meet because of shared goals, but individual roles and leadership patterns will emerge. Meetings result in increased participation by employees in the decision-making process, better decisions because of the pooling of knowledge and quicker implementation of ideas because participants are more likely to accept the solution. They can be expensive because of the time involved, so the objective should be to accomplish specific aims as quickly and effectively as possible.
- An interview is an interaction between two parties to accomplish a predetermined purpose. The interviewer should ensure that the interviewee understands the purpose of the interview and bring the right parties together while planning the interview's structure or format. The interview includes an opening to establish contact and set the tone, a middle to gain the information necessary and an ending to summarise and close the interview. Questioning technique is essential. Closed questions limit response and gain factual information whereas open questions encourage discussion. Interviewers should avoid leading questions since they assume agreement, or at the very least, lead the interviewee towards a predetermined response.
- Presentations are a vital part of any business. Their value can be maximised by asking 'who, where, when, why, what and how?' Every group is different, so a presentation needs to be designed for a specific audience. Supporting material will help listeners picture the ideas you are trying to convey by verifying, clarifying and amplifying the main points. A properly structured speech has three main parts: the introduction, the middle and a conclusion. Each has a specific function. The introduction helps gain the audience's attention. It may include a striking, attention-getting opening, a topic statement and a preview of the presentation's main points. The middle contains all the major arguments and supporting evidence. The conclusion recaps the main ideas, emphasising the message's most important points. Since the effectiveness of a presentation relies on the listener remembering the main points, the speaker must include simple words, key phrases and signposts to indicate which parts of the presentation are most important.
- Listening is composed of four stages:
  1. hearing
  2. interpreting
  3. evaluating
  4. reacting.

  Listening takes up much of our communication time and takes place in meetings, training sessions, telephone calls, conversations with superiors and discussions with peers.

- Feedback is the response to what a person sees, hears, reads or feels, and the knowledge gained from feedback is vital. It tells us when instructions are misunderstood, if our comments lack relevance and whether or not our behaviour contradicts what we say. Effective feedback is clear, understood, accepted and helpful.

Written and Numeric Communication 25%

- Letters, memoranda and reports are written to accomplish specific purposes. Reports are to inform, persuade, or present past events, new information or recommendations. They may be sent up to top management, horizontally to other departments or radially within and outside the organisation. Data may be presented formally in a prescribed format or informally.
- The ability to write an effective business letter is essential. A letter may be part of a daily routine, it may be used for emphasis or just to record an activity, or it may be used as a follow-up to a discussion.
- Memoranda (memos) are informal communications that can be used to request information, reinforce agreements, clarify previous messages or act as short reports about daily problems.
- Editing ensures that oversights and errors are eliminated. Editing results in messages being clear, concise and correct in every detail. There are several ways to edit a written document:
  1 Eliminate unnecessary words.
  2 Explain abbreviations and acronyms.
  3 Eliminate jargon.
  4 Eliminate unnatural phrases.
  5 Use shorter words where possible.
  6 Use the right word.
  7 Correct spelling and grammatical errors.
  8 Correct factual errors.
- Effective written communications represent the sender. They should be neat, well organised, easy to read, and follow an acceptable format. Properly edited, they are effective tools for communication.

Communication and IT 20%

- Telecommunication capabilities have become essential to many businesses. Communication has speeded up with the increase in effectiveness of telephone networks and emails have revolutionised communication internally and externally. The internet has made information available to millions of people at a relatively low cost and it presents business with easy opportunities to communicate with customers, clients, potential customers and rivals. This revolution has thrown up its own ethical challenges, principally with regard to security, accuracy, property and access. Privacy covers both physical privacy and privacy of information, while accuracy refers to the consequences of drawing inferences from inaccurate information. Property issues start with the ease with which data can be copied onto electronic media and continue with the difficulty existing law has in protecting intellectual property rights. Access issues include access to information and access to technology.

Excluded topics

- Questions are likely to be set in the examination in either section from any part of the syllabus. All aspects of the syllabus will be examined over time, though naturally not all topics can be covered in a particular examination. In addition, to ensure that we test students' understanding effectively, the case study will mean that individual questions will be set that require knowledge of material contained across a number of different syllabus areas. A narrow focus on selected areas of the syllabus is ill-advised.

Study hours

- It is recommended that students undertake approximately 200 hours of study for each module, including face-to-face tuition, self-study, examination preparation and reflection on work experiences.

Key areas of the syllabus

- An understanding of the diverse and (nowadays rapidly) developing methods and tools of communication is essential to facilitate successful communication internally within the organisation and externally with suppliers, clients and the public.
- It has been found that managers can spend as much as 90% of their time talking to others. Knowledge of communication theory, of the barriers which prevent successful communication and the filters which hinder or dilute it, can therefore only assist in creating a better climate in which successful communication will prosper.

Assessment approach

- This module will be assessed by a closed book examination of 2 hours duration. Section A will comprise 15 short-answer questions, which will account for 40 marks, designed to test both breadth and depth of the syllabus. Section B will require candidates to answer two multi-part questions, from a choice of five, which will account for 60 marks (2 x 30). The questions will be based on a prereleased case study, which will be circulated six weeks before the examination to enable students to research the case study.

Relevant study materials

- Students will be expected to use the ibam 'Business Communications' study text as their primary study text. For those seeking to broaden their knowledge of the subject area, supplementary study materials are recommended below:
  - Adair, J., *Effective Communication*, Pan Books, 2002.
  - Condrill, J. and Bough, B., *101 Ways to Improve Your Communication Skills Instantly*, GoalMinds, 1999.
  - Heller, R. and Hindle, T., *Communicate Clearly*, Dorling Kindersley, 1999.
  - Heylin, A., *Putting It Across*, Michael Joseph, 1991.
  - Kent, P., *The Complete Idiot's Guide to the World Wide Web*, Alpha Books, 2001.

Syllabus Overview

The Business Communications module

The Business Communications module is a cornerstone of the ibam Certificate in Business Practice. The study of the environment within which business organisations operate, accounting, management and business communications is essential to business practitioners at a junior level.

While this module is concerned specifically with communication for business, the ability to communicate effectively is a useful asset in our lives. The modern business world places extensive demands on managers and administrators to communicate effectively both within their organisation and with the outside world. Their jobs involve accomplishing the goals of the organisation by communicating and coordinating the tasks of employees and by eliminating barriers.

Why communication is important to business organisations

Communication is the lifeblood of all organisations, big, small, private or public. Communication takes place, whether well informed or not. Staff communicate, whether approved channels are in place or not and managers can spend as much as 90% of their time talking to others. Knowledge of communication theory will assist in creating a better climate where successful communication can prosper. An understanding of the many rapidly developing methods of communication is essential to facilitate successful communication with colleagues, suppliers, clients and the public. The reward is that the organisation's message is conveyed and understood; that staff understand their role and achieve it; that suppliers know what is expected of them and deliver; that clients know what the organisation offers and are not disappointed.

Key elements of the syllabus

There are five key areas within the syllabus. The weighting attached to each area is given to assist candidates in judging the importance of any particular area within the syllabus and the amount of time they should devote to it as a proportion of the whole. They are as follows:

Communication theory   10%

Communication: its nature, scope and purpose.
What, why and how we communicate.
Means and methods of communication.
What makes for effective communication.

Communication in the workplace   15%

Business communication: its overall form and style.
Communications and the organisation: communications in context.

External communications: customers and clients.
Marketing communications.

Oral communication 30%
Different types of business meeting and making them work.
Persuasion: getting agreement from others.
Negotiation: making the best deal.
Public speaking.
Briefing and giving instructions.
Telephone communication.

Written and numeric communication 25%
The nature of the written word.
The writing process: what to say and how to say it.
The different forms of written communication.
Numeric communications: dealing with numbers and numeric formats.

Communications and IT 20%
The IT revolution: dealing with the communications implications.
Matching technology to purpose.
The internet: opportunity and use.
Challenges and risks.
Effects of IT.
Benefits of IT.
Problems of IT.
Fax, mobile phones, voicemail, word processing, emails and internet.

How to approach the study of business communications

You have been communicating since you first learned to speak. Consequently, communication is a subject about which you know a great deal. Begin by calling on your experience, especially occasions when things went wrong, when results were not as expected and when real conflict occurred. Then do a similar exercise within your business experience. However short, it will be unusual if you cannot recall some instance of a communication being misunderstood by management, or a management communication which failed to achieve what it was designed to do.

The examples you can come up with and the exercise of analysing your experiences will be useful in the study of communication for business.

How to succeed in the examination

- Prepare. Read the text and cover all the syllabus. The examination is based mainly on the study text, but you are expected to be aware of issues affecting the subject which may be too new for the study text to have covered. General reading about the business world will help in this as in the other examinations.

- Read the questions carefully. Make sure you understand what each is trying to discover before you start to answer. Look at the marks allocated to each part and plan your answers to be in proportion to the marks. If the question asks for four reasons why something is the case, give four, not three or five.
- The examination is about communication – it is designed to test both your knowledge of communication theory and methods and your ability to communicate. This means that how you write is as important as what you write. Develop a clear style and write as neatly and legibly as you can.
- Leave time to read through and check what has been written. Proofreading is important.

Common pitfalls to be avoided

- Case studies and examination questions set up situations on which questions can be based. While it may be necessary to use that situation in your answer, remember that it is your knowledge of communication that is being tested. A question about interviewing with regard to performance-related pay is interested in the interview process, not how performance-related pay works.
- Make sure you allocate your time so that you can attempt the number of questions required. Even if you cannot manage a full answer, or are short of time, a few notes indicating what your full answer would have covered may earn some marks.
- The exam seeks to test *your* knowledge of the subject. Wholesale, word-for-word quoting from the study text is *not* acceptable; answer using your own words.
- Follow the instructions on how to use the exam script – start each question on a separate sheet of paper; do not combine multi-part questions into one answer; do not separate the different parts of a multi-part question.
- Do not think up elaborate scenarios to adorn your answers – keep any detail not directly concerned with communication as simple and short as possible.
- Writing the question at the beginning of your answer is a waste of time. Putting the number of the question is sufficient.

Summary

Students may find it hard to believe, but examiners want candidates to pass and are delighted when this happens. Read your text thoroughly, learn and understand it, answer the question the examiner has asked, not the one you would have liked him to ask, write neatly and legibly so as to make life as easy as possible for him, and good luck.

Acronyms and abbreviations

AGM	Annual General Meeting
AIDA	Attention, Interest, Desire, Action
AOB	any other business
AV	audio-visual
CV	curriculum vitae
DPA 1998	Data Protection Act 1998
HTTP	hypertext transfer protocol
IM	Instant Messenger
IP	internet protocol
ISP	internet service provider
IT	information technology
MD	Managing Director
OHP	overhead projector
PC	personal computer
PDF	Portable Document Format
PERFECT	Polite, Efficient, Respectful, Friendly, Enthusiastic, Cheerful, Tactful
PESTLE	Political, Economic, Socio-cultural, Technological, Legal, Ecological, Competitive
PR	public relations
SMART	Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, Timely
SWOT	Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats
TLD	top-level domain
URL	uniform resource locator

Communication theory

PART ONE

Contents

Overview

In this first Part, we look at the underlying theory of communication. We ask a number of questions:

- What is communication?
- Why do we communicate?
- How do we communicate?
- What makes communication effective?

All of these questions relate to the theory of communication. The theory is an important precursor encouraging the student to think about communication in general before going on to look at it in more detail in the context of business. The tendency to underestimate the scope and importance of communication is challenged. It is easy to believe that communication makes use of basic skills that everyone has of right and can employ with little thought. Some of the skills needed for effective communication are examined, as are the barriers and filters that can so easily block our best efforts.

Learning objectives

After reading the chapters in this Part, students should be able to:

- understand the scope, purpose and complexity of communication in a way that puts the individual techniques into context, and helps understanding and making use of them
- recognise the inherent potential difficulty of communicating and the consequences of failing to do so effectively
- understand the human psychology involved in communication
- be familiar with specific approaches to overcoming potential problems and understand how these approaches might be deployed.

The whole of this first Part is intended to support, and make clearer, the individual techniques which are described in more detail through the rest of the text.

Jane Taylor

Jane Taylor, ambitious would-be executive, has just been promoted. She works for a company which undertakes market research. In her previous position she was concerned only with the design and statistical analysis of the questionnaires used by the firm in the studies it undertakes for clients; this was essentially a backroom role. As the result of her promotion, she has been put in charge of a small section. For the first time in her career, she has staff of her own to manage, and there is a wide range of individuals and groups with whom she must be in touch in the course of her day-to-day work; she also has contact with people outside the organisation, both clients and suppliers. Her phone seems never to stop ringing, and every day the post boy delivers piles of paper which she thinks she has to read.

Her manager, Patrick Kaye, is very supportive. She has six staff; five with reasonable experience in their jobs, but a sixth who is new to the firm. Her section will usually be working with at least three or four clients at once on overlapping projects, and she will have another role, small at first, but with the potential to grow; this involves keeping in touch with past clients with the specific aim of seeking to ensure that they make use of the firm again. Some suppliers are especially important: a reliable printer, for example, and a travel agent, because the firm's clients are spread throughout the world, and she will have to travel extensively to meet clients old and new.

New as she is to the role, her success will depend on a number of things, not least of which will be her ability to recognise the importance to the job of communication; if she does not communicate well in all the different ways that will be necessary, any other success she may have will be negated.

What is communication?

1

List of topics

1. Communication: definition and evolution
2. Communication theory: why and how we communicate
3. Means and methods of communication
4. Two skills for effective communication: listening and reading

Introduction

This chapter sets the context for what follows by defining communication and explaining why and how we communicate. We look in some detail at the elements of communication which must be present for communication to have occurred. It also outlines the key means and methods of communication – verbal, non-verbal and visual – each of which will be detailed later in the text. Finally, the chapter introduces two key skills for effective communication: listening and reading.

1 Communication: definition and evolution

> 'The peoples of the world are islands shouting at each other across a sea of misunderstanding.' George Eliot

Without **communication** we are stranded, each on our own island, shouting, in the vain hope that we might make contact and establish some understanding with our neighbour. A far-fetched metaphor? Perhaps, but communication is as essential to survival as eating, breathing and sleeping.

communication
The process by which messages (thought, idea, instruction) are transferred from one person to another through the use of a common set of symbols.

1.1 Evolution

Communication is not restricted to those with the ability to make use of the spoken or written word. Communication is common throughout the animal kingdom, where it is less liable to misunderstanding than when used by man, but is very much more limited. Even insects are known to communicate; bees and wasps, for instance, use complex 'dance' routines in order to convey to their fellow workers the direction to follow to find a new source of nectar. Apes and man have developed gestures and postures in parallel, but the apes have failed to develop speech, which is one of the things which distinguish man from the rest of the animal kingdom, giving him the most powerful of all tools for communication, but one which can also create divisions and misunderstandings.

2 Communication theory: why and how we communicate

We communicate because of a need: a need to get our ideas, thoughts, instructions – our message – across to others in our family, to our friends, to colleagues in the same organisation, to our manager, or to clients. Communication is inherent to society, and in particular, for the purposes of this text, to the conduct of business and businesses. Whether you want to bring about a specific action, instigate discussion or encourage the generation of ideas, change attitudes or go through a specific process such as appraisal, everything starts with communication. More importantly, effective communication can ensure or enhance all these processes. In the context of business, communicating is more than just exchanging information. Communication in the workplace is much more complex than that. Every day, potential problems can accumulate, creating confusion or, worse, chaos. To maximise the effectiveness of communication needs time, patience and application, but it can be time well spent. A swift and effective decision needs to be taken, perhaps, and communicated quickly to all staff. It may require consideration, consultation and planning. By spending time getting communications right, the effective manager makes sure the team performs better, and at the same time shows commitment to the communication process.

2.1 The objectives of communication

We have seen that it is necessary to do more than just communicate: our aim should be to communicate well. It should be to find the most effective way to share ideas and information. To be effective, however, communication must also have a specific objective. When we communicate with an individual, a group or an organisation, we are seeking to establish a common purpose or goal. Objectives may be to:

- inform
- instruct
- motivate
- change opinions
- prompt debate or discussion
- stimulate the generation of ideas
- build on prior contacts or thinking.

encoding
The way the thought, idea or instruction is transferred from the mind of the sender to the mode he selects for its transmission. Encoding will involve the use of language if the mode is spoken or written, or pictures in some form if the mode is visual; for some modes, words *and* pictures are needed.

2.2 How do we communicate?

How we communicate can best be demonstrated by means of a simple diagram, which is itself based on a model made popular in the 1950s, the mathematical theory of communication. Figure 1.1 illustrates this at its simplest.

The feedback loop leading from the receiver to the sender was an early addition to the original model. One thing is missing from this diagram – the context in which the message is conceived, sent and received.

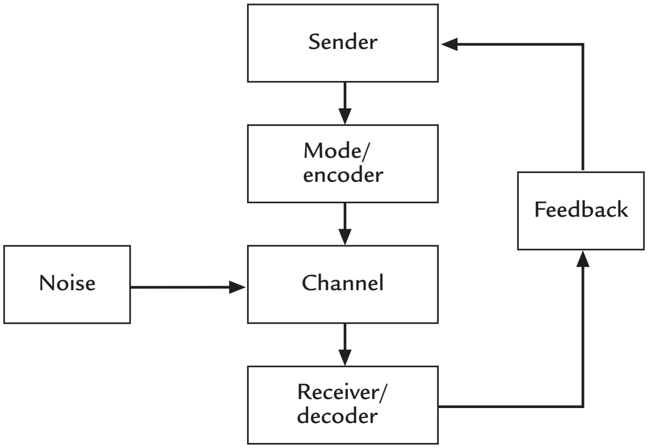


Figure 1.1 Elements of communication

2.3 Elements of communication

The different elements of communication are:

1. Sender: The sender takes the initiative, and originates the message. They also take responsibility for the choice of mode and channel, decide on the receiver and **encode** the message. The sender is the most important of the six elements, for without them there is no message and no communication.
2. **Message**: The thought, idea or instruction that the sender wishes to communicate.
3. **Mode**: The package into which the message is encoded. It may be a letter, a telephone call, an email, or any of the numerous ways in which a message can be transmitted.
4. **Channel**: The means by which the mode is transmitted – the phone line, the mail service, the world wide web.
5. **Noise**: Anything which interferes with or distorts the transmission and receipt of a message. It can be physical, like a crackle on a telephone line, or within the people concerned, like a message in English being sent to someone who only speaks Japanese.
6. **Receiver**: The person for whom the message is intended. Next in importance only to the sender, because without a receiver the communication loop is left unclosed, and there is no communication.
7. **Feedback**: The return message sent by the receiver to the original sender, confirming at the very least that the message has been received, and hopefully that understanding of the message has taken place.

message
The thought, idea or instruction that the sender wishes to communicate.

mode
The package into which the message is encoded. It may be a letter, a telephone call, an email, or any of the numerous ways in which a message can be transmitted.

channel
The means by which the *mode* is transmitted – the phone line, the mail service, the world wide web.

noise
Anything which interferes with or distorts the transmission and receipt of a message.

receiver
The person for whom the message is intended. Next in importance only to the sender, because without a receiver the communication loop is left unclosed, and there is no communication.

feedback
The return message sent by the receiver to the original sender, confirming at the very least that the message has been received, and hopefully that understanding of the message has taken place.

Making it work 1.1

Mixed messages: communication and context

There is a famous story of an officer in the army who was defending a position against the enemy. Faced with overwhelming odds, he decided that attack was the best means of defence. He picked up his field telephone and rang Advance HQ.

'Send reinforcements, we're going to advance,' he said. The message was passed from Advance HQ to Field HQ, from Field HQ to Battalion HQ, until eventually it reached Strategic Command. The telephone operator marched straight in to the Generals, crouched over their maps.

'Message from Lieutenant Davies, sir!' said the telephone operator.

'What does he say, man!' barked a Field Marshall. A look of disbelief spread over the telephone operator's face.

'He says "Send three and fourpence, we're going to a dance!" sir!'

As the message was passed further and further down the line, the context from which it originated was lost. Add to that the possibility of noise on the telephone line, making it more difficult to understand, and the original meaning was lost. Context is all important; had every one of the operators passing on the lieutenant's message stopped to think of where it had come from, and why, it would have remained unchanged, despite the noise on the line.

When we communicate, we have three types of channel to choose from, with a number of modes available in each channel, and with some modes fitting more than one channel:

Channel	Spoken	Written	Visual
Modes	One-to-one	Letter	Slides
	Small meeting	Email	Film
	Presentation	Memo	Video
	Film	Report	Photograph
	Video	Publication	Drawing
	Telephone	Fax	Chart
	Radio	Advertisement	TV
	TV	Computer	Picture
	Video conference		Fax
	Teleconference		

Figure 1.2 Channels and modes of communication

Channels and modes can sometimes be employed in combination, e.g. visual aids used in a presentation.

The choice of channel and mode can be affected by many factors:

- the number of receivers
- the identity of the receiver
- the location of the receiver
- the relationship of the sender to the receiver
- the complexity of the message and the language used
- the importance of the message
- the purpose of the message

- the urgency of the message
- the type of data – verbal or numeric
- the speed with which feedback is required
- the technology required and its availability
- cost
- precedent.

Test *yourself* 1.1

a) Define briefly (30 words maximum) why communication is important to mankind.

b) Identify the seven elements of the communication process.

Stop and think 1.1

Look again at the different channels and modes of communication. Think about each of these in the context of your own organisation. Which do you use most? Which least? How do you decide which channel or mode to use? Which of the list of factors affecting choice are most relevant to you?

3 Means and methods of communication

We have already looked very briefly at feedback, and will look at it in more detail later in Chapter 2. Feedback is essential for the communicator – the sender of the message – to know that the message has been received and understood. One way of looking at the different means and methods of communication, therefore, is by the ease or otherwise with which feedback can be transmitted and received. Communication methods where feedback is instantaneous are said to be **synchronous**, which simply means 'existing together', or 'happening at the same time'. Most verbal communication is synchronous – the telephone, face-to face meetings, presentations – but recordings of any kind are always **asynchronous**. Asynchronous is the opposite of synchronous; any written communication, therefore, will be asynchronous, since, by definition, response and feedback will be delayed, and television and radio are usually asynchronous, although modern techniques make this less certain, because of the possibilities of instant feedback by phone-ins or interaction.

synchronous
Existing or occurring at the same time; simultaneous with.

asynchronous
Out of step; not occurring together.

There are a number of terms used to describe the different means and methods of communication, and it will be useful now to look at them here.

3.1 Verbal

Verbal communication

The use of language means the use of *words*. Words are the main (but not the only) building blocks of communication. They are brought together to make sentences, which join in turn to create paragraphs, which become chapters, and so on. *Sentences* are common to both the written and spoken word, but the concept of paragraphs and chapters is more recognisable in the context of writing.

Speech/spoken word

Telephone calls, discussions, meetings, interviews, speeches, presentations, conferences, seminars, conversations, radio, cassettes, CDs, DVDs, television – the list can go on and on. Speech and the spoken word are everywhere. There is much more to speech than just words, however.

Written communication

Letters, memos, fax messages, emails, reports, notices, leaflets, agenda, minutes, advertisements, fact sheets, newsletters, forms, questionnaires, press releases. As with the spoken word, it is possible to compile a very long list. Written communications are looked at in more detail in Part Four.

Numerical communication

The written number, and the interpretations of numbers, such as graphs, pie charts, tables. Numerical communication is looked at in more detail in Chapter 15.

3.2 Non-verbal

It may seem surprising at first that communication can take place without the use of words, but a closer look soon shows a number of different ways in which this occurs.

prosodic communication The stress and pitch patterns used in speech, such as pauses and intonation.

Prosodic communication

The stress and pitch patterns used in speech, such as pauses and intonation. They are used to punctuate speech, and help to make its meaning clear. A good example is the phrase 'young men and women', which can have two meanings, depending on whether or not it is said with a brief, silent pause after the word 'men'. Without the pause, both the men and the women are young. With it, only the men are young. Such pauses are the equivalent of a comma in written communication.

paralinguistic communication Use of a range of non-verbal sounds which accompany spoken language.

Paralinguistic communication

All the non-word sounds (um, ah, mm, er) which do not have a clear linguistic function. Usually they are used to play for time, while the speaker marshals his/her thoughts. Pitch is also included – e.g. pitch rising at the end of a sentence usually indicates a question. Different cultures use different patterns of what linguists call 'back-channelling'. This is letting the speaker know that you are listening and encouraging them to continue speaking. Examples are phrases like 'oh' and 'right', 'I know' and 'really', all of them recognisable as words, but used like this as sounds to indicate attention. European and Latin American women tend to use 'mm'; South-East Asian women tend to use ' oh' or 'ah'.

body language Non-verbal yet complex signals given (usually unconsciously) by participants in communication to accompany what is being said. Although body language is used throughout the world, it is greatly influenced by culture.

Body language

Body language consists of a very large number of possible physical movements which can both strengthen and damage communication. Because of its range and subtlety, body language is difficult both to understand and control. It is a valuable way to understand more about the real opinions of a speaker, however. Someone who is lying may give this away by the way they move, stand or sit. It has always been said that first impressions are the most important; it is also claimed that the first five seconds of a first meeting are more important than the next five minutes. This means grooming and clothes are also important. If you are nervous at an interview, or when doing a presentation, you can use body language to make yourself appear more confident than you really are – smile, relax, look people in the eye when speaking to them, stand (or sit) up straight, and keep your hands still. Another important aspect of body language is personal space. Personal space is very important to everyone, so don't invade the other person's space – leave about a metre between you. However, there are cultural differences in body language – Britons and Americans, for instance, tend to leave more personal space around them than other nationalities, and are more likely to move away if they feel their space is being invaded.

Kinesic communication
The way we move our bodies – posture, gesture, etc. – while communicating. Gestures are as important as body language, and can consciously be rehearsed and prepared to create the effect(s) you need. There are cultural differences in gestures, so care is needed. Pointing with a finger is considered rude in China, while shaking the head may mean no to Westerners and yes to Indians.

kinesic communication
Use of posture, gesture, facial expression and body language.

3.3 Visual communication

The use of pictures, diagrams, cartoons, illustrations, graphics, photographs, slides, drawings and so on.

3.4 Multimedia

It is thought that using two or more different methods of communication together increases interest, understanding and retention. Thus a good presentation will use images as well as the spoken word. Again, there are very many examples – a few are newspapers, magazines, television, video, internet, CD-ROMs, illustrated and picture books.

Test *yourself* 1.2

a) Look again at Figure 1.2. A number of modes of communication are listed there. Think about each one, and say whether each is synchronous or asynchronous.
b) How might synchrony and asynchrony affect your choice of mode?

Stop and think 1.2

Imagine you are going to conduct an interview. Think about the non-verbal methods of communication you have just been reading about. How might these affect the way you set up and conduct the interview? Which of them could you use in this situation, and how?

4 Two skills for effective communication: listening and reading

Throughout this book you will be introduced to a number of skills that you will find useful in making communication effective and successful. Having looked at the different ways to communicate, and identified the spoken word and the written word as the two most important, let us consider two skills:

1 listening, which is concerned with the spoken word, and
2 reading, the skill essential for the understanding of the written word.

4.1 Listening

Listening is a skill of considerable importance. Managers need to do a great deal of listening – but how well do they do it? Often they are so concerned with getting their own views across that they fail to listen to others. It may be that skill in listening is not a natural ability, although we begin to learn to listen even before we are born. Is there, perhaps, a difference between hearing, which is the physical act, and listening, which is interpreting? The good manager not only hears, but also listens, decoding and understanding the message, and delivering feedback to show they have understood. Remember too, that, as we have already seen, a message consists of more than just the words – there are also the paralinguistic and prosodic messages (see above). If the speaker and listener are in each other's presence, non-verbal signals, such as body language, are also important. Listening, therefore, collects a surprising amount of data – not just about the message but also about the speaker.

Why should we listen?

- To gain information
- To get feedback
- To learn
- To create a relationship
- To show respect and value others
- To hear of someone else's experiences and insights
- To be in control (information is power).

Listening ability

Listening ability varies according to:

- interest in the topic
- the importance of the information
- the length of the message
- the complexity of the message
- the delivery of the message
- distractions – e.g. personal problems or external things – noise.

Different ways to listen

- Empathise: This means encouraging the speaker, and getting information from him in a supportive, helpful way. Put yourself in his place, try to understand him;

stay as silent as possible, but show encouragement by nodding, smiling, and the use of other non-verbal signals.

- Analyse: Separating fact from emotion and teasing out the information you need. Ask questions, carefully but analytically, so as to discover what is behind the speaker's statements; pick up clues from the answers and use them to help you frame your next question(s).
- Synthesise: This is guiding the exchange towards a specific objective. Make statements to which others can respond with ideas. Listen, and respond in a way which suggests the ideas can be implemented (even if they can't), but phrasing your next statement/question in such a way that you move them in the direction you want.

Obstacles to listening

- Environment: Background noise, too hot, too cold.
- Bad presentation: Over-elaborate language, jargon, overload (too much information).
- Attitude and perception: Incorrect assumptions or selectivity (selecting what you want to hear).
- Filtering: Allowing prejudice to influence what you hear. Filters and filtering are covered in more detail in Chapter 2.
- Anticipation: Beginning to think about your reply instead of focusing on what is being said.
- Prejudging: Background knowledge and experience can cause us to prejudge, to hear what we want to hear rather than what has actually been said.

4.2 Active listening

The key to good listening skills is to regard listening as an *active* process. This can be demonstrated by employing the following techniques:

- give your full attention
- look at the other person
- smile
- nod
- make affirmative/encouraging noises
- use verbal prompts
- ask questions
- summarise.

A final word on being a good active listener. The more obviously attentive you are, the better. Show you are listening by restating or paraphrasing, by summarising, by being aware of and responding to non-verbal clues, and by being aware of and responding to feelings and emotions.

4.3 Reading

A famous writer, Walter Savage Landor, said that reading is 'silent conversation'. It is tempting to think of reading as a lone occupation, but the model in Figure 1.1 earlier holds just as true for the written word as for the spoken. The writer (even if long dead) wants to communicate with you just as much as a speaker does. Writers, though, (and especially if long dead!) expect feedback to be slow, and sometimes non-existent.

It is tempting for busy executives, especially, to ask 'why read?' 'Surely,' they will justify, 'anything I need to know will reach me eventually by some other means. I do not need to spend my valuable time on reading.' The more you read (and, of course, understand) the better informed you are, and the faster you are informed, without having to wait for the grapevine or any other indirect means. Reading also helps to improve spelling, grammar and style.

A fundamental aid to reading is the art of making notes. These can be of points you want to remember, or of questions raised by the text which you hope to have answered later in the text. Notes are often written in the margins of books, a procedure encouraged by some, but frowned on by others.

In all forms of communication, you will find great emphasis is placed on understanding – or comprehension. This is no less true of reading. A common way of trying to improve comprehension is to read a passage slowly, or to read it normally and then go back over it. Reading slowly is not especially effective, since it has been shown that it has little or no effect on comprehension; regression (the second method) adds considerably to the time spent, but improves comprehension by as little as 3–7%.

Speed reading

There are a number of speed reading methods, and this is not the place for a detailed discussion. Many are based on eliminating unnecessary movements of the eyes. A simple way to speed up reading is to learn the art of skipping – running the eye quickly along and picking out pointers – usually key words – to passages needing closer attention. It may be a good idea to find ways which are suitable to you to improve your memory, too, since it is of little use reading more if all that happens is that you remember less.

Selectivity in reading

Speed reading and memory improvement will save time and improve your effectiveness, but the greatest skill of all, when reading matter proliferates, is selectivity.

- First, be selective in what you choose to read, especially for business. Some items you will be unable to avoid. When you can choose – go for quality rather than quantity. Scan the many papers that will come your way and decide on their importance. Eliminate the unnecessary. Put your time into what is important.
- Second, be selective in how you read – in other words, scan the text looking for the keywords that interest you, and read around them in more detail.

Putting the case 1.1

Q Imagine you are Jane Taylor – newly appointed, taking on the management of staff for the first time, threatened by too many telephone calls and too much paper. Fortunately, you have managed to find time, in this relentless schedule, to read the foregoing chapter. What do you think would be the three most important lessons Jane would learn from it from the point of view of making her life a little easier and her management more effective?

A Jane needs to learn most of all the art of listening, the art of reading, and the skill of selectivity. She needs to improve her listening skills so that, while she may not be able to avoid the telephone calls, she will listen effectively and make the calls as brief as possible. She needs to improve her reading skills so that she also reads effectively, quickly but with comprehension. She needs to appreciate what being selective can do for her: it can reduce the amount of paper she feels she needs to read, but selectivity can also be applied in other ways, in the meetings she sets up or attends, the one-to-ones she conducts, and in the phone calls she accepts, or allows to continue for more than a few minutes.

Test *yourself* 1.3

State briefly why reading and listening are so important in the communication process.

Summary

- Communication is essential to the human condition. We begin to learn some of the skills of communication before we are born, and most of us will continue to use them until the day we die.
- We communicate because of a need: a need to get our ideas across to others. Like animals, we communicate with sounds, although unlike animals, we have evolved speech, which can convey complex ideas. Unlike animals, too, we can encode these sounds into symbols, thus giving the ideas their own extended and independent life spanning the generations.
- Communication can be seen as a circular process. Someone has an idea they wish to pass on. They determine who is to receive the idea, and how it is to be recorded and transmitted. The chosen recipient becomes a sender when they deliver feedback to the originator of the idea to show that it has been received and understood.
- Communication takes two forms – verbal and non-verbal. Although non-verbal is important, verbal communication is the way that we communicate the ideas, thoughts or instructions we need to pass on. We do this in two ways: spoken and written.
- For a communication to be effective it has to be received and understood. There are two particular skills concerned with understanding: listening and reading.

2 Effective communication

List of topics

Introduction

Chapter 1 introduced and defined communication and the elements of communication process known as the communication loop. This chapter looks in more detail at how we can communicate effectively, focusing on the importance of preparation and some of the common problems which conspire to prevent effective communication such as lack of comprehension, filters and barriers. It also looks at the effect language, culture and groups have on communication, and, in the particular context of business communication, the role played by the external environment and organisational change.

1 Preparing to communicate

When you prepare to communicate, the most important thing to remember is that, while communication is a two-way process, and without a sender there can be no communication, it is the *receiver* who closes the loop and allows communication to take place. It is fashionable today to say that the customer is king; in the communication process, the receiver is king – communication cannot happen without him.

1.1 Choosing the appropriate method of communicating

How do you decide whether to write a letter to someone, ring them up or email them? Should I send a long memo to my boss about this problem, or should I write a full, formal report? Would our customers respond better to a glossy printed catalogue or an interactive CD-ROM? Where does our website fit into all this? Your choice actually depends on a number of factors, not least of which are the urgency of the message and the cost, not just in terms of real money, but also in time – your time and the receiver's. Most important of all, however, your choice should be based on your knowledge or, at least, your judgement of what will suit the receiver best, and most definitely not on what is the easiest or most convenient for you, the sender.

1.2 Planning communication

Remember that how well you communicate depends not so much on how well you say things, more on how well the things you say are received. There are a number of steps you should take, questions you should ask, and things you should consider when you are planning a communication.

Is your communication really necessary?
Don't clog up the channels with unnecessary chatter – determine that there really is a need to communicate, a need to say what you think should be said.

Why exactly are you communicating?
Think through your objective in communicating the message – what is its true purpose?

Who needs to receive the message?
Your boss? Your boss and the MD? The whole world? Don't send the message out to as many people as you can think of, rather to as few as you think cannot manage without it. This is not a matter of restricting the flow of information; it is taking a sensible approach which respects other people's time, and seeks not to waste it on unnecessary phone calls or pieces of paper.

Are you sure of what exactly you need to say?
Clarify your ideas, and think through what the content of the message needs to be, keeping the message as clear and concise as possible, while still accurately conveying the idea, thought or instruction. Deciding on the message includes consideration of:

- what the message is to be
- what you need to say
- how the message will be delivered
- the structure.

Does anyone else have a stake in this?
Consult others who may be involved or able to assist.

Remember the overtones of your message as well as the basic meaning
Words are tricky and can convey all kinds of shades of meaning, as well as some hidden meanings. Choose them carefully, and be aware of what your message *actually says*.

Be aware too of the context in which you will be communicating
We have already looked at context, so remember the poor officer wanting to attack. A man drowning in the middle of the Atlantic will communicate less well with his cry of help than a man drowning in a small lake, and neither will be saved if there is no one to hear.

Plan how you will obtain feedback
Feedback may be the last part of the communication loop, but it is crucial. Without it you will not know whether your message has even been received, let alone understood. From the very beginning, take into account your need for feedback; this is especially important with written communication, where feedback is not immediate and obvious, and can be very difficult to obtain.

Making it work 2.1

Using SMART objectives

The acronym SMART is a widely used tool for setting out and clarifying objectives. It can certainly be used to establish the purpose for any particular communication, involving you as the sender and the recipient/s of the message, and anticipating the effect it should have on them.

SMART stands for:

- Specific
- Measurable
- Achievable
- Realistic
- Timely/time-based.

As an example, the chapter on presentations later in this text might have as its objectives:

1. To provide information on how presentations can be organised and delivered effectively (Specific).
2. To prepare students for an examination (Measurable).
3. To provide enough information in a way that facilitates understanding (Achievable).
4. To present information in an interesting and readable way so that students will want to read it (Realistic).
5. To provide the right amount of information (Timely).

1.3 Effective communication

Stop and think 2.1

Try to write down the things you think make communication effective. Just list as many points as you can – you should be able to come up with a few just from your own experience and observation.

The phrase 'effective communication' has already been used several times in this book so far, and it will appear many more times before the book is finished. Let us see if we can produce a simple definition of effective communication:

> 'Communication is effective when the message we wish to convey is received, understood and acted on in the way we intended by our recipient.'

As a definition, the above is

- short
- relevant
- meaningful.

Here are two more statements about effective communication:

> 'Communication is effective when it resolves the conflict between the need for clarity and the ever-increasing need for speed. This is especially evident in written communication, when over-correcting and over-revising can reduce our output.'

This adds to our definition above, but does not replace it. As a qualification of our definition, though, it is useful.

> 'Good communication is, in part, a matter of attention to detail. Just using one

word instead of another can make a slight difference. Actually, just using one word instead of another can make a significant difference (as you see!).'

Can we put all these together, to make a 'definitive definition' of effective communication?

'Communication is effective when the message we wish to convey is received, understood and acted on in the way we intended by our recipient. Modern society demands that effective communication be fast, but speed should never be sought after at the expense of clarity and attention to detail.'

1.4 Key factors in effective communication

There are other factors that can be thought of as making communication effective, and many will be explored as this book continues. There are some overall factors that are of major importance, though, which can be used to improve your communications. Four are most significant.

Relevance

A message is more likely to be listened to and accepted if it makes very clear what effect it is going to have on the people it is sent to. People want to know 'what's in it for me?' and 'how will it hurt me?'; people are interested in both the positive and negative possible effects, and of course, overall, a communication may have many more than just a single effect on its recipients. Bear in mind that people will be most concerned with the effect it will have on them, so build in the answers before they feel the need to ask the questions, and you will avoid many of the problems, making it more likely that the message will be taken on board.

Logic and structure

The order and structure of communication is very important. If people can see that a communication is clear and logical and believe it will work for them, then they are more likely to pay attention. Using an appropriate sequence helps understanding and makes it easier for people to retain and use information. Tell your readers in advance about the order you have chosen for the information you are sending. This is called **signposting**.

Whatever you have to say, think about what you should put first, second, third and so on and make sure the order you choose is a sequence which will be clear and logical for whoever it is you are communicating with.

signposting
Identifying and communicating in advance the content or nature of what is coming next.

Involving the receiver

It is almost impossible not to allow related things to come into your mind as you take in a message. (Try now: do not think about a long, cool refreshing drink. Now put away the image you have of a long cold beer, or whatever your taste is, and carry on reading.) This fact about the way the human mind works must be allowed for and used to promote clear understanding.

It may be useful to refer to the receiver's experience by using phrases which link what you are saying to the experience of the other person. You could say, for example, something like 'This is like . . .', 'You will remember . . .', 'Do you know . . .?', or 'This is similar, but . . .', all of which are designed to help the listener understand what you are saying more easily and more accurately. Beware of getting at cross-purposes because you think someone has a frame of reference for something which they do not; link to *their* experience and use the link to reinforce your message.

Repetition

Repetition is fundamental in helping people to grasp a point, but it does not mean just saying the same thing, in the same words, over and over again. Repetition can be done much more subtly than that, and in a number of ways:

- Say something more than once, but in different ways (or at different stages of the same conversation).
- Make your points using different methods: for example, spoken and written.
- Use summaries or checklists to recap key points.
- Keep reminding them over a period of time (remember to vary both the method and the way you phrase the message for even greater effect).

Making it work 2.2

Organising communications

As discussed above, logic and structure are essential components of effective communication. The following six-point plan can be used to help organise any communication, particularly a communication that is, of necessity, detailed or complex, such as an important presentation.

Stage 1: Listing

List in short note or keyword form all the significant points that will need to be made. These can be made in random order at this stage, allowing the freestyle approach to act as a prompter and removing the need to pause, link points or worry about sequence.

Stage 2: Sorting

Review the points noted down and bring them into some order, deciding:

- what comes first, second, third, etc.
- what logically links together and how
- what provides evidence, example or illustration.

Stage 3: Arranging

Arrange and re-work the sorted list until the content, emphasis and level of detail are all clear.

Stage 4: Review

Review the list and make any final amendments.

Stage 5: Prepare the message

This is where the intent is turned into action, representing not only *what* will be said but also *how* it will be delivered.

Stage 6: Final check

Review and edit the final message as necessary.

Test *yourself* 2.1

Identify five factors to take into account when planning a communication.

2 Problems in communication

2.1 Comprehension

In Chapter 1 we touched briefly on comprehension, but only in the context of reading. Now it is time to look at it from a broader point of view. In the communication process, what the speaker or writer says is, in itself, of little value. A message sent is worth little;

what matters is that the message is received and understood; understanding, or comprehension, is what counts. For true understanding, the receiver has to come to the message with an open mind. Open – but not empty. For the receiver to comprehend or understand the received message, they must, consciously or unconsciously, have prepared their mind. They need to be familiar with the background of the message; they should be summarising and thinking about the message even as they see or hear it, and should be receiving it uninfluenced, as far as possible, by personal bias. Only when communication is truly two-way does it have value.

2.2 Filters

Filters are factors which can affect the way a message is both sent and received; they exist at both the transmission and receiving ends of the communication loop.

Both sender and receiver are affected by, for instance:

- their attitude/approach to the reason for the message
- their attitude to the sender/receiver
- their culture
- their emotions
- their status
- their education
- their language skills
- the relevance of the message.

filters
External factors which affect the effectiveness of the way a message is sent and received.

Whether boss or worker, anyone sending a message, upwards or downwards, should seek to apply the filter of relevance. Send everything that is needed or necessary, but no more and no less.

2.3 Barriers and problems

A **communication barrier** is usually something we say or do which makes the other person less willing to communicate, irritates the other person unnecessarily, or causes the other person to become defensive. Examples of such actions are butting in, talking down to people, arguing (rather than discussing) or being excessively firm. Barriers can be external, though, coming from the environment or some cause other than the people involved. All barriers, however, distort the message or prevent it from getting through at all.

communication barriers
External factors which prevent successful transmission or reception of the message.

2.4 Common barriers to communication

Common barriers to communication include the following:

1. Physiological: blindness, deafness, environment, noise.
2. Psychological: shyness, aggressiveness, prejudice, bias, prejudging, feeling threatened.
3. Cultural: message not understood because the recipients are not members of the sender's particular cultural group.

4 Political: message not sent to some individuals who have been excluded because of their views.
5 Economic: message not sent because of lack of resources.
6 Technological: message not sent or received because of technical failure.
7 Language: message is in a foreign language, foreign accent, dialect, jargon or technical language, or subject to waffling, overloading, poor articulation.

Stop and think 2.2

Look at the common barriers to communication listed above. For each of the barriers, try to think of a solution. How would *you* prevent the barrier having an effect? For example, if you wish to communicate with someone who is blind, use the spoken word, and if the message needs to be recorded, think about using a cassette or other recording device, or enquire if the person involved can read Braille.

Making it work 2.3

For want of a microphone . . .

An after dinner speech was being given by a very well known author and television personality, noted for his intelligence and his ability to convey ideas in an interesting and amusing way. Without exception, everyone fortunate enough to be invited was really looking forward to the event. The author rose to his feet and began to speak. Very, very quietly. The audience, at first, strained to catch what he was saying. Those near the front could hear most of what he said, but those in the middle could only hear a word or two in every ten, and those at the back, nothing at all. Muffled conversations began at the back, resulting in those in the middle now hearing nothing from the famous man. They too began to whisper, and even the front row was now affected. Whatever message the speaker might have communicated was totally lost and the event was a great disappointment to everybody, just because the organisers failed to provide a microphone.

3 Feedback

In any book or article on communication, the word feedback can be guaranteed to appear with great frequency. We have already looked very briefly at feedback in Chapter 1, where it was defined as:

> 'The return message sent by the receiver to the original sender, confirming at the very least that the message has been received, and hopefully that understanding of the message has taken place.'

Let's take a more detailed look at this process which is obviously so important to the communication loop. First, a definition taken from an authoritative dictionary:

> '1. (Electr.) return of a fraction of output signal from one stage of a circuit, amplifier, etc., to input of same or a preceding stage.
>
> 2. (Biol., Psych., etc.) modification or control of a process or system by its results or effects, esp. by difference between desired and actual result.

3. Information about result of an experiment, etc.; response.'

Notice first that communication is not mentioned. The concept of feedback has been borrowed from science. The three parts of the definition above all have one thing in common – the concept implied by the quite literal meaning of the word – that something, information or results, is fed back into the process, and that the action of feeding something back results in the modification of the process. So in the context of communication, feedback implies that the person receiving the message originates a response to the sender of the original to give them some very necessary information:

- that the message has been received
- that the message has been heard or read
- that the message has been understood
- that the instruction contained in the message has been carried out
- that carrying out the instruction had a result; the feedback needs to specify precisely the result was.

The receipt of this information may prompt further communication from the originator:

- The message is re-sent.
- The message is encoded again, differently, and re-sent.
- The instruction contained in the message is modified, and the modified message is encoded and re-sent.

All the above imply a repeat of the feedback process when the modified message is received. Feedback is the final process in, and is essential to, communication. For the giver, it is a way to check that you have understood the message. For the receiver, it is the way to confirm that the message has been understood. It is the response by the receiver which may modify the behaviour of the sender. It is the communication process reversed – the receiver becomes the sender and the sender the receiver.

Test *yourself* 2.2

Why is feedback such an essential part of the communication process?

4 Language, culture and groups

Words are important – they are the symbols we use to convey ideas – but there are many different systems that the symbols can come from – these systems are the different languages, and it is essential to choose the right language before worrying about the choice of individual words. The right language, however, is more than just the choice between French, German, Japanese, Mandarin and so on. It is more complicated than that. The effectiveness of communication, whether oral or written, certainly depends on the language we use, but this can show itself in two ways:

- using the wrong language – it is no use sending a message in English to someone who speaks only French

- using the right language, but the wrong 'level' – we would probably use very different words to convey the same complex idea to a child or to an adult.

4.1 Learning and using foreign languages

Learning and using a foreign language can have two benefits:

1. It increases the individual's ability to cope with uncertainty when meeting people from the culture in which the language is spoken.
2. It increases the individual's confidence generally.

4.2 Culture

'1. Intellectual and artistic achievement or expression.

2. Refined appreciation of arts, etc.

3. Customs and civilisation of a particular time or people.'

The definitions above, again taken from an authoritative dictionary, imply that culture operates on more than one level. There is the culture of an individual, but also a much wider concept of culture representing an era, civilisation or nation. Individual culture is important, but when looking at communication, it is essential that we take account of the wider idea. Culture shapes the way we think and behave, and both influences and is influenced by our patterns of communication. For communication to be effective, some degree of common background is needed between the parties exchanging messages. Unless we experience contrasting cultures at close hand, however, we will be mostly unaware of cultural influences. When people of dissimilar cultures try to communicate, they often encounter powerful barriers. The consequences can be amusing, but, at worst, disastrous.

Making it work 2.4

Two nations divided by a single language

To table a document in the UK means to put it forward for discussion; in the US it means to postpone it indefinitely. Try to imagine the confusion that ensued during some delicate negotiations when delegates from the US put forward a document which set out their negotiating position, and the UK delegation insisted that it should 'be tabled'.

One product of globalisation may be convergence – different cultures becoming more and more similar. Culture clash, or the disturbances and misunderstandings arising when two or more different cultures converge, is still an important barrier to communication, but it may become less so in the future, now that we can travel, or at least see images from, all over the world, extending our experience and understanding.

4.3 Organisational culture

Just as a country has a defined culture, and an individual has his/her own cultural background, so it is with an organisation. The culture of an organisation depends partly on the environment in which it operates, and companies can be seen to be identifiably British or American or Japanese and so on. Organisational culture is influenced even more, however, by the individuals which make up the whole, and most especially by the leaders and managers of the organisation. This means that the barriers and filters at work in an individual can also operate in much the same way in an organisation. At the extreme, a phenomenon known as **excessive conformity** can occur; this means that members of the group are willing to take part in actions as part of that group which they would not be willing to do as individuals. This willingness can become an unquestioning belief in the rightness of the objectives of the organisation, with ethical and moral considerations being ignored. The group creates negative stereotypes for individuals outside the organisation, and for rival organisations, and becomes deaf to messages from outside. At the very worst, self-appointed 'mind-guards' protect the organisation's leaders, filter information and exert pressure on dissenters. This is the extreme, it should be emphasised, and organisational culture usually exercises a much less sinister influence, often, indeed, being beneficial.

excessive conformity
A social psychological phenomenon in which the norms, values and behaviours of an individual increasingly follow those of a wider group. Members of the group are unquestioning in their belief in the rightness of the group, and there is considerable pressure to conform, with minority views being suppressed.

4.4 Groups

Groups may owe their homogeneity to race, geography, religion, gender, sexual orientation, educational background, social class, age, etc. These all have a profound effect on the way people think, behave and communicate. None of these groups has clear-cut boundaries, and there are considerable differences and variations within a group as well as between groups, with overlap as well where people belong to more than one group. Not every woman is a feminist; homosexuals with different educational backgrounds do not all share a world view; Jews do not all vote in the same way, and not every Muslim comes from Pakistan. It is important of course to be aware of the many influences at work within an individual with whom you need to communicate; far more important, however, is to be aware of them as individuals, and to realise that their very individuality will certainly have modified and may even have outweighed all these other influences. Above all, avoid stereotyping. Training in this area is available, and could be invaluable.

5 The external environment and organisational change

Organisations have always been subject to change, but the speed of development, the ease with which we now communicate, and globalisation have all much exacerbated the influence of factors in the business environment. The many different elements making up the business environment are summed up in the acronym PESTLE, which is sometimes expanded by the addition of the letter C to PESTLE C:

- political
- economic
- socio-cultural
- technological

- legal
- ecological
- competitive.

The result is that many organisations demand more and more that their managers and staff 'scan' the environment and their competitors' behaviour to look for signs of impending change. If staff do not fully report what they find on these issues, one problem for senior managers will be feedback starvation; they become less effective because they are not sufficiently aware of what is happening around them, not just in their own organisation, but also to competitors and the environment. Effective communication is an essential feature in the recognition, acceptance and implementation of organisational change.

5.1 Relationships

Communication is interpreted in terms of the relationship we have with the other person. The same message can have different meanings depending on who is sending and who receiving it. If I say to my boss 'Do you think you could do this for me, please?', I am making a polite request; a request, moreover, they can refuse. If I say the same thing to my son, I could be making a polite request, but, more likely, I am issuing an instruction in a rather sarcastic way; an instruction which, of course, he is not permitted to refuse! It is worth noting that while the words might be exactly the same, the intonation and emphasis would, of course, be very different. Relationships are not just between individuals, however, They can occur between organisations, and need to be understood if a company is going to be successful in selling its services to another company.

Putting the case 2.1

Q Jane Taylor finds that her new job has greatly expanded the number and range of groups with which she needs to communicate. What are the issues she needs to think about most in this connection? How can she best address the challenges this part of her job presents?

A Most important – she must avoid stereotyping anyone because of the group they belong to, or she perceives they belong to, and she must make sure her staff appreciate the importance of this, too. They should all recognise the importance of the groups, and especially those representing different cultures, since business with people in other countries seems to be an important part of the company's work. She should try to enlist the support of her manager to help her to organise training for her and her staff in recognising the various groups she will come across, and in being sympathetic and empathetic in dealing with them.

Test *yourself* 2.3

Identify three types of culture that can influence communication.

Summary

- Communicators should choose the method appropriate to the message to be conveyed, and to the person(s) who will receive it.
- Communication must be planned. Think about who, why, what, how, and remember to build in from the start the ways you will receive feedback.
- Effective communication comes about because of attention to:
  - the relevance of the message to the person receiving it
  - the logic and structure of the mode
  - the involvement of the person receiving the message
  - repetition of the content to reinforce understanding.
- If the message you send is not understood, there is no message. Be aware of the filters and barriers which may block its path or dilute its effect, and look for feedback to assure you that it has been safely received, understood and acted upon.
- Be aware of all the external factors that may act on the message – differences in language and culture, the attitudes of the recipients, changes happening in the organisation and the wider environment.

Part One Practice Questions

Section A

2-mark questions:
Write a brief definition for each of the following:

1.1 sender
1.2 message
1.3 mode
1.4 channel
1.5 noise
1.6 receiver
1.7 feedback.

4-mark questions:

1.8 Give three examples of spoken communication. For each example say whether it is synchronous or asynchronous and why.
1.9 Give three examples of written communication. For each example say whether it is synchronous or asynchronous and why.
1.10 Describe the following barriers to communication:
a) physiological
b) cultural
c) technological
d) language.

Section B

Note: the questions below are indicative only and represent 15 marks each. In the Business Communications examination, each Section B question is a multi-part question worth 30 marks in total.

1.11 In the case study, Jane Taylor's success will depend to a very great extent on her ability to communicate well. Help her to succeed by identifying for her which of the various elements of communication each of the following is involved with, and by describing the nature and processes of the involvement:
a) instructions or ideas
b) encoding
c) transmission
d) understanding.
1.12 Jane has been asked to investigate a possible new area of business which could be highly profitable, and to report her findings to her manager, Patrick Kaye. The way she is to deliver her findings has been left up to her. Compile a checklist of the various factors she will need to take into account as she chooses her method and prepares to report her findings.

Communication in the workplace

PART TWO

Contents

Overview

In Part 2 we turn away from the theory of communication and begin to examine some of the more practical applications. After a look at the business environment in general, and the specific problems of communicating within it, the idea of the corporate ethos is discussed – trust, credibility, ethics, morals and integrity. Chapter 3 concludes with a brief look at the tool of the communication audit and its effect on improving business communication. Chapter 4 turns to the market – to marketing, marketing research, the market plan and advertising, the principal way in which businesses communicate with their customers. This leads in to a study of the customers themselves, of the relationship businesses have with them and their strategies for communicating with them. Chapter 4 ends with the vital topics of customer care and complaint handling.

Chapter 5 explores the ways in which the electronic revolution has affected the ways in which organisations communicate – both internally and externally. We have more, better and faster ways to communicate with each other than ever before, and the chapter outlines some of the key developments and assesses the benefits and pitfalls of the range of new and enhanced communication channels now open to us. The chapter also explores the development of the internet and how it can be used as a powerful tool for organisational communications.

Learning objectives

After reading the chapters in this Part, students should be able to:

- understand a little of the nature of organisations, and appreciate the significance of the part communication plays in an organisation
- recognise some of the attitudes and elements which make up the corporate ethos, and the influence that the corporate ethos has on communication
- appreciate the nature of the external environment within which an organisation operates, and how that organisation relates to and communicates with the external environment

- identify how marketing communications are used by organisations to communicate with customers and potential customers, showing awareness of the importance of feedback and potential barriers in this context
- understand the importance of customer communications and customer care
- acknowledge the importance of complaints, made both to and by the organisation, to the way the organisation is perceived by the outside world
- develop strategies for handling customer complaints and using them positively as a type of free market research
- be aware of how information technology is changing the ways in which organisations communicate, and identify some of the key benefits and potential pitfalls of the IT revolution
- understand how the internet works and can be used as an important communications channel by organisations of all sizes.

PART TWO **CASE STUDY**

James Peters

James Peters works for a company which produces agricultural chemicals, supplying both farmers and agricultural distributors. He was recruited specifically to set up a new division with a brief requiring him to expand the company's markets and sales by selling, for the first time, products intended for domestic use, through garden centres and appropriate retailers. The first product to be repackaged and sold in this way is a selective weed killer, which in domestic form can be used on lawns. This is both a major opportunity, because research shows that this is a large and growing market, and also a major challenge. Many things need be done in preparation:

- A new brand image, designed to appeal to the domestic market, must be created, and products packaged to sell from retailers' shelves (rather than by bulk deliveries to farms and agricultural distributors).
- New members of staff are needed, including new field sales staff who will call on the new kinds of customer the repackaged product is intended for.
- Most importantly, new communications strategies are required, because the range and nature of people with whom the organisation will need to communicate is very different from its traditional target market.
- In addition, the new operation must be integrated into the existing organisation, with people working in a number of different functions understanding and supporting what needs to be done.

As soon as James has settled into his new post, his first task is to compile a specific business and marketing plan, and to determine the timing for the launch of the new product.

Business communications in context

3

List of topics

Introduction

Previous chapters have outlined the theory of communication, and investigated what is needed for communication to be effective. This chapter begins the movement from theory to practice which will characterise the rest of this book. After a brief look at communication in general in the business context, we turn to the way corporate entities are organised and run. This leads on to the way communication is organised in such entities, and the effect the overall ethos of the entity will have on the way it communicates. The chapter ends by considering some of the problems that can arise, and offers two possible solutions.

1 Communicating in the business environment

The fact that you are reading this text and proposing to take an examination means that you have already learned at least one language, and a quite difficult one at that – English. Some of you may actually have learned more than one language. You will probably have a vocabulary of several thousand words, and be capable of expressing complex ideas using quite complicated sentence constructions, even if English is not your first language. You are already a successful communicator, so why is there more to learn?

1. For business purposes, your existing vocabulary may not be enough – there will be many words and specialist terms in use around you which you will need to be master of.
2. At work you will need to communicate with a variety of people, both inside and outside the organisation. The words you use and the way you speak in your everyday living may be quite satisfactory for your dealings with friends and family, but they are almost certainly not right for your business dealings.
3. Languages – and especially English – are continually changing and developing. Many of these changes are business-based.
4. Communication is even more important in the business context than in the social – maybe even vital. Good communication, it has been said, is the lifeblood of successful organisations.

5 You need to be confident – to be able to use all the means available to you – telephones and letters, fax and email, reports and memos.

People work better when persuaded rather than pushed, and persuasion is a much-needed management skill. The link between the persuader (the Manager) and the persuaded (the Managed), both upwards and downwards, is communication.

Those who have made a successful career for themselves in business know that doing well is linked, or even dependent on, the ability to communicate effectively.

1.1 Planning and preparation

Over and over again, the importance of planning and preparation will be emphasised in this text.

- Analyse and organise your material.
- Ask yourself, what is it that I want to convey? Can I give it a title which will accurately describe it?
- Can the material be split into smaller, more easily digested parts which will help the recipient to grasp the structure of the whole and appreciate the relationships involved?
- What details are essential? Who, when, where, why, what, how? Arrange the details into a structured, logical order.
- Check the outline. Have I missed anything? Is it in a logical order? Is there too much? Is there too little?

1.2 Style

Pieces of written work – reports, letters, emails, etc. – when sent out, become your personal representatives, especially when they are received by someone who does not know you: these pieces of work will convey to the recipient an image of yourself. You must make sure that the image conveyed is a favourable one. A principal ingredient in producing work which will create such an impression is **style**.

style
The approach and choice of words and expression which can be adjusted to suit specific circumstances.

Style is considered in some detail in Chapter 12, especially with regard to writing. It is enough, here, to think of it in terms of being aware of the different effects that various combinations of words, expressions and structures can have, and developing the ability to express ideas in informative, discursive or persuasive ways.

1.3 Making contact

Whenever you meet someone, greet them, and eventually say goodbye, considerable social interaction is involved, whether the other person is well known to you or a total stranger; these interactions are all part of the communication process. The way you greet them will be determined by how well you know them, how long you have known them, and whether the relationship is an equal one or not.

Initial greetings should be as warm as possible, although cultural differences should always be respected. Meetings can end courteously, even if there has been no agreement, and a farewell can be as warm and friendly as was the original greeting. How much and, indeed, if any bodily contact should be made is a fine judgement, and cultural and sexual differences have to be considered. A handshake may be a normal greeting in the West but is an inappropriate one in, say, Japan or Korea, where it is normal to bow in greeting, with respect shown and judged by the depth of the bow.

Stop and think 3.1

Remember the five important points in preparing your work. Think back to the last time you had to write an important letter, memo or report. Try to think how well you carried out each of the points of preparation, and, most importantly, whether you could have done each one better.

2 Corporate communication

2.1 Corporate communication

There are three branches to corporate communication:

- management communication – by senior managers
- marketing communication – advertising, sponsorship, sales promotion, direct mail
- organisational communication – PR, corporate affairs, internal and external communication.

2.2 Governance

Governance is not about the actual running of the company, more about giving direction to the enterprise, and overseeing the management of the company.

Management runs the business; governance makes sure it is run correctly. Governance, therefore, is different from management, and involves setting a corporate direction, and overseeing executive action, supervision and accountability.

governance
The act, manner, fact or function of governing.

management
The administration of business concerns or public undertakings.

2.3 Hierarchy, status and authority

In a large organisation, hierarchy can cause distortion, and can stifle upward communication. This comes about because of the number of layers that messages have to go through to travel from one end of the hierarchy to the other. Centralisation can separate local experts and managers from the decision makers, encouraging irrelevant and misleading information. Status can have a devastating effect on those who have little of it. People of high rank feel free to interrupt those lower in the hierarchy, and may take little account of what those lower say. From a position at the bottom of the chain, your voice may feel weak and unheard. Status confers authority, so that even a manager's silence may be subject to scrutiny and interpretation.

2.4 Corporate culture

Deal and Kennedy (1982) suggest that there are four main types of company culture, based on key attributes. The key attributes are:

- values: shared beliefs and philosophies
- heroes: individuals who seem to personify the organisation's values
- rites and rituals: the ways in which members celebrate the values
- communication network: the informal channels which spread the values.

The four types of company culture are:

1. Tough-guy macho culture: Here individuals take risks, work hard and fast, and expect quick feedback and awards; it favours the young and is very competitive. It is difficult to get staff to co-operate.
2. Work hard/play hard culture: This thrives in a much less risky environment where staff are rewarded for hard work, and team play and conforming to recognised procedures are all emphasised.
3. Bet your company culture: This is epitomised by large businesses which invest large amounts in projects which take a long time to complete. Risks are high, but feedback may take a long time. Members of staff are valued for their commitment, competence and endurance.
4. Process culture: This places a strong emphasis on how things are done – getting it right and attending to detail. There is low risk and low feedback.

An organisation's culture is expressed through communication, and the content of the communication reflects the cultural values of the organisation.

2.5 Communication strategy

There are three important things to be determined:

1. What are the objectives for communicating, and what does the organisation want to happen as a result of communicating?
2. What resources are available in terms of:
   - money
   - people
   - time?
3. What is the organisation's reputation; how is it viewed by the organisation, group, people or person it wishes to communicate with?

Making it work 3.1

Changing approaches to communication

New ways of tackling things can often make a difference to effectiveness, and constant review is needed to make sure things do not get into a rut. In one company, for instance, the Accounts department always wrote to bad debtors; this action was often followed by a long period during which additional reminder notes were sent. When a telephone call was introduced to follow up the first note, cash flow improved. When people were required to make these calls *standing up while they were speaking*, cash flow improved still further, because it prompted a more assertive approach.

2.6 Management/staff communication

It is essential that management should realise the importance of communication and act to implement it. The vision that senior management may have of the organisation needs to be communicated downwards to all the employees; this will set the standard of communication expected throughout the organisation.

Surveys show that despite increased activity in the area of communication between management and staff, the satisfaction felt by staff with the way communication is handled within their own organisation remains steady at about 50%. It may be that however much you try, this is one area staff will always manage to criticise, because, as communication improves, so the expectations of staff increase.

Stop and think 3.2

Think about the organisation you work in, or one you are familiar with. How well do you think it communicates? Do you think your boss would give the same answer? Do you know what vision senior management have of the company? Try to think of ways in the company's communication strategy could be improved.

2.7 Upward/downward, horizontal/diagonal

It used to be the situation in most organisations that communication used to flow, for the most part, in one direction – downwards. Today it is considered to be essential that information flows in all directions, as needed, and as appropriate.

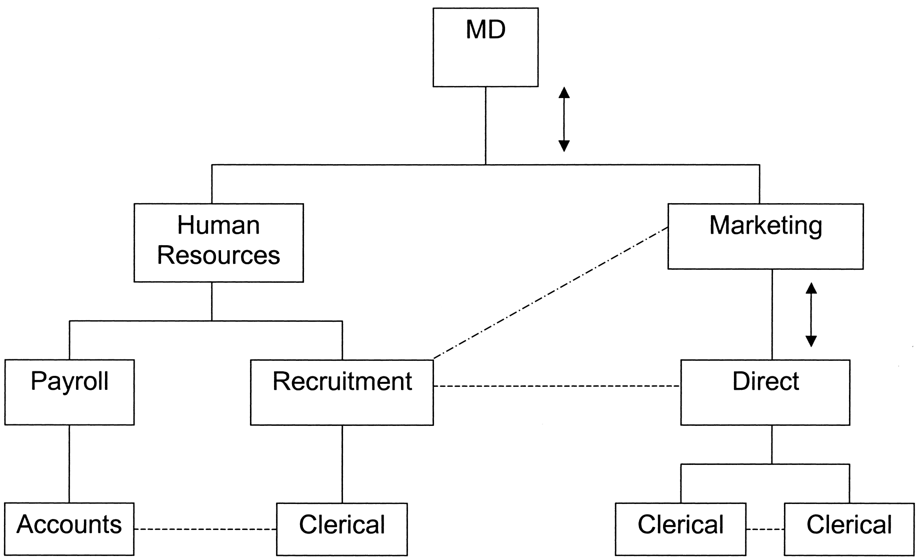


Figure 3.1 Communication flows within organisations

Upwards and downwards implies that communication is taking place between people of differing status. Horizontal communication takes place between people of the same status. Diagonal communication happens between different departments, when there is no obvious line of authority.

Test *yourself* 3.1

a) Why is style important to business communications?

b) Define:

   i) horizontal communication

   ii) diagonal communication.

3 The corporate ethos

3.1 Conflict

Contrary to what most people might believe, conflict is not necessarily something to be avoided. Too much agreement within an organisation may indicate that employees are not feeling involved in the objectives of that organisation, or even that the organisation's general culture is inhibited. The presence of a degree of conflict means of course that people are disagreeing, but about real issues in which they feel involved. Effective problem solving can only take place through the open expression of differences. If there is too much conflict, however, then people will stop listening and start shouting, and communication will fly out of the window. Messages will be misleading because of personal dislikes, and communication will be terse, with people expressing only the barest necessities, and not a word more.

3.2 Trust and credibility

Trust can be seen as the absence of fear. Fear results from injury caused by someone who was previously trusted. A manager may be trusted and respected for many years, but one lapse and all trust may be lost; trust takes a moment to be lost and sometimes a lifetime to build. With trust comes credibility.

Why is it that some managers seem to be credible, while others are regarded with hostility and suspicion? Why are the arguments of some union representatives listened to and believed more than those of the workers' own managers?

There is an important label on every message – the identity of the person who sent it. It is on the basis of the label, on the way in which we see the sender of the message, that we decide whether to accept the message, regard it with suspicion, or reject it. Anyone regarded as credible, and therefore trustworthy, can communicate far more effectively than one seen as untrustworthy, even though their communication skills may be the same.

Behaviour that can increase credibility and trust:

- Tell people about things in advance.
- Ask them for input.

- Listen to everyone carefully.
- Show you have been listening, by changing your plans if necessary.
- Stay in touch.
- Use plain language.
- Bring everyone into the decision-making process, especially those most affected.

Making it work 3.2

Credibility counts

In a famous experiment, two groups of American students were given the same statement about an industrial dispute. One group were told that the statement came from the *New York Times*, the other that it came from the *New York Daily Worker*. The first group thought the statement fair and objective, the second, unfair and one-sided.

3.3 Ethics, morals, probity and integrity

Ethics means the principles of right and wrong which individuals use to guide them when making choices in their behaviour. The same principles can be employed to guide an organisation in the choices it makes.

The specific ethical and **moral** problems which the internet and IT have thrown up are discussed in detail in Chapter 5. Just as a small example, however: consider the problem facing managers over whether or not to monitor employees who use a business network for personal reasons. Is such monitoring just good business sense, or is it unethical, or even an illegal invasion of privacy? The problem is even greater when the network is opened up to include access to the internet, with all the temptations that offers.

While it might appear obvious and 'only common sense', it is important to realise that **probity** and **integrity** are not tenets applicable only to dealings involving money and finance. Building and maintaining a reputation for honest dealing in your communications is just as important as your reputation in financial matters. Like trust and credibility, too, it can take a long time to acquire, and a moment to lose.

ethics
The science of morals, moral principles and rules of conduct.

morality
The distinction between right and wrong.

probity
Uprightness, honesty.

integrity
Soundness, uprightness, honesty.

Putting the case 3.1

Q What priority do you think James should put in his business and marketing plan on communication?

A Communication must have the highest priority. The description of what will be happening with the new market may be similar to what already happens, perhaps deceptively so. But communication needs to be interpreted in the context of the customers who the company now wants to be in touch with. The whole premise of the development James is leading is to attract new customer groups – this does not just mean more customers, but customers who will be different in nature: their thinking, way of working and needs will all be different from those of the customers the organisation is used to (and doubtless well practised at) communicating with. James may find it difficult to persuade others in the company just how different communications are going to have to be if they are to be effective, and targets in this area are to be met.

Test *yourself* 3.2

Give four examples of the ways in which behaviour can improve credibility and trust.

4 Problems

4.1 Timing

A great key to success in communication is timing. Effective communication is not just a matter of how, but also when. When you approach your boss, be aware of his moods, and of his situation. Is he rushed off his feet, or can you catch him in a relaxed, expansive mood? Are you about to ask or tell him about something he will find relevant to what you know he is currently occupied with, or are you straying too far from his present concerns? When writing, begin by preparing the way for what you want to communicate – asking about something, offering something for sale, etc., and open up the reader's mind ready for whatever you want – but do not take too long before you make your purpose clear, or you risk losing or antagonising them.

4.2 Grapevine

grapevine An unofficial informal communication channel based on rumour, gossip and hearsay.

The **grapevine** is the unofficial communication system which is informally constructed and is constantly shifting and changing. Every organisation will have one, no matter how good the formal channels. Sources for the grapevine can include letters left open on desks, computer files left open on screen, careless remarks and overheard fragments of conversation. The lifeblood of the grapevine is gossip, rumour and distortions of the truth, often resulting in misplaced resentment and unfounded fears.

The more an organisation tries to keep its communication channels open and available to its entire staff, the less the grapevine will flourish. Adequate and accurate information must be made readily available to people, especially in times of uncertainty. The grapevine deals in what people find 'interesting', i.e. what is likely to have the greatest effect on them. A good communicator will be aware of the grapevine and will make use of it. Not everything they hear about will be useful, although most of it will be interesting, and they will need to be very careful and highly selective. The good communicator can also use the grapevine for their own ends, feeding information into it; they must always be sure, however, that any information so released is correct, otherwise their credibility will suffer.

4.3 Short-circuiting

Sometimes the urgency of a message, or its importance or confidentiality, means that the sender, from high up in the organisation, has to bypass some intermediate levels of management, sending the message direct to the person it is intended for. Necessary this may sometimes be, but beware. If it is done too often, it will lead to resentment, and the very reasons that necessitated it may prevent explanation and excuse.

4.4 Distortion and disinformation

Lies are not unknown at some time in most organisations, and are the common currency of some. Governments are guilty of propaganda, which may be only distortions or exaggerations of the truth, but in some cases can be total lies; at the extreme is brainwashing. Most organisations of all kinds at some time are ‘economical with the truth’. There are legal requirements to do with, for example, being listed on the London Stock Exchange, which may cause prevarication, but apart from many companies not being publicly quoted, and so not affected, these requirements are to do with the timing of announcements and the restriction of information, not about distortion or disinformation, and certainly not about lies. Indeed, the law requires large registered companies to communicate openly with their employees. Companies that are less than ‘economical with the truth’ usually suffer great embarrassment when caught out.

5 Making it happen

After all this, how do you make sure communication actually happens? In the hectic modern world it may need to be encouraged. The following are examples of ideas being used in some organisations to encourage the right sort of communication:

- Scheduling regular meetings of a department or group to discuss change and future matters, as well as routine progress checks.
- Banning internal emails at certain times of the week to force people to talk face to face.
- Providing adequate meeting rooms so that gatherings needing a quiet and distraction-free environment are possible, thus encouraging creativity, for instance.
- Organising break times in pleasant environments (e.g. space to eat lunch) which, in part, may encourage people to talk shop in a useful way. One organisation provides regular free sandwich lunches for different groups of people; this mixes them up and, in return for the lunch, a prescribed topic is discussed.
- Using internal newsletters, websites and notice boards.

Stop and think 3.3

The list above could be much longer and even more varied. It may be useful to consider these ideas in the context of your own organisation, asking what is already being done to encourage communication, and what additional steps might be taken.

6 The communications audit

6.1 Purpose

communications audit
A way of assessing the effectiveness of an organisation's communication channels, and of identifying barriers to and filters of communication.

A **communications audit** is a good starting point for an organisation which seeks to improve the effectiveness of its communications. An audit will establish the communication needs of the organisation, which needs are being satisfied, and how well, which are not, and what changes need to be made to improve effectiveness. The audit can deal with all aspects of communication, or it can be tailored to cover only part. It can also consider either internal or external communication, or both.

The communication that takes place in an organisation is not always that which is intended by the management. If management feels that communication problems exist, then an investigation is in order.

Studies have shown that management often assumes, incorrectly, that it knows what employees need and want to know; equally, it has been shown that management in reality does not know what employees actually hear.

6.2 Objective

The objective of the audit should be clearly defined at the outset – is the whole organisation to be looked at, or only part, and if so, which part? Is the investigation internal only or external as well? Then a series of specific questions the audit will be expected to answer should be listed, questions of the 'why, how, when, where, what do we need, what will it cost?' variety.

7 Training

Most organisations consider training to be one of their most valuable investments. Since communication is 'the lifeblood of an organisation', the value of and need for training should be clear. Unfortunately, it is common to hear, nowadays, complaints from captains of industry that the education system turns out school leavers who are ill prepared for the business world; this is usually said in the context of literacy and numeracy. This often means that training is used to make up this perceived deficit in the education system, rather than being devoted to improving the more specialised communication skills of staff. Courses are available, however, on everything from writing simple letters to complex reports; from interviewing to presentation technique and public speaking.

Summary

- Business communication calls for language, skills and vocabulary which go beyond what is needed for day to day use.
- Communication needs to be planned, prepared and organised; communication in this context includes meeting and greeting.
- The governance and management of an organisation – the way it is run – and its culture exert a very great influence on the way it communicates.

- Practical experience shows that, however much and however well an organisation communicates with its staff, expectations increase proportionately.
- Internal communication is more complex than a straightforward upwards and downwards flow.
- Trust and honesty are all important in establishing good relationships in communication; within the concepts of trust and honesty it is necessary to have regard for ethics, morals and integrity if communication is to be effective.
- There are a number of specific problem areas – timing, the grapevine, short-circuiting, and distortion/disinformation. Of these, only the latter cannot be used positively as well as negatively.
- There are positive things which can be done to make communication happen more effectively, specifically training and audit.

4 External communications: markets and customers

List of topics

1 Relating to the external environment
2 Marketing communications
3 Customers and clients
4 Looking after customers
5 Handling complaints

Introduction

Business cannot afford to be introspective: it must look outwards towards its customers and clients. This chapter considers the way this is done, examining (from the specific standpoint of communication) marketing and marketing research. Communication with customers is examined, along with customer care, and the chapter ends with a consideration of the vital topic of complaints, and how to deal with them.

1 Relating to the external environment

There are a number of organisations, groups and people – sometimes known as **stakeholders** – with which businesses need to communicate. These include:

stakeholder
Any group or individual who can affect, or is affected by, the achievement of an organisation's objectives.

- shareholders
- suppliers and collaborators
- customers, potential customers and clients.

It is the last of these with which this chapter is especially concerned. The overriding factor here is *competition*. The dynamic nature of markets means that customers are hard to win, and demand attention if they are to be retained.

The context in which to see the communication that this demands involves **marketing**. Marketing is a much misunderstood concept. It describes a broad function, incorporating many disparate elements, all of which must link – and work – together.

marketing
Making goods or services available in the marketplace; putting goods and services up for sale.

The word *marketing* now carries many more overtones, but this definition is sufficient here, where were are concerned not so much with the marketing function itself, as with what it means for and in communication.

2 Marketing communications

marketing communications
The process by which a business can enter into dialogue with its clients and customers.

Marketing communications are about the promotion of both the business and the goods and services it has to offer. All organisations are involved in promotion to a lesser or greater extent, whether this involves the commercial sale of goods or services, a charity fundraising campaign or attempts to influence legislators.

The ways in which an organisation uses marketing communications to relate to its external environment are often referred to as the **promotional mix**, which involves the use and coordination of a variety of promotional channels to achieve the end goal. It is difficult to categorise these channels precisely, but it is widely accepted that the mix will include some or all of the following:

promotional mix
The range of channels an organisation might use to communicate with the external environment.

- direct marketing
- public relations
- advertising
- sales promotion
- personal selling
- exhibitions.

This chapter looks at some of the core concepts and principles of marketing communications, and gives a brief overview of market research and planning. Specific forms of promotion – such as advertising and press relations – are looked at in more detail in Chapter 14.

2.1 Market research

Market research looks for the information needed to identify target markets and marketing opportunities. It generates information which will inform the decision-making process.

market research
The systematic gathering, recording and analysing of information relating to the marketing of goods and services and covering the broad scope of marketing activities.

Research should only be conducted when the value of the information to be obtained is greater than the cost of obtaining it.

In summary, the research process follows certain key steps :

1. Define the marketing problem to be solved, and specify the research objectives.
2. Select the data collection method(s) to be used.
3. Select the sampling method(s) to be used. (Note that sampling may not be valid for every piece of research – if the universe (the whole population to be investigated) is small, a census may be better.)
4. Develop an analysis plan. Specify what data will be reported and what statistical methods will be used to analyse the results.
5. Estimate the time and resources needed.
6. Check back to make sure everything fits with the person, department or organisation specifying the research.
7. Collect the data.
8. Analyse the data.
9. Report the findings.

There are two main types of research which may be carried out:

- Primary research: Original research which is being carried out for the first time for a particular purpose. This can be achieved by using a range of tools, including surveys, interviews, observations and experiments.
- Secondary research: Research into data that has already been published, such as a company's own records, or published sources, such as government statistics.

2.2 Marketing communications research

Marketing communications research includes advertising research, the evaluation of sales promotions and direct mail, trade journals, exhibitions, personal selling, corporate communications, telephone marketing, the internet and so on. It is fundamental to the marketing process, evaluating, as it does, the overall effectiveness of an organisation's marketing in general, and of any specific communications campaign being conducted. The organisation may need to research the characteristics of its customers, defining the target audience for future campaigns. The audience may be individuals or other organisations, depending on the product. Which will be the most effective media through which to conduct those campaigns? Television for individuals? Trade journals for other organisations? How exactly should the message be presented? What sales force will be required, and where or how should it be placed?

2.3 The marketing plan

A marketing plan is a document covering all a business's marketing activities, including the implementation and control of those activities. It is a major way of communicating to staff, and hence of great importance in the context of this text. It:

- offers a 'road map' for implementing the firm's strategies and achieving its objectives
- assists in management control and monitoring of the implementation of management strategy
- informs new participants in the plan of their role and function
- specifies how resources are to be allocated
- stimulates thinking and makes better use of resources
- assigns responsibilities, tasks and timing
- makes participants aware of problems, opportunities and threats.

A typical format will contain:

1. Business definition and market analysis: Categories of customers served, and their needs; market size and trends; analysis of market segments.
2. Situation analysis: Review of trends and changes in the environment the organisation operates in, from an economic, political, social, cultural and technological viewpoint; analysis of customers and potential customers; detail of the company itself – profit and performance, market and market share, resources.
3. Analysis of key issues/SWOT: All the key analyses from 1 and 2 in a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats statement.
4. Marketing objectives: A statement of marketing objectives, covering sales, market share, image, profit and margins.
5. Marketing strategy: Target markets, position in the market, marketing mix – product, price, distribution, promotion.
6. Financial projections and budgets: Budgets, sales forecasts, profit forecasts.
7. Controls, evaluations and contingency plans.

2.4 Advertising

To advertise is defined in some dictionaries as 'to inform', and it is indeed a prime way that business uses to communicate with and inform its customers and clients. More specifically, though, advertising is about persuasion. Customers have to be motivated to make a purchase. Advertising, therefore, seeks to identify and present the benefits of a product to the target audience, as effectively and as cost-effectively as possible. It is used to develop and reinforce a producer's image, and to establish a brand image, an identity for a product to which customers can relate. Part of a brand image is the packaging used for the goods, and this in itself is a form of advertising, and a powerful way to convey a message from supplier to customer. For advertising to be effective, it must be well managed. There are six basic elements to managing advertising:

1. Identify the target audience.
2. Determine the objectives.
3. Determine the budget.
4. Select the message.
5. Select the media.
6. Evaluate the effectiveness.

Advertising is looked at in more detail in Chapter 14.

Putting the case 4.1

Q Why is it likely that existing sales staff will not form part of the sales team that James Peters needs to create?

A There are two reasons:

First, productivity. It is probable that these people are already fully stretched by their task of selling to existing customers. More important, however, is that the nature of the new customers is very different: an arable farmer compared with the manager of a suburban garden centre, for instance. It is likely, therefore, that the skills needed to communicate with the new customers will be different from those held by the existing team, and that people with experience relevant to the new task will need to be recruited. Some people might transfer, with suitable training, but it is essential that those doing this job are well matched to the task.

Test *yourself* 4.1

Identify four elements which are usually included in a marketing plan.

3 Customers and clients

3.1 Customer communications

Communication with and between customers and clients is central to marketing. It takes many forms, of which the biggest, best known and most obvious is advertising. Of great importance, however, is word of mouth: interpersonal communication between two or more individuals, passing on product news, advice and experience. Word of mouth can be negative as well as positive, and negative is the more powerful. Dissatisfied customers communicate negatively to three times as many others as satisfied ones do positively. One particular type of negative word of mouth is rumour, which can be extremely destructive.

Making it work 4.1

The power of 'word of mouth'

A very famous restaurant suffered a few years ago from the negative power of word of mouth. The restaurant was justifiably well known, for its good food and wine, for its comfort, and for the level of service it provided. Eating at such an establishment cannot be cheap, of course, and it had an equally justified reputation for being expensive. In a perverse way, that reputation added to the expectations its customers had of the experience they were going to enjoy, until, that is, a rumour – an urban myth – grew up. This took a number of forms, but the theme was that a party of four, all used to dining in expensive places, had eaten dinner there, enjoying to the full the range of food and wine on offer. At the end of the evening, they had been presented with a bill of such astronomic size that they had refused to pay, with all the attendant unpleasantness that would accompany such an action. Like all such myths and rumours, this was always passed on as having happened to 'a friend of someone we know'; no one ever met the 'real' customers.

The myth continued and the restaurant's business began to suffer. It was, in fact, saved from possible bankruptcy by the existence of the myth being taken up by the media, thus giving the restaurateur the opportunity to refute the rumour. This is the power of rumour, then – the ability to turn a good, profitable business into a bankrupt one.

The internet has taken the power and opportunity for word of mouth communication to new levels.

3.2 Customer communications strategies

Communication with customers and clients should be proactive and managed. Too often, it is purely reactive. A supplier will respond to a communication from a customer in the form of an enquiry, an order or (worse) a complaint. If the communication is proactive, the customer would never need to ask about the progress of their order because the supplier would have a system to inform them at each stage of the order/delivery process. This is an area where on-the-road sales staff can play a huge part. Advertising is important, too, because it explains service policies. Increasingly it has been found that customers do not worry too much about delays in provision as long as they are kept informed. The existence of flexible mobile communication systems today – radio, paging and mobile (cell) phones can all combine to keep sales and other offsite staff up to date so that they can provide customers with best possible service.

Another element in this is direct marketing – where businesses communicate directly with named individuals. Traditionally companies have relied on market research and observations made by the wholesale and retail chains in order to communicate with clients. Many companies now also operate a direct marketing system, which has certain advantages in terms of communications and enables a company to:

- write to its potential clients directly
- write to its current clients directly

- describe specifically a product or a range of products to clients
- write directly to a specific sector of its clients, whether they are current or potential customers
- obtain replies from all of the above without channelling the information through any other company.

3.3 Communication is two-way

Effective communication is not just about giving out information to the customer. Organisations should never assume what their customers want or expect. The successful company meets real needs, not just what it perceives as its customers' needs; to achieve this it actively identifies the expectations of its customers. It is always seeking to review and improve service standards, and it positively encourages feedback from its customers, feedback which is used to help staff in their work, and in their training and development programmes.

As in any communication, confirm that customers have correctly interpreted the message – the advertisement, promotion, flyer, etc. – and that their understanding will be translated into purchasing or other positive action towards the company. Remember that the best feedback of all is sales.

3.4 Listening

We discussed earlier in Chapter 1 the difference between *hearing* and *listening*. In the more specialised context of marketing, listening assumes that customers know what they want, and lets the customer know they are valued. Show you are listening by the way you approach and deal with customers. A listening company does everything possible to anticipate its clients' needs, to establish what the client thinks its needs are and to meet those needs.

3.5 Barriers

Just as in general communication, barriers get in the way of the message and prevent it getting to the receiver, or corrupt it as it travels, so in marketing, barriers prevent the marketing communication from reaching the receiver successfully.

For example, types of barrier in the retailing sector might include:

- Value barrier: Due to a product's lack of relative advantage compared with substitute products. For example, mobile (cell) phones, when first introduced, cost about £2,000 each; they were acceptable to businesses because the advantage of mobility was worth the cost, but were prohibitively expensive for ordinary consumers because the advantages over conventional phones were then very slight.
- Usage barrier: The item on offer is not compatible with the consumer's existing practices or habits. Interactive in-home online shopping is an example, having been resisted because consumers like to interact with personnel and like to see the merchandise; they also perceive shopping as a special, social occasion, often

carried out in the company of family or friends. Usage barriers are difficult to overcome because the attitudes involved can be very ingrained.
- Risk barrier: The physical, economic, performance or social risk of adopting an innovation. Microwave ovens were seen at first as a radiation risk. Improved technology and consumer education have overcome this. New car designs can be introduced by offering test drives, so that innovations which may be disturbing to the conservative customer can be experienced without risk.

Similarly, barriers in the advertising communication process include:

- communications objectives not being defined to reflect consumer needs
- the product benefits not being adequately encoded
- the wrong market segment being targeted, or the wrong media being used
- consumers failing to decode the message in the way the advertiser intended.

4 Looking after customers

4.1 Customer care

Everyone wants good service when they buy things or deal with an organisation. The techniques needed for good customer care can be summarised by the mnemonic PERFECT, which states that relations with customers should be:

- Polite
- Efficient
- Respectful
- Friendly
- Enthusiastic
- Cheerful
- Tactful.

4.2 Complaints

Good service is intended to give an edge over the competition, but things can go wrong, and even the best run organisations get some complaints. Good management should ensure that these are few, but, when they do come, they need to be handled effectively. Complaints can also be viewed positively: as an effective way of collecting customer feedback and fine-tuning products and services.

Stop and think 4.1

Think about a large department store you know well. Do you know to whom you should address a complaint? Do you think the sales staff would be able to handle a complaint effectively, especially at a busy time? Are there any signs to direct you to 'The Complaints Department'? If there were, what sort of impression would they give?

Now think about the same store in a different way. Imagine you are the store manager. How would you take up the advice above to welcome and encourage complaints, without giving customers who are generally satisfied the impression that things are so bad that complaints must be happening all the time?

4.3 Understanding complaints

Complaints can come in many forms, but they also have some common characteristics. To handle complaints well, it helps to understand something about them:

- They can be emotive: Customers might be upset and determined to get satisfaction, so feelings often run high.
- Complaints have many causes: Products, service, company policy and organisation or personal performance may all be to blame, as well as factors outside an organisation's direct control (for example, a flight delayed due to bad weather). Some of these can be anticipated; if, for example, a production problem causes quality failure, then complaints should be expected from the customers affected.
- Complaints may not always be justified: The customer may be mistaken, so the immediate response should not automatically be to accept blame.
- Complaints are a source of information: Complaints often provide useful feedback about a product or service, and this can help in anticipating or preventing further complaints, and may even contribute to the market research or product development process. It is important to capture this feedback, perhaps by using a standard form to record complaints.
- Complaints present an opportunity: Complaints matter, but they also present an opportunity to turn a negative into a positive. If a complaint is well handled, the customer may view the organisation more positively than if they had never had occasion to complain in the first place.

Test *yourself* 4.2

What characteristics of customer service do the letters PERFECT stand for?

5 Handling complaints

A well thought out customer complaints policy should be discussed, drawn up and agreed, and staff trained to follow it. In particular, the company should appoint someone whose job is to respond to complaints. The authorised person must be :

1. Aware of just what the job is going to entail.
2. Instructed in how to respond sympathetically to complaints. Customers are often unfair in their complaints, yet may feel genuinely aggrieved.
3. Aware of the costs associated with all aspects of customer service, costs to both customer and company. Replacement, for instance, is often, in the long run, the cheapest way to deal with a complaint about faulty goods.
4. Trained to keep proper records, so that complaints can be analysed and at the very least those which keep recurring can be traced and eliminated.
5. Able to provide feedback to senior management on the type and frequency of complaints.
6. Authorised to satisfy customers if it is at all possible and realistic to do so. Customers hate to be sent from place to place, so their complaints need to be

sorted out quickly and efficiently. On the rare occasions the authorised person cannot satisfy a complainant, they must have the means to refer the complaint upwards.

7 Willing to check with the customer to confirm all is well, showing a caring attitude which will help to make up for the reason for the original complaint.

5.1 A systematic approach to complaints

While all complaints (like all customers) are unique, most respond to a common procedure for handling them.

There are a number of stages:

1. Listen: No complaint can be properly handled until you find out what has happened. Show that you are listening by responding with suitable brief comments, and be sure to get the details clear, even if it means double checking; it may also help to make it clear to the customer that you are making notes.
2. Sympathise: Make people feel that you are genuinely concerned that they have needed to have this conversation, that you understand their point of view, and that you sympathise.
3. Clarify: Because complaints tend to be emotive, they can also be confusing. You need to identify exactly what has happened and summarise this for the customer.
4. Check: Give yourself time, if you need it, to check what has happened.
5. Provide an answer: Complainers want things to be cleared up with as little difficulty as possible. Focus on making sure that whatever should have happened in the past actually happens now, and try to compensate in some way for any errors that have occurred. If the fault is not with the customer, then apologise unreservedly. It does not help to:
   - lay blame
   - claim this is an exception
   - make excuses.

   Any action should be quick and convenient, such as collecting the faulty goods, or paying the postage for them to be returned.

   Sometimes, more than corrective action may be necessary; a concession of some kind might also be appropriate. A delivery charge could be waived or an additional discount given; this is why whoever is dealing with the matter must be empowered to make such decisions immediately.
6. Follow up: Confirm what has been done or is going to be done in writing.

The objective overall is to deal with things in a way that confirms your organisation's continuing desirability as a future supplier.

Making it work 4.2

Complaint handling

Complaint handling works best if those in a position to undertake it are well briefed and empowered to do a complete job. Transferring people who telephone in with a complaint, passing them from one person to another, or forcing them through time-consuming formalities all make matters worse. Customers simply want whatever has gone wrong to be sorted out; the system should normally allow this to be done on a 'one-stop' basis, as quickly and efficiently as possible.

Monitoring

Formal monitoring of complaints can provide useful data for improvement programmes. The cost of a dissatisfied customer is often huge, far more than the sum of the cost of putting things right plus the cost of lost business and the risk of negative word-of-mouth feedback.

5.2 Free market research

Complaints should be seen as free market research. They allow the business to interact with its customers and clients, and to acquire detailed information about the services on offer. They are an inexpensive way to isolate and correct problems. Listen not just to customers but also to the staff who deal with them.

- Make sure complaints are recorded, including details of the complainant, a summary of the complaint, and the response.
- Identify the source of the complaint and what corrective action is needed.
- Monitor the frequency of different types of complaint so that priorities for action programmes can be set.
- Monitor product and process performance after corrective action has been taken.

Making it work 4.3

Evidence of a commitment to customer care

A well known high street bank has stated that it:

- will not make mistakes on statements, standing orders, direct debits
- will send out cheque and paying-in books before the customer runs out
- will give decisions on overdrafts and loans immediately and have funds ready within one hour of agreement
- will open new accounts within 48 hours of the application.

If it fails to achieve any of these it will pay the customer £10. The amount of money involved is not large, but the risk the bank is taking, of course, is that *any* failure might lead to very costly bad publicity. However, the reaction of customers, both personal and business, is that it is not the compensation being offered that matters, rather the evidence of the bank's commitment to quality customer service.

Putting the case 4.2

Q Apart from trying to make sure that complaints do not happen at all, how best should James Peters organise the handling of any complaints coming from his new customers?

A View complaints positively. If the organisation features a help line, this could attract enquiries about product use from the potential new customers, and also any complaints; it could also be linked to the sales side, especially as the product range increases, as the database of customer details here could be used for promotional purposes. Clearly, well briefed and skilled staff would have to man these lines.

Test *yourself* 4.3

a) What is the one positive thing that can be derived from a complaint?

b) Complaint handling must be undertaken systematically. How could you deal with a telephone complaint in a logical manner?

Summary

- Organisations have to communicate with a number of external groups and individuals, such as shareholders, suppliers, clients and customers.
- For organisations to be successful, communication about the goods and services it has to offer – marketing communication – is of especial importance.
- Marketing opportunities and problems are identified by the process known as market or marketing research.
- As part of this research it needs to investigate and monitor its marketing communications: Is the message effective? Is it being delivered in the right way? Is the correct message being delivered? Are the right staff in place?
- Organisations should draw up a marketing plan to record the direction all its marketing will take.
- The most important marketing communication is with customers and clients. Word of mouth plays a significant role in this, as a negative as well as a positive force.
- It is advisable for a business to create and implement a strategy for its communication with its clients and customers.
- Like any other communication, customer communication should be two-way, and involves barriers and feedback.
- The most effective communication with customers and clients is shown by the care an organisation takes of them.
- One of the most significant parts of customer care is the handling of complaints; a procedure which staff are trained for and carry out assiduously is essential; in the end this will pay handsomely in the form of excellent communications with customers.

Communication and IT

5

List of topics

Introduction

We have more ways to communicate these days than ever before. As little as 25 years ago only a few different forms of communication were commonly used. If the matter was urgent, you went to see someone or sent a telegram. If it was not so urgent, you telephoned them. If it did not require an instant response, you wrote them a letter. Records were kept manually and information generation and retrieval was much slower. Expectation was not so high and time limits were far more generous than today. Now there are all kinds of different and exciting ways to communicate with someone, whether they are sitting at the desk next to you or on the other side of the world. It doesn't matter where you are, or what time it is, someone can reach you by some means or other. Business communication is far more informal and non-hierarchical than it was before. It is fast and it is furious, and the pace of change has speeded up expectation.

This chapter focuses on the overall scope of the technological revolution and its effect on workplace communications. The focus is on the benefits, the attendant pitfalls and the challenges the rapid pace of technological change presents for organisations. It also looks in more detail at the internet and its increasing importance as a communication channel. Many of the topics in this chapter are also relevant to the more detailed coverage of email as a communication channel in Chapter 13.

1 The IT revolution

The application of IT has undoubtedly enhanced business. It helps organisations in a variety of ways, including:

- generating income and saving money
- enhancing performance from people
- improving the use of physical resources
- increasing productivity
- streamlining processes

- assisting with money management
- delivering strong intangibles like perception of quality and value and goodwill.

Many of these changes have also had a significant impact on business communications. This has manifested itself both in the range of new communication channels (email, internet messaging) and in enhancements to existing ways of communicating (videoconferencing, mobile telephones, spreadsheets). Some of the major changes in IT which have impacted on business communications are outlined in more detail below.

1.1 Mobile technology

Bluetooth technology A system that allows separate devices such as computers or phones to be linked together operationally without physically being connected by wires.

Mobile technology is progressing at an incredible rate. It can save both time and expense if used wisely. For example, times and locations of meetings can be changed at the last minute, even while in transit to a meeting. Perhaps the most widely used mobile technology is the mobile telephone. These are increasing in capacity and developing a wide range of applications, such as picking up emails or accessing the internet. With the availability of **Bluetooth technology**, their impact is ever greater.

Mobile technology has led to even greater flexibility of working practices, allowing for both verbal and written communication from a variety of locations and in a variety of ways.

1.2 Teleconferencing and video conferencing

teleconferencing The means of talking to a number of different people on the telephone at the same time.

Teleconferencing is the means of talking to a number of different people on the telephone at the same time. By using a system of dial-up technology, people in various locations can speak to each other and effectively hold a meeting over the phone. 'Telecons' are useful ways of keeping in touch with overseas offices, of holding staff meetings where it is impossible to travel, and of assisting clients and customers when a face-to-face meeting is not viable.

Video conferencing is like teleconferencing except that it provides a video picture of the parties speaking to each other. It is becoming widely used to effect a meeting-like situation when people are unable to travel to a central location. These are made possible via satellite link-up, and enable people to conduct virtual meetings even across continents and time zones.

Teleconferencing is efficient and cost-effective, but communication through this channel can be compromised because it does not allow for the non-verbal clues which contribute to understanding in a face-to-face meeting and which should, in theory, make videoconferencing a more attractive option. Both channels are also obviously more impersonal than a face-to-face meeting, and there may be occasions where the benefits of bringing a group together outweigh the disadvantages of the greater costs and time involved.

Stop and think 5.1

Think about a meeting you attend regularly. What would be the advantages and disadvantages of holding the meeting over the telephone rather than face to face?

1.3 Text messaging

Text messaging developed initially as a means of sending and receiving personal, quick and short written messages via mobile telephones. Increasingly, the channel is being used by commercial organisations to communicate information such as weather forecasts, traffic reports or the latest sports results. It is also now being used by organisations such as banks to communicate with individual customers about their own personal accounts, or as a marketing or customer relations tool to send short messages to groups of customers or potential customers. The nature of the channel makes it obviously unsuitable for lengthy or complex messages, or where personal interaction is important. In a now famous and spectacularly inappropriate use of the channel in 2003, 3,000 staff at a UK company called Accident Group were sent a text message which invited them to call a number where a recorded message told them that they were being made redundant with immediate effect.

1.4 Internet messaging

Software such as MSN Messenger uses **instant messaging** (IM) and allows a sender and receiver to engage in an almost immediate communication exchange using the internet. In this sense, the channel is nearer to a telephone conversation than an exchange of emails, because it has a greater level of synchronicity. The channel works by identifying predetermined groups of senders and receivers who need – or choose to – communicate regularly. Receivers must actively agree to involvement. At any given time, members of the group can assign to themselves a status, such as online, offline, busy or away from their desk, which gives the sender a cue as to their availability. Once the receiver has declared himself available, the speed of interaction is dictated only by the speed with which the message and response can be typed. Unlike most telephone conversations, however, internet messaging can create a permanent (written) record of the transaction.

instant messaging
An internet application that allows a predefined sender and receiver to exchange messages almost instantaneously.

1.5 Office automation

Most people who work in an office environment now take for granted the range of technology available to support their working lives. Everything from the humble fax machine to broadband internet access has increased and enhanced the range of communication channels which can be harnessed for the dissemination and receipt of information. Word processing software has revolutionised the creation and presentation of written communications (see Part Four). **Voicemail** acts as a personalised telephone answering service and allows users to save and forward as well as retrieve telephone messages. Records management and retrieval systems (see Chapter 12) speed up the process of keeping track of essential documentation. Electronic diary software is becoming increasingly sophisticated. These packages allow mutually convenient times to be set amongst people located widely apart. Making optimum use of your own and others' time is an example of the sophistication of time management that electronic technology has enabled.

voicemail
An automated telephone answering machine system commonly used in organisations to allow individuals to create personalised outgoing messages and receive and manage their own incoming messages.

2 IT benefits and pitfalls

2.1 IT benefits

As outlined above, the development of IT has had significant implications for communication within and between organisations. This has had a beneficial effect on organisational communication in a number of ways:

Speed and ease of communication
Communication is now quicker than ever before, which means that information can be sent and processed and decisions made faster than previously possible. Contrast, for example, the time taken for an exchange of business letters with the almost instantaneous exchange of emails. The ease with which Microsoft PowerPoint® slides can be created (see Chapter 10) means that even the smallest scale presentation can benefit from professional looking visual aids. The internet offers almost instant and 24-hour a day access to a wealth of up-to-date information.

Process and workflow automation
IT systems designed to facilitate scheduling, planning and workflow have streamlined a whole range of organisational tasks, including the communication of information. Examples range from the use of accounting software to run sales ledgers and create financial reports to management information systems which underpin large-scale logistics and distribution operations and provide regular and accurate information about stock management and sales trends.

Making it work 5.1

The benefits of speed and automation

In a large company, speed may be inherently linked to company-wide action. For example, major car manufacturers like Ford Motor Company can tell at a central point exactly what cars, and how many, were sold through all their distributors in the last 24 hours. Action based on this can be taken at once – and that speed may contribute directly to results.

Efficiency and cost savings
Used well, technology can deliver significant cost and efficiency savings. In communication terms, examples include teleconferencing, which enables communication between parties where face-to-face communication would otherwise be difficult or prohibitively expensive, or the ability to communicate with groups of people simultaneously by email rather than having to send individual letters or memos.

Flexibility and versatility
Organisations now have a greater number of communication channels available to them than ever before, and many of these can be accessed or used in a variety of more flexible ways. Laptop computers and email, for example, have meant that home or remote working is a viable alternative to having all staff based in a central location. The development of the internet has added another important channel for communication with customers and other stakeholders.

Competitive advantage

Information technology, correctly used, gives companies a competitive edge. For example, a company with a good website is likely to attract new business and can use it to maintain and enhance customer relations.

Smart companies are harnessing the latest advances in computing and telecommunications technology to make themselves faster and more flexible. They process information faster and distribute it internally and externally and make themselves in the process more competitive and successful.

Presentation and automated checking

The presentation of written communications has benefited from software which facilitates the use of a range of layouts, type styles and sizes and the integration of text and graphics. Spellcheckers provide a basic, if imperfect, tool to help improve accuracy. Numerical data can easily be presented in a variety of graphical formats. Creating well laid-out reports, internal newsletters or even basic business letters has never been easier.

2.2 IT pitfalls

Developments in IT have clearly facilitated business communications, but the use of IT is not without its pitfalls, and it is important to bear these in mind.

Technophobes and enthusiasts

Some people are reluctant users of IT. This can be due to lack of confidence, unfamiliarity or insufficient training, and can usually be overcome. However, technophobia can be a problem where attempts are being made to integrate technology into new working practices.

The opposite problem is that of the techno-enthusiast, who has a tendency to become over-absorbed in IT processes to the detriment of the wider picture. Spending a lot of time fine-tuning a spreadsheet may not actually improve the quality or clarity of the message which needs to be communicated. New technologies can also be very seductive, and there is sometimes the temptation to use the latest technology for its own sake rather than in furtherance of more general objectives. For example, an over-engineered website can be a barrier to communication with certain audiences.

Impersonal

As outlined above, IT may have led to improved efficiency in communication, but this also brings with it the danger of over-reliance on particular channels to the detriment of other ways of communicating. It has been argued that technology-driven channels have made communication more impersonal. Chapter 13, for example, looks in more detail at the routine use of email to the exclusion of face-to-face or telephone contact.

Raised expectations

The increased speed and flexibility of communication have raised expectations about speed of response and the availability of individuals outside the workplace and beyond standard working hours. This change in working practices brings with it the potential for overload and stress for the individuals concerned.

Hidden costs

The cost of an individual communication may have been cut because of IT developments, but computer equipment and software typically represent a large proportion of the operating budget of many organisations. There is also the need to upgrade equipment and develop the skills necessary to make the best use of it. Investment in IT equipment and training must be balanced against potential organisational savings and advantages.

Lack of control

IT gives users a great deal of freedom of speech and access. This has undoubtedly facilitated communication, but also brings with it the potential for misuse and exploitation. The ability to access unsuitable material, such as pornography, on the internet, for example, is a less positive aspect of the technological revolution.

The technological divide

There is an increasing acknowledgement of the divide between those who have access to technology in their working and personal lives and those who do not. This has implications for skills acquisition, earning potential and the ability to take advantage of new communication channels. Society is now so driven by information technology that it can be very powerful. People unable to access this information can be disadvantaged professionally and educationally.

Stop and think 5.2

Think about how you use technology-driven communication channels in your working or personal life. Is the overall effect positive or negative?

3 IT challenges and issues

3.1 Data protection

personal data
In data protection terms, the data relating to a living individual.

Data protection is not only an IT issue, but the wide availability of technology provides even greater potential for the manipulation and processing of data. Data protection laws are designed to protect the rights and freedoms of individuals while recognising that organisations need to use data for the purposes of their business. Legislation such as the UK's Data Protection Act 1998 does not prevent organisations from holding or processing what is known as **personal data**, but it does seek to prevent this information from being abused.

Making it work 5.2

The UK's Data Protection Act 1998

Under DPA 1998, any organisation which obtains, records or stores personal data must notify the Information Commissioner, who is responsible for the operation of the Act. To comply with the Act, the data controller – the person who decides what the data is to be used for – must comply with eight data protection principles:

1. Data must be obtained and processed fairly and legally.
2. Data must be processed for specified purposes.
3. Personal data must be adequate, relevant and not excessive in relation to the purpose for which it is to be used.
4. Personal data should be accurate and kept up to date.
5. Data should be kept for no longer than is necessary.
6. Personal data should be processed in accordance with the rights of the individuals concerned, for example, rights of access.
7. Data should be processed in a secure environment.
8. Personal data should not be transferred to a country that does not offer an adequate level of protection for the individual.

Failure to comply with the DPA 1998 can lead to the issue of an enforcement notice, or prosecution and the imposition of a fine – not to mention damage to reputation.

The application of data protection legislation to communication channels such as the internet is clear. Most websites will want or need to process personal data on individuals visiting the site, sometimes by requesting visitors to register their details to access certain site areas or when conducting an e-commerce transaction. For this reason, most sites now post a privacy policy which explains who is collecting the data and what it will be used for. Sample 5.1 gives an example of an introduction to a standard website privacy policy.

Sample Website privacy policy 5.1

This privacy statement sets out the practice of XYZ Company Ltd in relation to the information that it collects on this website. This privacy statement intends to inform you of the following matters.

1. Who collects information from you through this website.
2. What information they collect.
3. For what purposes they use that information.
4. When the information is collected.
5. With whom they share that information.
6. Your rights in relation to the collection, use, distribution and correction of that information.
7. The kind of security procedures that are in place to protect against the loss, misuse or alteration of information under the control of XYZ Company Ltd.

If you are not happy, either with the contents of this privacy statement or with the practices of XYZ Company Ltd in relation to this statement, you should first contact us by email at the address set out below. If you do not receive acknowledgement of your enquiry or feel that it has not been properly addressed, you should then contact the Office of the Information Commissioner (www.informationcommissioner.gov.uk).

3.2 Intellectual property

intangible assets Assets which do not take a physical form, such as development costs, goodwill or intellectual property rights.

Intellectual property rights prevent the unauthorised use or exploitation of **intangible assets** such as inventions, brand names, original literary works or computer software. The four key intellectual property rights are:

1. patents: which protect industrial inventions
2. trade marks: which protect brand identity
3. design rights: protection for the aesthetic appearance of articles
4. copyright: protection against the unauthorised copying of original literary, musical or artistic works.

The ease with which information and images can be accessed electronically does not mean that they are not subject to these rights. For example, displaying another person's content on a website without their explicit permission would be a breach of copyright. Equally, the unauthorised use of a logo associated with a well known brand which carries a registered trademark would be an infringement of that trade mark.

3.3 Computer security

Communication channels based on computers are subject to disruption caused by breaches of security.

Viruses, worms or Trojan horses

Viruses, worms and Trojan horses are all malicious programs that can cause damage to computers, but there are differences between the three.

A *computer virus* attaches itself to a program or file so it can spread from one computer to another, leaving infections as it travels. A virus may exist on your computer but it cannot infect your computer unless you run or open the malicious program, i.e. it needs human action to keep it going. People continue the spread of a computer virus, mostly unknowingly, by sharing infecting files or sending emails with viruses as attachments in the email.

A *worm* is similar to a virus by its design, and is considered to be a sub-class of a virus. A worm spreads from computer to computer, but unlike a virus, it has the ability to travel without any help from a person. The biggest danger with a worm is its ability to replicate itself on your system, so rather than your computer sending out a single worm, it could send out hundreds or thousands of copies of itself, creating a huge, devastating effect. One example would be for a worm to send a copy of itself to everyone listed in your email address book. The worm then replicates and sends itself out to everyone listed in each of the receivers' address books.

A *Trojan horse* is full of as much trickery as the mythological Trojan Horse it was named after. Those on the receiving end of Trojan horses are usually tricked into opening them because they appear to be receiving legitimate software or files from a legitimate source. Some Trojans are designed to be more annoying than malicious but they can also cause serious damage by deleting files and destroying information on your system. Unlike viruses and worms, Trojans do not reproduce by infecting other files nor do they self-replicate.

Combating viruses, worms and Trojan horses

Anti-virus software that can search out and destroy a virus is essential and should be updated regularly to ensure the software has the latest fixes for new viruses, worms and Trojan horses. The anti-virus program should also be able to scan email and files as they are downloaded from the internet. This will help prevent malicious programs from even reaching computers. Additional protection can be provided by installing a **firewall**, a system which prevents unauthorised computer use and access.

firewall
A computer security system which prevents unauthorised computer use and access.

Hacking

'Hacker' is a slang term for a computer enthusiast, i.e. a person who enjoys learning programming languages and computer systems and can often be considered an expert on the subject(s). The term is mostly recognised as a pejorative one because it is used to describe individuals who gain *unauthorised* access to computer systems for the purpose of stealing and corrupting data.

Fraud

The biggest single threat to computer security is not related to the technical or hardware aspects of a computer system, but comes from deliberate fraud. For example, an individual might call a user supposedly from an IT helpdesk to secure a user's password and gain access to a particular application and, therefore, potentially valuable information. This can be exacerbated if a user tends to use a generic password for a variety of applications (such as websites, emails, voicemail).

Making it work 5.3

Phishing

Phishing is an increasingly common form of identity theft carried out using email and the internet. Messages are sent to a user supposedly from an established and legitimate organisation (such as a bank or retailer) in an attempt to defraud the user into surrendering private information that will be used for identity theft. The email directs the user to visit a website where they are asked to update personal information, such as passwords and credit card, social security and bank account numbers that the legitimate organisation already has. The website, however, is bogus and has been set up only to steal the user's information. Increasingly, the bogus website will be a clone of the legitimate organisation's actual website, and will look both familiar and authentic to the user.

Phishing emails often use software failures, data loss or system updates as the means of encouraging users to re-enter their personal information. Ironically, some pretend to be anti-fraud measures. Despite increased publicity about the dangers of phishing, it remains a potentially serious problem, as the following facts attest:

- The UK's National Hi-Tech Crime Unit claims that internet-based identity theft is now a favoured tactic of organised criminals.
- Victims of phishing include some the biggest and well-known online brands, such as eBay, Yahoo and Amazon.com.
- A 2005 report by internet service provider AOL claimed that up to half of all internet users had received spam emails designed to trick them into handing over personal information.

3.4 Human resources issues

Individuals in most organisations now need access to email and the internet. This brings with it the inherent risk that these communication channels will be abused. Offences range from the unauthorised personal use of the internet during working hours, which wastes time and resources, to the more serious issues of email harassment or the downloading and circulating of pornographic images.

To try to combat such abuse – or to support any necessary legal action following abuse – organisations are advised to develop a clear internet and email use policy, which should be communicated to employees to:

- clarify the organisation's position concerning what constitutes acceptable use of the internet and email
- protect the organisation against potential liability
- promote awareness and good practice
- encourage the effective use of resources.

Such a policy might include:

- specified authorised and unauthorised use
- expressly prohibited use, such as the downloading or distribution of improper material
- details of access and rules of conduct during use
- details of any sanctions which might be applied for breach of the policy.

The policy might also include a statement that the employer will exercise its right to monitor electronic communications.

internet
A global network of computers that enables people throughout the world to communicate with each other.

Test *yourself* 5.1

Identify what is included in:

a) a standard website privacy policy.

b) an acceptable email and internet use policy

4 The internet and the world wide web

world wide web
Information-sharing software that provides a way of accessing information from the internet.

web browser
A computer program that decodes information from the internet so that it can be read on an individual's computer screen.

The **internet** is now a well-established communication channel, used by most organisations to disseminate information and communicate persuasive messages.

The **world wide web** and the internet are not the same thing, but people often refer to them as if they were. The internet is the basic structure of connected computers. The web is the software application that rests over it. It comprises millions of websites, which run on a host server. Computer users view them via a special piece of software called a **web browser**. The browser is a program that decodes the information on the internet so that it can be read on screen. One of the most widely used browsers is Microsoft's Internet Explorer, but there are also other software programs which facilitate internet access, such as Netscape Navigator. The internet is also used for a number of applications which do not use the world wide web, such as email and internet messaging.

4.1 Going online

Connection to the internet – often referred to as going online – requires computer hardware and software and a telephone line or cable connection. Many computers use broadband technologies to connect to the net, which increases speed, and in some cases need no cables because they can connect via radio signals. Multimedia computers have speakers and a sound card inside their processor so that sounds on web pages and music from online radio stations can be played. To access the internet you need to use an **internet service provider (ISP)** to act as the 'gateway' to the internet. Connecting to the internet via the ISP enables you to explore the internet and download information from the web.

internet service provider
A company that provides access to the internet.

The internet requires computers and networks to use protocols to communicate. These are a series of rules governing how web pages are transferred over the internet. They are known as hypertext transfer protocol (HTTP). The URL (uniform resource locator) is the internet address of a particular web page. Such addresses begin with *http://*, often followed by *www* to indicate that it is a page on the web.

4.2 Domain names

With so many millions of computers forming the internet, each computer has its own unique address, called an internet protocol (IP) address. Part of this address is a number and part of it is a **domain name**. Domain names have to be registered through an accredited ISP and can be categorised in three levels: top, second and third.

domain name
The part of an email or website address that identifies the name of the organisation, what type of organisation it is and, often, which country the organisation is from.

The top level (TLD – top-level domain) usually tells us something about the type of organisation whose domain name it is: .org (non-commercial organisation) or .com (commercial organisation) are examples. Combined with a country suffix, we can glean further information: for example, a domain name ending in .co.uk or .com.uk would typically indicate a commercial organisation based in the UK.

The part of the URL appearing before the TLD is generally descriptive of the organisation or brand concerned, for example, the 'icsa' of www.icsa.org.uk. This is the 'domain' and must be registered with a country or international domain name registrar.

The final portion of the URL, following the TLD and separated from it by a forward slash, is individual to each website and refers to particular web pages, such as www.icsapublishing.co.uk/pages/catalogue.php – a specific reference to the online catalogue on the ICSA Publishing website.

Making it work 5.4

Domain names and 'cybersquatting'

Thousands of new domain names are registered each week. These are allocated on a first come, first served basis. It can be hard luck if the domain name you want has already been registered by somebody else, and making contact with the owner of the domain name and negotiating a deal to buy it doesn't always work.

Because of the value placed on domain names as a branding and marketing tool, disputes can arise about ownership and use. Domain name 'warehousing' or *cybersquatting* – where individuals or businesses register names in which they have no legitimate interest – is not uncommon. This is done in order to sell the names at a later date (and at inflated prices) to organisations where they will be commercially valuable.

A series of court cases have highlighted this problem. For example, following a press release announcing a takeover bid by Glaxo plc for Wellcome plc, the defendants registered a company under the name of GlaxoWellcomeLimited. The claimants discovered this and offered £1,000 to buy back the name. The defendants demanded £100,000. The court decided in favour of the claimant, finding that the defendant's scheme was dishonest and aimed at appropriating the claimant's goodwill. A mandatory injunction was granted requiring the defendant to facilitate the transfer of the name to Glaxo.

As well as resorting to the courts, there are also now recognised dispute resolution services which follow a set procedure to investigate and, if necessary, cancel or transfer the domain name concerned.

4.3 E-commerce

e-commerce
The buying and selling of goods online.

E-commerce is the term used to describe the buying and selling of goods and services on the internet, especially the world wide web. With its 24-hour availability, the internet is a fast-growing channel for advertising and selling, with companies such as Amazon.com acquiring the type of household status that would rival many more traditional retail organisations. At the other end of the scale, developing an e-commerce facility on a website is usually a viable and cost-effective option for even the smallest organisations. Online 'store fronts' offer lists of items for sale that can be easily accessed and updated, and the interactive nature of the internet allows for the collection of large volumes of customer information at the point of registration or sale. This gives e-businesses the unprecedented ability to generate highly targeted marketing based on detailed customer profiling.

Paying for the goods electronically by entering credit or debit card details means that transactions can be processed quickly and easily. Adding an e-commerce facility to a website necessitates a greater level of security to ensure that the personal financial information collected cannot be stolen or misappropriated.

Marketing and trading via a website has to be done carefully and with consideration. Existing consumer and data protection legislation will almost certainly also apply to electronic transactions and there is also a growing body of law which is addressing the more specific characteristics and potential abuses of e-commerce itself.

intranet
A secure, private computer network based on internet technology standards used within a single organisation, effectively as an internal internet.

4.4 Intranets

An **intranet** is secure, private computer network based on internet security standards, but used within a single organisation. As such, it is a sort of internal internet. A well-designed and maintained intranet site can be a useful tool for providing essential and up-to-date information to staff – ranging from an internal telephone directory to key employment policies and documents. Access to different areas can be password protected to keep confidential information, such as certain financial information, secure.

4.5 Extranets

An **extranet** is a secure computer network that facilitates communication between an organisation and a defined group of external customers and/or suppliers. For example, a courier company might provide customers with online access to its systems, allowing them to monitor the progress and location of packages they have in transit. This access would not be generally available over the internet.

extranet
A secure computer network based on internet technology that facilitates communication between an organisation and a defined group of external customers and/or suppliers.

4.6 Search engines

The world wide web has been likened to an enormous international library which comprises a wealth of useful (and not so useful) information. Users will not always know the address of the site they need to access, or even be aware of which site the information they need will appear on. Sophisticated web search engines such as Google or Yahoo have been developed to help users find their way around the web, and have become some of the most successful sites in their own right.

Putting the case 5.1

Q How might the internet be used to support the launch of the new product?

A James Peters' company probably already has a website, but this will be tailored to the needs of the company's traditional audience, and will not necessarily be appropriate for the new product or its target market of domestic consumers.

One option for James is to set up a new website with its own address which could be accessed separately as well as via the main company site. This would allow the site to be designed specifically with the new product and new audience in mind.

The weed killer could also be promoted via other websites which market and sell gardening and DIY products. Online marketing is likely to be an element of the promotional mix identified in the marketing plan, and might also form part of the negotiations with intermediaries such as garden centres and retail outlets.

Test *yourself* 5.2

What is the difference between and intranet and an extranet?

5 Websites: first principles

Websites are an increasingly important element of an organisation's communications portfolio and most organisations will have their own site. Websites can serve a number of different or overlapping purposes, including:

- to inform
- to act as a sales channel via an e-commerce facility
- to persuade
- to communicate with stakeholders.

All of these purposes involve the persuasive communication of clear messages.

Like all forms of communication, the site must be appropriate for its audience. Avoid trying to incorporate everything that is technologically possible. Over-complex websites can be counter-productive: a website should be functional, fit for purpose and accessible.

The setting up and design of a website is an important part of communication. It requires planning, coordination and careful execution. Practical and operational issues should be to the fore:

- Is the cost of setting up the website offset by what it will deliver?
- Who is responsible for the site as a whole, and for coordinating the collation and organisation of the material it will comprise?
- How is it to be developed and maintained?

Decisions need to be made about:

- The actual site content: What should be included and how will it be organised? This is an ongoing process, so enough flexibility will need to be built in.
- Interaction: How interactive will the site need to be? If a dialogue with users is desirable, how will this be achieved?
- Topicality: How up-to-date should the website be? Will it (or parts of it) need to be updated daily, monthly or less frequently?
- Navigation: What devices will be used to ensure ease of use, convenience and accessibility?
- Image: What will the site look like? What impression should it create? In most cases, an organisation's website will not be created in isolation and will need to relate closely to the design of other external communications.
- Security: The site will need to include an appropriate level of security.
- Measuring use: How important will it be to measure and monitor site use?

5.1 Driving website traffic

Simply having a website does not mean people will necessarily know about it and visit it. To be effective, it must be promoted via other communication channels, including:

- company notepaper and email sign-offs
- advertisements and brochures
- promotional postcards
- links from other sites, which can improve the ranking of the site in search engines.

6 Website design

Good website design involves three interrelated elements:

1 the content, and how it is organised
2 the 'look' or image presented by the site
3 how the site functions (for example, ease and speed of navigation).

Functionality relates to issues such as the ease with which users can navigate the site using menus or other shortcuts, how information can be accessed and transactions conducted. For example, effective e-commerce depends on an effective ordering system. It needs to be quick and intuitive and any necessary follow-up must be good. Any initial good impression created by an effective website can quickly evaporate if the ordering process is unclear or inefficient.

Graphics should be used to inform and impress. If they take a long time to download due to complexity and colour, it may deter people from using the site.

One of the prime objectives of good website design is to encourage repeat use. This can be encouraged by using a range of devices, including the regular updating of key information, such as a news service. The inverse of this is when poor design or lack of content means first-time visitors to a site are unimpressed by it. On the internet loyalty is only a click away, and users are unlikely to return to a site without good reason.

Making it work 5.5

Jakob Nielsen: web usability guru

For a decade Jakob Nielsen has been a leading champion of what he calls web usability – what makes a website easy to use. In an interview for the BBC News website, Dr Nielsen looked back on his decade as a usability guru and considered whether the core guidelines drawn up back in 1994 are still relevant to the web today:

> 'Roughly 80% of the things we found 10 years ago are still an issue today. Some have gone away because users have changed and 10% have changed because technology has changed. Some design crimes, such as splash screens that get between a user and the site they are trying to visit, and web designers indulging their artistic urges have almost disappeared. But there's great stability on usability concerns. The basic principles of usability, centring around ease of use and clear thinking about a site's total design, are as important as ever. A lot of people thought that design and usability was only a temporary problem because broadband was taking off, but there are a very small number of cases where usability issues go away because you have broadband.
>
> The success of sites such as Google, Amazon, eBay and Yahoo show that close attention to design and user needs was important. Those four sites are extremely profitable and extremely successful; they have largely defined commercial success on the net. All are based on user empowerment and make it easy for people to do things on the internet. They are making simple but powerful tools available to the user, but none of them has a fancy or glamorous look.'

Source: Adapted from news.bbc.co.uk, December 2004. Further information about Jakob Nielsen is available on his website, http://www.useit.com.

Stop and think 5.3

Think about a website you've visited recently and analyse the following:

- How easy it was to find the information you needed?
- Were the graphics appropriate or did they slow down the site?
- Did the site have an e-commerce facility?
- Did the site encourage you to communicate with the organisation concerned?
- Did it include a site search facility?
- What were your overall impressions and were you encouraged to visit the site again?

Summary

- Developments in information technology or IT have had a significant impact on how organisations communicate both internally and externally.
- The IT revolution has given organisations both new channels of communication and enhancements to existing channels. This has led to significant benefits for the ease and speed of communication, but has also brought with it a number of new challenges and pitfalls which need to be addressed.
- Computer security is compromised not only by technical and systems breaches, but also by deliberate fraud.
- Organisations should develop acceptable email and internet use policies to make clear what expectations are in place regarding the appropriate use of these channels in the workplace.
- The internet is now an important and well-established channel for organisational communications.
- Most organisations will want to develop their own website, which can be used for a variety of purposes: to inform, persuade, communicate with stakeholders and act as a sales channel via an e-commerce facility.
- Good website design involves three interrelated elements: content and organisation; the look or image presented by the site, and how the site functions.

Part Two Practice Questions

Section A

2-mark questions:

2.1 Define *morality*.
2.2 In one sentence, explain why *style* is important.
2.3 What are the three main barriers to marketing communication?
2.4 What does the mnemonic PERFECT stand for?
2.5 What is meant by *Bluetooth technology*?
2.6 There are a number of ways in which the IT revolution has enhanced business. Say briefly which two you think the most important.

4-mark questions:

2.7 Define *governance* and *management* and explain the essential difference between them.
2.8 There are a number of stages in handling a complaint. Describe one.
2.9 Identify the four key intellectual property rights.

Section B

Note: the questions below are indicative only and represent 15 marks each. In the Business Communications examination, each Section B question is a multi-part question worth 30 marks in total.

2.10 In the case study, James Peters is preparing to communicate with a whole new group of customers, and to achieve this he will have to employ a number of new staff. What are the elements of communication in the business environment that he will need to bear in mind if he decides to brief a training organisation to help him to prepare his new workforce?
2.11 If James and his staff are to be successful in their new enterprise, they will need the advice and help of the Marketing Department. Imagine you are the Head of the Marketing Department. Explain briefly to James what you mean by the following tools in the marketing armoury:
a) marketing research
b) marketing communications research
c) marketing plan.
2.12 In integrating the new operation into the existing organisation, James must be aware of his IT requirements. Bearing in mind all that is being planned, what do you think his most important requirements will be? What will be his greatest challenge brought about by this technology?

Verbal communication

PART THREE

Contents

Overview

This part concentrates on the skills and techniques which can be used to develop and enhance communication in the workplace. On a daily basis we meet and talk to customers, suppliers, colleagues, managers, supervisors and staff. We may have a formal meeting, such as committee or board meeting, a presentation or an informal chat. At all of these it is important to get your message across without confusion.

Preparation, planning and thinking ahead will play an essential part in most of these situations. If you know clearly what the purpose of the conversation is, and what you want to communicate, you will have a much better chance of getting your message across effectively and achieve the result you want.

The Part starts by looking at how to communicate persuasively. This is key to effective verbal communication, and sets the scene for the next chapter, Negotiation. Whether you are finalising arrangements with a supplier or working with your team to introduce a change in working methods, these skills will be important. Moving on, the chapters look at communication in different contexts, such as meetings, interviewing – where specific techniques such as questioning and clarifying are introduced – presentations and, finally, communication by telephone.

Learning objectives

After working through the chapters you should:

- understand the principles of persuasive communication and how to apply them
- understand what is involved in negotiation, and how the process can be influenced and managed
- understand what goes on before, during and after meetings, the role of the Chair and the importance of forward planning

- recognise the purpose and characteristics of interviews, and understand what is involved in developing good interviewing and questioning techniques
- be aware of what is involved in preparing and giving presentations
- understand the importance of good telephone technique and how to make the most of this form of communication.

PART THREE **CASE STUDY**

Spare Parts plc

Spare Parts plc, a manufacturer of components for the automotive industry, has developed a new product. Part of its launch will be a gathering of the manufacturer's international distributors from around the world, each of which will be invited to send a senior representative to be briefed on the new product and its potential, and to look at how it will fit in their local market. These companies are large in their own right (for example, a trading house in Singapore), with a range of products to promote and links with numbers of principles in different parts of the world.

Ultimately the new product will be most successful if the distributors, after the briefing, see it as sufficiently important to warrant individual marketing effort.

The attenders will be important people, each instrumental in bringing a significant amount of export business. The occasion is therefore important not only as an integral part of the product launch, but also as a public relations exercise – these are people the organisation wants to impress.

The general manager, David Soames, is in overall charge of the project, and sees himself as host for the event. A product manager, Michael James, has particular responsibility for the new product and its launch. Given the nature of the event, its organisation involves numbers of staff from around the organisation.

The event consists of a series of presentations and working sessions held over a long weekend at a prestigious country house hotel.

Planning for the event continues over some months and its timing is an inherent part of the overall new product launch schedule.

Being persuasive

6

List of topics

Introduction

We have already seen how communication can be compromised even when the sender is attempting to transmit the simplest message, and how the receiver is a crucial element in the communications process. This chapter takes these principles a step further by discussing persuasive communication: how communicators can construct and use an argument or case to encourage the receiver to respond positively to a particular proposition or act in a certain (desired) way. This is important because, in most situations, the receiver has an element of choice about how to respond and some scope for either accepting or rejecting the message they are sent. Many messages contain an element of persuasion: this is sometimes so subtle as to be hardly noticeable (for example, routine interaction during a business meeting or in an email), while in other cases (such as a consumer advertising campaign) it is a significant component of the message itself.

The techniques discussed apply equally to one-to-one business situations which arise every day – such as encouraging a colleague to take on a task they'd rather not do – as to the development of a consumer advertising campaign involving large-scale planning and big budgets or persuasive messages associated with professional public relations and lobbying.

1 The principles of persuasive communication

The key to persuasive communication is to approach the process as something that relates as much to what the *receiver or audience* wants and how he/they think/s, as to what you want to do yourself. The starting point is to think through how being persuaded looks from the other person's point of view. Assessing the audience for the message is an essential precursor to developing the message itself and selecting the channel through which it is delivered.

There are three aspects to this:

- how people feel
- what they want
- how they go about making a decision to agree to act, or not.

1.1 Others' feelings

People usually recognise very quickly when they are in a situation where someone is trying to persuade them of something. Their instinctive reaction may be to dislike the idea of it – *I'm not being made to do anything* – but once they begin to appreciate what is being asked of them, their feelings may be positive or negative, or indeed a mixture of both.

In an obvious case – persuading someone to do something they will clearly find beneficial – they may see it as a good idea almost at once. A manager telling someone that they want to discuss changes to their work portfolio which will make their life easier and put them in line for a salary increase is likely to find them attentive. This does not mean that they will not be on the look-out, in case what is being suggested is not entirely beneficial, but essentially their thinking will tend to be positive. In this case, there may well be no difficult implications for the person doing the persuading, other than to build on the goodwill that already exists.

The opposite, however, will usually be the case. A variety of negative feelings may arise, either immediately or as the case is being made. These reactions could well form a barrier to effective communication. It is not enough to be clear or to present what seems to you an obviously strong case: the other person must see it as something with which they can willingly go along.

1.2 What others want

What people want may vary enormously. Their wants will relate to their situation, opinions, experience and prejudices. Their wants may reflect deep-seated, long-held views or be more topical and transient – or both. Sometimes you know in advance what people want. On other occasions it comes out in the course of conversation, or you need to explore it as you go along. Understanding and responding to peoples' desires is an important part of being persuasive.

Making it work 6.1

Constructing a persuasive case

Imagine you have to make a joint formal presentation with a colleague at work. You want to persuade them to set aside sufficient time, in advance, to rehearse the presentation together to make sure it goes well, but instinctively feel that they may not see this as necessary.

To communicate persuasively, it is important to think about what might they want. They may want to:

1 make sure it goes well: as you do, but perhaps they are more confident of success than you are
2 minimise time spent in preparation: like you again no doubt, but perhaps this blinds them to the need to rehearse
3 leave preparation to the last minute: maybe because other tasks have greater short-term urgency, or seem to have
4 outshine you on the day: they might be more intent on scoring personal points than on making sure the overall event goes well.

Even in a simple example like this the individual viewpoints are clear:

1 You both want it to go well, but take differing views of what is necessary to make this happen.

Making it work *(continued)* 6.1

2 In general you want the same thing, but would define the minimum amount of time needed differently.
3 Here you differ.
4 There are very personal wants that are, to a degree, outside the main objective involved: that of making your presentations work well together.

The differing viewpoints need to be balanced if agreement is to be reached. If you are the persuader, you feel your viewpoint is right – or at least the most appropriate option. How do you move them towards it? Clearly, doing so involves them adjusting their intentions. You do not have to persuade them to change their views completely. For instance, they may always see it as easier to do whatever preparation is involved at the last minute, but may still agree to set a time, as you want, or – compromising – somewhere between the two views.

1.3 How decisions are made

Whatever the commitment is you are trying to secure, any persuasive process of obtaining it is best viewed as one that *assists people to make a decision* – and which, at the same time, encourages them to decide in favour of whatever option you are suggesting.

A process of decision making is inherently involved, and this needs to be acknowledged; the intention should be to *help* it. Persuasive communication is not something you *direct at other people*; it is something you *engage in with them*.

People make decisions by:

- considering the options
- considering the advantages and disadvantages of each
- *weighing up* the overall way in which they compare
- selecting what seems to be, on balance, the best course of action to take.

This does not mean finding and selecting an option with no disadvantages – which may not realistically be possible – but a means of assessing and selecting an acceptable option, where the pluses outweigh the minuses. Different elements of the argument may well be more important than others are. Some signs represent tangible matters; others are more subjective. For example, getting agreement to a 10% increase on a budget is tangible. In contrast, an individual's desire to increase their status within an organisation through the way they are perceived is intangible. Intangibles can be a powerful component of any case.

Some decisions are more important than others and therefore may be seen to warrant more thought. In this case, people may actively want it to be *considered*. They want to feel that the process of making it has been sensible and thorough (and therefore their decision is more likely to be a good one); and they may want other people (their manager, say) to feel the same. In either case, this feeling may lengthen the process of persuading them.

1.4 The thinking involved

Psychologists have studied the process of how people weigh up options in any persuasive conversation. This involves several stages:

- *I matter most*. Whatever you want me to do, I expect you to worry about how I feel about it, respect me and consider my needs.
- *What are the merits and implications of the case you make?* Tell me what you suggest and why it makes sense (the pluses) and whether it has any disadvantages (the minuses) so that I can weigh it up; bearing in mind that few, if any, propositions are perfect.
- *How will it work?* What are the practical implications of what's being suggested?
- *What will I need to do?* What action will I need to take if I accept the proposition?

projection
The way in which a person presents themselves to others. The combination of a person's approach, personality, authority and charisma.

This thinking process is largely universal. It may happen very quickly or take longer, but it is always in evidence. This is why persuasion can be viewed as *helping the decision-making process*.

Making it work 6.2

Know your audience: senior executive decision making

A recent survey-based study identified five broad decision-making styles among senior executives. The authors concluded that these styles were relatively permanent characteristics of the individuals concerned and argued that persuasive communications would be more likely to succeed if these individual styles were taken into consideration:

'Executives make it to the senior level largely because they are effective decision makers. Learning mostly from experience, they build a set of criteria that guides them. Each decision is influenced by both reason and emotion, but the weight given to each of these elements during the decision-making process can vary widely depending on the person.'

Source: Williams, G. and Miller, R.B. (2002) 'Change the way you persuade'. *Harvard Business Review*, 80, 65–73 (May).

Stop and think 6.1

Everyone is involved in persuasion. Think of a recent example of when someone has tried to persuade you to do something. Did they succeed? If so, why? If not, why not?

2 Personal credibility and manner

empathy
The ability to see things from another's point of view. More than that, it is the ability to *be seen* to see things from other people's point of view.

How you are perceived by the receiver will also affect your persuasiveness. While your communication style will no doubt reflect your personality, there are certain factors which you can *choose* to emphasise or not in anticipation of what will be important to the other person.

Two factors are especially important here: **projection** and **empathy**.

These act together. Project too much and you could give the impression of being dictatorial and aggressive. Too little empathy and you will seem insensitive and uncaring. Sufficient empathy softens what might otherwise be seen as too powerful an approach, and makes the net effect acceptable. This may only necessitate a few words being changed, with an unacceptable – 'I think you should do this' – being replaced by something like, 'Given that you feel timing is so important, you may want to do this.'

Stop and think 6.2

Think about a situation where you might need to persuade a colleague to do something they're not likely to embrace with open arms. Would it help to be seen as knowledgeable, expert, caring, friendly, responsive, adaptable, secure, forward-thinking, confident, consistent, reliable? Which kind of manner would be most appropriate for what you are trying to achieve?

Persuasive communication is predicated on awareness, flexibility of approach and recognising and exploiting an audience's fundamental self-interest.

3 Creating and communicating a persuasive message

The content and delivery of a persuasive message will depend on a number of factors:

- overall objectives (modest, ambitious, i.e. what is the purpose of the communication?)
- the level of complexity involved (how much evidence will be needed to support the case?)
- the composition and size of the audience
- the likely effect on the audience (non-contentious, surprising, unwelcome, threatening?)
- the likely extent of personal or emotional involvement on the part of the audience
- the outcome required (straightforward action, an acknowledgement of irrefutable facts or more complex persuasion associated with changing the receiver's beliefs, values or behaviour)
- the context in which the message is delivered.

3.1 The persuasive message

To be persuasive a case must be:

- understandable
- attractive
- credible.

Creating understanding

People like clarity of explanation and ease of understanding. A powerful description, especially one that puts things in terms the other person can identify with, can strengthen a case disproportionately.

- Think about explanations and descriptions, try them out, and be sure they work.
- Aim to make what you say immediately and easily understood.

- Be thorough and precise, giving people enough detail to make the point and emphasising what is most relevant.
- Match the level of technicality you use with the other person (and avoid or explain jargon if it might confuse).

Think about the structure and sequence of what you say and how it breaks down into sub-sections, present a logical and organised case and signal what you aim to do in advance.

benefits The positive aspects of a product, service or situation that do something for or mean something to someone.

features The factual aspects of something, for example a product or service, or a situation.

Making the case attractive

This part of the argument has to set out the core pluses of the case, painting a picture of why agreement should follow. You get your own way when people see what something does for, or means to, them. How this is done is largely a question of giving the argument a focus of what is called **benefits**, rather than **features**.

The spellchecker on a computer is a feature. Being able to produce an accurate manuscript quickly and easily, the time and effort saved and the avoidance of material being returned for correction (by a boss, customer or, for an author, an editor) are all benefits. Features act to produce benefits.

The task is to make a clear case, to emphasise aspects of the case that have a positive effect on the other person and to make sure there are sufficient, and sufficiently powerful, pluses to add up to an agreeable proposition.

Putting the case 6.1

Q How can Spare Parts plc persuade their overseas distributors that the time and cost of attending the product launch will be beneficial?

A Overall, the key point is that attendance will benefit *their* businesses in measurable terms, that is, sales and profits. A sound briefing – and just what that will entail may need to be explained – will put them in a better position to:

- appreciate the full business opportunity
- brief their own staff about the product
- plan their own local launch
- exchange ideas with their counterparts in other countries.

There may be more personal benefits of a trip to the UK but less tangible benefits like these need to be qualified, and it is not enough just to say 'You will have a great time'.

Adding credibility

Credibility is added to your case by offering evidence, other than your opinion, that the case really is sound. Such credibility can be added in many ways, for example:

- quoting past experience
- involving the support of others (a person or organisation)
- quoting measurement of results
- mentioning any guarantees, tests or standards that are met
- invoking quantity that reinforces the case.

Putting the case 6.2

Q What factors could be used to add credibility to the case for distributors attending the Spare Parts launch?

A It is easy to exaggerate a case, so it is reasonable for people to ask: 'How do I *know* attendance will be worthwhile?' The kind of thing that will add to the case might include:

- research findings about the potential for the product
- the chance to hear a UK customer quote their experience of the product 'on the day'
- a sight of the working schedule (speaking for itself of a constructive event)
- reference to past experience of earlier events that were successful (this might be a reminder for some people).

If such things are well described and positioned appropriately – 'We know you will find it useful because . . .' – then the case for attendance will be reinforced.

Test *yourself* 6.1

Explain the difference between a benefit and a feature.

4 Persuasion in practice

There are a number of practical techniques which can be used to facilitate persuasive communication. The relevance and effectiveness of these may vary according to specific circumstances, but the general principles apply.

4.1 Gaining the audience's attention

The first task is to gain the audience's attention. This makes them concentrate on the issue at hand and is an important precursor to the delivery of the message. This can be achieved by:

- Showing interest in other people: It is important to make the audience feel that they are important to the proceedings. Addressing individuals or groups directly by name can increase the sense of involvement. Where the communication is taking place face-to-face, non-verbal signals, such as eye contact and gestures, can also help attract attention.
- Asking questions: In certain settings, for example a business meeting, asking questions and encouraging a dialogue will naturally engage others. Listening carefully to the answers will also often provide the communicator with more information that can, in turn, be used to support a case. Similarly, presenters often use questions at the opening of a presentation to encourage interaction.
- Being provocative: Some communications are deliberately provocative to catch the immediate attention of the audience. For example, controversial or striking images might be used in a poster advertising campaign. By submitting a blatantly

unorthodox curriculum vitae, an job applicant might aim to stand out from other applicants.

4.2 Soliciting feedback

The importance of feedback has already been discussed in Chapter 2. Persuasive communication is an interactive process, and securing feedback is an important part of the process. Feedback can be obtained in two ways:

- Observation: Look and listen for verbal and non-verbal signs of interest or potential agreement.
- Questioning: To check the receiver's understanding, reactions and perspective.

4.3 Anticipating and handling objections

objections
Doubts or reservations, either in someone's mind or voiced, that add weight to the negative side of the 'decision making balance' which will in turn lead to a failure to persuade.

The better you present your case, and the better it is directed towards the receiver, reflecting their situation, needs and views, the fewer **objections** you are likely to get.

It is often not difficult to anticipate the nature of objections. Anticipation does not mean objections then become easy to deal with, but at least you have time to consider how best to handle them.

Whatever the objections, they need to be carefully handled. They should always be acknowledged, and can be dealt with in a variety of ways. The four key options are:

1. Remove them: Remove the objections and persuade the person that they are not actually a negative factor.
2. Reduce them: Show that although there is a negative element to the case, it is a minor matter.
3. Turn them into a plus: Take what seems like a negative factor and show that it is, in fact, the opposite.
4. Agree: Sometimes it is necessary to agree that an objection raised is a problem.

In every case, keep the vision of the whole balance in mind. The job is *not* to remove every single minus from the negative side; it is to preserve the overall configuration of the balance you have created in the other person's mind.

Reaching agreement

close
To actively *ask* for someone's agreement in order to obtain a commitment or prompt an action and lead towards a conclusion of the conversation.

Once your case is explained and all objections have been raised and dealt with, the case has to be **closed**.

For example, in a business meeting, it is not enough simply to make a good case; interest and agreement must be converted into action. If agreement or action is not immediate, it may also be necessary to deal with indecision (by finding out why the receiver is unable to respond in the way you want them to) and also to follow up.

Summary

- Persuasive communication relates to how communicators can construct and use an argument or case to encourage the receiver to respond positively to a particular proposition or act in a certain (desired) way.
- The key to persuasive communication is to approach the process as something that relates as much to what the *receiver* wants and how they think, as to what you want to do yourself. Persuasive communication is an interactive process.
- Any persuasive process is best viewed as one that *assists people to make a decision* – and which, at the same time, encourages them to decide in favour of whatever option you are suggesting.
- Persuasive communication is not something you *direct at other people*; it is something you *engage in with them*. Successful persuasive communication will depend on your awareness, flexibility of approach and recognising and exploiting an audience's fundamental self-interest.
- The content and delivery of a persuasive message will depend on a number of factors, including overall objectives, the level of complexity and the composition and size of the audience involved.
- To be persuasive a case must be understandable, attractive and credible.
- There are a number of practical techniques which can be used to facilitate persuasive communication. These include gaining the audience's attention, soliciting feedback and anticipating and handling objections.

7 Negotiation

List of topics

Introduction

This chapter focuses on negotiation, a form of persuasive communication that can be defined as the process of making a deal and agreeing the terms on which it is arranged. This is an important, and ubiquitous, business communication skill. On a website, Annabel (aged six) is quoted with a saying that sums up much about the negotiation process: 'If you want a hamster, you start by asking for a pony.' Negotiation, put simply, is a bargaining process.

Negotiating is an interactive communication skill, one that must be deployed in many different circumstances and at all levels of organisational life. A great deal can depend on the outcome of negotiation. Successful negotiation involves a range of techniques, each of which must be tailored to meet the specific circumstances of the negotiation.

1 Negotiation defined

1.1 A form of communication

negotiation The process of making a deal and agreeing the terms on which it is arranged to the satisfaction of everyone involved.

bargaining The process of trading during negotiation.

Negotiation is a particular kind of communication and is best defined in that context. Communication is the flow of information between people to inform and instruct. More important here, however, is *persuasive communication*. This is designed to produce agreement and action in another person; and has many applications (see Chapter 6).

When persuasion has worked and agreement has been reached, negotiation may take over. It is concerned with the relationship between two parties where the needs of both are largely in balance. It is the process of **bargaining** that arranges and agrees the basis on which agreement will be concluded – the terms and conditions under which the deal will be struck.

Making it work 7.1

Negotiation: two simple examples

In the classic case of wage bargaining, the employer wants to reach an agreement (to secure the workforce and keep the business running), and the employees want an agreement (so that the process of negotiating is over, and they can get on with earning at a new, improved, rate). This balance defines the process.

In selling, the first stage is to get agreement – from the point of view of the seller, *to get what they want* – but beyond that, negotiation is what decides the 'best deal'. For example, when buying a car, the purchaser will take into account the whole package and not just the car itself. Factors such as the finance, discounts, non-standard extras, delivery or trade-in of an existing vehicle might all be relevant. The conversation will range around a possible point of agreement, from a starting point – **initial stance** – to the ultimate **point of balance**.

Test *yourself* 7.1

What is the difference between negotiating and persuasive communication and what is the relationship between the two?

2 The nature of negotiation

Negotiation is characterised by various factors:

- It is an interactive and balanced process. 'Winning' (win-lose) might be satisfying in the short term, but is unlikely to be the basis of a longer-term relationship . Equally, it important not to be the loser (lose-win). The best outcome is one agreeable to both parties. This is usually referred to as the **win-win factor**.

	A loses	**A wins**
B loses	Lose-lose	Win-lose
B wins	Lose-win	Win-win

Table 7.1 Possible negotiation outcomes

- An adversarial element is inherent within the process as each party vies to get the best deal that they can.
- A major part of the process of bargaining is one of *trading*: as the terms and conditions (or variables) are discussed, they must be traded to create a balance.
- Give and take is necessary, and the discussion may take time.
- An element of ritual is involved, in that negotiation must be perceived as having been justified by the size of the task involved; time and procedure are part of this.

2.1 Three key factors

The process of negotiation involves three key factors:

1. information
2. time
3. power.

initial stance
The starting point or first offer in a negotiation, one that is almost always pitched high, sometimes clearly unreasonably high.

point of balance
The point where the 'deal' can be agreed by both parties, though it may not reflect the best hopes of either.

win-win negotiation
The best negotiating outcome, in which both parties are satisfied and have an agreement with which they can feel comfortable, even if it is not the ideal 'best deal'.

Information

Both parties in a negotiation want to know as much as possible about the other. A better understanding by one side allows a more accurate deployment of the skills and gives that side an advantage.

Time

This is always a pressure, and urgency and specific deadlines may be imposed on any situation, often coming from outside the control of the person negotiating. Other circumstances may affect timing, for example the publication of a company's annual accounts. On the other hand, time and timing is one of the raw materials of most negotiations and most deadlines are themselves negotiable.

Power

Many factors can add weight – power – to the ability to negotiate. Power stems from two main areas:

- The power of precedent: What has happened in the past can affect our approach to negotiation. Every possibility should be considered, regardless of precedent.
- The power of legitimacy: People's attitude to what can be negotiated often depends on perceived authority. This authority may be real, or it may be assumed or implied. Power may be intentionally invested in something to give it more power and make it weigh more heavily in the balance. For example, saying 'that would be against policy' could well discourage discussion.

Power also comes from the legitimacy of factual evidence, similar in concept to the proof required in persuasion (see Chapter 6).

2.2 A constructive process

Negotiation demands that proposals are made and discussed. It may be adversarial, but in the interests of longer-term relationships, the overall aim is generally a mutually agreeable outcome – what has already been referred to as a win-win outcome. Negotiation is about seeking common ground, relating to the other person and their concerns, participating in to-and-fro debate but not insisting on a totally rigid agenda. It means:

- asking questions and *listening* to the answers
- disclosing information (to some extent)
- openly stating a point of view
- building a relationship
- treating the other person with respect.

Negotiation must aim throughout at agreement and actively act to avoid stalemate. If persuasion answers the question 'Will this person agree?', then negotiation must address the question 'On what basis will this person agree?'

Putting the case 7.1

Q Take the distributors' view of the product launch. What if one the most important of Spare Parts' distributors is unsure about sending a representative to the launch. What factors give them power and how can these factors be used?

A Negotiation demands empathy: you have to see things from the other side's point of view. Spare Parts wants to use the product launch to encourage its distributors to champion the new product in their local markets. The distributors may be more circumspect: they need to be convinced that the new product is worth the effort of sending a representative to the launch, followed by the marketing effort on their return. The fact that Spare Parts needs the cooperation of its distributors gives the distributors a possible advantage in this negotiation. The product launch organisers need to be aware of this potential power and make sure that the motivations and business needs of their distributors are taken into account, and that the case for attending – and subsequently endorsing the new product – is well made. Precedent may well be a significant factor in the negotiation; if the distributors have attended successful product launches in the past, they are much more likely to attend this time around.

The distributors' power over attendance or non-attendance must also be balanced by whether or not they wish to secure a long-term relationship with Spare Parts and how important working with the manufacturer is to their business profile in their markets. The prospect of non-attendance may be a useful bargaining position, but actual non-attendance may not ultimately be in the distributors' own interests.

Test *yourself* 7.2

What is meant by the phrase 'win-win negotiation'?

3 The negotiation process

As described above, the negotiation process is a discussion involving the presentation of proposals and counter-proposals.

3.1 Objectives and variables

Successful negotiation begins with preparation. It is particularly important to have clear **objectives**.

objectives
A clear specification of the *result* you want from the negotiation: what it is, its timing.

Planning should be detailed enough to produce the equivalent of a route map to help shape the negotiation. This should provide an ideal route through while also recognising that things might not go exactly to plan.

The core of the negotiation process revolves around what are called **variables**. For example, in negotiating price, the price itself is clearly a variable, but discussion may involve associated matters such as payment terms, extras (e.g. with a product such might range from delivery to service arrangements to credit) and other factors such as timing, staffing or other services.

variables
Those factors that can be varied and arranged in different ways to create different potential deals.

The overall rules here include:

- aiming high – going for the best deal possible

legitimacy
A case has *legitimacy* if is supported by factual evidence: the better the evidence, the higher the legitimacy and the stronger the case.

bogeys
Red herrings, elements apparently a significant part of the negotiation, which are introduced only to distract or confuse the issue.

trading variables
The process of deciding how factors are decided and agreed in relation to each party to the negotiation.

- discovering the full list of variables the other person has in mind
- treating *everything* as a potential variable
- dealing with detail within the total picture (rather than one point at a time without reference to others).

Variables can be used in various ways. You can gain attention by offering the reward of something you are prepared to give. Conversely, you can offer punishment by showing your intention to withhold something. Your case is strengthened, given power or **legitimacy**, by being linked to authority or supported by factual evidence. Similarly the use of **bogeys** (e.g. statements such as 'That's beyond our control', aiming to stop questioning in its tracks regardless of its truth) can add power.

Variables have to be ranked, both in preparation and during the negotiation, when some fine-tuning may be necessary. There will be some things that are:

- essential: a deal cannot be reached unless these are met
- ideal: what you really hope to achieve (and these need to be prioritised, because there may be more of these than can realistically be achieved)
- tradable: those things that you are prepared to concede to help create a workable deal.

The concept of **trading variables** is key to the whole process of negotiation. It is important never to give anything away. **Concessions** must be traded.

The trading of variables often involves a process of 'if you will do this I will do that' which must take place for an acceptable balance to be reached. This is often prompted by **'what if' questions**.

In this trading, the value of every given concession must be maximised and every accepted concession minimised, so that the trading drives the balance in the direction you want.

Putting the case 7.2

Q To organise the product launch, Michael James has had to make the crucial decision of where the event should be held, which has meant creating a shortlist of suitable hotels and then negotiating a deal which balances the overall cost with the importance of creating the right impression. What variables will be in play in these negotiations?

A The deal will include the following variables:

- Facilities: The right facilities in terms of the launch itself and accommodation, hospitality and recreation. For example, would a nearby golf course provide opportunities for informal networking with international representatives?
- Timing: The hotel has to be available at the right time.
- Location: Is the hotel easily accessible for the international representatives?
- Price: Can Michael James negotiate a good price without compromising the essentials?
- Extras: Perhaps the quality of the rooms, or the catering.
- Ongoing relationship: The prospect of future business might be used to negotiate a better deal for this event.

Test *yourself* 7.3

How would you group potential variables into different categories to make the process more manageable?

concession
In negotiation, a variable that is offered to the other party (usually in a way that balances the total picture) as part of the to-and-fro process of agreeing a total arrangement of variables.

'what if' questions
In negotiation, the process whereby adjustments are made by making suggestions that offer new ways of rebalancing matters: 'What if . . . I do this and you then accept (or do) that?

4 Negotiating techniques

There are a number of techniques which may be used to enhance negotiation. These include:

- Using silence: A pause may make a point or prompt a comment.
- Keeping track: Never lose your grip on the details. Summarise regularly and make notes as the meeting progresses.
- Being seen to be reasonable: You can keep the perception of your attitude and of progress to date positive by the tone of voice and phrase you adopt: 'that's a good idea', 'let's do that', 'it should work well'.
- Reading between the lines: Nothing may be quite what it seems – or sounds – and you need to watch for 'danger phrases' from the other side, e.g. 'That's everything' (meaning 'Everything – for now, but there are more demands to come'), 'Right, that's good all round' (' . . . and especially good for me').
- Focusing on the arrangements: If you want a deal, then you must proceed as if there is one to be had.
- Concentrating: Keep thinking and run the conversation to allow this, building in pauses where necessary, e.g. say 'Let me think about that' and pause. Never be rushed.
- Considering matters in the round: Be careful not to go for final agreement only to find out that the other party is still introducing new issues. There is a particular danger in agreeing to parts of the proposition as they arise and then finding you are left with nothing to bargain with towards the end.
- Regarding timing as a variable: Deadlines, duration and every other aspect of time are almost always negotiable.
- Questioning what is described as fixed: What seem like constraints can often be made into variables and included in the trading.

Making it work 7.2

Negotiation: attention to detail

The list above makes clear both the complexities of negotiation and the opportunity presented by attention to detail. One element of technique overlooked can affect things drastically. Consider the purchase of something complex and expensive such as a piece of construction machinery. If either party neglects to take notes, then two things may happen. First, some detail may be missed, resulting in an unnecessarily unsatisfactory deal. Second, needing to check the details after the event could give the other party the perception of lack of concentration. This may give them added confidence and allow them to score points that they would not do otherwise.

Details matter. Being well organised, having thought it through and having a handle on how you will orchestrate all the different, and often disparate, factors is crucial. The process is also important. Negotiation works best when both parties accept the need for the process and take it seriously.

4.1 Interpersonal behaviour

Negotiation also involves behavioural factors. These include:

- Disguised motivation: Consider spelling out your true meaning and asking others to do the same. It is possible to have so much double guessing going on – why are they asking that? – that no one knows what is happening.
- Advance warning: The above can be helped by what many refer to as clear '**signposting**'. This is best done positively – 'It might help meet the timing considerations if . . .' – so that it is clear why the suggestion is being made. Negative signs ahead of a counter-argument are often just a cue for the other person to stop listening as they begin to marshal their response: 'I'm not letting them get away with that, I'll suggest . . .'

signposting
Identifying and communicating in advance the content or nature of what is coming next.

- Tactics to disrupt: Tactics may be used to confuse, disrupt or play for time.
- Giving nothing away: If you sound firm, you must look firm – even if you are wondering what on earth you can do next. There is a link here with body language (see Chapter 1).

Because negotiation is a particular form of communication, all the general rules of good communication – such as the need for clarity and questioning and listening – apply if negotiation is to be successful.

Checklist 7.1: principles of negotiation

- ✓ Negotiation is about bargaining to reach a mutually agreeable outcome. This is the win-win concept.
- ✓ Never neglect preparation. Have a clear plan but remain flexible.
- ✓ Regard the other party as your equal. Mutual respect is essential both to conduct and outcome.
- ✓ Abide by the rules. Negotiation is about discussion, rather than debate.
- ✓ Put your cards on the table. Do not pretend powers or state intentions that are untrue.
- ✓ Take your time and do not rush discussion or decision making. Delay is better than a poor outcome. Patience is a key characteristic of a good negotiator.
- ✓ Put yourself in the others' shoes and see things objectively from their point of view. Empathy is vital.
- ✓ State clear objectives. Being open early on about overall intentions can save confusion later.
- ✓ Avoid confrontation. Do not get into a corner you cannot get out of. Avoid rows and showdowns, but stand firm and keep calm.
- ✓ Treat disagreement carefully. Act as devil's advocate, apparently looking at the case from the other's viewpoint, to avoid a confrontational style.
- ✓ Deal with concessions progressively. Where they have to be made, make them unwillingly and one at a time – and trade them.
- ✓ Do not let perfection be the enemy of the good. An outcome that is 100% what you want is rarely achievable. Be realistic, do not waste time and effort seeking something out of reach.
- ✓ Use openness but not comprehensively. Declaring your plans and intentions may

be useful to the discussion. You may want to keep hidden the motivation behind them.

- ✓ Stick with your objectives. Set your sights high and settle as high as possible. Know when to drop the whole thing rather than agree to an inappropriate deal.
- ✓ Keep your guard. Maintain your stamina, bide your time. The other party may be prepared to persevere.
- ✓ Remain professional. Respect confidences that are given in the course of negotiations. Such consideration builds relationships and may help you next time.
- ✓ Never underestimate people. A velvet glove may be disguising an iron fist.
- ✓ End positively. Neither party will get exactly what they want, but if the deal is agreeable, emphasise this at the end.

Checklist 7.2: negotiating tactics

- ✓ Select the right starting point. Your plan should make it easy for you to take the initiative and quickly get into your agenda.
- ✓ Aim high, so that you do not have to move too far from your ideal aim.
- ✓ Do not make your feelings obvious. There is an element of bluff. If your face and body language say 'this is minor' as you respond to something major you will achieve more.
- ✓ Use silence. Some things need no reaction at all.
- ✓ Avoid early difficulties. Let a rapport and momentum build up before you tackle contentious issues.
- ✓ Do not exaggerate facts. They can be verified and exaggeration causes problems later.
- ✓ Communicate clearly. Remember the need for understanding is the foundation of the whole process.
- ✓ Be seen to go with the other person's way of doing things, at least to some degree and particularly if you are on their ground.
- ✓ Do not push too hard. There is usually a line beyond which the outcome is not a better deal, but complete breakdown.
- ✓ When negotiation has finished, stop. Once agreement is reached, agreed and perhaps noted, move on to other matters.

Making it work 7.3

Negotiation: timing and preparation

Sometimes one key factor can influence disproportionately. For example, a famous American sportsman was once negotiating a sponsorship deal with a sports clothing manufacturer. His face would be used in promotions, he would make some appearances and they would pay him well during the period of the deal. He wanted more money than the company wanted to pay, and they wanted a quick agreement to meet their already scheduled launch date.

By agreeing to the man's face being used in this one-off campaign, for a reasonable fee, while overall negotiations continued, the sportsman's agent put the man in a very strong position. As the launch broke and his face appeared across the nation the company realised that they either had to agree terms or explain to the public why he was no longer 'the face of the

Making it work *(continued)* 7.3

product'. Was this due to a clever agent, or perhaps a lapse of concentration by the company people fronting the negotiation? The interaction of timing and money were instrumental in settling the deal.

This kind of situation is just as common in less high profile business situations. It emphasises the need for preparation, keeping control as negotiation proceeds and doing so in an organised way.

Test *yourself* 7.4

List five tactics which might be employed in a successful negotiation.

Summary

- Negotiation is the process of making a deal and agreeing the terms on which it is arranged. It is an interactive and balanced process. Although it may be adversarial, generally the overall aim is a mutually agreeable outcome. This is usually referred to as the 'win-win factor'.
- The negotiation process is a discussion involving the presentation of proposals and counter-proposals. This involves bargaining and the trading of variables, those factors that can be varied and arranged in different ways to create different potential deals. Always keep in mind what is essential – in other words what aspects must be met for there to be agreement at all – and what is tradable.
- Negotiation is about seeking common ground, understanding the other person and their concerns, participating in to-and-fro debate, but not insisting on a totally rigid agenda. Stalemate should be avoided wherever possible.
- The nature of the process means that details are important – for example, keeping track of progress, making notes where necessary. Sound preparation is fundamental but remember to remain flexible.
- A number of practical techniques can be used to enhance or influence the progress of the negotiation. By keeping focused on what you want to achieve, questioning fixed assumptions and considering matters as a whole, rather than agreeing piecemeal, you will stand a good chance of reaching a suitable solution.
- Behavioural factors are also important. Empathy, respect for the other party and their point of view, and avoiding confrontation will all help. Patience and objectivity are essential.
- Because negotiation is a particular form of communication, all the general rules of good communication – such as the need for clarity and questioning and listening – apply if it is to be successful.

Meetings and teams

8

List of topics

Introduction

It was the economist J.K. Galbraith who said, 'Meetings are indispensable when you don't want to do anything.' Then it is said that the ideal meeting involves two people – with one absent.

If there is one thing in business life that is a mixed blessing, it is meetings. Yet what organisation could survive without the regular exchanges of information and opportunities for decision making which meetings provide? This chapter looks at the proper purposes of business meetings, how they should be planned, conducted and recorded depending on the level of formality required. Particular attention is given to topics such as the role of the Chair, key documents such as the agenda and minutes and the importance of involving everyone present. The chapter also looks at the more informal opportunities for group exchanges offered by team working, and looks at the range of roles which are important to effective team functioning.

1 Meetings: benefits and costs

Business meetings are a necessary and important part of business communication. They are crucial to organisational communications, consultation, debate and decision making. However, because they *are* held so frequently, and often involve a lot of time and people, they are also expensive. This makes it all the more important to get the most from them, be careful not to hold too many, and not let them go on longer than they need to. Above all, they must be constructive.

1.1 The benefits

Whatever the meeting, large or small, formal or informal, long or short, if it is planned, considered and conducted with an eye on how it can be made to go well, then it can be effective.

The role and importance of meetings can vary. As another form of communication, they can be a source of:

- information

- analysis and problem solving
- discussion and exchanges of views
- inspiration and motivation
- counselling and conflict resolution
- opinion and feedback
- persuasion
- training and development
- reinforcement of the status quo
- changes in knowledge, skills or attitudes.

The key role is most often to prompt change, and for that to happen decisions must be made. To achieve this, any meeting has to be constructive and put people in a position where good decisions can prompt appropriate action.

Good meetings are not just useful, most people *want* them, believing that they:

- keep people informed and up to date
- provide a chance to be heard
- create involvement with others
- are useful social gatherings
- allow cross-functional contact
- provide personal visibility and public relations opportunities for the individual
- can broaden experience and prompt learning.

Having too few meetings can be as big a mistake as having too many.

1.2 The costs

All meetings are costly, and poorly run or unnecessary meetings are more costly than good ones. Poor meetings:

- waste time
- waste money
- divert attention from more important tasks
- slow progress and delay action
- are divisive
- lower morale
- are a platform for the talkative and disruptive
- breed office politics
- create muddle, or at worst, chaos.

Meetings need to be productive and useful.

Test *yourself* 8.1

List five possible penalties of a poor meeting.

2 Types of business meeting

The form and intention of business meetings vary greatly, and in many cases overlap. It should always be clear what the meeting is for, and the format it should take. There is considerable potential for confusion between purpose and format. For example, one might expect that an executive committee would be charged with making high-level decisions, but in reality its purpose may be to consult or to brief rather than to decide. Similarly, those attending a meeting have different views of its purpose: for example, if a meeting is a one-way briefing, then attendees expecting consultation will be confused or upset and this may be disruptive.

The level of formality varies too. One factor affecting this is the numbers attending: greater numbers of people need more organising. One-to-one meetings are simplest in terms of the flow of communication; a few more may meet perfectly well sitting around in an unorganised fashion. A round table may help when everyone is contributing and little chairing is necessary, but the classic boardroom table layout is perhaps best for larger numbers and puts whoever is in the chair in a commanding position.

Table 8.1 summarises some of the main types of business meetings and their purposes, and gives examples of formal and informal meetings which fall into each category.

Type	Primary purpose	Formal example	Informal example
Briefing	To deliver information	Chief executive presents financial results to investment analysts	Project manager explains the task to a newly-formed team
Investigatory	To gather information	Board of inquiry interviews witnesses to a serious accident	Architect and structural engineer visit construction site to resolve technical problem
Advisory	To provide information	Panel of experts advise government department on new legislation	Human resources manager consults two colleagues on a disciplinary case
Consultative	Voice opinions	Community leaders speak at public inquiry into new airport runway	Manager asks her staff how they feel about a proposed profit-sharing scheme
Executive	Make decisions	Board of trustees agrees a new strategic plan for hospital trust	Emergency workers at the scene of a fire decide on the best course of action

Table 8.1 Organisational meetings: overlapping types, purposes and styles
Source: *Successful Organisational Communication*, 2nd edition, Blundel, R., Pearson Education Limited. Copyright © Pearson Education Limited 2004.

2.1 Formal meetings and committees

The need for planning and structure outlined below applies to all kinds of meetings, irrespective of the level of formality. However, it is also likely that the more formal the meeting, and the more decision-making power that meeting has, the greater the need will be to follow agreed rules and procedures and to keep a formal record of proceedings. For example, under UK law, the meetings of boards of directors are governed by that company's constitutional documents, known as the Memorandum and Articles of Association. If the directors subsequently act outside the stated rules and powers, their decisions may be invalidated, and directors may find themselves personally liable.

Similarly, the UK's Companies Act 1985 includes specific provisions for the conduct of the meetings of a company's shareholders, especially concerning the annual general meeting (AGM). The specific requirements include rules on how frequently meetings should be held, who is entitled to receive notice to attend and vote, and the format of **resolutions**, depending on the kinds of decisions to be made.

resolution
The way in which a decision is proposed and passed at a formal meeting, such as a board meeting or annual general meeting of a company.

Organisations may also operate through a series of committees, made up of representatives from different departments or representing different interests. Committee members may be appointed or elected by a wider group. These committees generally have their own rules of conduct or terms of reference, and may elect sub-committees to deal with specific issues or topic areas. It is common, for example, for universities to be governed by an academic board, supported by sub-committees dealing with areas such as academic standards, finance or examinations. Similarly, charities are governed by boards of trustees.

The timing of formal meetings of boards and committees is generally agreed and notified in advance to allow attendees to schedule in attendance. Regular meetings may also need to be supplemented by extraordinary meetings to deal with urgent or unusual issues.

Making it work 8.1

The UK Combined Code and board committees

The Combined Code is a voluntary corporate governance code of conduct for UK public companies with a formal listing on, for example, the London Stock Exchange. The evolution of good corporate governance for large UK companies has led to an increasing focus on the relationship between directors and shareholders – generally at the annual general meeting – and the structure and operation of boards of directors, including the recommendation that companies establish three main board committees:

- a nominations committee to oversee the appointment of directors
- a remuneration committee to look at directors' remuneration
- an audit committee to supervise the appointment and management of the company's external auditors and the internal audit function.

The Code also makes specific recommendations about the composition of the committees (i.e. how committee membership should be made up) and includes guidance on their role, duties and terms of reference in an appendix.

3 Planning and preparation

Irrespective of the level of formality, successful meetings have to be carefully planned.

First, ask some basic questions:

- Is a meeting really necessary?
- Should it be held regularly?
- Who should attend? (And who should *not*?)

Anyone convening a meeting needs to bear in mind a number of key issues, including:

- Setting an **agenda**: No meeting will go well if you make up the content as you go along. Notify the agenda in advance and give good notice of contributions required from others.
- Timing: Set a start time *and* a finishing time and allocate rough timing to individual items. In this way you can judge how the meeting should be conducted against the duration. Respect the timing too: start on time and keep to the planned duration.
- Objectives: Always set a clear objective so that you can answer the question *why* a meeting is being held.
- Preparing yourself: Read and check all necessary papers, and think about how you will both contribute yourself and encourage active participation from others.
- Insisting others prepare: This may mean instilling habits. For example, if you pause to run through something that should have been studied before the meeting, then you encourage the view that reading beforehand is not really necessary.
- Attendees and their roles: Who should be there (or not) and what roles individuals should have.
- Environment: A meeting will go much more smoothly if people attending are comfortable and if there are no interruptions.

agenda
The document setting out topics for discussion at a meeting, the sequence in which they will be dealt with and administrative information such as timing and location.

4 Setting the agenda

Every meeting needs an agenda. In most cases it should be in writing and is best circulated in good time ahead of the meeting. Its purpose is to help shape and control the meeting that follows. Agendas should:

- specify any formalities (should such things as apologies for absence be noted, for instance?)
- pick up and link points from any previous meeting(s) to ensure continuity
- give people the opportunity to make agenda suggestions
- specify who will lead or contribute on each item
- help individuals prepare for their participation
- list and order the items for discussion or review; this should show the logical order of the topics, and reflect the difficulties they pose, the time they are likely to occupy and participants' views. Some compromise is normally necessary

- deal with administration – when and where the meeting will be held and any other arrangements that need to be noted in advance.

The order of items on an agenda can be significant, and should be presented in a logical sequence. It could be argued, for example, that simple or non-controversial items should be discussed first, although these may be difficult to identify. Agenda items are generally numbered sequentially for ease of reference. In some cases, especially for more formal meetings, there may be a more complex numbering structure based on the year plus agenda item (for example, the first agenda item in 2007 would carry the reference 07/01), which continues from one meeting to the next in that given year.

Sample Agenda and notice of meeting 8.1

ABC Department: Project Review Meeting

The next meeting is to be held on Thursday 12 January 2006 in Conference Room B, starting at 3.00pm. The meeting aims to conclude by 5.00pm.

Agenda

07/01	Apologies for absence	
07/02	Minutes of last meeting	
07/03	Matters arising from the minutes of the last meeting	
07/04	Project A: progress to date	CG
07/05	Financial projections	SB
07/06	Information from X	SER
07/07	Any other business (AOB)	
07/08	Date of next meeting	

To make sure the discussion at the meeting is as well informed as possible, written reports and proposals may also be circulated in advance with the notice of meeting and agenda on the understanding that attendees will read these ahead of the meeting and come prepared to discuss the matter in hand without having to run through the basic facts at the meeting itself.

For some formal meetings – for example, general meetings of company shareholders – formal rules may be set down about the format and timing of sending out a notice of meeting and an agenda. In most cases, it is good practice for the notice and agenda to be circulated about two weeks before the meeting, either in hard copy or as an email attachment. This task usually falls to the company or committee secretary.

Putting the case 8.1

Q How should David Soames set up and time meetings with Michael James to ensure that the product launch is successful?

A The starting point is the launch date. Before then, a number of meetings will be necessary to keep the project on schedule. Rather than risk delays, perhaps from not being able to get together, it would be sensible to schedule a number of meetings (of adequate duration) leading up to the event. If things are on schedule and proceeding to plan, then some meetings could be cancelled or cut short – but such an approach guarantees that matters will not cause problems because meetings cannot be convened at short notice. Draft agendas might well be prepared for all such meetings; the core topics (venue, arrangements, etc.) would be the same for each meeting.

Test *yourself* 8.2

What should be included in an agenda for a meeting?

5 The role of the Chair

Even a simple meeting needs someone in the chair who is responsible for managing and directing the meeting so that:

- the meeting will focus better on its objectives
- discussion will be more constructive
- a thorough review will take place, avoiding *ad hoc* decisions being taken
- all sides of the argument or case can be reflected and balanced
- proceedings are kept businesslike and less argumentative, even when contentious issues have to be dealt with.

5.1 The Chair's responsibilities

A good Chair faces the challenge of managing the flow of information in a meeting so that all opinions are heard as objectively as possible and the chances of reaching agreement or achieving the meeting's objectives are maximised. This involves skills such as diplomacy and coordination. There are also a number of more tangible responsibilities.

Before the meeting

- Liaise with the secretary about the purpose of the meeting, the specifics of the agenda and meeting tactics.
- Read all relevant documents and anticipate the main areas of debate or controversy.

At the meeting

- Be on time, start on time and keep control of the time.
- Ensure any administrative matters are organised and will be taken care of appropriately (e.g. refreshments, taking **minutes**)

minutes
A written record of the decisions and action points agreed at a meeting.

quorum
The minimum number of appropriate attendees who must be present at a formal meeting (for example a board meeting) for its decisions to be valid. The number will be set out in its constitution.

- Where relevant, ensure that the meeting has the necessary **quorum**.
- Introduce people if necessary.
- Set, or keep, the meeting rules. For more formal meetings, the secretary is also likely to be on hand to help with this.
- Control the discussion, and do so in light of the different kinds of people who may be present: the talkative, the strident, the reserved, etc. Ensure everyone has their say.
- Encourage contributions where appropriate or necessary.
- Ask questions to clarify where necessary.
- Act to keep the discussion to the point.
- Summarise, clearly, succinctly and regularly.
- Ensure that the key decisions are recorded appropriately.
- Provide the final word, summarising and bringing matters to a conclusion, remembering any final administrative detail, such as setting dates for action or further meetings.

After the meeting

- Check and approve the meeting's minutes (see below), and ensure they are circulated in a timely manner.

Stop and think 8.1

Think about a meeting you have attended recently. Who was in the chair? Did this person facilitate discussion? Did the meeting achieve its objectives? If not, why not?

5.2 Encouraging participation

Assuming that the right people are at the meeting, contributions should come from everyone. To ensure adequate and representative discussion and that subsequent decisions are made on all the appropriate facts and information, discussion may need to be prompted.

Participants may hold back for a variety of reasons:

- fear of rejection
- pressure of other, more senior or more powerful, people
- lack of preparation
- incomplete understanding of what has gone before
- a lack of encouragement to make contributions.

A good Chair will ask for views and do so in a way that prompts open, considered comments. This can be achieved by asking the right questions. These must be clear, pitched in an appropriate manner and appropriate to the particular format or circumstances of the meeting itself. Examples of these questions include the following:

1. Overhead questions: These are put to the meeting as a whole and left for whoever wants to picks them up; they are useful for starting discussion.

2 Overhead/directed: These are put to the whole meeting (as 1.) and either followed immediately by the same question to an individual, or after a pause as a way of overcoming lack of response: 'Now, what do we all think about this? . . . David?'
3 Direct to an individual: Without preliminaries; a useful way to get an individual reaction or to check understanding.
4 Rhetorical: A question demanding no answer can still be a good way to make a point or prompt thinking and the Chair can provide a response if they wish: 'Useful?'
5 Re-directed: This presents a question asked of the Chair straight back to the meeting either as an overhead or direct question: 'Good question. What do we all think? David?'
6 Development question: This really gets discussion going, as it builds on the answer to an earlier question and moves it round the meeting: 'So, Mary thinks it will take too long; are there any other problems?'

Prompting discussion is as important as control. It is the only way of making sure the meeting is well balanced and takes in all required points of view. If decisions are made without discussion, they may be challenged later. It may sometimes be necessary, therefore, to persevere in order to get the discussion the meeting needs. Ways have to be found to achieve this; two examples are:

- Asking again: Rephrase the question and ensure the point is clear and that people know a comment is required.
- Use silence: Silence can be embarrassing, but even a short silence, making it clear that answers are required, may be sufficient to get someone speaking.

5.3 Sparking creativity

Meetings need to be creative. Two heads can really be better than one, but new ideas can also prompt a negative cycle of point scoring.

The Chair has to foster creative thinking and open-mindedness and ensure that instant negative reactions do not take over the meeting by:

- actively stimulating creative thinking (saying this is part of the meeting and ruling against instant rejection of ideas without consideration)
- contributing new ideas themselves or steering the discussion in new, or unusual, directions
- considering novel approaches and giving them a chance
- aiming to solve problems, not tread familiar pathways.

Wherever possible, meetings should always finish on a positive note.

Making it work 8.2

The creative Chair

Meetings need not always be a question of slavishly following rules. Whoever is in the chair can be as creative as they wish, finding ways to bring a meeting to life, while ensuring that it is effective and businesslike.

For example, some make a point of switching from the traditional format of ending with the usual 'Any other business' (AOB), which too often sees the meeting degenerate into a mess of bits and pieces, gripes and irrelevances, leaving people irritated when they should be saying, 'That was a useful session.' Better, perhaps, to start with AOB: a Chair saying, 'Let's take ten minutes before we really get started to deal with any peripheral points and get those out of the way so that we can concentrate on the main business' is often appreciated – and creates the opportunity to finish without irritation.

Test *yourself* 8.3

a) List six of the responsibilities of whoever is in the chair for a meeting.

b) How can discussion at a meeting be prompted?

6 Attending a business meeting

6.1 The individual's responsibility

It is vital for a meeting to be well led, but everyone attending must also play their part. Before attending a meeting, participants should ask themselves:

1. What can I contribute and how?
2. What can I get from the meeting?

The key things that make for effective participation in meetings are:

- sound preparation
- effective communication
- well handled discussion.

Sound preparation

- Read everything necessary in advance: This might include past minutes, agendas and documents of all sorts; some circulated in advance, others good background. Sometimes other research may be necessary.
- Annotate any relevant documents and make your own notes on them: It is essential to be able to check facts quickly during a meeting.
- Note who else will attend: Are they allies or not? Might liaison be useful before the meeting?
- Plan questions: Consider what you need to ask, of whom, when and how.
- Prepare any formal contributions: Think through things in the same way that you would plan a presentation; do not assume an informal meeting makes this unnecessary.

Effective communication

- Stick to the rules: Do not monopolise the conversation, interrupt, become

emotional or argumentative, make it difficult to keep to time, appear unprepared or undisciplined – and stick to the point.
- Break the rules: On occasion, there may be room for more dramatic impact – a dramatic outburst (a fist banged on the table, for instance), a display of emotion or some humour; even an organised interruption has been known to create advantage.
- Stick to the structure: Communicate in an organised way: introduce what you want to say, set out the issues, putting points for and against and dealing with the main issues and implications, be prepared to debate points and answer questions and summarise and pull together your argument.
- Get your facts right: Much time is wasted because of imprecise information; ensure you are explicit, accurate and precise.
- Always observe others: Watch reactions, listen to everything and try to put yourself in others' shoes.

Well handled discussion

Much here depends on the Chair, but an individual can influence things too.

- Remain alert and concentrate on everything that goes on.
- Listen.
- Keep thinking – you may have to fine-tune everything you planned in the light of events.
- Remain calm and collected, whatever the provocation, and stick to your guns in a businesslike manner.

Making it work 8.3

Looking the part

One thing worth bearing in mind is that a meeting is a public forum; you are on show. There may be people unknown to you, senior or important people, and appearance is a factor. It is best to appear organised and as if you have some clout. If you rush in late, unkempt and clutching a collapsing pile of papers you will certainly give the wrong impression. In some forums seating may be important and you need to avoid being squeezed into some corner, barely visible to the Chair.

Stop and think 8.2

Most people attend, or conduct, meetings on a regular basis. Here is a useful exercise. Focus on a real meeting in your diary, then ask yourself how well set up it is. Is there a (good) agenda? Have you read relevant papers? Analyse it alongside this chapter, and judge it: how well do you think it will go?

Then judge it again after the meeting – and make a list of the factors you believe, with hindsight, would have made it better. You will then be in a position to make your next meeting better.

Putting the case 8.2

Q What steps can be taken to put individual delegates at their ease so that they feel comfortable participating in the launch?

A Even experienced and senior people can be circumspect about meetings. They may be unsure what to expect – or what is expected of them. Careful briefing is necessary. A clear written brief should:

- go beyond the administration (where things are, when things happen)
- deal with any rules or formalities of the meeting and matters of confidentiality
- make clear which papers should be read in advance
- identify where questions will be raised and where delegates will be expected to voice their views
- state whether any particular individual has a role to play.

7 After the meeting

The key thing after a meeting is that the actions decided upon should be implemented – as intended and on time. This is what makes a meeting worthwhile. This may involve anything from a small piece of information being passed on to the implementation of a major project. Whatever it is, however, it may well need prompting.

7.1 Minutes

Some form of written record of a meeting's discussion is usually needed, although this may range from a simple written note to complete minutes. Three key reasons make meeting notes or minutes necessary. They provide:

1. A prompt to action, reminding those who have taken on, or been given, tasks that they should do them – and when.
2. A tangible link to follow-up discussions or a further meeting. This can help ensure that points are reported or taken further – the classic 'Matters arising' item from minutes.
3. A record of what has occurred and particularly of what decisions have been made and what action decided upon. Some records clearly need to be kept longer than others; this is dependent on the topic and importance of the meeting.

Any meeting record should be:

- accurate
- objective
- succinct
- understandable
- businesslike.

Rather than a verbatim account of the meeting, most minutes are a narrative summary of decisions taken. Their key purpose is to spell out *what* action is expected, *by whom* and *when*. These key points should be *highlighted* in some way in the document. For example, minutes may include an 'action' column at the right-hand side of the page to indicate who is responsible for carrying out the decision made. Minutes must be attractive and easy to read, deal with formalities (apologies, minutes of the last meeting, matters arising, etc.) and list the essence of the discussion and outcomes. They should be circulated promptly, to the correct circulation list and regarded as important documents.

Sample Meeting minutes 8.2

ABC Department: Project Review Meeting

Minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 12 January 2006 at 3.00pm in Conference Room B.

Present:	Kim Evans (Chair)
	Kelvin Edwards (Secretary)
	Chris Green
	Stuart Robson
	Sarah Browne
07/01	Apologies
	Received from Imogen George.
07/02	Minutes of last meeting
	The minutes of the meeting of 15 December 2005, as circulated, were signed as a true record.
07/03	Matters arising
	None.
07/04	Project A: progress to date
	Chris Green reported on progress to date, highlighting the general problems of meeting the tight deadline within existing resources. However, Phase 1 has now been completed.
07/05	Financial projections
	Sarah Browne presented the latest financial position on the project. Costs are under pressure because of production delays at Phase 2. Stuart Robson asked for an up-to-date financial report based on the latest schedule to be circulated ahead of the next monthly meeting to keep the department informed during this critical period.
07/06	Information from X
	Stuart Robson presented the results of the latest survey commissioned in support of project Phase 3. The meeting agreed that the results were encouraging and could be used as part of the formal Phase 3 specification.
07/07	Any other business (AOB)
	None.
07/08	Date of next meeting
	Thursday 16 February 2006, starting at 3.00pm.

Minutes of a formal meeting will generally be taken by the meeting's secretary. They will be presented to the next meeting for approval, corrected as necessary, and thereafter become a formal record of proceedings. The minutes of a company meeting may record more formally the outcome of any resolutions which are necessary for making decisions which affect the legal status of the company, as outlined in Sample 8.3.

Sample Formal resolution minutes 8.3

Resolved: THAT John Colin Smith be appointed managing director of the company with effect from 1 January 20 . . .

OR

It was RESOLVED that the name of the company be changed to NewCo Limited.

Test *yourself* 8.4

Give three reasons why it is a good idea to create a written record of a meeting's discussion.

8 Teams and team working

team
A group of people, each with different roles and responsibilities, working together to manage a specific project or task.

As outlined above, meetings can take different forms. Where people in an organisation work together, then this necessitates meetings. However, meetings need not necessarily imply a formal gathering with a precirculated agenda and formal minutes. People within organisations often achieve the same outcomes, such as tackling complex tasks or planning a future action, by working together as a **team**.

In a team, different people with different responsibilities come together so that the totality of their experience and views are drawn together in a way that allows progress to be made. Thus a customer strategy might be discussed by a sales person, a sales manager, a product manager and a technical person; similarly a doctor, a nurse and a specialist might plan what treatment comes next for a specific patient. In such circumstances the final say may be with one person, but the inputs of the group are important, or even necessary, before a decision can be made.

Team working may be especially important in dealing with:

- complex issues which require input from more than one person, or a range of skills or experience to solve
- matters demanding creativity to find a novel solution or way forward where interaction between team members might spark new ideas.

In addition, team working and meeting is a spur to overall motivation because people like working this way and see themselves as able to make a contribution larger than that within their own restricted terms of reference.

8.1 Team roles

The roles people can play in teams are varied. Research has suggested that the effectiveness of a team depends on the blend of individual skills and abilities of its members. Belbin's picture of the most effective team, derived from a long study of teams of managers, involves nine necessary roles. One person may play more than one role and each is required for the team to be effective. Too many of one type in a team means lack of balance; too few roles and some tasks do not get done.

Team role	Primary contribution	Implied communication task
Chair	Organises, coordinates and seeks to retain team's focus and involvement.	Monitors and coordinates messages between team members.
Team leader	Initiates, provides leadership and drives team towards achieving task.	Generates persuasive bilateral and multilateral messages directed at team members.
Innovator	Creates novel ideas and solutions in support of the task.	Synthesises messages from diverse internal and external information sources.
Monitor–evaluator	Provides objective assessments of performance in relation to stated purpose.	Analyses primarily cognitive task-related messages within the team.
Team worker	Encourages other members, fosters team morale and reduces negative emotions.	Assesses and generates primarily affective, process-related messages within the team.
Completer	Maintains a check on outcomes in relation to project milestones and deadlines.	Analyses primarily cognitive task-related messages within the team.
Implementer	Carries out much of the practical work required to achieve stated purpose.	Receives bilateral messages (i.e. instructions) and avoids distraction from other internal exchanges.
Resource investigator	Establishes external contacts to secure resources in support of stated purpose.	Engages in bilateral exchanges of persuasive messages beyond the boundaries of the team.
Specialist	Commands support from subject knowledge and ability to make decisions based on in-depth experience.	Adds legitimacy to both internal and external communications.

Table 8.2 Team roles: a communication perspective
Source: adapted from *Successful Organisational Communication*, 2nd edition, Blundel, R., Pearson Education Limited. Copyright © Pearson Education Limited 2004.

Summary

- The main purpose of a meeting is most often to prompt change and make decisions. Meetings can take many forms – large or small, formal or informal, planned or unplanned.
- It should always be clear what the purpose of the meeting is and what format it should take.
- Irrespective of the level of formality, successful meetings should be carefully planned. Generally, the more formal the meeting is and the more decision-making power that it has, the greater the need for organisation and planning beforehand. Equally, in a meeting of this kind it will be important, and in some cases an essential legal requirement, that it is conducted according to certain rules and procedure.
- Every meeting needs an agenda to provide context and continuity.

- Every meeting should have someone acting as Chair, who will be responsible for managing and directing the progress of the meeting. The Chair should prepare in advance for the meeting, including ensuring that administrative matters are organised. At the meeting the Chair should be responsible for timekeeping, controlling and encouraging contributions and discussion as necessary, and ensuring that decisions are recorded accurately. After the meeting, the Chair should check the minutes for accuracy.
- Individuals attending meetings should prepare in advance, stick to the rules, and be aware of others and their points of view.
- Minutes, whether a simple note or full minutes, act as a prompt to action and a tangible link to follow-up discussions. They should be circulated promptly after the meeting, noting points for action.
- In many organisations, groups of people with different roles and responsibilities come together to form a team to work on a specific project or task. The mix of individual skills and abilities is important to the success of the team and should be carefully considered.

Interviews and questioning

9

List of topics

Introduction

An interview is an interaction between two parties to accomplish a predetermined purpose. Interviews are in wide use in organisations, with examples ranging from recruitment interviews to market research interviews. As we have already seen, effective communication is not just the exchange of *spoken* information. Both the interviewer and interviewee will be communicating across a range of channels, both verbal and non-verbal, with body language and other non-verbal signals accompanying the pattern of questions and answers between the parties. Because of this range of channels being used, usually at close quarters, the potential for misunderstanding is high. During an interview, both interviewer and interviewee will engage in persuasive communication. To achieve the best results, the interviewer needs to make sure that the purpose of the interview is made clear to the interviewee, that the structure and format of the interview are appropriate and that he makes use of key interviewing skills such as active listening and clarifying and summarising. This chapter looks at all these issues, and also focuses on another key element of good interview technique: effective questioning.

1 Types of interview

There are a number of interview types used widely by organisations. Each of these has unique characteristics. Levels of formality are likely to vary depending on the organisational culture and the individuals involved.

Recruitment interviews

The face-to-face job recruitment interview usually comes after a process of screening applications and shortlisting potential candidates. By the very nature of the interview, the interviewer does not generally know the interviewee. It is important that the interviewee is put at their ease and that exactly how the meeting will run is made clear. Preparation is important; the interviewer needs to be familiar with material that comes ahead of the candidate (CV, etc.) and, because it takes a while to make a reasonable assessment, sufficient time must be allowed. The interviewer must proceed systematically and the candidate must be allowed time to answer.

The job interview has a number of purposes:

- to check or clarify information provided by the candidate

- to provide an opportunity for a manager to meet a potential colleague, and assess how the candidate might fit in with other members of the team
- to persuade the candidate that the organisation would be worth joining.

Like any other form of external communication, the interview also provides the opportunity to provide a positive impression of an organisation, which might subsequently be communicated through informal networks.

Promotion/placement interviews

These interviews operate in a similar way to recruitment interviews, except that the interview will be between the interviewer and a number of *internal* candidates looking to secure a more senior position. In most cases, this will mean that interviewer and interviewee will already be known to one another and the unsuccessful candidates will continue to work for the organisation even if their application for the new post is unsuccessful.

Appraisal interviews

appraisal The process by which an employee's performance in his job is assessed by a superior, usually in conjunction with the employee himself.

Many organisations operate a system of regular staff **appraisal** or performance review. This gives managers the opportunity to review in a systematic manner the performance of their staff, and employees a formal forum for discussing their views about their job and the environment in which they work.

The purpose of an appraisal system is to:

- provide a regular opportunity for manager and employee to discuss the progress and performance of the employee since the last interview
- consider any shortcomings in past performance or any skills which might need to be developed or improved to enhance overall performance or to tackle new challenges
- determine future priorities and targets
- set training and career paths
- identify what the expectations of each party are in order to assist progress
- provide feedback on an organisation's structures and processes as a whole.

Successful appraisal depends on a consultative dialogue between employee and manager. An open and honest interview can include both praise for tasks well done and a discussion about the reasons why an employee might have underperformed in certain areas. A well conducted appraisal interview can motivate staff but the reverse is also true. Linking an appraisal scheme to a review of financial rewards is unlikely to encourage openness.

Many organisations use a system of standard appraisal review forms to encourage consistency and objectivity and to help both the interviewer and interviewee prepare ahead of the interview, and structure their discussion during the interview. This also then becomes a summary of the discussion and a plan for the period leading up to the next appraisal interview. Appraisal forms and systems must be clear to both parties and operated fairly.

At the interview itself, the onus is on the manager to create a climate conducive to an effective interview. Sufficient time, a systematic approach and a clear meeting plan are all important to both parties, but there are two key things for the manager to bear in mind.

- The focus should be on the future, not the past. Appraisals exist to ensure that the *next* period goes well; examination of past performance is a means to that end.
- The person being appraised should do most of the talking.

Making it work 9.1

360° appraisal

Some organisations have developed what is known as 360° appraisal, where everyone is appraised by all those with whom they come in contact – ranging from colleagues to bosses to peers, and even, in some cases, external customers and suppliers. All forms of 360° appraisal also require people to evaluate themselves. In communication terms, the main advantage of this approach is the perception that the validity and objectivity of feedback provided from a variety of sources is improved. It is also suggested that 360° appraisal can lead to a more open communication culture in organisations.

Disciplinary and grievance interviews

Both of these types of interview are held in response to a problem or unacceptable behaviour raised either by a manager (disciplinary) or employee (grievance). In an ideal world, most of these problems will have been dealt with through more informal interaction between manager and employee, for example, calling a brief meeting to challenge an employee who is often late for work, or tackling non-serious, but inappropriate, behaviour by an employee as part of an appraisal interview. However, a more formal interview may well be necessary for more serious or persistent problems.

It is good practice for organisations to have formal procedures in place to deal with this eventuality, and to communicate these policies to employees, usually as part of the employment contract. In some countries – for example, the UK – this is a legal requirement. The procedure will have two distinct purposes:

- a positive purpose: attempting to address the problem and reach an outcome acceptable to both parties
- a negative purpose: providing evidence which, in extreme cases, might support the dismissal of an employee or provide a defence against an employee claiming to be bullied or victimised.

The interview itself should focus on the positive purpose, aiming to establish the facts of the case and resolve the issue at stake. Both parties should participate as fully as possible. Points may need to be made firmly, but a constructive view of better performance in future needs to be kept in mind by both parties and thus criticism must be well based – proven – and everything that is done must always be completely fair.

Coaching/mentoring meetings

These interviews form part of an ongoing process of employee development, often deployed as part of a familiarisation or induction process for a new or newly promoted employee. The coach or **mentor**, usually not the employee's line manager, makes himself available to the employee to answer questions or concerns and to guide the

mentor
Someone from the organisation, not the employee's line manager, who provides advice, guidance and support to a newly appointed employee.

employee with information and advice. The role of the interviewer or mentor in these situations is to act as a facilitator as much as an advisor, encouraging the employee to evaluate their own performance and how they might develop and meet new challenges.

Research interviews
Face-to-face interviews can also be used as part of a research or data collection project. This approach usually allows the interviewer to collect qualitative as well as quantitative data or to test preliminary conclusions or proposals.

2 Practicalities and structure

As with all communication, clear objectives and thorough preparation will have a crucial effect on the success or otherwise of the interview. Interviewers should familiarise themselves with and verify all the relevant background information, identifying queries and anticipating potentially difficult issues. The structure of the interview (see below) and possible outcomes should also be taken into account.

Other important factors include the following.

Keep the interviewee informed
Make sure the interviewee is given the necessary information before, during and after the meeting. For example, practical details of time, venue, duration, a clear message about the purpose of the interview and any relevant background information.

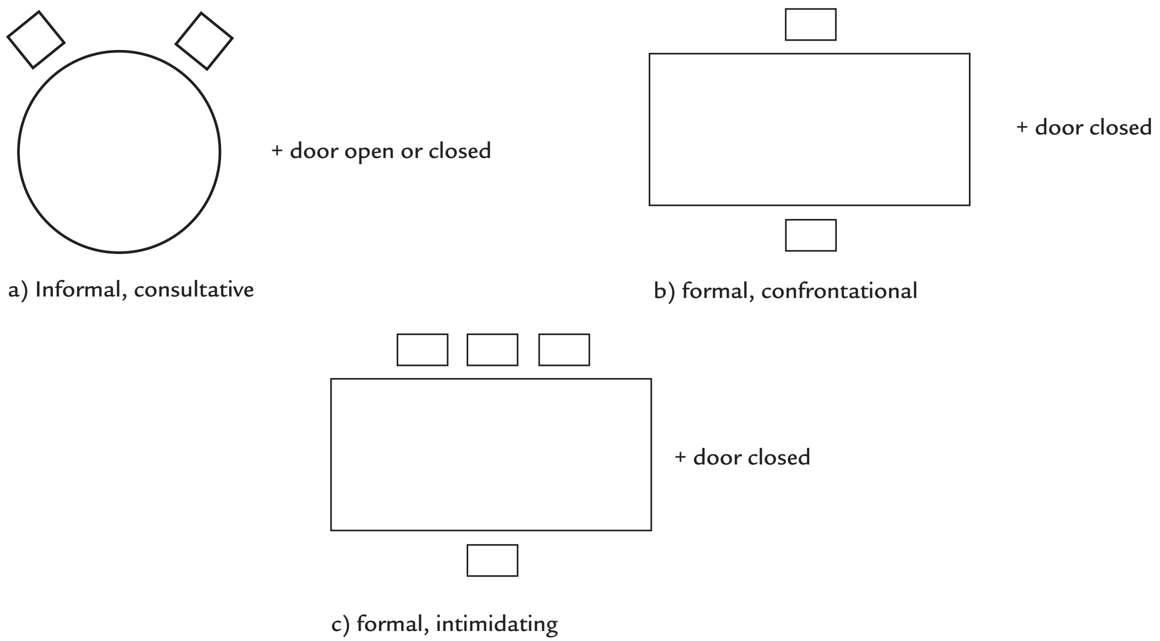


Figure 9.1 Seating and room layouts

Location, seating and room layout

Select an appropriate location and think carefully about seating and room layout. This has a significant effect on the perceived formality or informality of the interview, and the relationship of power or trust engendered. For example, seating the interviewee in a lower chair sends a message of superiority or distance. Figure 9.1 identifies alternative seating and room layouts and how they are perceived.

Interruptions and distractions

Make sure that the potential for interruptions is minimised by diverting telephones or notifying others when the interview will be taking place.

Test *yourself* 9.1

a) Identify three types of interview common to most organisations.

b) What would be an appropriate room layout for a job appraisal interview.

2.1 The structure of the interview

A typical interview has three phases:

- a beginning
- a middle
- an end.

The beginning: establishing rapport

The beginning of the interview should be used to establish rapport with the interviewee. Making the interviewee feel at ease will undoubtedly result in more open and effective communication. This is also the stage where the purpose of the meeting is established, and any necessary facts checked.

The middle

This is the key phase of the interview, where basic facts will be elaborated, and broader issues explored. In a recruitment interview, for example, this is where you might expect a candidate to relate experience to date to the job in question, or, in a disciplinary interview, where the broader context for the problem would be investigated. This stage often involves finding out more about the interviewee's attitudes, opinions and values, and how they react to certain situations.

The end

An interview should end with a summary of the discussion and a review of possible courses of action. Both interviewer and interviewee should leave the interview with a clear sense of 'what happens next'.

Making it work 9.2

The case of the persistently late employee

A common cause of problems between an employee and employer is where the employee turns up late for work. If the problem persists, there may well be a need to investigate more systematically in an interview why this is happening.

Such an interview could take the following structure:

Beginning:

- Explain the purpose of the meeting.
- Outline the facts as you understand them and check that they match the employee's view.
- Explain expected standards of behaviour, checking understanding and agreement.
- Resolve any discrepancies.

Middle:

- Ask for an explanation for lateness.
- Investigate the reasons for the lateness.
- Consider motivation, attitudes, feelings, commitment and the wider context.

End:

- Review possible courses of action.
- Agree a course of action.

3 Interviewing skills

An effective interviewer needs a range of skills, including:

- establishing rapport, encouraging discussion and keeping the right pace
- listening
- questioning
- clarifying and summarising.

Establishing rapport

In order to get the best out of the interviewee, the interviewer should try to put them at their ease. This can be done by:

- being welcoming and courteous
- using small talk to start a dialogue
- outlining the purpose and structure of the meeting.

Encouraging the interviewee to participate fully in the interview discussion has to be balanced with keeping the right pace of the meeting. No one's interests are served by allowing an interview to carry on indefinitely, and it is part of the interviewer's role to judge the pace of the session, keep the discussion moving forward and, if necessary, bring the discussion to a close at the appropriate time.

Listening

The importance of listening to all forms of communications was outlined in Chapter 1. It is especially important in face-to-face communication such as interviews and meetings, where the flow of information is paramount.

Some key characteristics of being an active and effective listener are:

- Paying attention when people are talking to us.
- Not prejudging what someone will say based on past experience or personal characteristics.

- Signalling interest and understanding by using a combination of non-verbal cues such as adopting an open posture (with arms unfolded), making eye contact and nodding and making verbal acknowledgements, such as 'yes', 'I see' or 'good'. These cues can also signal encouragement and aid discussion.
- Being alert to feelings and emotions which are maybe not being explicitly expressed (i.e. 'reading between the lines').
- Avoiding the temptation to interrupt or distract by, for example, looking at a watch or shuffling papers.
- Seeking clarification where necessary and summarising or paraphrasing the discussion to make sure the message received is correct.

Questioning

The most important interviewing skill is questioning. This is discussed in more detail below.

Clarifying and summarising

If two pieces of information seem to conflict, the conflict should be resolved before the discussion moves on. Inconsistencies may be between:

- information already received and what the person is saying in the interview
- what people say and the way they say it – problems of self-expression.

Another aspect of clarification may be to ask for specific examples to support any claims made. For example, if a candidate in a job interview says that she has experience of handling difficult customers, it would be worthwhile to ask for a particular example from her experience to back this up.

Some interview questions may result in long, complicated answers. Using the example in Making it work 9.2, probing into the reason why the employee is persistently late may take some time and require some unravelling. This is why summarising what has been said is important to both parties in a discussion. However, this does not mean telling the interviewee what you think about what has been said. A good summary is specific, concise and offered tentatively.

Making it work 9.3

Effective interviewing: summarising

In a large department store, a member of staff asks to see her manager about the conduct of her section supervisor. She is clearly distracted and when asked what the problem is, her reply is not untypical of this sort of situation:

'I know you might think I am making a fuss and I know I've only been working in your department for three months, but it's not on. I've never been treated like this in my life before. You know it's unfair. You know it's undeserved. He says I'm untrustworthy. He says he can't leave me alone with the till. He says there have been rumours about me. It's victimisation, that's what it is. He's jealous of my husband's promotion above him in the firm and he's getting at me. He hates me. He says he'll see me out before Christmas, and discredit Tom into the bargain. Well, he won't! I want him out, and I want you to register my complaint.'

Here are two summaries – one good, one not so good:

1 'Right now, let's see if we can make some sense of all this upset. You've got yourself all wound up in your new job, with unfamiliar surroundings, and are finding it hard to adapt to someone else's

Making it work *(continued)* 9.3

regime. You feel that your husband's status within the firm should buy you privilege and exception from the rules and conditions that apply to all our new staff. You've got yourself upset because your pride's been hurt and you want to hurt back. It's perfectly natural.'

2 'Now let me see if I have understood everything that you have said. You feel that you have been treated unfairly by your section supervisor. He says that he cannot trust you with the till and that he will see you out of the firm by Christmas and discredit your husband. You feel you are being victimised because of your section supervisor's jealousy over your husband's promotion. Is that about right?'

Stop and think 9.1

Think about an interview you've taken part in. Did the interviewer ever:

- glance at the time while you were speaking?
- complete your sentences?
- find eye contact difficult?
- anticipate what you were about to say?
- interrupt you?
- appear distracted?

If so, it would seem that this interviewer needs to work on his active listening skills.

4 Questioning

Questions can be asked in a number of different ways, and the way in which a question is asked can elicit a different response. Questioning techniques can be improved by an awareness of these different types of question and how and when they should be used. Effective questioning is an important aspect of interviewing in particular and effective communication in general.

4.1 Open and closed questions

closed questions Questions which require short, simple answers, often 'yes' or 'no'. Useful for gaining factual answers to specific questions, but can limit useful dialogue.

Closed questions limit the ways in which the receiver can answer. For example:

- What was the name of your last employer?
- Were you late for work on Monday?

are closed questions. A characteristic of closed questions is that they can generally be answered with short or even one word responses, often 'yes' or 'no'. For this reason, they are useful for gaining specific pieces of information. Closed questions have the effect of limiting communication, so can also be used to cut short discussion if appropriate.

An **open question** encourages the receiver to think and allows for a wider range of responses. For example:

- What do you feel you could bring to this job?
- How did you feel about being asked to do that?

are open questions. Open questions nearly always begin with words such as 'what', 'where', 'when' or 'how'. They produce much more information, as they encourage the receiver to speak for longer and give a more considered response.

open questions
Questions which prompt reflective answers, instead of a simple 'yes' or 'no'. Useful for prompting discussion.

Making it work 9.4

Open and closed questions

Compare the following two exchanges.

Simon:	Hello, Kim. Did your presentation go well?
Kim:	Yes, I think so . . .
Simon:	Great. Well done.

Simon:	Hello, Kim. How do you feel your presentation went?
Kim:	Well, I was a little nervous, but I think I got the main points across. I was asked some tough questions, but I think they may be interested in following up the deal.
Simon:	Great. Let's get together later to run through what we do next.

By asking basically the same question in an open rather than a closed way, Simon has encouraged Kim to provide more information and has also opened the way to further communication.

Stop and think 9.2

Which of the following questions are open questions?

- Did you go on holiday last year?
- What kind of holidays do you like to take?
- What were your main responsibilities in your last job?
- When did you leave your last job?
- Do you feel that your performance last year was satisfactory?
- How do you feel about your performance last year?

4.2 Other types of questions

Probing questions

As the name suggests, **probing questions** ask for additional information based on a previous response. They can be open or closed, depending on the information required, and can work alongside the process of clarification described above. Probing questions should be used carefully; while it is important for the interviewer to find out the facts and clarify any ambiguities, repeated use of probing or clarifying questions can be perceived as aggressive and may have the effect of closing down communication.

probing questions
Questions which ask for additional information or clarification based on a previous response. Depending on the information required, they can be open or closed.

hypothetical questions Questions which ask the recipient to apply their knowledge and experience to hypothetical (i.e. imaginary) situations.

Hypothetical questions

Hypothetical questions can be used to create scenarios to encourage the interviewee to apply their knowledge and experience to hypothetical situations. For example, in a job interview, the interviewer may outline a typical situation and ask the interviewee what they would do in that situation. Similarly, a coach or mentor might use a hypothetical question to help someone explore new options and opportunities.

leading questions Questions which steer the recipient into responding in a particular way, in line with the answer the interviewer either wants or expects.

Leading questions

Leading questions direct the recipient to respond in a particular way: in line with the answer the interviewer either wants or expects. Clearly, they are not an aid to effective communication, as the receiver is not being given the opportunity to consider the message and make a decision about their own response.

Stop and think 9.3

Make a recording of a television interview. Analyse the types of questions used and the responses they elicit. Also look out for any non-verbal signals and how they were used. Was the exchange an example of effective communication?

Summary

- Interviewing is a key communication skill for managers and prospective managers. As well as formal interactions, such as recruitment, appraisal or disciplinary/grievance interviews, a manager or supervisor will also need to be able to cope more informally with situation as they arise.
- For formal interviews, such as appraisals and recruitment interviews, practical considerations are really important. Make sure the room is set out appropriately and ensure that you won't be interrupted. Take time to prepare properly and familiarise yourself with any advance paperwork – such as the candidate's CV or an employee's job description and appraisal history. Allow enough time to make a reasonable assessment, and be systematic in your approach.
- Begin by establishing a rapport and explaining what will happen during the interview. End by summarising the discussion and explaining what will happen next.
- In more informal, *ad hoc* situations, you may not have time to prepare and there may be no paperwork. However, the same principles apply. Make sure there is a beginning – where the conversation is opened – a middle – the key part of the interview – and an end.
- Whatever the situation, three skills are vital – appropriate questioning, active listening and the ability to clarify and summarise. The interviewer must also be able establish a rapport and manage the discussion effectively.
- Effective questioning is an important aspect of interviewing and an effective interviewer will use different approaches according to need. The main types are: open, closed, probing and hypothetical.

Presentations

10

List of topics

Introduction

The presentation is still regarded as a difficult communication channel. Most of us have had some experience of sitting through a badly delivered presentation and many otherwise self-confident people are reduced to panic at the prospect of delivering a presentation themselves. All presentations exhibit one similar characteristic: presenters are judged by how they perform. A message that is poorly presented can be poorly received, regardless of the quality of its content. Small differences – an ill-chosen word or phrase, a hesitation, a misplaced emphasis – can all too easily dilute the impact. However, understanding the dynamics of presentations and mastering some basic skills and techniques can help most of us to make the most of such a potentially powerful communication channel. This chapter looks at the planning necessary for effective presentation and how to apply some of the tools and techniques available.

1 The importance of presentations

Presentations are important. All sorts of things can be involved. Presentations may be necessary:

- at an internal meeting
- externally, to distributors or customers perhaps
- to a committee (or board)
- at a conference or business event.

Presentations may have to be made to people you know, or those that you do not know; to more senior people, difficult people or those who are younger or older than you. You may need to speak to 10, 20 or 200 people; or more.

1.1 The power of the presenter

Most presentations take the format of an individual or individuals addressing a live audience in the room where the presentation is being made. Although this may make the presenter feel vulnerable, they are, in fact, in a position of some power. The receivers of the presenter's message, i.e. the audience, have very little control over the presentation, and are not in a position of being able to stop the flow of information or review or clarify something which has already been said, which generally has to wait until the end of the session. This lack of balance, and the tendency for the communication to default to being one-way, is another reason why presentations can be an ineffective communication channel.

Presenters need to be aware of this potential problem and act positively to involve the audience by:

- engaging and retaining their attention
- making the presentation accessible by structuring the material appropriately and the judicious use of signposting (see below)
- stimulating interaction with the audience by asking questions or soliciting feedback.

2 Preparing to present

Few people can speak without thought. It was the author Mark Twain who said, 'It usually takes me three weeks to prepare a good impromptu speech.' Preparation is key to success.

Purpose and objectives

Be able to answer the question: why must this presentation be made? Have a clear purpose in mind, one that reflects the audience and the effect you want to have on them. Some presentations will have more complex objectives than others: you may want to inform, motivate, persuade, change attitudes, demonstrate, prompt action and more. Sometimes several of these are intended.

Format

Decide what to say (and what not to say) and arrange things in a logical order (see below). Take into account the time available for the presentation, and make sure the content matches the time available. If the presentation is to be accompanied by a written version or handout, make sure the presentation complements rather than reproduces what the audience already has, and take into account whether the written version has been made available ahead of the presentation or not.

Delivery

Think about how what you say will be expressed; not just the main content, but examples, illustrations and other visual aids. Prepare suitable notes as an aide-memoire to have in front of you as you speak. Recheck your plans after the initial preparation and consider a rehearsal. Anticipate reactions and questions and how you will deal with these.

Practicalities

If the venue is an unfamiliar one, consider visiting before the presentation to make sure it is suitable for the size and type of audience. Think carefully about the equipment needed, and make sure it will be available on the day.

Figure 10.1 gives an example of a planning sheet that might be used to plan an effective presentation.

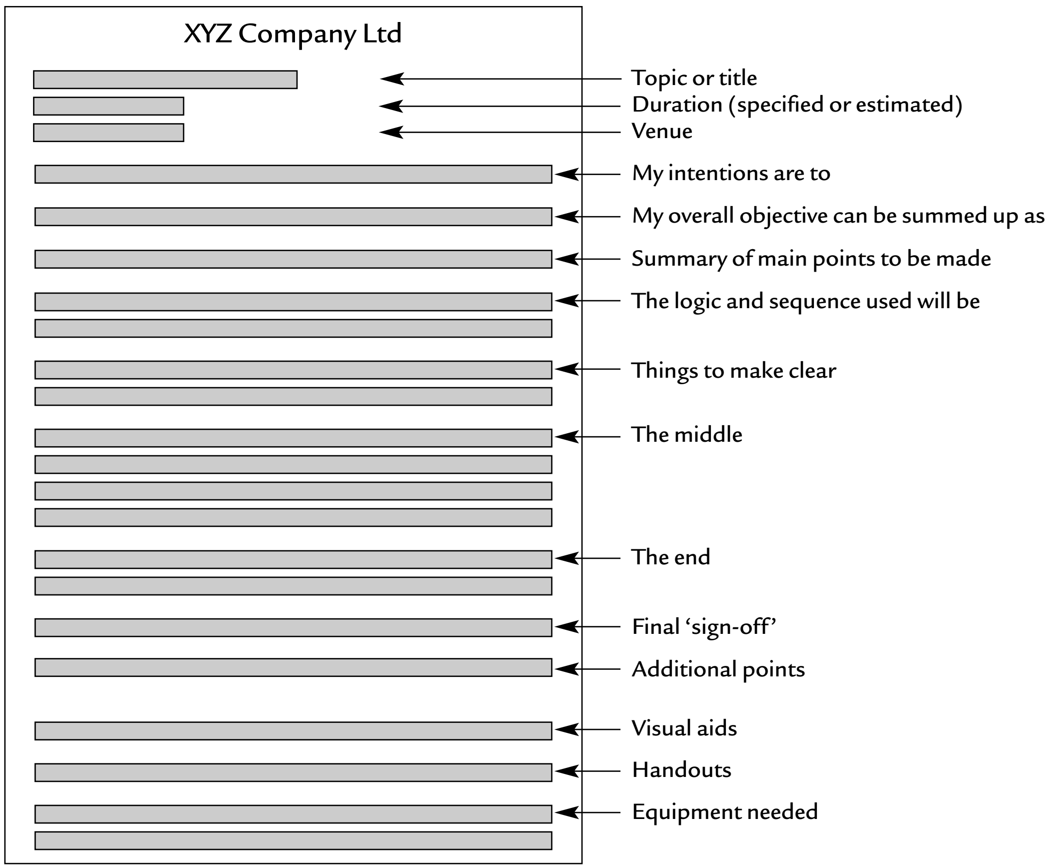


Figure 10.1 Presentation planner

Putting the case 10.1

Q What are the main objectives of the Spare Parts launch?

A There are a number of interconnected objectives for the launch presentation, including:

- to disseminate information about the new product
- to influence the promotion of the new product in international markets
- to motivate the international distributor network by persuading them that the promotion of the new product will be in their interests
- to receive feedback on the new product and its market potential
- to promote Spare Parts plc as a desirable business partner
- to provide networking opportunities between Spare Parts and its distributors and between the distributors themselves.

3 Know your audience

Every effort should be made to find out who the audience will be and what their expectations are.

Any audience *wants* a presenter to:

- be knowledgeable
- look the part
- respect them, acknowledging their situation and their views
- discover links between what you say and what they want from the talk
- be given an adequate message, so that they understand and can weigh up whether they agree with what is said or not
- make it 'right for them' (for example, in terms of level of technicality)
- hold their attention and interest throughout.

A good presenter will always have empathy for the group they address; and it must be evident to them. As well as understanding the audience and the individuals in it, it is also important to appreciate their point of view and their way of seeing things. Presentations may well demand decisions of people, so it is necessary to understand the thinking process which takes place in the minds of those in the group in such circumstances. Anyone making a presentation must not simply talk at their audience, but rather tailor their approach based on an understanding of the audience's point of view.

Stop and think 10.1

Think about a presentation you've attended recently. Did you at any stage:

- sense that the presenter was ill-prepared?
- feel confused, or blinded with science, technicalities or jargon?
- find it difficult to follow what was being said because of a convoluted (or lack of) structure?
- find it difficult to relate what was said to your own circumstances?

If so, it sounds as if the presenter had not done enough to tailor his presentation to the needs and expectations of the audience.

4 Presentation format and structure

Like all effective business communication, successful presentations need to be clear, understandable and persuasive. To this end, presenters should always:

- use clear, precise language which is familiar to those present, and which does not overuse jargon
- make explanations clear, making no assumptions and with sufficient detail to get the point across
- give specific examples – help your audience's imagination and your message will be better understood
- use visual aids. These are a powerful aid to understanding. They are covered in more detail below.

Presentations should also have a clear structure. Like other forms of communication, presentations typically have three distinct parts: a beginning, middle and end.

The beginning

The beginning is clearly an important stage; its main objective is to set the scene, state the topic (and rationale for it) clearly, and begin to discuss the 'meat' of the content. It must also:

- gain the group's attention
- create some sort of rapport both between you and the group, and around the group itself.

Making it work 10.1

Opening a presentation

There are a number of types of opening, each presenting a range of opportunities for differing lead-ins. For example:

- a question: rhetorical or otherwise, preferably something the audience is likely to respond to positively: 'Would you welcome a better way to . . .?'
- a quotation: humorous, making a point, a classic, or something internal: 'At the last company meeting, the MD said . . .'
- a story: again, something that makes a point, relates to the situation or people, or draws on a common memory: 'We all remember the situation at the end of the last financial year when . . .'
- a factual statement: perhaps striking, thought-provoking, challenging or surprising: 'Do you realise that this company receives 120 complaints every working day?'
- a dramatic statement: a story with a startling end, perhaps, or a statement that surprises in some way
- an historical fact: a reference to an event which is a common experience of the group: 'In 2004, when company sales of what was then a new product were just . . .'
- a checklist: perhaps a good start when it is important to place the 'shopping list' in mind early on: 'There are 10 key stages to the process we want to discuss, first . . .'

When talking about direct mail advertising, a presenter started by asking the group to count, out loud and in unison, from one to ten. Between two and three he banged his fist down on the table saying 'Stop!' loudly. 'And that,' he continued, 'is how long your direct mail has to catch people's attention – 2 seconds!'

The opening stages need to make it absolutely clear what the objectives are, what will be dealt with, and how it will benefit those present. It must also move the audience into the topic in a constructive way.

The middle

The middle is the core of the session; its objectives are to:

- communicate the detail of the message
- maintain attention throughout the process
- ensure acceptance of the message.

Possible objections also need to be anticipated, prevented and, if necessary, dealt with.

Communicating the core of your message requires a structured approach. Deal with points in a logical sequence; and use signposting to help communicate with the audience. Giving advance warning of what is coming makes it clear what you are doing and makes it clear also that you are not moving onto the next content point just yet. Putting everything in context and relating it to a planned sequence keeps the message organised and improves understanding.

To maintain attention:

- Keep stressing the relevance of what is being discussed to the audience.
- Make sure that the presentation remains visually interesting by using visual aids and demonstrations wherever possible.
- Use descriptions that incorporate stories or anecdotes to make the message live.
- Generate attention through your own interest and enthusiasm.

Effectiveness is not just a question of understanding; acceptance is also vital. Acceptance is helped by factors already mentioned (telling people how something will benefit them – or others they are concerned about, such as their staff), and the more specific this link can be made, the better the effect will be on the view formed. In addition, acceptance may only come once credibility has been established. This can be achieved by using references to other sources which are likely to resonate with the audience.

The end

The end is a pulling together of the overall message that has been given. What has gone before should be summarised in an orderly fashion. Like the beginning, there is then a need to find a way of handling the final signing-off.

4.1 Visual aids

visual aids Examples such as pictures, diagrams or even sample products which add interest and aid understanding of a presentation.

The use of **visual aids** to support a presentation serves several roles, including:

- reinforcing understanding and acceptance
- focusing attention within the group
- providing changes of pace
- adding variety
- expressing ideas visually
- signposting.

Visual aids should *support* the message, not lead or take it over. Start by looking at the message and at what you are trying to do, and assess whether appropriate visual aids will help to improve the communication of your message. They may make a point that is difficult or impossible to describe; for example, a graph might make an instant point which would be lost in a mass of figures.

There are a variety of visual aids that can be used, including:

- pictures – from photographs to cartoons
- charts and diagrams
- checklists and summaries
- sample products or promotional materials
- moving pictures – film, video, computer-generated images.

These are not mutually exclusive and can be used in combination to add interest or aid understanding during a presentation. Their use may depend on the audio-visual (AV) equipment being used (see below) or the venue for the presentation. For example, it is very common for presentations to be summarised on, and illustrated by, a set of slides created on transparencies or by a software program such as Microsoft PowerPoint®, which allows for the combination of different types of material into a coherent whole and can act both as a prompt for the presenter and a focus for the audience.

Making it work 10.2

Microsoft PowerPoint®

The popular Microsoft PowerPoint® software undoubtedly facilitates the preparation of slides to be presented using a data projector and display screen. The software offers a variety of layouts, colours, and illustrations and the option of incorporating other features at the touch of a button.

However, it is important not to let the technology carry you away:

- Not everything PowerPoint® can do is useful or appropriate to every presentation.
- Avoid the temptation to include too much information on each slide.
- Do not use too many slides.
- Colours, graphics and different typefaces add interest, but don't overdo it.
- Make sure the slide presentation is in a logical order, has the correct emphasis and is proofread and checked.

In summary: Don't let the technology become more important than the content. Do not be seduced into creating a slide presentation which falls into the category of what is known as 'death by PowerPoint®'.

When using visual aids, the presenter should remember to talk to the audience, not to the visual aid. For example, focusing on summary slides projected on a display screen rather than the audience is a common fault. Make sure visuals are visible (do not get in the way), explain them and their purpose as necessary, mention whether or not people will get a paper copy of them and stop them distracting by removing them as soon as you are finished with them.

Whatever visual aids are selected, and however they are presented, they should always be used appropriately to support or enhance the message, and chosen with the audience very firmly in mind.

4.2 Handouts and giveaways

These are items relating to the presentation which are given to the audience either in advance of, or after, the presentation itself. They are intended to reinforce, or add value to, the message communicated. Examples include:

- paper copies of presentation slides
- a related report or other background information
- sample products
- promotional material
- an information pack.

However, these should be used with caution. For example, handing out a paper copy of the presentation slides before the presentation carries the danger that the audience will focus on these rather than the presentation. Like visual aids, handouts and giveaways should always be appropriate for the audience.

Test *yourself* 10.1

a) What should the main objectives of the 'middle' of a presentation be?

b) What role can visual aids play in a presentation?

5 Presentation techniques

As outlined above, it is possible to improve presentation technique by learning and practising certain skills. Having a well prepared presentation that is likely to meet the needs of the audience will undoubtedly help, but there are other aspects which will also contribute to a successful presentation.

5.1 Non-verbal cues

Presentation has already been compared to performance; it is a form of communication where non-verbal signals can contribute significantly to communicating a message successfully or not. Presenters send out a message just by standing in front of the audience. Standing upright and well-balanced, adopting an open posture and making eye contact with the audience will help the presenter appear confident and positive about the message he is communicating and improve his personal credibility. Looking down, folding arms and moving from one foot to the other may be a natural response for a nervous presenter, but is unlikely to create a positive rapport with the audience and will therefore act as a barrier to communication.

Physical appearance can also affect an audience's response, and a presenter's choice of clothing acts as another non-verbal signal. There are no longer strict or consistent rules about formal business dress, but it is important that your clothes and appearance are consistent with the message and in line with audience expectations. For example, a sharp business suit that would be appropriate for impressing a group of high-profile potential investors might well be distracting or intimidating for a less formal presentation to an audience of colleagues.

5.2 Using your voice

Clear vocal delivery is not necessarily a natural ability. Presenting requires the presenter to speak for an extended period in a fairly structured way and to a range of people at the same time. Particularly where there is the need to address a large audience, it may be necessary to practise projecting your voice or even undertake vocal exercises to strengthen the voice and improve diction.

It is also important to speak at the right volume, and maintain it. The presenter must make sure everyone can hear what is being said. Similarly, it important to speak at the right speed. Speaking too quickly or slowly is a barrier to communication. The problem of speaking too quickly is often associated with trying to provide too much information in the time available; this can be addressed by careful planning and rehearsal (see below). Variations in volume or pace can be used to draw attention to or emphasise certain key points, but this must not be overdone.

As with other forms of verbal communication, varying the pitch of the voice can also be used to create a persuasive message. Finally, the power of silence should not be underestimated. Pauses can be used for dramatic effect or to give the audience the opportunity to absorb a key point or reflect on a significant announcement.

An experienced presenter will undoubtedly use his voice in a variety of ways to create interest, engage the audience and communicate a powerful message.

5.3 Speaker's notes

Having every word down on paper and reading them out is often seen as a form of security in presentations. However, it is generally difficult to read anything smoothly, get all the emphasis exactly where it needs to be, and do so fluently and without stumbling.

Most people speak very much better from notes which are an abbreviation of what they intend to say. For most people having *something* in front of them as they speak is essential.

Speaker's notes have several roles:

- to boost confidence
- to act as a guide to what you will say and in what order
- to assist you in saying it in the best possible way: producing the right variety, pace, emphasis, etc. as you go along.

Making it work 10.3

Presenters' nightmares

The performance element of presenting inevitably focuses attention on the presenter. This may lead to a variety of concerns, all of which are common, and all of which can be addressed, including:

- Butterflies in the stomach: If you are nervous, then you are likely to feel nervous. Without some apprehension, which can act to focus you on the job in hand, you would probably not do so well.
- A dry mouth: Is easily cured. Take a sip of water. Never attempt to speak without a glass of water in front of you.
- Not knowing what to do with your hands: The best solution is to give them something to do – hold the lectern or a pencil, make the occasional gesture – but then forget about them. Thinking about them as you proceed will make matters worse.
- Not knowing how loudly to speak: Just imagine you are speaking to the furthest person in the room; better still, try it beforehand.
- A hostile reaction: The vast majority of audiences want you to succeed. The only thing worse than knowing that you are not presenting well is being in the audience and having to listen to it.
- Not having sufficient material: This can be removed completely as a fear; if your presentation is well prepared you will know there is the right amount.
- Having too much material: See above.
- Losing your place: Also part of preparation; notes should be organised so that it is unlikely that you will lose your place (and so that you can find it easily should you do so).
- Drying up: Why should this happen? Dry mouth? Take a sip of water. Lose your place? Organise it so that this does not happen. Just nerves? If it does happen, often it takes only a second to resume: it just feels as if you paused forever.
- Misjudging the timing: This is something that good notes can help with.

5.4 Rehearsal

When the presentation is prepared and ready, when you are clear what you need to do and how you want to do it and have any supporting visual aids organised, it may be advisable to rehearse what you will say.

There are three levels of rehearsal:

- running through the presentation in your head: this may be sufficient for many things

- practising out loud: the additional possibility here is that you record it and listen to how it sounds
- in front of others: for instance gathering an audience of colleagues.

Rehearsal provides a final opportunity for revision and, if other people are involved, for consultation and getting an outside view. The more important the presentation is, the more seriously some element of rehearsal should be considered.

Putting the case 10.2

Q Is this Spare Parts launch the sort of event where rehearsal is necessary? If so, how should it be done?

A This is a perfect example of when a full-scale rehearsal is essential. Ideally, it should take place at the venue that will be used on the day, and sufficiently far ahead to allow for adjustments to be made. A rehearsal augments preparation and improves the chances of getting it right on the day. It can also boost the confidence of presenters.

Making it work 10.4

Final checks

Many presentations are held on unfamiliar territory: maybe in an office, conference room or venue with which a presenter is unfamiliar. On the day of the presentation itself, it is always necessary to:

- Check the venue: Heat, light, number and arrangement of seating, signs, possible extraneous noise, what to do in case of change or emergency.
- Check the equipment: Be sure it all works, slides are legible at the back, the microphone volume is suitable, and that everything is accessible and easy to work.
- Check your personal appearance.
- Check the immediate environment is comfortable, for instance that there are no electric wires you might trip over, and that whatever you will put your notes on is at a height that allows easy reading and no squinting or bending down.

6 Audio-visual equipment

Like visual aids, the choice of how a presentation will be delivered should be made in support of the presentation and its aims and not as an end in itself. The right choice will undoubtedly enhance a good presentation, but the best possible use of even the latest technology will not save a badly prepared or ill-judged one. And as the sophistication of equipment increases, so too does the number of things that can potentially go wrong. The venue for a presentation may also dictate or suggest which equipment to use. Clearly, selecting the appropriate equipment and planning for its use is an important aspect of making a presentation.

Some of the main audio-visual equipment options are listed below, with the key advantages and disadvantages of each outlined.

6.1 Projectors

Traditional overhead projectors (OHPs) are used to project transparencies onto a screen. These are usually pre-prepared, but can be annotated or created during a presentation as well. Increasingly, OHPs are being replaced by **data projectors**, which project images from a computer onto a display screen. The advantages and disadvantages of such computer-based projection include the following:

data projector
A device which projects an image from a computer onto a display screen.

Advantages	Disadvantages
Flexible: can be used for all sorts of content	Needs a power source
Allows for links with other technologies	Presenter may stand in front of the display screen
Clarity of image	Potential confusion between image on screen and what is being said
Easy to operate	Possibility of technical failures
Slides can double as speaker's notes	

Table 10.1 Pros and cons of data projectors

Making it work 10.5

Contingency planning

An important presentation had to proceed without the planned slides because the projector (resident at the venue) could not be connected to a laptop computer (which had been brought to the venue) because the leads were incompatible.
Running off transparencies that can be shown on a traditional OHP or having paper handout copies can be a sensible insurance in case disaster strikes.

6.2 Flipcharts and whiteboards

Flipcharts are a very simple paper-based system that can be used for pre-prepared notes or for use during a presentation. They are primarily used with smaller groups where the level of interaction between presenter and audience will be greater. Similarly, whiteboards are common in teaching and small group discussions where changes to the material presented can be easily made and highlighted. Electronic whiteboards allow for the capture of written material directly onto computer.

Advantages	Disadvantages
(Mostly) no power source needed	Expensive to prepare professionally
Can be prepared beforehand or adapted as you go	Usually large and cumbersome to move
Easy to see	Beware dried-out pens
Usually available in some form	Can look messy
Easy to write on and colour can be used	Can get shoddy with repeated use
Flexible: can be used for all sorts of content	May involve the presenter turning his back to the audience

Table 10.2 Pros and cons of flipcharts

6.3 Video/DVD players

Moving images can be a very effective way of enhancing a presentation, and the development of computer and DVD technology has made it easier to incorporate them into presentations than ever before. However, this has to be carefully managed: it is important to distinguish between a presentation, where the presenter is interacting with the audience, and a film, where the communication is very definitely one-way.

Advantages	Disadvantages
Power of moving image Rapid access to specific sections	Potential to overshadow other elements of presentation Incompatible playback formats Potential for technical breakdown

Table 10.3 Pros and cons of video/DVD players

6.4 35mm slide projectors

Like traditional OHPs, slide projectors are rapidly being overtaken by computer technology. However, they are still in use for presentations where the visual content is of particular importance.

Advantages	Disadvantages
Clarity of image Familiarity and reliability	Inflexibility Time needed to prepare slides Projector bulb failures

Table 10.4 Pros and cons of 35mm slide projectors

Summary

- Presentations can take many forms. You may find yourself addressing a large group of potential customers at a conference, or a small group of internal colleagues. Whatever the reason for the event, preparation and planning is essential.
- A good starting point is to clarify the purpose and objectives of the presentation, and to find out who the audience will be and what their expectations are. This will help you plan your presentation and tailor the content to suit their needs.
- Plan the structure and content carefully, taking account of the key points you need to get across. Arrange the content in a logical order, think about how you can best communicate it and whether any visual aids would be appropriate. Always bear in mind the length of time you have to speak, and plan accordingly.
- Before the presentation takes place, familiarise yourself with the venue, and check you know how to operate any equipment and that the immediate environment is comfortable.

- Use clear, precise language and bring your presentation alive with examples and illustrations to help your audience's imagination.
- Dress appropriately and be aware of other non-verbal signals. Make eye contact with your audience and adopt an open stance and you will appear confident and positive about the message you are communicating. Speak clearly, neither too fast nor too slowly, and at the right volume. Rehearse and, if necessary, use notes to boost your confidence. Never read word for word.
- In planning the presentation, ensure that your choice of equipment is suitable for the purpose, that you are comfortable about operating it and that the venue has everything you need.

11 Telephone communication

List of topics

Introduction

The telephone is everywhere and has been around for a long time. It now exists not only as a single phone, but as part of a profusion of electronic gadgetry that can store information and carry out multiple functions at once. It may be digital and portable and life may be unimaginable without it, but it should not be taken for granted. Good telephone communication does not just happen. It needs to be planned and executed with care. This chapter looks at what is involved in good telephone technique and how to make the most of the opportunities that this form of communication provides.

1 Using the telephone: possibilities and pitfalls

James Thurber's comment – 'Well, if I called the wrong number, why did you answer the phone?' – makes an immediate point. Telephone communication is not like any other form.

Is the following something you recognise instantly? 'Err, yes . . . hold on – Sorry, will you repeat that? – Well, it's a bit difficult, y'know. Just a tick . . .' This is the abominable no-man of the telephone: the moment when, even after only a few words, you *know* the communication is going to be difficult. The reverse is also true too. Some people, also within a few words, create confidence. They make you feel that all will be well, that a good start has been made and that you can look forward to what comes next.

The telephone is a powerful tool. Like face-to-face meetings and discussions, it offers a two-way, synchronous communication channel. Unlike face-to-face meetings or presentations, the receiver does not have the advantage of the non-verbal cues that can add to understanding. It can create a strong and sometimes lasting impression – and do so for good or ill. Good telephone technique should:

- create an appropriate and positive image
- avoid communication breakdowns, and thus delay, confusion, and waste of time and money
- smooth the whole communication process on which any organisation is dependent, internally and externally
- achieve clarity
- project the right image.

1.1 An inherent fragility

Not only is it important to get telephone contact right, there is more to it than a simple resolve to speak carefully. Small differences along the way can make a major difference to the overall impact.

Making it work 11.1

Telephone communication: details matter

When waiting in the reception area of a company, a visitor noticed that the receptionist also staffed the switchboard. It quickly became apparent that she was very busy. Calls came in every few seconds and were clearly mostly from customers. The company had two separate departments that were predominantly concerned with customer contact: a sales office, which took orders, and an order-processing department, that handled the subsequent details.

The switchboard operator had to discover quickly which department to put calls through to. She was therefore repeatedly asking callers: 'Are you placing an order, or chasing an order?' This at least gave her the information she needed to direct the call through accurately to the right department, but did the company *want* every customer who telephoned to have it made so clear that orders *needed* chasing? The detail was efficient, but the total effect was wrong. A more positive message with the same efficiency would have created a much better effect.

Communication is never as straightforward as we sometimes believe, and the obvious voice-only nature of the telephone compounds the problem. If something hits the wrong note or is simply unclear, we cannot see a puzzled expression at the other end of the line and may not therefore fine-tune our approach to correct matters and move on positively.

Stop and think 11.1

To demonstrate the difficulty inherent in telephone communication, try describing to someone how to tie a necktie. You can *show* someone, but telling them is difficult if not impossible. You can apply a similar exercise to actual descriptions you may need to make in the course of your work; for instance, how a system operates.

2 Making and receiving telephone calls

Like any communication, telephone contact must have a clear purpose. It is necessary to think before lifting the telephone to make a call. In some cases, it may be important to plan and structure what will be said. Similarly, taking incoming calls cannot be viewed as being entirely reactive. It is not enough to lift the phone and see what happens. A clear idea of purpose is needed:

- What is the call for?
- What are the caller's expectations?
- What are we trying to achieve?
- What impression should we give?
- How, exactly, must the call be handled? (Promptly? To project efficiency, corporate or individual personality?)
- When the receiver is replaced, what should have been achieved?

2.1 Taking a call

When the phone rings you may not know who is calling, so how you answer matters. If most of your calls are internal, you may be able to be a little more relaxed, but, for external callers, you need to act accordingly.

Answer promptly and identify yourself

It may be sufficient to say your name. A fully stated name sounds best – 'Lisa Smith' – or you may prefer something more – 'Good morning, this is Lisa Smith' – or need something that includes a departmental or functional description – 'Good morning, Sales Office, Mary Bolton speaking'. This may be a matter of departmental policy and consistency and should link neatly to whatever a switchboard has said if calls come via this route (see below).

Hold the phone properly

It really does impede hearing if the handset is tucked under the chin or pushed aside as you reach for something. You must be clearly audible, which is why headsets are increasingly common and used universally in **call centres**.

call centres
Groups of people working exclusively by telephone on a range of repeating service and/or enquiry calls in sectors such as banking or insurance.

Decide whether to take the call or not

Some calls, for example, calls from customers, should always be taken at once. The telephone can be obtrusive, however, and, if you are busy, and a colleague simply wants a word, it may be acceptable to delay it: 'I'm just finishing an important draft, may I call you back in half an hour?' Alternatively, the call may need to be transferred to a colleague, something that must always be explained and handled correctly.

Adopt an appropriate manner

It may be appropriate to emphasise certain traits or adopt a particular tone with certain callers.

Summarise and signpost

To avoid misunderstanding, it is sometimes useful to summarise at certain times of the conversation and signpost to indicate to the caller what is coming next: 'Right, you want an update about the new brochure design project. Let me go through it. The key things are probably the costs, the copy and the design – and the timing. Now first costs . . .' This helps both parties, giving the caller the opportunity to amend the list and giving you – as the receiver – a list to keep in mind or note down and work through.

2.2 Essential telephone techniques

The following factors are important for any telephone conversation, whether the call is incoming or outgoing.

Speaking and listening

Always listen carefully. The telephone may be a voice-only medium, but it is also two-way. Do not do all the talking, make it clear you are listening by acknowledging points as the conversation progresses. It is also important to speak clearly and a fraction slower than normal. Do not gabble, and try to keep your thoughts organised. This may be difficult when you begin to speak and, as you cannot see the other person, thoughts can easily become confused.

Be aware of pauses; remember the pause might seem longer to the person waiting than to you. It is sometimes better to suggest phoning back to give you time to marshal the necessary information. Or you can split what would otherwise seem a long pause into two shorter pauses by saying something like, 'Right, I've got the file, I'll just turn up the figures you want.' This might be especially important when someone is working with a computer in front of them; time taken to do something on screen needs to be explained to a caller to explain an otherwise mysterious gap in the conversation.

Be polite and maintain reasonable courtesies

Bear in mind that, with voice only, it can be easy to sound abrupt when you are simply trying to be efficient. People can be sensitive about their names, so be careful. Get them right, ask for the spelling or how to pronounce them if necessary, and use them occasionally during the conversation.

When receiving a call, hang up after the caller. Hanging up first may leave the caller thinking of something else they want to say, finding only a dead line and feeling they have been dismissed.

Anticipate and have the right information to hand

Many calls are repetitive in nature so you can handle them more efficiently if you anticipate what information might be needed and have it to hand.

Mobile phones

Technically, phone systems are now usually good but if a bad line should really hinder communication it may be better to call again. Mobile phones may also fade away or cut out as conditions or location change, and it is good practice to say you are speaking from a mobile at the start of a conversation to prepare for this possibility.

2.3 The switchboard

The first point of contact with an organisation is often a switchboard operator. Acting as an invisible receptionist, they set the scene for the ensuing contact and must do so efficiently and professionally. To be effective they must be organised. They need to know which calls go where, who does what, who backs up whom and where priorities lie – is it more important to obtain an outside number for the Managing Director or attend to an incoming customer enquiry? They need to learn something about the outside world too. Who calls regularly? Who do they usually speak to? How well do they know us? Do they like to be recognised? Operating the switchboard should not be a repetitive, automatic, function. It is important to sound lively and interested.

There is a need to:

- answer promptly
- provide a friendly greeting such as 'Good morning' – coming first, this avoids anything crucial being missed (it can take the listener a moment to 'tune in' to the first words spoken and something may be missed)
- clearly identify the organisation reached

- offer assistance – 'How may I help you?' This must be said carefully to avoid insincerity.

Questions should be used to identify where a call should go ('Is this a first enquiry?') and once action is taken it must be efficient and accurate. Callers resent holding on for a long time, unable to get back to the switchboard if an extension is unanswered. Alternatives should be offered – 'Can I get them to call you?' 'Would you like me to find someone else who can help?' – as necessary. If there are delays, callers should be told exactly what is happening; waiting on the telephone often seems very much longer than it is.

Making it work 11.2

Automated telephone responses

Automated telephone response systems are becoming increasingly common. Many believe that the human touch is always better but, if they are used, they should be logical and work efficiently. They should offer a reasonable number of options (not too many) in a sensible order, allowing someone who wants to get through and start a real conversation to do so, bypassing the automated system quickly.

Similarly, queuing systems should involve a reasonable wait with plenty of information – 'You are second in the queue' – as you wait. Systems that offer call back might be appropriate if waiting times may be prolonged.

Overcomplicated and obviously ill thought-out systems can cause disproportionate annoyance.

3 Making the voice work for you

The most important element of telephone manner is the voice. Not only is the voice important; it has to act alone. This can cause some difficulties. The telephone can make communication more difficult than it would be face to face. When we speak on the telephone, it can distort the voice (more so if there is a bad line), exaggerate the rate of speech and heighten the tone.

It is important to talk directly into the mouthpiece in a clear, normal voice. It is surprising how many things can interfere with the simple process of speaking into the mouthpiece, for example:

- trying to hold a file open
- trying to write
- allowing others in the office to interrupt
- eating or drinking

will all have an adverse effect.

Stop and think 11.2

Get hold of a simple cassette recorder or dictating machine. Choose something to say which you routinely deal with and record just a minute or two of your voice. Play it back. If you have not done anything similar for a while then you will notice at once that it does not sound like you.

We all hear our own voice differently from the way it sounds to others. But a recording *is* how you sound to others on the telephone. How do you think you sound?

3.1 Voice and manner

The following are all important.

Speak slightly slower than normal

Pace is important, and a considered pace will help to avoid misunderstanding. It allows the listener to keep up, particularly, for example, when they may want to make notes. It is also important not to speak at a rate that precludes easy interruption.

Make inflection work for you

Inflection is what makes, for example, a question mark stand out at the end of a sentence, and also what gives variety and interest to the way you speak. It is important that inflection is noticed.

Get the emphasis right

It is necessary to get the emphasis of words right: for example, contrast:

this is really important

with

this is really important.

Also, stress the part of the message to which the listener must pay most attention.

Ensure clarity

Be clear and be particularly careful about: names, numbers and sounds that can be difficult to distinguish: Fs and Ss for instance.

Adopt the right tone

In most circumstances you want to be friendly without being flippant, you want to sound courteous (*always* with customers) and usually you want to tailor your style to the circumstances, deciding whether to produce a note of respect or a feeling of attention to detail.

Smile and use gestures

Even though these cannot be seen, they may make a difference to how you sound and contribute a suitable emphasis. For example, smiling produces a pleasant tone and makes for the right sound. A warm tone of voice produces a feeling that the speaker is pleasant, efficient, helpful and, most importantly, interested in the caller.

Stop and think 11.3

When you need to be assertive, try making the telephone call standing up. It really does work, and makes a change from the 'Sorry to worry you, but I wonder if perhaps . . .' approach.

Be positive

This is especially important where an impression of efficiency is needed. Avoid saying 'possibly', 'maybe' and 'I think' when the expectation is that you should give definitive information.

Be concise

Most of the people you will speak to expect and appreciate their time being valued. Descriptions need to be thought about in advance and made concise, yet precise. Be careful with social chatter. It may often be liked by regular contacts, but there is a thin line between it being a pleasure and timewasting.

Avoid jargon

Jargon is professional shorthand, and can be very useful – in its place. You need to be sure of what another person understands and select the level of jargon accordingly. Beware of company jargon (abbreviations of a department, process or person, perhaps); of industry jargon (technical descriptions of products and processes) and even of general phrases that contain an internal meaning that is not immediately apparent to an outsider.

Be descriptive

Good description can add to any message. There is a difference between saying that something is 'smooth as silk' and describing it as 'sort of shiny'. Things that are inherently difficult to describe can create powerful impact if a well thought-out description surprises by its eloquence. Beware, however, of bland descriptions that mean little. No company's product is merely 'quite nice', and something that is 'user-friendly' nowadays fails to differentiate itself from everything else.

3.2 Creating a dialogue

Good communication demands good listening skills, and this is especially vital on the telephone when there are few other signals to aid understanding. Two-way communication is not simply a matter of talking one at a time and listening in between; creating a dialogue needs to be actively worked at.

- Talk to people not at them.
- Maintain a two-way flow: If the other person is talking at some length, do not interrupt, but make sure they know you are still there and listening – 'Right . . .' – and flag what you are going to do to make your intentions clear – 'Good, I have those details, now perhaps I can just set out . . .'
- Do not jump to conclusions: For whatever reason. It may be that you do know what is coming, but if you make unwarranted assumptions it can cause problems.
- Give the feeling of things being well handled: The dialogue should not just flow, it should appear to sort out or deal with things as necessary. The whole manner and structure needs to get to the point and clearly be doing whatever is needed to sort out the problem.

4 Taking and leaving messages

Inevitably, telephone callers are not always able to reach the person they want to speak to. If you are the caller, this means that you will probably want to leave a message with whoever answers the phone. If you receive a telephone call for someone other than yourself, you should be prepared to take a message to pass on to the person the caller wanted to speak to. It is also increasingly common for organisations to use voicemail systems or answering machines when particular employees are unavailable. These are also discussed below.

4.1 Taking messages

Making it work 11.3

Mixed messages

What would you want if you missed a call while reading this chapter? A clear message, without a doubt. Messages are important: a lost one can cause chaos. The world is full of people puzzling over tiny bits of paper with uninformative messages on them:

BROWN (BROWNE?) RANG – TOLD HIM YOU WOULD CALL.

Which Brown? What did they want? How urgent was it? What was it about? When did the message come in? Who took it?

When taking a telephone message it is important to note or, if necessary, ask for sufficient information to make the message meaningful and useful. At the very least, this should include:

- the full name of the caller
- which organisation they represent
- the nature of the call (i.e. what they were calling about)
- the date and time of the call
- the caller's telephone number, or alternative method of being contacted (for example, a mobile phone or email)
- whether the caller wants their call to be returned, and when they might be available.

The message should also indicate the name of the person who took the call.

Some organisations use standard telephone message forms which are designed as a prompt to collect and relay the required information. Figure 11.1 shows an example.

When the message reaches the intended recipient, it is almost always good practice to respond to a message *promptly*.

4.2 Leaving a message

Leaving a message with a person requires the reverse of what has already been discussed above: you need to provide enough information to create a meaningful message for the person you are unable to speak with. It is also important to bear in mind that the person taking the message has to note the key points, and may be unfamiliar with the subject you are calling about.

Whether leaving messages with a person or on a machine, speak slowly and clearly and aim to give a succinct message in a way that cannot be misunderstood. Take particular care to articulate names and telephone numbers clearly. It is also useful to give an indication of how urgent your call is and the most convenient time for the person to call back.

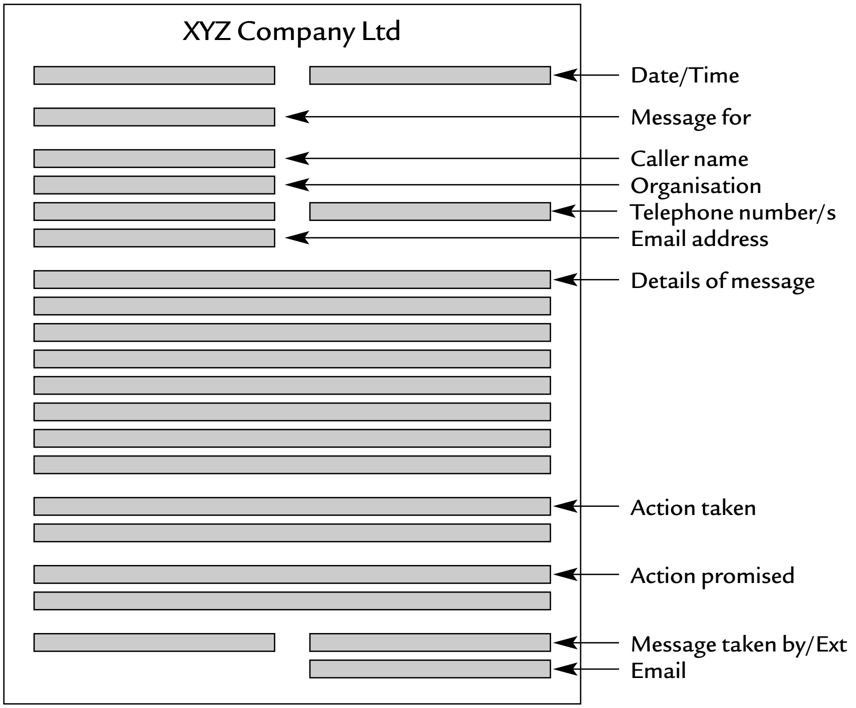


Figure 11.1 Telephone message form

4.3 Answering machines and voicemail

The outgoing message on an answering machine or voicemail system needs careful thought. Instructions to the caller must be polite, quick and clear. Some employees use their outgoing voicemail messages to provide regular – even daily – information about their movements and availability. These must obviously be kept up to date or replaced with a more generic message.

In most organisations, it is unusual for switchboard operators to take messages, and callers are transferred to the relevant staff in individual departments or voicemail or answering machines at individual telephone extensions to leave messages. Ideally, anyone dialling direct and reaching a voicemail system should have the option of returning to the switchboard if that is what they will find most helpful.

Test *yourself* 11.1

What should be noted in a standard business telephone message?

Summary

- Like face-to-face meetings and discussions, the telephone offers a two-way synchronous communication channel. However, unlike a meeting, there are no non-verbal cues to aid communication and understanding. Good telephone technique will compensate for this and simple differences in approach and manner can avoid confusion and ambiguity.
- A telephone conversation is often the first time a customer or potential customer has contact with an organisation. It is important that the person taking the call responds appropriately and creates the right impression from the start.
- Like any other communication, telephone contact should have a clear purpose, so plan the conversation before making the call. Equally, incoming calls should have a planned response.
- Observe the usual courtesies – answer promptly, giving your name (and department) and be polite. Concentrate on the call, and do not allow yourself to be distracted by other conversations or, worse, by eating or drinking which can be heard by the caller.
- Speak clearly and listen carefully, making it clear you are listening by acknowledging points as the conversation progresses. Avoid long pauses, and if they are necessary, tell the caller what is going on. Speak a little more slowly than usual, and adapt your tone according to the circumstances.
- Although they can’t be seen, gestures such as smiling or standing up will make a difference to the way you sound, and help to get your message across.
- When you need to leave a message, make sure that it is to the point and leave important details such as your name, the purpose of your call, and when and where you can be contacted. If you are taking a message for someone else, make sure you take full details, including how urgent it is that the caller is contacted. Make sure that voicemail greetings are polite and clear.

Part Three Practice Questions

Section A

2-mark questions:

3.1 In the context of *persuasion*, what is meant by *projection*?
3.2 How can silence be used in negotiation?
3.3 What do you think J.K. Galbraith meant when he said 'Meetings are indispensable when you don't want to do anything'?
3.4 Distinguish between an open and a closed question.
3.5 In one word, what is the purpose for using visual aids?
3.6 Briefly describe the importance of *speaking* and *listening* in relation to telephone calls.

4-mark questions:

3.7 What are *benefits* and *features*, and how do they fit in to *persuasion*?
3.8 Describe briefly two of the techniques used to enhance negotiation.
3.9 How should a participant prepare for a business meeting?
3.10 Describe briefly four different types of interview.
3.11 What is meant by *non-verbal clues*?
3.12 When taking a telephone message, what are the essential points to note?

Part B

Note: the questions below are indicative only and represent 15 marks each. In the Business Communications examination, each Section B question is a multi-part question worth 30 marks in total.

3.13 Define *persuasion* and *negotiation*. Explain the difference between them, and how they complement each other.
3.14 David Soames, the general manager of Spare Parts plc, the company in Case Study Three, sees himself as organiser and host of the gathering of distributors, on which so much depends. The event is to consist of a series of presentations and working sessions. Help him to prepare by compiling a checklist of everything he will need to do and be aware of. Draw on and adapt your knowledge of meetings and teams, and effective presentations, to do this.
3.15 Soames decides to ask for volunteers from staff throughout the organisation to act as assistants, each of which will be designated to look after a representative attending the launch. He gets more volunteers than he needs, and decides that the fairest way to decide between them is to interview them. Devise three sets of questions for him to use, remembering the nature of the launch and the people who will be attending. Each set should consist of two questions – a closed question to elicit a specific fact, and an open question to develop and expand on the answer that results.

Written and numeric communication

PART FOUR

Contents

Overview

As we have already seen, the ability to communicate well is key to business effectiveness, and this applies just as much to written communication as to verbal. Business letters, reports, press releases and even email provide communication which is one-way, offering the recipient no *immediate* opportunity to respond to or clarify a statement. As a consequence, they must be planned carefully and expressed clearly to ensure that the full message is received and to avoid misunderstanding. Written communications are asynchronous – that is, they involve a delay between sending and receipt – which give them a clear disadvantage against the telephone if the message is urgent.

At the same time, putting messages in writing has specific benefits in particular circumstances. For example:

- No personal contact is involved. If contact with a number of receivers is required, the written word can save both time and money and ensure that the same message is received by everyone.
- It is more formal than most spoken forms, and carries an innate authority.
- It is better suited than the spoken word for conveying long and complex messages.
- The risk of distortion during transmission is less than with spoken word.
- It provides a record of the whole sequence of transactions.

This part introduces the principles of effective writing then looks in detail at the different types of written communication you will encounter in your working life, in particular how they are constructed and presented.

Learning objectives

By the end of this part you should:

- ▶ be able to describe the various types of written business communications and understand when they should be used
- ▶ understand the importance of style, expression and presentation in written communications

- know the format of common written communications such as business letters or emails, and be able to apply it
- be familiar with the structure of key written communications such as reports, business plans and press releases
- be familiar with the different ways of handling and presenting numerical data
- recognise the importance of records management.

PART FOUR **CASE STUDY**

Hilltopp Hotel

Hilltopp Hotel, a 180-room property on the outskirts of a market town only two hours from London, consists of an attractive Victorian building with a modern extension. Set in its own pleasant grounds, it has a restaurant in two sections, one end a coffee shop and the other more formal, a bar and a lounge, as well as a small gym in converted stables in the grounds. The hotel is a successful four-star property appealing both to visitors to the area and to local organisations and companies. Its non-resident business is an important a part of its overall operation.

A general manager, Chris Long, runs the hotel. Other relevant staff are Mary Brown, Chris Long's secretary, Sarah Taylor, who is in charge of the Front Office (dealing with both Reception and bookings), and Mark White, who is in charge of sales and business development. Mark's secretary Pauline Connelly helps to extend the sales role and deals with most of the customer contact. They liaise with a small public relations agency which assists them with their overall promotional activity. All matters regarding food and drink are dealt with by the head chef, Jean Monet (an excellent, typical, but temperamental, French chef). There are other staff – everything from waiters to cleaners, with others who help administratively and secretarially. Many are part-time and work shifts.

It is planned to expand the business, and to this end a further outbuilding is being converted to become a self-contained conference suite. The cost is considerable and it will take some time to complete: quite apart from other implications, there are various communication factors to consider both during and after construction. For example:

- Staff need to know about the development and to be kept in touch with progress; they must also be able to inform customers appropriately and perhaps persuasively about the new 'product'.
- Customers must be informed, too, and assured that any disruption caused by building work will not affect them. Those who are prospective customers for the new facility will also need to know about it before it comes into operation.
- New employees must be recruited to staff the conference suite; they will have to be briefed and their work will need to be integrated into the other parts of the hotel's operation.

This communication will involve many people in various ways, and it must be planned and coordinated so that what is said, by different people and in different ways, presents a unified picture. Everything must be done to ensure that the new facility starts to earn as quickly as possible, and that it achieves a good level of occupancy as soon as it comes into operation.

The written word

12

List of topics

Introduction

This chapter looks at the principles essential to effective written communication. It outlines the details of the writing process, addresses issues of style, appropriateness and grammar and syntax, and also the importance of good presentation and layout. Anticipating the more detailed chapters that follow, it also outlines the principal forms of written and numeric communication. A final section looks at the issues of record keeping and records management.

1 The workplace context

Every year millions of words are typed, printed and even handwritten, in the context of communication in business. These words can be positive, oiling the wheels, or negative, seizing them up. It has already been said in this text that communication is only effective when it achieves results – if it is read, understood and acted upon. What you will learn here about written communication will apply in all fields of business, from a simple enquiry to your company and the reply you give, to the most complex report or elaborate sales and advertising campaign.

All the problems, barriers and filters already discussed in the context of the spoken word are applicable to the written word. Their form may be a little different, so that, for instance, deafness will not be a problem, but bad handwriting and poor expression will, and the effects are the same. Written communication also has the same needs as verbal – the need for preparation, thought, clarity, brevity, conciseness, style, grammar and so on.

Test *yourself* 12.1

Identify four advantages of written communication.

2 The writing process

Communication presents an opportunity to create an impression on the person or organisation with which it takes place. Most communication can be planned and thought about beforehand, and this is especially true in the case of the written word, where the impression is created as much by the appearance of the piece as its content. To this end:

- Plan: Think about the purpose of the communication. Think about the recipient – what do they already know and what do they need to be told; what level of formality is needed, and which 'language' should be used – technical or layman's?
- Research/gather: This avoids using the wrong information, forgetting information, ambiguity and confusion.
- Assemble/organise: Make sure first that you understand what you have assembled, and then that it is presented in a logical order.
- Create/write: Put your material in its final form, focusing on the desired outcome.

2.1 Style

style
The approach and choice of words and expression which can be adjusted to suit specific circumstances.

Style involves being aware of the different effects that various combinations of words, expressions and structures can have, and developing the ability to express ideas in informative, discursive or persuasive ways. Contiguous with style is the ability to look critically at what has been written, to assess its potential effect, and to be able to modify it. You also need a feeling for the shades of meaning words can have, dependent on their context. The best and clearest style for effective communication is to keep the language as simple as you can, choosing short words and sentences whenever possible, and avoiding words which are not in common use. Using punctuation is vital, as it aids understanding.

Stop and think 12.1

Imagine you are writing a letter to tell a candidate for a job that they should attend for interview at a particular date and time, to see Mr David Brown, the manager of the department. The following two paragraphs both give exactly the same information:

'The interview will be held here on Monday 1 February at 10.00am in Meeting Room No. 1 on the first floor. Please enquire at Reception when you enter the building. Your interviewer will be Mr David Brown.'

'The interviews are at 10.00am on Monday 1 February. David Brown, the interviewer, will see you in Meeting Room No. 1. This is on the first floor, but if you ask at Reception when you come in, someone will help you to find it.'

Think about the different impressions the two paragraphs make. Both have their particular advantages and disadvantages which you should also consider. Can you write a third sentence which manages to come between these two in terms of formality versus friendliness?

2.2 Naturalness and liveliness

In many ways, the more a piece of written work can be made to resemble the patterns of speech, and the more natural and lively it is, the more effective it will be as a means of communication. Some caution is necessary, however. Speech, by its very nature, is transitory; the words and grammatical constructions we use in speech are accepted in the ebb of flow of dialogue. Committed to paper in, say, a business letter, they may annoy the reader, and lessen the effectiveness of the writing. Be natural and lively by all means, but with a degree of care. There is the ever-present danger of oversimplification – of concentrating on the superficial or literal meaning of what is being communicated, without considering how it will be interpreted.

2.3 Appropriateness

It is important to achieve the correct degree of formality and courtesy. It is wise always to be as courteous as possible, even when (or perhaps especially when) complaining; the degree of formality depends on the context of what you are saying as well as how well you know the recipient. Choose the right language for whomever you wish to address. This doesn't just mean not addressing a French speaker in English. An engineer speaking to or writing for other engineers can safely use technical language; if he is dealing with laymen, he needs to use non-technical language. Remember that effective communication is about generating shared meaning between the sender and receiver.

Certain devices that can enhance communication in a particular context can also cloud meaning where used inappropriately. For example, jargon and specialist terminology can be a useful shorthand in groups where the meaning is clear to all parties, such as organisation-specific acronyms or official phrases. However, they can become a communication barrier when used outside that group. Again, communicators need to be aware of their audience and either explain or avoid jargon or terminology which may obscure the message.

Similarly, the use of **metaphors**, **idiom** and figurative expression can add richness to communications, but may also cause confusion for non-native English speakers or where, as discussed in Chapter 2, other cultural differences have to be taken into account.

Some words or phrases become so overused that they lose their original meaning. Such **clichés** should be avoided at all costs.

metaphor
A word or expression with the qualities or character you want to attribute to your subject, which is used as a substitute.

idiom
A form of words or expression specific to a group of individuals or language.

cliché
A phrase whose effect has lost its meaning through overuse.

Stop and think 12.2

The business world is not immune to clichés. We're all familiar with 'thinking outside the box', 'the bottom line' and 'singing from the same hymn sheet'. Think of some examples of phrases and words used in an organisation you're familiar with which have become clichéd through overuse; do these contribute to or detract from effective communication?

2.4 Clarity

Writing should have a logical development, well constructed sentences, good transition from part to part or idea to idea, cohesion, and be well paced. Don't hide anything – make sure all ideas, inferences and conclusions are out in the open and clearly stated. Be brief – remove all unnecessary words. Avoid ambiguity; the order of words matters. Consider – 'the hunter killed a lion in his pyjamas'. Use as few and as short words as possible.

Making it work 12.1

Too many words

Using too many words is a common problem in written communication, and can act as a barrier to understanding. Here are some examples, and their simplified versions:

I would make the suggestion	I suggest
At this moment in time	Now
Circumstances which obtained prior to the event	Earlier conditions
I should be glad if you would be kind enough to let us know	Please confirm

Test *yourself* 12.2

Read the following extract from a letter sent to acknowledge an order. It contains 108 words. Edit the passage, removing all unnecessary words and where possible substituting shorter ones. You should be able to reduce it to fewer than 40 words.

> This communication is sent to express our grateful thanks for your esteemed communication of the 1 January 2005. The order contained therein has been passed to our production department, which will make every effort to expedite your requirements, and the assurance has been given that your order will be ready on the 8 January 2005. It is our usual custom and practice to make use of an express delivery service; this will be done in the case of your order, and it is our confident expectation that you will be in receipt of the goods you require by, at the absolute latest, no more than 24 hours later.

2.5 Tone

Just as intonation matters in speech, so tone matters in writing. Be aware of how your words will 'sound' when they are read by someone else. The results may be:

- giving the wrong impression
- failing to achieve your objective
- annoying or upsetting the reader.

The tone you use will depend on your reason for communicating, and whom you are communicating with. Should you be:

- friendly or impersonal?
- formal or informal?
- concerned/conciliatory or firm?

Take the trouble to search for the 'right' word. Keep a good dictionary and thesaurus by you when you are writing. A dictionary defines the meanings of words and is also a good way to check your spelling. A thesaurus allows you to look for words with the same or similar meanings, giving you the chance to vary the vocabulary you use.

What is acceptable is constantly changing, and what was once unacceptable is now allowed. If in doubt, err on the side of too much formality; this is unlikely to offend, whereas treating someone with an informality they do not welcome may cause them offence.

2.6 Emphasis

It is possible to emphasise words or phrases in written work just as in speech, and this can be a great aid to understanding. It can be achieved by careful use of:

bold
italics
<u>underlining</u>, or
any *<u>combination</u>* of the **<u>three techniques</u>**.

Consider this sentence taken from a letter:

'I am happy to be able to do this, this time.'

If the same sentence is written with two words emphasised in bold, while the meaning does not change, the force of the statement is quite different:

'I am happy to be able to do this, **this time**.'

3 Grammar, syntax, spelling and punctuation

3.1 Grammar and syntax

Grammar is the foundation on which good writing is built, and **syntax** is the cement holding the construction together. They are essential for good writing (and speech); this may be a problem if you are required to write in English when English is not your first or mother tongue. The only advice is to read as much English prose as possible, because reading is the best way to learn about not just grammar and syntax, but also style, spelling and vocabulary.

grammar
The rules which govern the use of language – phrases, sentences, paragraphs.

syntax
The rules of sentence construction.

3.2 Vocabulary

Possessing an extensive vocabulary means more than 'just knowing a lot of words'. Implicit in the expression is the idea of a wide set of general and specialist words and expressions which will facilitate the encoding of your message. A good vocabulary allows you to choose and use words carefully but effectively, avoiding common mistakes such as 'disinterested' instead of 'uninterested', 'imply' when you mean 'infer', 'practical' when it should be 'practicable', or qualifying words that can only mean one thing – 'very unique'.

3.3 Spelling and punctuation

Your vocabulary has to be more than just a list of words held phonetically in your head. You have to know how to write down the words in their accepted form, and then how to link them together clearly and unambiguously in meaningful sentences and paragraphs.

Making it work 12.2

Computer spellcheckers

Whatever you do, do not rely on your PC's spellchecker. There is a story, which may be apocryphal, that a local authority had to apologise to tenants after sending out a letter addressed to Dear Sir or Madman.

Spellcheckers cannot distinguish between **homonyms** (words which sound the same but have different meanings) such as 'there' and 'their'. *Theirs a lot off mistakes weighting to happen out their witch you're spellchecker mite miss!*

homonym
A word which sounds the same as another, but means something different, e.g. *bear* and *bare*.

Grammar and syntax have been simplified in recent times and much is accepted now which would have been frowned on previously. Simplification is on the whole a good thing, but clarity and meaning are still all important, and if simplification actually reduces clarity, it is not desirable. This is especially true in sentence construction, where the order of words can change meaning completely.

Contrast:

There was a meeting yesterday to discuss the problem of theft in the boardroom.

with:

There was a meeting yesterday in the boardroom to discuss the problem of theft.

Make sure the words you use all 'agree' grammatically within a sentence:

The team is waiting to help you.

not:

The team are waiting to help you.

4 Presentation and layout

Presentation and layout are to do with aesthetics and taste, with making the written or printed work look right. To some extent this is subject to fashion, and this can be demonstrated in the way the layout of letters changes, for example, the placing of the valediction (the closing, as in 'Yours faithfully', 'Yours sincerely' and so on). This was traditionally centred on the page, but is now mostly left justified.

Make sure first that your work, handwritten or printed, is legible and attractive. Colour should be used with care. Colour is no longer expensive because of the availability of colour printers, but colour used badly is worse than no colour. Colour is especially useful in letter headings. In reports and similar presentations use it sparingly, but can be useful to:

- emphasise key points
- establish groupings
- provide continuity
- highlight important information
- improve comprehension.

Make use of the power of the PC and its software. Experiment with different fonts and type sizes, remembering always that clarity is what is needed. Be aware of any house style your organisation may use and avoid the temptation to mix too many fonts in a single document. This is akin to getting carried away with Microsoft PowerPoint® in a set of presentation slides: it will only distract from the message.

In a business context, some typefaces are more appropriate than others.

This one, for instance, (Tahoma) is acceptable.
This one (Impact) or **this** (Bauhaus) are best avoided.

Continuous text is often printed using fonts such as Times New Roman that have **serifs**. **Sans serif** fonts, such Arial or Tahoma, are often used for titles and headings.

Lastly, when appropriate, don't forget that paper can be used in landscape as well as portrait mode.

serifs
Small extensions on letters which make the type easier to read.

sans serif
Typeface that is straight with no serifs or small extensions on letters, generally used for headings.

4.1 Revise, edit and proofread

When you finish a piece of writing, your first feeling will almost certainly be relief, and you will be tempted to pass the work straight on. Like many temptations, this is one to be resisted. At this point, it is necessary, mandatory even, to revise, edit and proofread. These are three different processes which all combine to serve one end – to make sure that your reader, whoever and wherever they may be, will be able to understand your message.

- Revise means re-read and review what you have written – for accuracy and completeness.
- Edit means cut out anything superfluous. Editing may also involve changing the order of things, and perhaps even adding material.
- Proofread means check for errors – of grammar, style, spelling or punctuation. Remember always to check for 'attitude' – overt or, worse, covert sexism, racism, etc. Make sure that names – personal, products and company – are correctly spelled, or you will lose credibility.

The distinction between the three processes is not important, and they are often all combined as one process, in name at least, and often in practice. What is important is to check what you have written, and think about it – does it mean what I want it to mean, and can it be read and understood in more than one way?

Make sure that abbreviations and **acronyms** are explained when each is first introduced. Eliminate *all* jargon, such as a phrase like 'energetic disassembly', meaning 'explosion'.

acronym
A word which is an abbreviation of a longer expression, formed from the initial letters of the original.

Professional writers know that rewriting is as important as writing. It is rare for a first draft to be accepted unchanged. Remember that it is less expensive, ultimately, to produce a good piece of writing than a bad one – your reputation and image, and that of your organisation, may be at stake.

Good writing is more, even, than the sum of all the foregoing parts. Learning to write grammatically and to spell correctly does not in itself lead to effective writing. Conciseness and brevity are not just about a simple word count. Good writing, effective writing, is learned by practice, of course, but also by reading as much as possible, and analysing what you have read, not just for its content, but also for the techniques the author employed; then learn from it ways to be persuasive, convincing and all the other things you need to do in business and business writing.

Putting the case 12.1

Q The key to the success of the expansion and development of Hilltopp Hotel has been identified as communication, with staff, so that they can tell customers what is going on, with the customers directly, and with potential new employees. The manager, Chris Long, decides to commission the public relations agency the hotel already uses to produce a brochure describing the hotel in general and the new conference suite in particular. Imagine you are Chris Long, and the agency's draft for this brochure has arrived in the post. You set aside a morning to look at the draft in detail. Make a list of the things that will be in your mind as you do this. Describe what you will take into consideration at each stage.

A

1. Revise, edit and proofread: General read-through to see if anything has been missed, if anything is superfluous, and if there are any obvious errors.
2. Check grammar, syntax, spelling and punctuation: Depending on your confidence, you may find it useful to have a dictionary and an English Grammar to hand. Take nothing for granted – if in any doubt, check.
3. Clarity: Read through again, testing for clarity of meaning, the possibility of misunderstanding, use of jargon, etc.
4. Appropriateness: The brochure is intended for a number of different user groups (staff, public informed via staff, public informed directly, potential conference centre users, potential members of staff). Read through a number of times with a different group in mind each time, to make sure it is appropriate for that group.
5. Style and layout: Read through one last time testing the style – does it read well? is it a good ambassador for the hotel? – with an eye for the overall look of the publication.

Test *yourself* 12.3

Proofread the following sentences, suggesting any changes you think appropriate.

a) I heard a man saying that he was late quietly through the window.

b) The manager was just as anxious to look after his customers as his staff.

c) When he was asked what he thought the manager said he was disinterested.

d) The company claimed that there product was very unique.

5 Principal forms of written communication

Particular forms of written communication will be dealt with in depth in the following chapters. It is useful to give here a brief summary of the main ones, so that you are reminded of them and can think about them in the context of what you have just learned.

5.1 Business letters

Letters are probably still one of the most common forms of written communication, especially when a company wishes to communicate with its customers. They can be formal, informal, serve many purposes and be used internally and externally. They are used in all phases of business to establish and/or maintain a business relationship. Their main advantage when used internally is when formal documentation is required.

5.2 Reports – formal and informal

An essential function of a report is that it provides a basis for decision making. There are many kinds of report, but all present a series of facts on a specified subject for a particular purpose. Informal reports are usually short, with perhaps only an introduction saying why the report is needed, the body of the report where the main information and findings are, the conclusions where all is summed up, and recommendations made if appropriate. There is a recognised structure for a formal report:

- terms of reference (why the report needs to be written)
- procedure (how the information contained in the report was obtained)
- findings (the main part of the report)
- conclusion(s) (where the main points of the findings are summarised, leading towards the final section)
- recommendations (actions the writer thinks necessary)
- appendixes may follow, consisting of documents or other supporting evidence referred to in the report.

5.3 Memoranda (memos)

A memorandum is a written note sent through the internal post. There may be one intended receiver or many, but the memo should always be addressed to individuals. It can be used to communicate both ways in the vertical part of a structure. A memo is usually less formal than a letter, but this does depend on to whom it is addressed.

5.4 Emails

Emails are now replacing letters and memos for internal and external communication. They have had profound effects on business, with attendant new behaviours, etiquette and protocol. Speed, connectivity, and interaction were all sought prior to the advent of email. However, email combines them all very effectively and cheaply.

5.5 Notices, agenda and minutes of meetings

For some meetings, a formal notice that a meeting is to be held is sent by the secretary to all members of the body or committee.

The agenda, which may accompany the notice, indicates what will be discussed at the forthcoming meeting. It is prepared by the secretary, often with the aid of the Chair. Even for less formal meetings, an agenda helps to structure the meeting to help it achieve its objectives.

Minutes are the written record of a meeting, serving as an historical record and a basis for action. They usually appear high on the agenda of the meeting, for correction and discussion.

Meetings and minutes are discussed in more detail in Chapter 8.

5.6 Notes and abstracts

abstract Brief statement of the contents of a book, report, etc.

Notes and **abstracts** are useful tools both as memory aids for yourself, and for passing on essential information you need to convey – to inform your boss of the main points of a report, for instance, or to tell them about a conference you have attended. Establish first the purpose of the notes and their audience. Are the notes an end in themselves, or have they some other purpose – the basis for another communication such as a report? If the notes are not for you, what does the other person want them for? How expert are they on the topic being covered by the notes? Has coverage of any specific area been asked for, or a length or amount of detail specified? Be careful when using abbreviations, even if the notes are for you. The layout should be structured, with headings and numbering.

5.7 Business plan

A business plan is the formal means by which planning strategies are developed and articulated – a kind of road map, usually covering five specific areas:

1. the market strategy
2. the production strategy
3. the research and development strategy
4. the organisation and management strategy
5. the financial strategy.

5.8 Mission statement

It has been said that a mission statement is the first act in the development of an organisation's identity, defining the organisation, its goals and its operational principles. It is the expressed purpose and commercial intent of the organisation.

6 Principal forms of numeric communication

Numbers are as important and effective as words for the communication of ideas. Numeracy is, therefore, just as important a skill as literacy. Numeracy means more than the mere ability to perform arithmetical calculations: it means understanding numbers, singly and *en masse*, and how to handle numeric information. Most management communications – letters, reports, presentations, speeches – will contain some numerical content. Chapter 15 looks at numbers in more detail, but the main forms are listed here for initial consideration.

6.1 Tables

Tables are a way to list information in an ordered and logical way, and are used particularly, but not exclusively, when the information is mainly numeric. They can be used as an alternative to a graph, particularly where specific values need to be referred to. There are also very specialised uses for tables, such as train or bus timetables.

6.2 Graphs

The best known and most effective way of illustrating the relationship between two series of numerical facts. They are easily understood and relatively simple to prepare. Graphs are an ideal management communication tool, used to show trends, for example whether sales are increasing or decreasing.

6.3 Pie charts

Used to show proportions, e.g. sales by geographical region. The ideal way to show the composition of the whole.

6.4 Histograms

Used to describe groups of numbers. A histogram consists of a series of narrow rectangles, the area of each bearing a relationship to the frequency of the value it represents, and to the spread of the values.

6.5 Bar charts

A variation of the histogram and often easier to understand. Bar charts are good for presenting and comparing quantities, but are not usually used to demonstrate the relationship between them. They are used to make comparisons, for example the sales of different products.

6.6 Pictograms

Pictograms show trends by using graphics, and are especially good if only basic information is needed, rather than detail. They are a very visual way to show quantities, but can easily be misused.

6.7 Spreadsheets

Spreadsheet is a term used to cover both a computer program and the result of using that program. Programs which deal in spreadsheets include Excel®, Lotus and Supercalc.

A spreadsheet can be many things, including a database handling totally non-numeric data. In the context of dealing with and presenting numbers, however, it is a way of storing, on a computer, numeric data in an ordered and versatile way; the data can be manipulated, the way of presentation can be varied, many calculations can be made automatically, and graphs, histograms, pie charts – all the usual and a number of less usual visual methods of presentation – can be created very easily.

Test *yourself* 12.4

Describe the difference between a graph and a pie chart, saying what purpose each best serves.

record
Any information captured in reproducible form which is required for conducting business, and generated or received by a business as evidence of its organisation, functions, policies, decisions, procedures, operations and transactions.

records management
The logical and practical approach to the creation, maintenance, use and disposition of records, and of the information those records contain.

7 Record keeping and filing

7.1 What are records?

At its simplest, a **record** is any information captured in reproducible form which is required for conducting business. This definition, however, would include a dictionary or a directory, which are obviously not business records, so the definition needs some expansion.

7.2 Records management or data processing?

A record is a permanent form of storage – the information is permanently etched onto something physical – a piece of paper, a roll of film, a reel of magnetic or videotape, a computer disk. The capture, storage and management of information in a meaningful format are the business of **records management**.

Data (text or number) is raw or unformatted information, constantly being updated, edited, manipulated or moved about, regardless of its storage medium. Working with raw data is known as 'data processing'. Data processing can be used as we shall see to assist in records management.

7.3 The information life cycle

- Creation: Records are created in various ways – letters are written, forms filled in, photocopies made. Thought should be given even before the record is created: Is this record necessary? Should I phone instead of writing? Is it necessary to capture the record in a reproducible form?
- Maintenance and use: Records move from the individual to the organisation, and into a central location, which is accessible to many users. For these records to be retrievable, a filing system using organisational standards is required.
- Disposition: Even when the record is no longer active, it may still need to be retained – because of statute or regulation for instance. If it is not legally required, a judgement on the value of the information it contains must be made. The record can continue in its original form, but if it may have a life of years and its form is not permanent, it is more likely that it will be recaptured in a reproducible form to ensure permanence, e.g. microfiche/film/digital media.

7.4 Practical considerations

A survey has shown that only 10% of all records put into files are ever used again. Material about to be filed must be reviewed. There are three options for action:

- Do not file it, but throw it away.
- File it with no thought of how long it will stay in the files.
- File it with a clear indication of a possible destroy date (or at least a review date).

Stop and think 12.3

Think about the three stages of the information life cycle. In the context of your own organisation, how well are these stages considered? Can you see ways to improve your organisation's handling of records and information? Could you suggest ways to reduce the amount of filing that takes place?

Making it work 12.3

Reviewing information needs

The Managing Director of a company asked the sales office for some particular figures. Someone in the sales office said that just such a breakdown was already sent to the MD's office every month. The MD denied all knowledge of this, but his secretary, overhearing the conversation, said that she had a file of the information.

Checking showed she was right. The report arrived every month and she filed it. On looking back, it was found that the MD had asked for these figures before, two years ago, and a summary had been produced at that time. He had looked at it, put it in his secretary's filing tray, and she had opened a file for it. The sales office produced it again the next month, and the MD's secretary had filed it without showing it to him. This had continued every month for two years. Someone in the sales office spent several hours each month producing the figures and, after the first time, it had all been a complete waste of time.

Situations like this can continue all too easily. Who was at fault? Could the wastage have been prevented? When asked to provide information to anyone, ask whether or not they need it once, or on a continuing basis. If they ask for it to continue, make a note in your diary to check at some point in the future – in 6 or 12 months perhaps – whether it is still needed:

- at the same frequency (would quarterly be as good as monthly?)
- to all the people on the original list?
- in as much detail (would some sort of summary do?).

Very few people will ask for information to stop coming to them, but may well admit that they can happily do without it if they are asked.

Test *yourself* 12.5

a) Define a record.

b) What is the difference between records management and data processing?

Summary

- The written word is just as important a tool in the business world as in the world in general.
- The written word becomes your ambassador. It is worth spending time, not just on the content, but also on the complete package – style, grammar, vocabulary, punctuation, presentation and so on.
- When you have finished a piece of written work, check it thoroughly before you send it out.
- There are a number of forms of written communication, with different applications, and each with its own strengths and weaknesses.
- Numbers are as important as words as a vehicle for communication, and present their own difficulties as well as advantages.
- Written communication, whether by word or by number, inevitably creates records, with a strong temptation to keep them. The paperless office is still a myth, and likely to remain so for some time. Systems are needed, therefore, to determine which records need to be kept, and to deal with methods of storage and retrieval.

Written communications I 13

List of topics

Introduction

Any written business document must stand up to analysis, and its only real test is whether its reader finds it does the job it was intended to do. As outlined in Chapter 12, this means it must have a clear purpose and communicate a clear message that meets the needs of its specific intention.

In this chapter and the next, we look at some examples of different types of written business communication, identifying their principal uses, outlining key channel characteristics and giving examples of presentation, style and content. While a variety of word combinations and style can be appropriate, there are some things that must be done in particular ways and there are certainly things to avoid. This chapter looks at the main written communication channels used for a variety of general business uses: the letter, the internal memo and the email.

1 Business letters: first principles

Business letters are a well established communication channel which can be used for a variety of communications, both internally and externally. One of the main reasons why business letters are still so widely used is that they provide a formal and permanent record of a transaction or conversation. This makes them especially appropriate for communication with, for example, external suppliers, where the terms and conditions of any agreement need to be clear to both parties, or where a formal message needs to be communicated internally, for example a contract of employment. Like all other forms of written communication, this advantage also carries with it the potential pitfall of making permanent unfortunate or ill thought-out messages which cannot easily be removed at a later stage.

Letters are also appropriate for long and complex messages, as they give the recipient the opportunity to read and review the content in their own time. They are often used in combination with other forms of communication. For example, an email exchange may be used as a quick way of testing proposals and counter-proposals, with a follow-up letter sent as confirmation of final agreement; similarly, a promotional letter may be followed up with a telephone call.

1.1 Types of business letters

As identified above, business letters can be used for a variety of purposes. Table 13.1 summarises some of the main types of business letter, noting the likely sender and receiver and typical communication objectives.

Type of letter	Sender and receiver	Typical communication objectives
Promotional	Marketing department Prospective customer	Increase brand awareness, stimulate sales
Contractual	Purchasing department Supplier	Establish clearly defined contract terms
Credit control	Accounts department Customer (debtor)	Speed up customer payments – politely
Supplier payments	Accounts department Supplier (creditor)	Avoid conflict over firm's late payment
Adjustment/ complaints	Customer services Customer	Keep customer loyalty by prompt action
Recruitment	Human resources Prospective employee	Inform and attract applicants
Employment contract	Human resources Employee	Provide clear and accurate information on pay and conditions
Disciplinary	Human resources Employee	Inform, meet legal obligations and encourage behaviour change
Redundancy	Human resources Employee	Inform, meet legal obligations and provide appropriate support

Table 13.1 Some examples of widely used business letters
Source: *Successful Organisational Communication*, 2nd edition, Blundel, R., Pearson Education Limited. Copyright © Pearson Education Limited 2004.

2 Business letters: layout, structure and content

2.1 Layout

open punctuation
Where full stops and commas are omitted from the address, opening and closing in a letter.

There are conventions about the layout of business letters, and most will conform to the accepted standard. In recent years, this has meant that all text is aligned with the left hand margin and uses **open punctuation**, where, in the interests of simplicity and economy, the commas and full stops are omitted from the address section, greeting and closing sections of the letter. Sample 13.1 shows an example of this style.

Sample Business letter layout 13.1

XYZ Company Ltd

Reference: XYZ/12345

1 July 2005

Mr K J Smith
Company Secretary
Greenwater plc
Mile End Towers
London WXX 2YY

Dear Mr Smith

New Product Launch, 15 September 2005

Thank you for confirming that you will be attending our new product launch on **Thursday 15 September**.

I enclose an information pack about the event, which includes full details of the venue and the structure of the day, together with some advance product information. Additional details are also available on our website at www.xyz.com.

I look forward to meeting you at the launch.

Yours sincerely

Kim Evans
Marketing and Sales Manager
Telephone: 0123 456 789
Email: kevans@xyz.com

Business stationery

The actual content of the business letter will be viewed by the recipient alongside the business stationery on which it is printed, and the message in its entirety will include both the written and graphic elements. The quality and design of the letterhead gives an important first impression about an organisation and provides an opportunity to create a positive image. In most cases, business letters will be printed on standard company letterhead, but different designs may also relate to specific products or brands. In either case, the letterhead used will undoubtedly link to images, style and designs used in public relations and publicity, and include the following information about the organisation:

- address
- telephone number
- fax number

- general email address (frequently info@xxx.com)
- website address.

As well as looking good, the design should work practically; for example typefaces and colours should allow a clear photocopy to be taken.

There may also be legal requirements about the information provided on business stationery, designed to provide full details for anyone doing business with the organisation concerned. In the UK, for example, the 1985 Companies Act requires companies to include the following information:

- the full company name
- whether the company is a limited company (Ltd) or a public limited company (plc)
- the country in which the company is registered (for example, England and Wales)
- the company number (the unique identifier given to the company on registration)
- the address where the company is registered (this must be included whether or not this is the same as the main office address for correspondence).

If a UK company is also VAT registered, it is also usual to include the VAT registration number.

These legal details are usually reproduced in smaller type at the bottom of the headed notepaper.

2.2 Structure

Sample 13.1 also gives an indication of the key elements which make up a standard letter. These elements are identified more clearly in Figure 13.1, and discussed in more detail below.

The greeting

The formality of the greeting will depend on how well the parties know each other, but should also reflect the degree of formality that the recipient expects. Be especially careful about spellings and check titles (Mrs/Ms/Dr, etc). Where the identity of the recipient is not known, it may be necessary to use 'Dear Sir/Madam'.

Signposts

People will not necessarily read everything put in front of them; their first scan is saying: Do I need to read this? This is why it's important to include signposts which can be easily identified and provide a way in to the core message of the letter. These include:

- the subject identifier or heading, usually identified in **bold** or *italic*
- a reference or account number, creating continuity if this is part of an exchange of letters or providing the context for what follows.

The core message

Beyond the subject heading, getting down to business in a way that makes content clear is important too. The opening paragraph should outline explicitly why you are writing the letter, and may also include a link to previous correspondence: 'Thank you for your letter of . . .', 'I am writing to let you know . . .'.

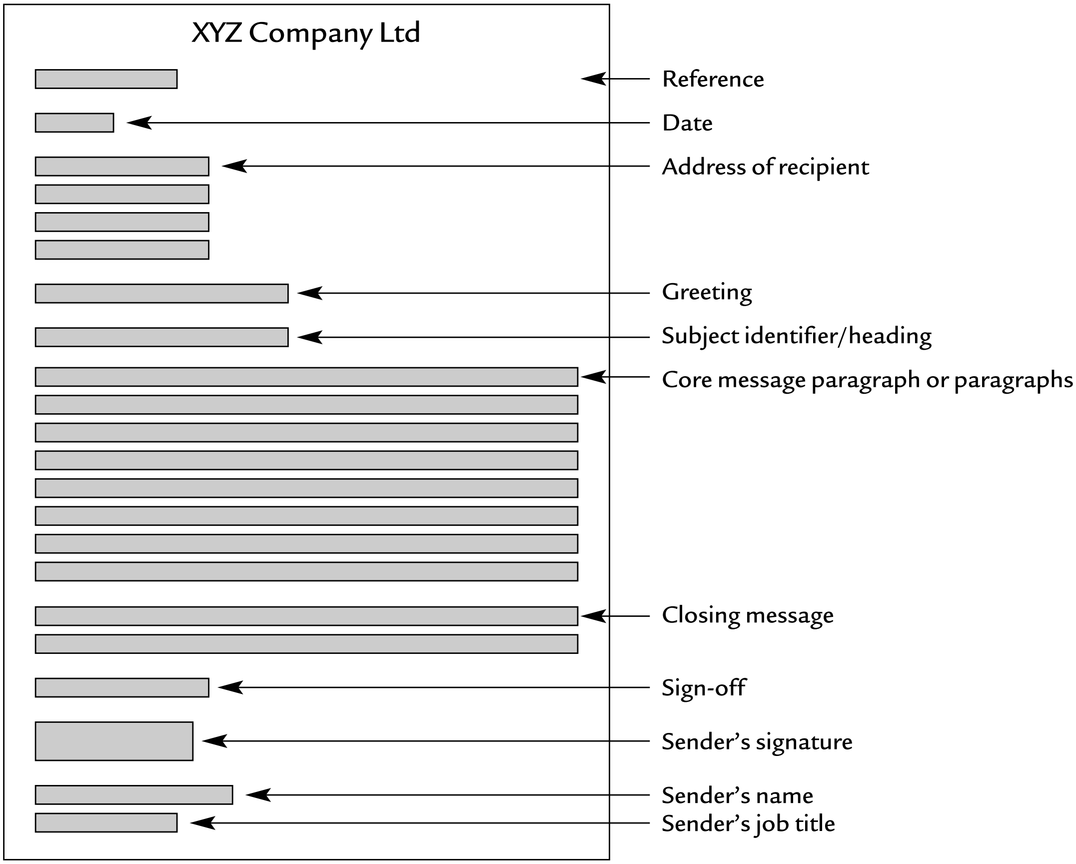


Figure 13.1 Sample business letter structure

Style should be businesslike and jargon kept to a minimum. The objective of the letter is always the starting point: if you know *why* you are writing and what you want to achieve, everything else follows. The letter should be logically structured, using new paragraphs to identify new subjects. Do not be afraid to add emphasis: for example, in a letter confirming a meeting it may be useful to put the time and place agreed in **bold type**.

It is also important to state clearly whether you expect, or would like, the recipient to respond in a certain way, perhaps answering a specific request or, in a promotional letter, ordering a product sample. For some letters, it might also be appropriate to include a brief closing message, such as 'I look forward to hearing from you' or 'Please do not hesitate to contact me if you need any more information'.

Sign-off

This links to the greeting and depends on the level of formality required. In most cases, the default sign-offs are:

- Yours sincerely: where the name of the recipient is known to you

or

- Yours faithfully: where the name of the recipient is not known and you have used Dear Sir/Madam.

The sign-off also includes the sender's signature (or first name where the recipient is well known to them), their full name and, usually, their job title. This may also be followed by a direct line telephone number and email address to give the recipient a variety of ways of contacting the sender either to respond to or to clarify the message.

Test *yourself* 13.1

Write a brief business letter incorporating all the key elements outlined above.

3 What makes a good business letter: intention and style

One of the best ways to analyse what makes a good business letter is to look at some examples. This section gives both good and bad examples to illustrate good practice and some of the common pitfalls of business letter writing.

Because of the one-way and asynchronous nature of the business letter, receivers have to interpret the message based on the words used and the image the letter presents. Chapter 12 has already looked at style and how the use of grammar, vocabulary and presentation contribute to how a message is communicated. Where possible, the style should be tailored to the receiver and what the letter is trying to achieve. However, where the receiver of a letter is not known to the sender, or where a standard letter is used unthinkingly, the potential for miscommunication is great. Sample 13.2 shows an example of a letter which is less than clear in its objectives and leaves much to be desired in terms of style.

Sample 13.2

Dear Guest

We would like to thank you for allowing us to serve you here at the XYZ Hotel and hope that you are enjoying your stay.

Our records show that you are scheduled to depart today, and we wish to point out that our check-out time is 12 noon. Should you be departing on a later flight, please contact our front desk associates who will be happy to assist you with a late check-out. Also, please let us know if you require transport to the airport so that we can reserve one of our luxury Mercedes limousines.

In order to facilitate your check-out for today, we would like to take this opportunity to present you with a copy of your updated charges, so that you may review them at your convenience. Should you find any irregularities or have any questions regarding the attached charges, please do not hesitate to contact us.

We wish you a pleasant onward journey today, and hope to have the privilege of welcoming you back to the hotel again in the near future.

Sincerely yours

Jim Jones

Front Office Manager

Intention

It is unclear what the main intention of the letter is. Is it to:

- simply remind people to pay the bill?
- make check-out quicker or easier?
- sell a transport service to the airport?
- persuade people to come and stay again (and thus presumably give an impression of efficiency and good service)?
- just say 'Thank you'?

Because of this lack of clarity, the message itself is confused and unclear. For example, nothing about the check-out procedure is explained, nor are reasons given as to why someone should stay again.

Style

The language used in the letter is old-fashioned, with rather pompous-sounding phrases such as: 'we wish to point out that' and 'in order to facilitate', when something shorter, more straightforward and businesslike would surely be better. The choice of words such as irregularities almost suggests that something will be wrong with the account and everything is expressed from an introspective point of view: 'we', 'we' and 'we' again leading in to every point. Sentences are neither clear nor concise.

Even where the recipient is not known personally to the sender, it is important to think about any general characteristics which the receiver might have. For example, a hotel offering luxury transport to an airport must have a high percentage of customers whose first language is not English. When sending a letter chasing payment, it may be important to think about the nature of the relationship with the recipient (is it long-standing? how important is their business to your organisation?). Such factors may well influence the level of formality and overall tone of the letter.

Samples 13.3 and 13.4 show alternative approaches to a letter written by a training organisation to someone who failed to attend on the date on which they were booked for a training course and who wrote requesting a refund.

Sounding too formal or adopting an off-hand approach may be because of urgency or lack of thought, but they can create letters that do more harm than good. Sample 13.3 is neither polite nor helpful and is unlikely to be received positively, present a good image for the training company or encourage an ongoing relationship with the customer. The structure and layout of the letter also leaves something to be desired. Contrast this approach with Sample 13.4.

Sample 13.3

15 December 2005

Peter Smith
Clocktower Engineering Ltd
Arlton Road
London N1

Dear Mr Smith

Thank you for your letter of 14 December. You will see that you missed attending our training programme *Making Successful Presentations* which you were registered to attend on 10 December because you misread the joining instructions.

The enclosed copy clearly shows that the correct details of time and place were sent to you.

If you want to try again, the programme runs again on 2 February next year, at the same venue. You will need to record your intention to attend in writing.

Yours sincerely

JOHN NICKSON

Sample 13.4

15 December 2005

Peter Smith
Clocktower Engineering Ltd
Arlton Road
London N 1

Dear Mr Smith

Seminar booking for 10 December 2005: *Making Successful Presentations*

You must have been annoyed to miss attending the above seminar for which you were registered as a delegate; I was sorry to receive your letter of 14 December setting out the circumstances.

The joining instructions (copy enclosed) sent to you did give the correct information, but we should perhaps have made the details clearer, especially as you were intending to attend at short notice.

Luckily the programme is scheduled to run again before too long. I have therefore moved your registration forward to the next date: 2 February 2006. The seminar will take place at the same venue. I hope this will be convenient for you, and that you will be able to put the date in your diary now while places are still available. Information about this (and about later dates, just in case) is enclosed.

My colleague, Sue Smith, will call you in a day or two to confirm the arrangements. I am sure you will find the programme useful when you do attend. If you have any special objectives in attending, do let us know; we aim to meet participants' needs as individually as possible.

I look forward to meeting you before too long.

Yours sincerely

JOHN NICKSON

Training Manager

Although the client in this example has obviously contributed to the confusion surrounding his non-attendance, letting the customer down lightly and offering an alternative is a better long-term strategy. The letter in Sample 13.4 adopts a friendlier tone, but is not unnecessarily apologetic and sets the facts out in a clear and unambiguous style. It also makes plain that the recipient needs to make a decision about the alternative offered, which is reinforced by the promised phone call to confirm what that decision will be. Finally, it opens the possibility of further communication with the offer of discussing what the recipient would like to get out of the training course before attending.

Stop and think 13.1

Look at the *structure* of the two letters in Samples 13.3 and 13.4. Which one do you think is better? Can you identify the elements which make a difference between the two?

Making it work 13.1

Tone and style

It is sometimes difficult to judge whether the tone and style of a written communication such as a business letter is right for the recipient. Here are some questions to ask as a check. If in doubt, and if the communication is an important one, it might also be useful to ask a colleague to read a draft and give their opinion.

- Who is going to receive this letter?
- What do I know about them?
- What are the circumstances surrounding this particular communication (for example, do you need to communicate bad news, is your letter a response to a complaint, etc.)?
- What is the letter intended to achieve?
- Will its objectives be clear to the recipient?
- Is the letter about the right length?
- Are all the key facts included?
- Is there anything which can be taken out?
- Is the language used clear and concise (no unnecessary jargon; good sentence structure; no grammatical or spelling errors, etc.)?
- Is the core message organised into a logical structure?
- If some action is required by the recipient, is this made clear?
- How would I respond if I received this letter?

4 The internal memorandum or memo

A memorandum or memo is a letter or note sent internally within an organisation. Before the advent of email, it was the main channel for this kind of communication with an individual or a group, and is used for upwards and downwards communication in organisations.

As with business letters, communication via memo is one-way and asynchronous. Memos cannot compete with email in terms of speed of delivery and feedback, but, also like letters, they can still have a role to play where a more formal or permanent record is needed, and can be used in conjunction with other channels, such as the telephone.

The layout of memos is typically standardised, and is generally simple and concise. It should always include the following elements:

- the name/s of the recipient/s (including those who might have copies)
- the name/s of the sender/s
- the date sent
- any references (department description or code)
- a clear heading describing the topic
- the core message.

Sample Internal memo 13.5

XYZ Company Ltd

Internal memorandum

To:	Kim Evans
	Imogen Green
Copy to:	Stuart Robinson
From:	Catherine Green
Date:	1 July 2005
Ref:	PROD02/0705
Subject:	**Preparations for New Product Launch**

I confirm that the final meeting to finalise arrangements for our new product launch will take place on Wednesday 13 July in Meeting Room B starting at 2.00pm. I'll be circulating a more detailed agenda next week, but wanted to make sure the date is in your diary.

There are two main types of memo:

1. transient: those exchanging information or instructions that will be made redundant by events, such as a memo arranging a rehearsal for a presentation
2. permanent records: those setting out policy, rules or instructions that must be retained and borne in mind, at least for a period.

Memos can be as important as letters. All the same elements about clarity, language and style apply, as do the possibilities of misunderstanding and the damage that can do. No communication should be dashed off unthinkingly just because it is internal. In this respect, and also in terms of purpose and style, the memo is the definite forerunner of internal email systems.

Test *yourself* 13.2

Give an example of when an internal memo might be a more appropriate channel than an internal email.

5 Email: first principles

Communication by email is now routine for both internal and external communication. Emails can be sent anywhere in the world and are received almost instantly. Like letters and memos, emails are a one-way communication channel which create a permanent record. However, the speed of delivery and the ease with which the recipient can respond creates a greater level of interactivity between sender and recipient than is possible with more traditional forms of written communication. This gives the impression of greater synchronicity even though the channel is still effectively asynchronous.

Email is usually considered to be a less formal channel than the business letter, but this is not always the case. It is still important to select an appropriate level of formality depending on the audience. In some cases, for example short messages to colleagues, informality may be acceptable, provided the meaning of the message is clear. Sending an email to other recipients, such as a customers or a senior colleagues, might require a different approach.

Because it can be difficult to read and absorb lengthy messages on screen, email is most appropriate for short, direct information giving or gathering. Additional information can be appended as an **attachment** (see below) or communicated via another channel. Because messages can easily be sent and received, communication can be one-to-one, one-to-many or many-to-one. Email software also allows recipients to respond directly to a message (sending a message either to the sender or to everyone who received the original message) or forward it to someone else for information or action.

attachment
A document or file sent with a letter or email.

Emails are sent through an ISP (Internet Service Provider) to the ISP of the recipient. The messages wait in the inbox until the recipient logs on to read them. In most organisations, it is possible to send email messages to other people in the same organisation as well as sending them to people outside the internal network. An organisation may have numerous offices all over the world, but the internal system allows for the email to be sent to colleagues wherever they are located.

6 Email: layout, structure and content

6.1 Layout and structure

Like business letters and memos, there is a standard format for an email message. They usually comprise the following elements:

- the name/s (email address/es) of the sender/s
- the name/s (email address/es) of the recipient/s (including those who might have copies)
- the date and time of the message, which is automatically added when a message is sent
- the subject heading
- core message
- sign-off and contact details.

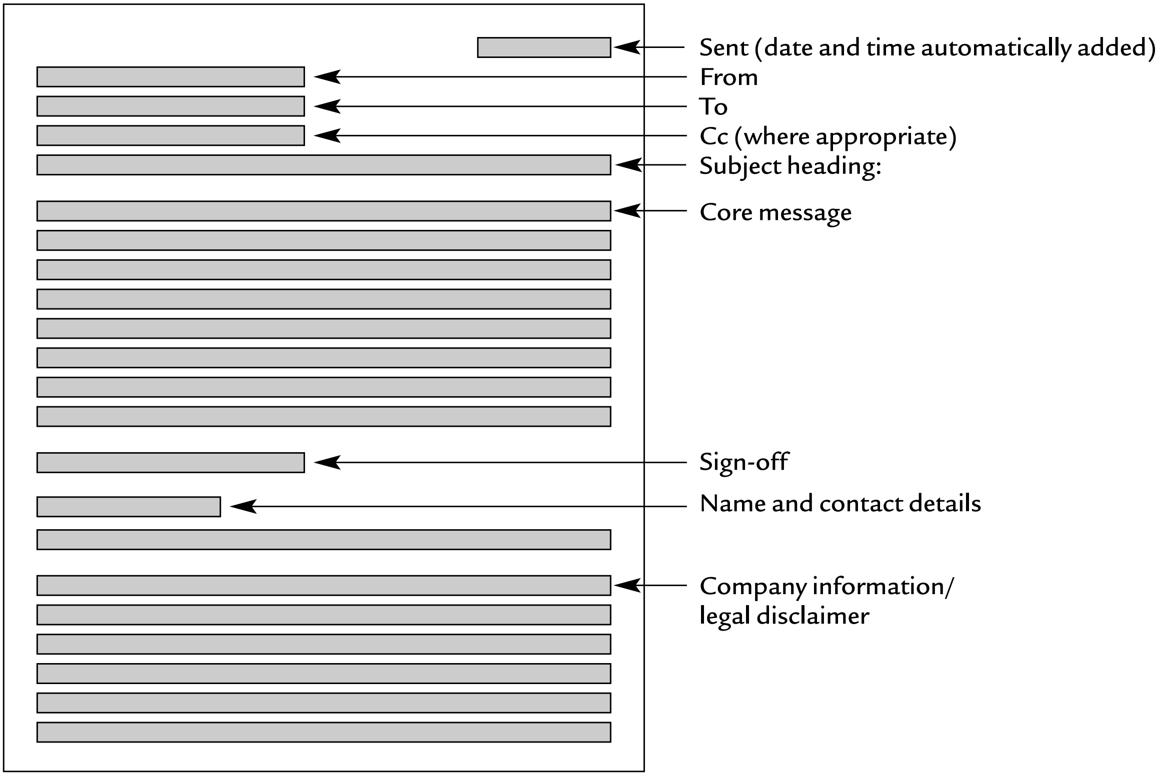


Figure 13.2 Sample email layout

Email addresses

There are millions of computers sending emails at all hours of the day and night. It is essential that each computer knows where it is and where the recipients of the emails are located. To do this each user needs a unique email address. This consists of four or five parts:

	user name	**at**	**domain**	**code**	**country**
	another	@	anycompany	.co	.uk
or:					
	another	@	anycompany	.com	

It is common for organisations to adopt consistent protocols for the first element of email addresses, such as initial+surname, surname+initial or firstnamesurname. This makes it easy to identify the email address for any one person in the same organisation. Spaces, punctuation and capitalisation are usually omitted.

Making it work 13.2

Email address clues

Think of the email messages you receive. There are several types of organisation and it is possible to work out from the code in an email address what type a particular one is. For example

ac	academic organisation
co or *com*	commercial organisation
edu	educational establishment
gov	government body or agency
org	a not-for-profit organisation

The fifth element of the address (when used) will also identify the country the message has been sent from, for example:

.uk	UK
.au	Australia
.hk	Hong Kong
.fr	France

This can provide useful information when receiving a message from someone for the first time.

Email software allows users to set up an address book of email addresses so that it is easy to find and use the addresses of regular contacts. It is also possible to set up groups of recipients, such as a project team or department. Most organisations also provide access to a directory of email addresses for all staff.

Subject heading

The subject heading has the same purpose as a heading in a letter or a memo, but is particularly important in email as it appears in the receiver's inbox alongside the name of the sender and the date and time the message was sent. It therefore acts as a summary of or guide to the message itself. The subject heading field should always be used and used effectively: a short, descriptive heading is usually most appropriate. The subject heading can also be used for any customer reference or other identifier which will help the recipient to put the message in context.

When replying to an email, the software will automatically add a 'Re:' to the original subject heading to show that the new message has been sent in response to an original message. If the email exchange involves several messages, it is good practice to review the original subject heading to make sure it is still relevant for what is being communicated.

Sign-off

There are no hard and fast rules about email sign-offs, and the exact wording will usually reflect the general level of formality adopted. In most cases, the sign off will be less formal than for a business letter: 'Best wishes', 'Many thanks' or 'Regards' are common. It is important, though, to include the full name of the sender with other contact details such as address and telephone number to give the recipient a range of options for responding to or clarifying the message. Additional information – most commonly the organisation's website address – can be added, especially on external email messages. Signatures can be set up as a default so that they appear at the end of every message sent.

Many organisations also arrange for a legal disclaimer to be added automatically to all email messages to cover, for example, the implications of an email being sent to the wrong person or to state that the sender has made all reasonable attempts to guard against the inadvertent transmission of a virus (see Chapter 5).

Sample Email disclaimer 13.6

'The information contained in this email is confidential and may be subject to legal privilege. If you are not the intended recipient, you must not use, copy, distribute or disclose the email or any part of its contents or take any action in reliance on it. If you have received this email in error, please email the sender by replying to this message.

All reasonable precautions have been taken to ensure no viruses are present in this email. XYZ Company cannot accept responsibility for loss or damage arising from the use of this email or attachments and recommend that you subject these to your virus checking procedures prior to use.'

Stop and think 13.2

Think about the emails you send and how you sign off. Do you always use the same wording? Is this always appropriate?

6.2 Style and content

The same basic rules of written communication – identifying clear objectives, assessing the audience, selecting an appropriate level of formality, being clear about any response required – apply equally to emails as to letters. However, there are some other considerations which are specific to email because of its channel characteristics, particularly the speed and ease with which emails can be sent and received.

Short, simple and straightforward

As outlined above, emails are most suited to short, straightforward messages, and the style they employ should reflect this. The message should be:

- brief: use plain words and short paragraphs and line lengths
- direct: clear presentation, no ambiguity
- logical: with a clear structure.

This does not mean that all messages must be written in an informal style. It is still important to differentiate between a message sent to an internal colleague and a message to a key client. Both messages may be brief and to the point – in line with the channel – but the style and language used will undoubtedly be different.

If the message needs to cover complex matters, it is better to attach a more detailed explanation or send this by another channel, for example, a follow-up letter. Emails are usually intended to be read quickly, and the content should reflect this.

When replying to messages and your reply is integrated into the original text, make sure that the responses you insert are in a different colour to draw attention to revisions and insertions.

Informality and accuracy

The speed and relative informality of email is sometimes seen as a justification for lower standards of spelling, grammar and punctuation. There is no reason to assume that this is acceptable; spelling errors and bad grammar act as a barrier to written communication whatever channel is being used.

Tone

Using the appropriate tone and style in an email is especially important, because it is instant and non-retrievable. As with other written communication, there is no tone of voice, facial expression, posture, body language and gestures to augment your message. As email is a rapid and concise form of communication; the detail matters.

Lack of thought

The speed of email can also contribute to confusion or embarrassment. The ease with which is possible to send or forward an email to the wrong person should give all email users pause for thought – and make them think carefully about what they commit to writing. Email seems to encourage a tendency towards ill thought-out messages which can be transmitted at the touch of a button, especially in response to another email.

Signposting and urgency

A clear heading will make the purpose of the message immediately apparent. It is also helpful to flag any (real) urgency and say whether, and perhaps when, a reply is needed. Most email software allows senders to set a priority level for messages. This can be another useful prompt, but becomes meaningless if overused.

Emails as postcards

It is sometimes said that an email is more like a postcard than a letter. Because of how they are transmitted and stored, they are generally more widely accessible than letters or memos. Emails are not necessarily opened only by the person named in the 'Send to' box. It is possible that colleagues have access to another person's mailbox, for example when someone is sick or on holiday. It is important to bear this in mind when writing the message. For this reason, too, email is not generally an appropriate channel for confidential or sensitive messages.

6.3 Attachments and hyperlinks

Attachments

Email is made infinitely more useful because documents and files can be attached to email messages. Attachments can include word processed documents, images, sound or video files. It is even possible to email computer programs. When an attachment is sent, the email program copies the file from where it is located and attaches it to the message. The advantage of sending documents and files as attachments is the speed and efficiency of communications. The recipient of the documents can keep these on file and can edit, return or forward them as necessary.

Image files can take some time to upload and download, so it is advisable to keep these to a minimum if speed is important. If security is an issue, an attachment should be sent as a PDF (Portable Document Format). PDF documents can be created in such a way that they may be printed but not amended – ensuring the integrity of the printout. They can also be password-protected.

If an email is to include an attachment, this should be referred to and described in the core message. If the attachment is in a different or unusual format, it is a good idea to ensure beforehand that the recipient's computer is able to receive these files in readable form. It is also important to think carefully about the size of the attachment being sent, as shown in Making it work 13.3.

Making it work 13.3

(Is This The Way To) a computer crash

In 2005, a spoof video of the song (Is This The Way To) Amarillo, performed by British soldiers on service in Iraq, crashed the UK's Ministry of Defence computers. Troops in the Royal Dragoon Guards shot a home video of their version of the song and then emailed it to Army friends in London. So many tried to download it that the MoD server could not cope.

The MoD went on record as saying the spoof was 'brilliant' and the crash did not cause problems. For them, maintaining morale on operations was considered to be more important than the crash itself, which was described as 'unfortunate' rather than disastrous: the crash did not affect operations and the system was soon up and running again.

hyperlink
An electronic cross-reference. The user clicks the link, which is highlighted on a web page, to access related information either on the same website, or on a different site altogether.

Hyperlinks
Inserting **hyperlinks** into email messages is particularly useful when something that is available on a web page needs to be communicated to your recipient. The recipient simply clicks on the link and opens the web page. However, in most cases, hyperlinks should be used as an enhancement to, rather than a replacement for, the core message. For example, in an email responding to a request for product information, the response might include a link to an online catalogue, but this would need to be explained carefully, and should also be accompanied by an alternative, such as offering printed promotional materials.

6.4 Email security

In certain cases, it might be necessary to transmit sensitive or confidential information by email. For example, in the financial services sector, email might be an effective channel for communicating records of transactions or customer details quickly and efficiently. In these instances, there are devices which can be used to improve security.

Electronic signatures
Electronic signatures (or digital IDs) are used to encrypt (code) an email message to ensure that it is read only by the intended recipient. They can also be used to prevent a third party sending false or misleading information under your name. Digital IDs work by proving the sender's identity in electronic transactions, rather like producing your driving licence or passport when communicating face to face. They are obtained from independent certification authorities whose websites contain a form which when completed contains your personal details, and instructions on installing the digital ID. This is used to identify emails and ensure security of your messages.

Encryption
Encryption is a special way to send sensitive information by email. It is a form of electronic code: one code is used to encrypt the message and another code is used to decrypt it. One key is private, and the other is public. The public key is passed to whoever needs to use it, whether they are sending the message (in which case they would use it for encryption) or if they are receiving the email (they would use it to decrypt the message).

7 Email: benefits and pitfalls

The benefits of email as a communication channel are clear. It is quick, easy to use and can prompt rapid action and boost efficiency. It is also now possible to communicate across the globe and its various time zones within minutes and cost-effectively.

Making it work 13.4

The global power of email

As an example of what is possible, a company located in Wisconsin, USA emailed its service consultants in Cambridge, UK about obtaining a specific part for a processing machine.

The UK office emailed the manufacturers in Manila, Philippines for information. They responded by email within minutes. The reply was then transmitted back to the US company.

Total time taken – 17 minutes to circumnavigate the world and deliver exceptional service.

Email can also be used to record the details of the communication by showing when an email has been sent, received, opened and read by the recipient. This can be important in some time-critical instances, such as in finance, banking, law and property.

However, as with most communication channels, email is not without its pitfalls.

Over-reliance on email

In the working environment, emailing is often used as a substitute for other kinds of communication, such as face-to-face meetings or even informal exchanges of information. The use of email can be overdone, reducing personal contact to the detriment of relationships and collaboration. Emails can document discussions and send high impact messages around the world at the click of a mouse. But they can also mislead people into thinking they can communicate with large groups of people solely through regular group emails. Email is efficient but the 'impersonal' non-direct contact means that people feel can feel slighted by the loss of the personal touch. It is important to balance the efficiency of email with the benefits of personal interaction and the use of a variety of communication channels.

Overload

One of the biggest problems of email is the large number of messages received every day. This is exacerbated by perception that it is almost a synchronous channel, with messages requiring an immediate response, and the reality that it is increasingly easy to access email from outside the workplace. This can cause obvious problems for the receiver, who may be expected to read, understand and respond to a quite complex message in an unrealistically short time solely because of the channel through which it has been communicated. Overload is also a potential problem for the sender: an important message might have to compete for attention with many other, less important ones.

Email abuse

The exchange of personal email messages can waste much time in the workplace, and many organisations have developed email use policies and guidelines to provide some ground rules and allow for monitoring (see Chapter 5). Recent case law has also highlighted the dangers of personal or supposedly humorous workplace emails which have been misinterpreted by recipients.

Making it work 13.5

Email and time management

Computer Associates, one of the world's largest software companies, acted to stop their employees constantly checking their email. Logging in was restricted to three times each day. Other approaches include limiting all messages to one screen or imposing a notional charge on departments to cover the computing costs.

Making it work 13.6

Keeping email under control

It is difficult to control the number of emails which arrive in an inbox, but it is possible to manage them once they are there. Here are some tips for keeping email under control:

- Read through, and, if possible, clear the inbox every day.
- Create a series of folders for filing important messages, but only keep what is absolutely necessary and review the folders regularly.
- Categorise items that are urgent and items that will require work later.
- Delete any emails that are irrelevant or unimportant.
- Unsubscribe from email lists which are irrelevant or clutter up the inbox unnecessarily.
- Copy yourself (cc) or blind copy (bcc) yourself a message when responding to emails where arranging a meeting or promising a response or sending information.
- Ration the reading of emails to, say, three times a day, early morning, midday and end of day. Reading messages as soon as they flash on the screen causes severe interruptions.
- Delete messages that you've dealt with and empty the Deleted folder regularly.
- Don't let messages build up in the Sent Messages folder.

Technical problems and viruses

All computer-based systems can be affected by technical problems. If technical problems put your system out of action this can cause problems; and technical back-up needs to be in place. Beware of opening messages from unidentifiable sources, particularly with attachments. These can contain viruses or micro-programs that can access the information held on the recipient's PC and, using email address books, send the virus to other contacts too. These issues are looked at in more detail in Chapter 5.

Junk email

Junk email – or 'spam' – is just as irritating as the junk mail that arrives through the letterbox. Anti-spam filters do not catch everything, but they certainly reduce the volume of spam reaching email inboxes. Replying to spam will often make things worse as the spammer will know that the email address is valid, will continue to use it and will circulate it to other spammers. Some unwanted messages from specific email addresses can be blocked. When a sender is blocked, their message will be diverted straight into the Deleted Items folder.

Making it work 13.7

Email dos and don'ts

Given the potential pitfalls of sending email messages, it may be useful to review the following list:

Don't

- send emails just because they are easy
- use them to the exclusion of all other forms of communication
- send a response in anger or frustration
- put something in an email that is confidential; it can be abused.
- forward someone's email without their permission
- assume your recipient wanted it and is desperate to receive it
- copy a message more widely than is necessary.

Do

- think about why you are sending an email and whether email is the most appropriate channel for the message
- use the 'send later' button if in doubt about sending an email
- reply promptly; because email is quick, a reply is generally expected
- be polite and friendly but never assume familiarity
- keep attachments to a minimum.

Test *yourself* 13.3

Identify three potential pitfalls of email as a communication channel.

Summary

- Business letters are used to communicate inside and outside the organisation. Because they provide a formal and permanent record they are particularly appropriate for use in situations where the terms and conditions of any agreement need to be clear, or where a formal message needs to be communicated. They are also used for long and complex messages, giving the recipient the opportunity to read and review the content in their own time.
- Business letters conventionally follow a standard format, and are printed out on the organisation's letterhead. The quality and design of the letterhead should be carefully thought through and should contain contact details for the organisation. In the UK, legislation also requires specific information relating to the company's status and registration to be included.
- As with any form of communication, for maximum effect, a business letter should be carefully planned, and structured in a logical fashion. The purpose of the letter should be clear to the reader and the style should be tailored to their needs.
- Until email took hold, internal memos were the most common form of internal written communication. Like business letters they provide a permanent written record and can, for example, be used to set out policies or instructions.
- Email is now a routine method of communication both inside and outside the organisation. It is quick and easy to use, and allows cost-effective and efficient

communication across the globe. This has improved the efficiency of organisations and opened up new markets.

- Although email is often regarded as being a more informal channel than a business letter, it is still important to pay attention to the basics of careful planning to make sure that your message is appropriate to its recipient in tone and style.
- Because it is so simple and convenient, email is often used instead of a more personal interaction, face to face or on the telephone. This can mean a deterioration in the personal relationships between colleagues in an organisation or its customers and suppliers. Users also need to keep track of all their incoming and outgoing messages.
- Security and privacy are issues which can affect the use of email.

Written communications II 14

List of topics

1 Business reports
2 Report format and structure
3 The report writing process
4 The art of summarising
5 Business planning and business plans
6 Mission statements
7 Advertising
8 Newsletters
9 Press relations and press releases

Introduction

Chapter 13 looked at the main written communication channels used for a variety of general business communications. This chapter looks at a range of written communications which have more specific purposes. Again, for each channel, emphasis is placed on the principal uses of each of these formats, outlining key channel characteristics and giving examples of presentation, style and content.

For written channels such as business reports or press releases, the relationship between what the communication is intended to achieve and how it is communicated is very clearly defined. The use of established formats and conventions is in itself an important part of how the message is communicated and received. For example, a busy journalist is likely to respond more positively to a press release sent to them in a format they expect and understand, and which enables them to extract the information they need as efficiently as possible. Similarly, a complex business report will benefit from an organisation which summarises the content at the outset and separates out ancillaries such as detailed evidence from the core message.

1 Business reports

A **report** is a written document which presents a series of facts on a specified subject for a particular purpose. A report is generally prepared as an aid to decision making. Reports can be informal or formal, produced regularly to a set format or as a one-off on a particular topic or for a particular project. In size, they can range from a single page summary to a lengthy and complex document involving several authors. Table 14.1 outlines some common types of report and some practical examples of their use.

report
A written document which presents a series of facts on a specified subject for a particular purpose.

1.1 Objectives and specification

Because of the complex nature of longer reports which are not based on an established or predetermined format, identifying why the report needs to be written and the scope

Type	Example of purpose
Executive briefing	The factory manager provides the managing director with a concise summary of the main issues and likely questions on health and safety prior to a shareholders' meeting when the issue is likely to be raised.
Research results	A market research executive at a medical charity is investigating the impact of a recent donor recruitment campaign. She presents the findings from a telephone survey to the charity's trustees and senior managers.
Regular update	On a weekly basis, the management accountant of a major retail chain advises regional managers of their profitability performances by branch and geographic area.
Business proposal	An entrepreneur contacts a venture capital company to offer a possible equity stake in her new leisure business. She provides them with a business plan to read before attending the presentation.

Table 14.1 Types of report: some practical examples
Source: *Successful Organisational Communication*, 2nd edition, Blundel, R., Pearson Education Limited. Copyright © Pearson Education Limited 2004.

terms of reference
The detailed objectives, specifications and remit of, for example, a particular report or a regular committee.

of what it is to cover is the first key report writing task. A report's objectives are sometimes referred to as its **terms of reference** and are often reproduced as part of the introductory section of the final written report to set the context for what follows. Standard terms of reference will identify in detail what the report is intended to achieve, including:

The intended audience
Who has asked for the report to be written and who will be reading it? This has obvious implications for overall style and tone, and for the use of language. For example, the use of technical jargon may be appropriate for certain audiences, but not for others.

Scope
Exactly what the report is to cover, including, in some cases, any limitations, exceptions or boundaries.

Aims
What the report is intended to achieve: for example, will it need to summarise certain findings, provide information or make recommendations?

Sources
The initial stages of specification also involve an assessment of the sources on which the report will be based (where the information will come from) and the procedures which will be used to access or interpret these (how the information will be used). The practicalities of access and availability should also be borne in mind.

The schedule/deadline
When the report is needed and, if necessary, a schedule for the key stages of its production.

2 Report format and structure

2.1 Format and structure

Reports generally have a defined structure, depending on the level of formality required. Informal or shorter reports may only need a simple structure which outlines:

- the title
- introduction
- report core, where the key information and findings will be presented
- conclusions and/or recommendations
- details of who has compiled the report
- the date the report was submitted.

Sample A short business report 14.1

Proposed housing on Footsway Meadows

Introduction

The Housing Committee has been asked to report to the Council on whether or not an estate should be built on Footsway Meadows.

The Committee has had three meetings to discuss this matter and a number of reports have been received from the Borough Surveyor and the Legal Department.

Legal considerations

Our Legal Department reports that there are no restrictions, i.e. no rights of any kind and no encumbrances that would prevent building.

The site

There are some problems. The site is triangular and this would mean that those houses built too close to the apex will have much smaller gardens than those on the other side. But this is not a major drawback and it does seem possible to build two- or three-storey houses. We have been informed by the water, gas and electricity authorities that these services are already available.

The contract

We understand that a few of the contractors in town are not busy, so we should expect some competitive tenders.

Conclusion

We would recommend the Council proceeds and decides to build here because we have heard that private developers are interested in the site. We thus suggest the following steps:

1 The Council should find out what grants may be available.

2 The Council should ask for tenders.

J. Knox

Chairman, Housing Committee

15 September 2005

A more formal or complex report will expand on this basic structure to allow for the inclusion of more detail, and provide signposts and summaries to help readers find their way through the material. The main elements of this kind of report are as follows.

Title page

A separate sheet which provides not only the title of the report, but also its author/names/s and their affiliations and its publication date.

Executive summary

This is a summary of the report as a whole, providing an overview of its scope, purpose and findings and usually focusing on any conclusions or recommendations. This enables the reader to make an initial assessment before embarking on the detail that follows. In some contexts, for example academic research reports, an executive summary is known as an abstract.

Introduction

The introduction to a report must:

- set the scene by linking to, or outlining, the terms of reference or any other prompt for the report to be written
- state the topic and theme
- outline the sources of information used and/or the procedures used to collect or analyse this information
- make the objectives clear
- help to position the report as appropriate for, and important to, the reader
- begin to get into the topic, creating a thread that helps draw the reader through the first part to the core of the report.

Report core (or findings)

This is where the 'meat' of the report will be. In some cases, the core will comprise a number of chapters, and even the simplest report core should be broken down into logical and easily identifiable paragraphs, using sub-headings and section numbering for ease of reference (see below). Each paragraph should deal with a discrete topic. The key aims of the report core are to:

- present the detail of the report's message (findings)
- maintain and develop interest
- lead into the conclusion and recommendations.

Conclusion and recommendations

These may be one section or two separate sections, depending on the report's terms of reference. The concluding section pulls together the report's arguments and/or findings, relating back, where possible, to the original objectives. The recommendations section is used to indicate alternative or preferred courses of action based on the findings of the report. It might also recommend that additional research should be undertaken to clarify or develop what has been covered in the original report.

References

This section provides details of the sources or evidence used in compiling the report. The extent and style of presentation in this section will depend on the context in which the report is being written. For example, business reports tend to include only minimal referencing, usually through the device of numbered notes. In contrast, academic research reports tend to include extensive referencing to sources and other information on which the research has been based or to which it is related, and there are a number of conventions for listing full bibliographical details and linking these to references within the text.

Appendices

Appendices are used to provide additional supporting evidence or data. This type of material is positioned at the end of the report to prevent it interfering with the flow and argument of the report core. Report writers may be tempted to include a vast array of appendices to indicate thoroughness or completeness, but this is not always necessary. Appendices should only be included if they are of direct relevance and help the report to meet its objectives.

Test *yourself* 14.1

Identify the main elements which make up a typical formal business report.

2.2 Signposting and navigation

The report writer should make it as easy as possible for the recipient/s to read and understand the message they are trying to communicate. A clear and logical structure (as described above) and devices such as an executive summary or abstract will help with this, but there are a number of other ways to signpost and aid navigation.

Contents list

A report's contents list is probably the single most important navigational device that will be used. Depending on the complexity of the report, this will include opening page references for the main sections or chapters, and sometimes the main sub-sections. Particularly long reports may also be indexed.

Section heading and numbering

Section headings help to identify individual sections of the report and help the reader to find their way around the report. They also help to break up the text visually and make it easier for the reader to work through a page. Headings should always follow a logical sequence. For more formal reports, they can be numbered to help establish a hierarchy of heading levels. For example: section 1 will comprise section 1.1, 1.2 and 1.3; section 1.1 might also in turn comprise sub-sections 1.1.1 and 1.1.2. This can help if the report requires cross-referencing between sections.

Consistent use of type/typefaces

A hierarchy of heading levels can also be established by using a range of type sizes and styles. Main section or chapter headings are usually bigger and more prominent that sub-headings, and may be presented in bold or italic type for additional emphasis. It is also important to establish a style for bullet points, extracts and the presentation of any graphical material throughout the report; using these consistently will improve the flow of information.

Presenting information graphically
Breaking up the written text with tables, figures and charts will add impact and interest. Graphics should always be relevant and referenced in the text itself. They should also appear in a logical place in the text, close to, but after, the text reference.

Stop and think 14.1

Look closely at the page layout of this textbook. Can you identify how the hierarchy of heading levels is established by a combination of numbering and type styles?

3 The report writing process

The process of actually writing a report can be a daunting one, but can be broken down into three key stages:

1. analysing (or, in some cases, creating) the terms of reference to master the brief
2. researching, marshalling and organising the necessary information or data
3. drafting and refining the report itself.

3.1 Drafting the report

Depending on the terms of reference, decide on an appropriate structure for the report; there is a close relationship between the structure of a report and how content is written and presented. It is generally best to compile the core of the report first, adding in the opening and closing sections at a late stage. The executive summary or abstract should be compiled last, when the detail and focus of the report has been finalised. Choose a relevant title which refers to the terms of reference and identifies clearly what the report is about.

The order in which topics are covered is largely a matter of personal judgement, although the content may lend itself to a particular order, such as chronological, most important first or escalating complexity. Drafting an outline of the order in which topics will be presented, including main and sub-headings, will help. At this stage it is also useful to develop a template for heading and layout style. This can be done manually or via most word processing packages. Where a report is to be written by more than one person, such a template is essential to ensure consistency.

3.2 Style

It is important for the key findings and recommendations to emerge clearly from the report. The style employed needs to facilitate understanding, taking into account the existing knowledge and expectations of the audience at which it is aimed.

A more formal writing style is appropriate for most report writing. This means:

- using an impersonal rather than a personal style: 'Discussions with X revealed that . . .' rather than 'I spoke to X and he told me . . .'
- avoiding overfamiliar or colloquial language

- choosing words that have a precise meaning
- using facts with precision
- avoiding assertions that can't be substantiated.

3.3 Checking and refining the report

Once the first draft is complete, this should be reviewed to check that:

- the structure is logical and includes headings and sub-headings as appropriate
- internal cross-references are correct
- the language and tone are appropriate
- graphics have been used appropriately.

The whole draft will also need to be proofread for spelling, grammar and punctuation (see Chapter 12), and it may be helpful to ask a colleague to read the draft for sense and accessibility. Where the report has more than one author, it is good practice to identify a lead author or editor to carry out final checks for consistency.

Publishing the report
Most reports will be created on a PC and printed internally, although some more formal documents, such as a company's annual report and accounts or a tender for a large contract, may be typeset and printed professionally. These, and other, reports may also be made available via an organisation's website.

4 The art of summarising

Being able to make sense of a large body of information and data and summarise the key points succinctly is a valuable written communication skill. Much executive decision making is based on summaries and briefings prepared by junior colleagues, and most employees will be called upon at some stage to provide this kind of document.

The skills required to create a summary or briefing are similar to those needed for any written communication, and can be practised and reviewed in the same way. The basic process of summarising includes the following key stages:

- Be clear about the brief, based on what the recipient (audience) wants or the particular focus required.
- Review the source material carefully and systematically.
- Identify key points and arguments.
- Select an appropriate format and layout for the summary. Bullet points can often be a useful device.
- Draft the summary.
- Review and check the summary – internally and against the original.
- Prepare and present the final summary.

Stop and think 14.2

Select a report or other lengthy document recently published by your employer or with which you are familiar. Try to summarise the main findings in 500 words.

5 Business planning and business plans

business planning
The process of establishing objectives and formulating, evaluating and selecting the policies, tactics and strategies to achieve these objectives.

strategic plan
A document or strategy indicating in detail the timescale for an organisation's longer-term strategy and the resources available to achieve it.

A good deal of documentation is necessary in the area of **business planning**. For some, the term 'business plan' is synonymous with the summary document created as part of the process of securing investment in a new or growing business. However, the scope of business planning is much wider than this. All organisations should have a long-term or **strategic plan** and a shorter-term operational or tactical plan which is designed to ensure that the resources and competences are in place to deliver the strategies the organisation wants to pursue. Operational business plans are usually reviewed annually. In communication terms, creating the annual operation plan presents both challenges and opportunities.

A good operational business plan will:

- give the business direction
- enable people to identify clearly what is expected of them
- improve the control of the business
- help to identify key business areas and key business opportunities for the future
- help improve profitability
- identify how resources should be allocated.

The actual process of writing a business plan can also have positive effects. Involving people throughout an organisation can be highly motivating, and also carries the advantage of making the plan and its purpose clear to all involved.

5.1 Business plans: characteristics and formats

Business plans have some common channel characteristics:

- The audience for the plan may be a wide range of people, up and down the hierarchy of the organisation.
- Plans should be working documents, to be followed, discussed and used as a template for operations.
- A business plan is an *action* document: it needs to spell out what the organisation is setting out to achieve, how it will be done and specifically what will be done, by whom and when.
- They will inevitably include financial information alongside the more general commentary.
- By setting objectives, business plans are necessarily forward-looking.

Strategic vs operational plans

The purpose of strategic planning is to analyse and set the direction and scope of an organisation over the longer term. Because of the delay between plan and implementation, the plans themselves will be less detailed and precise, and may be expressed in more general terms. Typically, they set out to identify and link strategies in five key areas:

1. the market
2. production
3. research and development
4. organisational and management
5. financial.

In contrast, operational plans can be more concrete and specific because they cover shorter periods. Operational objectives need to be:

- quantifiable (a sales increase of 5%)
- time-limited (a sales increase of 5% in the next financial period)
- realistic and achievable.

Often, standard or tailored planning formats are used and a planning cycle, specifying all timings, agreed in advance. This cycle will need to take into account a facility to 'fine-tune' the plan and to incorporate reactions to it. Business plans need to be communicated effectively. Objectives are more likely to be met if they are agreed in advance with the person responsible for meeting them.

Test *yourself* 14.2

What is the difference between a strategic and an operational business plan.

6 Mission statements

A **mission statement** is a brief statement that describes, and encapsulates, what an organisation aims to achieve. By definition it must be:

mission statement
A generalised statement of the overriding purpose of an organisation.

- short (it could be only one sentence)
- absolutely clear
- focused externally on the market and customers.

Its importance is as much in the thinking that defines it as in its existence. Once it is decided and written; it is an active reminder to everyone internally and externally of the organisation's style and purpose. It is important that it is specific: if it is only a series of bland, good-sounding phrases – *we will be the best at what we do* – then it is unlikely to be so useful.

Some organisations link them tightly to goals:

> *'Its first responsibility is to its customers, its second to its employees, its third to the community, and its fourth to its stockholders.'* *(Johnson & Johnson)*

Others are better linked to the markets they serve, for example:

> *'To be the most successful computer company in the world at delivering the best customer experience in the markets we serve.'* *(Dell)*

or:

> *'Our vision is to be the world's best 'quick service restaurant'. This means opening and running great restaurants and providing exceptional quality, service, cleanliness and value.'*
>
> *(McDonald's)*

The largest challenge is to clarify what the content of the message should be rather than writing it; once decided, a succinct and memorable turn of phrase is needed to do the statement justice. Mission statements should be reviewed regularly (perhaps linked to the annual business plan preparation) and kept up to date and relevant.

Making it work 14.1

Mission statements in the workplace

The internal usefulness of a mission statement is often linked to the communication that accompanies it. It needs to be sold to staff. It needs to communicated with enthusiasm, and it needs to make sense in a way that links easily to the individual jobs people do. Like so much in business it is not, of itself, going to change anything; but used wisely it can be a powerful force.

Test *yourself* 14.3

What is the purpose of a mission statement?

7 Advertising

As outlined in Chapter 4, advertising is persuasive communication in bought space, and may be anything from a poster to a television or newspaper advertisement. The wording it carries (if it has any words) is only one element of it, albeit an important one. Advertising, therefore, relates to persuasion and marketing (see Chapters 4 and 6). Here we touch briefly on some key issues.

Advertising is a complex and multifaceted activity; it is just one part of the promotional mix used by organisations to communicate – and influence – customers and potential customers and as such has a variety of intentions. It can aim to cultivate a positive and particular image for an organisation, or prompt the sale of an individual product, or everything in between. Even saying that an advertisement is designed to prompt a sale is a generalisation: it can aim to do this in a multitude of ways, from getting someone to visit a retail store or a website to getting them to request and allow a visit to their home or office by a member of the field sales staff of the organisation (who have the job of converting interest generated by advertising into actual purchases).

7.1 Advertising formats

The degree of effectiveness of an individual advertisement is influenced by various factors. These include:

- How well targeted it is – it needs to appeal to the specific kinds of people who might realistically buy whatever product or service it offers.
- Whether it can be seen – it needs to appear in the right media appropriate to its target audience.

- Whether it is noticed – is it a size that will be noticed and does it look interesting, and will it appear often enough to have an impact?

Thereafter its effectiveness is down to what it says and how it says it; and how that appeals to the target audience. For example, if a product is being sold to a specific segment of the market – for example, young men with particular interests – it must be pitched in a style and tone with which they can identify. Table 14.2 identifies some popular advertising formats and how they are used.

Slice of life	Links a product with a lifestyle that is familiar to the target market. Popular for domestic appliances or fast-moving consumer goods.
Humorous	Visual or verbal humour used to secure audience attention and generate a positive response.
Aspirational	Uses imagery to enhance a brand identity or to suggest that the audience can obtain some element of a fantasy lifestyle by purchasing the product.
Endorsement	Gives the audience an assurance regarding the message because it is delivered by someone that they know and trust.
Demonstration	Shows products actually in use, which can be effective for new or difficult to understand products.
'Postmodern'	Bizarre and self-parodying advertisements where the promotional message appears obscure.

Table 14.2 Popular advertising formats
Source: adapted from *Successful Organisational Communication*, 2nd edition, Blundel, R., Pearson Education Limited. Copyright © Pearson Education Limited 2004.

Advertising is a creative process, one that uses images, humour, links to lifestyle and more to get people's attention and then communicate with them. The two things go together: some advertisements have a high recall (people remember seeing them), but a low identification with the product (people don't remember the product – or buy it). Sometimes advertisements win awards within the advertising industry, yet succeed little in affecting sales. Successful advertising must be both memorable *and* effective.

Stop and think 14.3

Look at the advertisements in a magazine or newspaper. Using the categories outlined in Table 14.2, identify which descriptor most accurately fits the range of advertisements published.

7.2 The purpose and intention of advertising

All advertisements should relate to the product or service, its market and potential market. As a communication, it can perform a variety of tasks:

- To provide information: An advertisement can act as a reminder to current users of the product's existence.
- To persuade: It can attempt to persuade current users to purchase again, non-users to try the product for the first time and new users to change brands or suppliers.
- To create cognitive dissonance: This means that advertising can help to create uncertainty about the ability of current suppliers to best satisfy a need. In this way, advertising can effectively persuade customers to try an alternative product or brand.
- To create reinforcement: Advertising can compete with competitors' advertising, which itself aims to create dissonance, to reinforce the idea that current purchases best satisfy customers' needs.
- To reduce uncertainty: Advertising may also aim to reduce the uncertainty felt by customers immediately following an important and valuable purchase, when they are debating whether or not they have made the correct choice.

Clearly, the intention of the advertisement will dictate the approach and format an advertisement will take.

Intention can be summarised as:

- The basic proposition – the promise to the customer, the statement of benefit.
- The 'reason why' or proof justifying the proposition – making the proposition as convincing as possible.
- The 'tone of voice' in which the message should be delivered – the image to be projected, and the relationship between this and the image the recipient has of himself.

The acronym AIDA (Attention, Interest, Desire, Action) provides a summary guide to the thinking which might underpin an effective advertisement. This is shown in Table 14.3.

Attention	To create initial attention and persuade prospects to look further you must be in the right media, take an appropriate space and use a headline or picture to provide a strong first impression.
Interest	Interest is created by involving the prospect, by telling them why they will benefit/what problems will be solved, presenting facts to build the case and describing quality.
Desire	To prompt desire within the reader it must continue to focus on them. Spell out the benefits, enthuse and communicate clearly, simply and credibly. Then they start to want more.
Action	A summary may link the overall message to the injunction to act. If possible, specify the action you want, make it easy (perhaps offer a choice) and stress why such action is good for the prospect (rather than for you) – keep stressing benefits throughout and consider adding some urgency.

Table 14.3 Advertising intention

Test *yourself* 14.4

Identify four purposes an advertisement may fulfil.

8 Newsletters

The term 'newsletter' usually describes something produced to look more like a newspaper or magazine than a report. They are usually, but not always, produced regularly (maybe monthly or quarterly). The timing might continue for a while – several years – or run for a specified and transient period (a weekly bulletin circulated during a company takeover to inform and reassure staff, for instance).

The reason for the format is to present the information in a more interesting or palatable way. Newsletters may be used to provide information to groups such as:

- employees
- customers
- shareholders
- members or supporters (of, for instance, a charity or association).

The objectives can reflect the full gamut of business communications; a newsletter or an item in a newsletter might aim to inform, persuade or educate or an combination of these. The formality and style of the writing must reflect whatever the aim(s) may be.

Overall, though, newsletters tend to deal with matters:

- in a reasonably informal manner
- succinctly (referring people elsewhere if more detail is necessary)
- in the context of other items (like a magazine).

They are, as their name suggests, vehicles for news. Thus matters in them should ideally be recent; if every recipient regards them as 'old news' then they will not command attention.

A further consideration is that newsletters are often used to promote a dialogue. Thus they might aim to prompt orders or enquiries from customers, suggestions from employees, participation from members. Feedback channels need to be made clear and the content needs to be persuasively written.

Despite their informal nature, they must also be dynamic. There is a danger of newsletters being seen as a fixed part of the status quo. If the content has also become stale and boring it can begin to do more harm than good. A rethink or redesign may be necessary. A change in frequency may be appropriate; or sometimes the newsletter should be discontinued and the resources used to produce it deployed elsewhere.

Newsletters must not be thought of as a panacea. They may need to work in tandem with other communications methods to be effective. For example, a matter may be flagged ahead in a newsletter to get people thinking about it, then dealt with in detail in a later meeting.

9 Press relations and press releases

Press or media relations is an important aspect of **public relations** or PR. Media such as the press, radio and television are an important PR channel because, as intermediaries, they are perceived as being more impartial in reporting information than an originating organisation with a vested interest in their external communications being positively

public relations (PR)
A planned and sustained effort to establish and maintain goodwill and mutual understanding between an organisation and its public.

received. Coverage of the benefits of a new product in a national newspaper article, for example, would provide a significant boost to the overall launch strategy. Communication via the media can also be more cost-effective than other marketing communications such as large budget advertising campaigns.

However, encouraging the media to communicate a message on your behalf is not a straightforward process:

- There is no guarantee that your message will be reported or, if it is, reported positively.
- By its very nature, the media is looking for news stories, and is only interested in reporting information or events which are original or truly newsworthy.
- The media is not a homogeneous group. For example, a story which might be of interest to a specialist trade magazine would be unlikely to make it on to national television.

Apart from the largest and highest profile organisations and individuals, who by their very nature are of interest to a range of channels and who might command a more proactive approach from the media, securing media coverage is a communications challenge. Because of this, it is important to improve the chances of success by being aware of media expectations of how and in what format information is received by them. One important element of communications with the media is the issuing of **press or news releases**.

press (news) release
A precisely written communication designed to prompt a mention of something that can be described as news about an organisation in various media.

9.1 Targeting a press release

As with other forms of communication, planning and sending successful messages to the news media via a press release involves an appreciation of the audience who will be receiving the message, in this case the media. It also requires an understanding of the audience which the particular medium is itself engaging with. More specialist media channels, such as local newspapers or the specialist trade press, allow for the more precise targeting of a well defined audience. National or more general coverage may be wider, but is also more difficult to secure and less precise in its delivery.

Understanding what a particular media channel is looking for is crucial to the success of a press release. Do not 'cry wolf': save releases for when you really have a story. If you send a series of contrived releases, there is a danger that a good one among them will be ignored.

9.2 Structure, format and style

There are two, perhaps conflicting, aspects of putting together a press release that will stand a good chance of publication:

1. Comply with the accepted standard format demanded and understood by the media to whom releases are sent (see below).
2. Stand out as being of genuine interest from the very large number of releases received.

Figure 14.1 shows a typical structure for a press release, which is also described in more detail below.

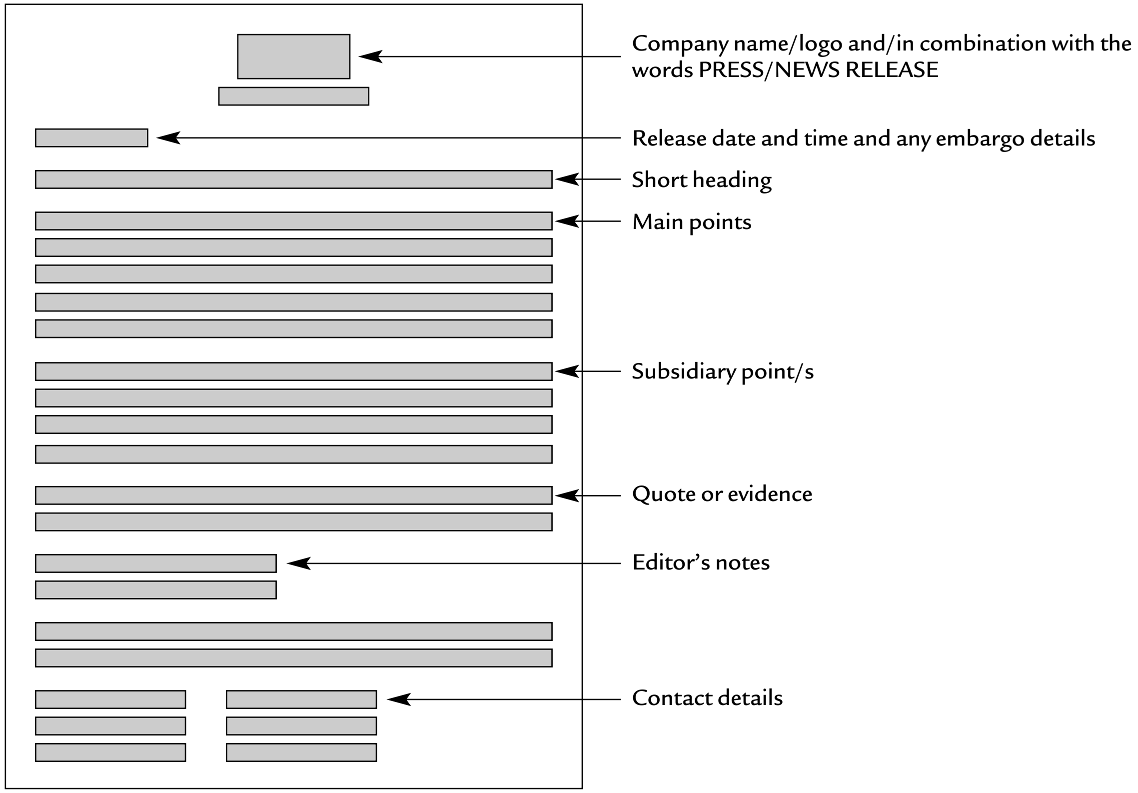


Figure 14.1 Standard press release structure

Signposting and gaining attention

A press release should carry the words 'Press Release' (or 'News Release') at the top. Some organisations have special stationery printed for this purpose.

The date and time of the release should come next, preferably at the top left-hand side of the first page. If an embargo is necessary, it should be clearly stated: 'EMBARGO: not to be published before (time) on (date)'. Underline or use capitals for emphasis.

A short descriptive heading should indicate clearly the contents of the release or aim to generate interest in it.

The first sentences are crucial and need to summarise as far as possible the total message. Place the most important or newsworthy facts at the top of the release.

Provide evidence

Try to attribute opinions to third parties where possible: for example, having an accountant saying '. . .this event is being arranged for all those who are interested in minimising their tax liability' is better than '. . .this event will be of great interest to all those wanting to minimise their tax liability'. Quotes ascribed to a named individual can also work well.

Encourage follow-up

Always provide some brief background notes (for example, company or product information if relevant) and full contact details to make it easy for the recipient to clarify the message or find out more.

Presentation

Space the message out well with wide margins and leave reasonable gaps between paragraphs. This allows the recipient to make notes on it.

If the release runs to more than one page, make sure it says 'continued' or similar at the foot of the page. Breaking a sentence at the end of the page will make it more likely people will turn over. To make it absolutely clear that there is no more, many put 'end' at the foot of the last page.

Style

Use a style appropriate to the audience: short paragraphs, short sentences and two short words rather than one long one. Keep it brief, long enough to put over the message and on to a second page if necessary, but no more. Stick to the facts and present them concisely.

Avoid overt 'plugging' (although that may well be what you are doing). Do not mention names right at the beginning, for example, and do not overdo the use of adjectives, which can jeopardise credibility.

Carefully thought-out 'soundbites' might encourage the recipient to reproduce short messages as they stand.

Putting the case 14.1

Q What role will written communications play in the plans for, and launch of, the Hilltop Hotel extension?

A This kind of business development project will rely on a range of written communications channels in the run up to the launch, including the following:

- Chris Long and his senior team will undoubtedly need to create a detailed operational plan for the project, outlining issues such as costs and schedules, which can be used as a means of monitoring progress and identifying potential and actual issues.
- Technical and/or progress reports may be necessary from contractors or members of staff charged with managing particular aspects of the launch.
- Regular briefings and meetings with staff should be reinforced by regular emails outlining progress and/or key messages and instructions. Given that many of the staff work part-time or shifts, a regular printed newsletter might also be considered.
- Existing customers should be sent letters at the outset of the process explaining the change, perhaps in combination with a series of emails to update them as the work progresses. Nearer the launch, promotional letters may offer incentives to encourage customers to use the new facilities in the launch phase to generate a return for the new investment as quickly as possible.
- Advertising the new extension will hopefully bring in new customers.
- Recruitment advertising will also be needed to attract new staff. Once in place, they will need the usual written confirmation of their terms and conditions and access to the hotel's key policies and procedures.
- Coverage of what the new facilities offer in the local and any relevant trade press will undoubtedly help the launch. Press releases can be used to generate initial interest.

Test *yourself* 14.5

List six specific features you would expect to see in a well prepared press release.

Stop and think 14.4

Look through a newspaper and find a headline that intrigues you. Using the sample structure given above, write the press release that might have encouraged the newspaper to run the story.

Summary

- Reports are written documents which present a series of facts on a specified subject for a particular purpose. They can be informal or formal, produced regularly to a set format or as a one-off on a particular topic or project, and can range from a single page summary to a lengthy and complex document involving several authors.
- Reports generally have a defined structure, depending on the level of formality required. Informal or shorter reports may only need a simple structure: title, introduction, core message, conclusions/recommendations, author and date details. A more formal or complex report will expand on this basic structure to allow for the inclusion of more detail, and provide signposts and summaries to help readers find their way through the material.
- Being able to make sense of a large body of information and data and summarise the key points succinctly is a valuable written communication skill.
- Regular business planning involves a range of communication skills. All organisations should have a long-term or strategic plan and a shorter-term operational or tactical plan which is designed to ensure that the resources and competences are in place to deliver the strategies the organisation wants to pursue.
- A mission statement is a brief statement that describes, and encapsulates, what an organisation aims to achieve.
- The effectiveness of advertising as persuasive communication is influenced by factors such as targeting, visibility and whether it is noticed. Different advertising formats will appeal to different target audiences.
- Newsletters are usually produced to look more like a newspaper or magazine than a report, and aim to present information in a more interesting or palatable way. They are, as their name suggests, vehicles for news, and are generally informal and suitable for the communication of short, succinct messages.
- Press or news releases are an important element of communications with the media. There is an accepted standard format for press releases designed to appeal to the audience at which they are aimed.

15 Dealing with numbers

List of topics

Introduction

Numbers can clarify or confuse. Used well, they can have a dramatic and positive effect, highlighting and creating impact where a case might otherwise be weak. Contrast, for example: 'This scheme will make a significant improvement to productivity' with 'This scheme will improve productivity by a full ten percent': the value of the scheme is immediately enhanced, particularly to someone who understands just what a 10% increase would do. On the other hand, numbers can be used deliberately to confuse or obscure. For example, in marketing, confusion pricing creates a pricing structure of such complexity that it makes it difficult for a customer to undertake comparison with competitors. Mobile phone tariffs are an example of this with which many people are familiar. More commonly, the confusion is not deliberate; the well-meaning but ill conceived use of numbers will do nothing to aid communication and may well act as a barrier.

This chapter focuses on the positive aspects of using numbers, outlining a number of practical techniques to ensure numbers are communicated effectively. It also looks at how the graphic presentation of numerical information can, when used properly, aid understanding by allowing audiences to visualise information that might otherwise be difficult to interpret.

1 Using numbers

The use of numbers in communication needs to be carefully thought through, especially if the numbers form an important part of the message itself (for example, a company's annual report and accounts) or are being used to illustrate or enhance a message (for example, to support a presentation showing a product's market share, or to encourage an improved sales performance).

There are three key elements to this:

- selecting the right information
- communicating it effectively
- presenting the information in an appropriate format.

1.1 Selection

It is important to select what information is required, focusing on key information and leaving out anything that is unnecessary. The information needs to be tailored to the audience and fit for purpose; for example, a detailed bar chart included in a report appendix may well be an essential component of that particular communication channel; it is unlikely that the same information could be communicated effectively in a verbal presentation without supporting visual aids.

In some cases, key or summary information can be separated from the calculations that arrive at it. This can be done using appendices or devices such as boxed paragraphs in a report. This means that the main message includes only key figures, and the overall flow of the communication is maintained while more details can be accessed if required.

It is important to judge the level of numerical precision required. Sometimes precision helps understanding or is simply important, while on other occasions it can confuse and 'ball park' figures suit better. Making it work 15.1 shows how different levels of numerical precision can create different impressions, depending on the effect required.

Making it work 15.1

Numerical precision

Sales figures may be up, but there are a variety of ways to describe this.

- 'Sales are up': No detail might be necessary
- 'Sales are up about 10%': A broad estimate may be fine.
- 'Sales are up 10.25%': The precise figure may be important.
- 'Sales are up about £10,000': The actual amount may be more important than the percentage.

When using a percentage, what the figures refer to must be made clear. For example: 'Sales of product X are up 10.25% for the period January–June 2005'.

Similarly, it is possible to communicate the same numerical information in more than one way. For example, larger numbers can be broken down into smaller component parts that make more sense to the audience concerned, as illustrated by Making it work 15.2.

Making it work 15.2

Making sense of numbers

A firm of travel agents with 30 retail outlets was falling behind on its sales targets. Although it faced stiff competition, market conditions were good, and there seemed little reason to suggest that a more active, sales-oriented approach would not result in improved sales.

Initially, attempts were made to draw attention to the problem at every level. To try to engage with sales staff, memos were circulated giving actual annual sales vs budgets which showed quite clearly a shortfall of hundreds of thousands of pounds. The result? Well, certainly the sales graph did not rise. But, equally certainly, morale dropped. People went from feeling they worked for a successful organisation to thinking it was foundering; and feeling that the fault was being laid at their door. The figures meant little to the people who manned the counters – they were just

Making it work *(continued)* 15.2

unimaginably large numbers to which they were wholly unable to relate personally.

At the next sales conference, a different strategy was planned. The large shortfall was presented as a series of smaller figures relating to each retail outlet. For each outlet, clear 'catch-up' figures were linked to what needed to be sold, in addition to normal business, in order to catch up and hit target. At this level, the extra sales required amounted to just two additional holidays per branch, per week. This was something staff could easily relate to and which they felt they could actually achieve. Individual targets, ongoing communication to report progress and some prizes for branches hitting and beating the targets completed the picture. The result this time? The numbers slowly climbed. The gap closed. Motivation increased with success in sight. And a difficult year ended with the company hitting the original planned targets. In addition, motivation continued to run high as a real feeling of achievement was felt.

In this example, the sales numbers and the difficulty of achieving them did not change. However, how the numbers were communicated – and therefore perceived – did. By presenting the numbers in a more meaningful way for the audience, the sales targets became manageable, personal and – above all – achievable.

1.2 Graphical presentation

The graphical presentation of numbers helps the receiver by encoding the message in some kind of visual image. For example, a graph can convey an overall picture where a mass of figures cannot. There are a variety of different types of graphics used to present numbers, and these are described in more detail below. Allowing an audience to visualise the information is a distinct advantage, but to avoid confusion the type of graphical image selected must match the message and must be used correctly.

2 Communicating numbers effectively

Given the potential for numbers to be misused and misinterpreted, the rules for effective communication already discussed in earlier chapters most definitely apply.

In verbal communications, the speaker may want to slow the *pace* of delivery when dealing with numbers to allow the receiver more time to receive and interpret what is being said. For example, when leaving a message on a telephone answering machine, you will probably want to slow down when giving the return telephone number. Clear *articulation* is also important. *Signposting* can focus attention and prompt concentration and *checks* (such as 'Is that clear?') give the receiver the opportunity to clarify what has been said.

When used in written communications, numbers, and the words that accompany them, can be presented with different emphasis: in **bold type**, or *italics* perhaps, or in a larger typeface. There is also a difference between writing

- 10%
- 10 percent or
- ten percent.

Numbers must also be proofread carefully; even one figure wrongly typed might change the meaning radically.

Numbers are rarely used in isolation, and generally require explanation. Using the right words to accompany numbers can make a difference to understanding, for example, phrases such as 'note that this figure is an *estimate*' or 'this is the position *today*'. Consider too the different effects of '£149' compared with 'only £149' or 'less than £150'.

Using comparisons can also help. For example, comparisons with other periods of time – 'this is more than last year', or with other elements – 'administration costs are down, though customer service ratings are up' will help place the numbers in context. Comparisons can be made simply to aid description. This is especially helpful if figures are large or otherwise beyond the day-to-day experience of those for whom the numbers are being laid out. Thus an office extension might be described as *the size of a tennis court* when even an accurate number of square metres (and this may be there too) might fail to create an easy-to-grasp and accurate picture.

3 Graphs and charts

As outlined above, using graphics to present numerical data can help to provide a more immediate and accessible message. Various forms of graphics can be used, but it is important to select a format that is appropriate for the data and the audience and enhances or reinforces the message. The inappropriate use of graphs and charts serves to obscure rather than clarify.

3.1 Tables

A table is a way of presenting information in a series of columns and rows. They can be of varying degrees of complexity, and are often, though not exclusively, used when the information to be communicated is mainly numeric. Tables are particularly useful when there is a need to organise numbers and/or related information into a readily accessible summary. They also allow for basic calculations.

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total annual sales
Hong Kong	50	45	40	55	190
India	20	25	20	25	90
Ireland	10	5	15	10	40
UK	50	55	50	60	215
USA	100	90	95	110	395
Totals ($000s)	230	220	220	260	930

Figure 15.1 A table: total annual sales by geographical region (Q1–Q4)

3.2 Pie charts

Pie charts show the composition of a whole divided into a number of constituent parts, for example sales by geographical region. Each segment is labelled and often shows the value and/or percentage share. Components can be colour coded or, as in Figure 15.2, identified by different styles of shading.

Pie charts can be an especially vivid visual device and can communicate proportions of a whole more immediately and clearly than a table or a description. However, their impact is diminished if there are too many components to be shown clearly.

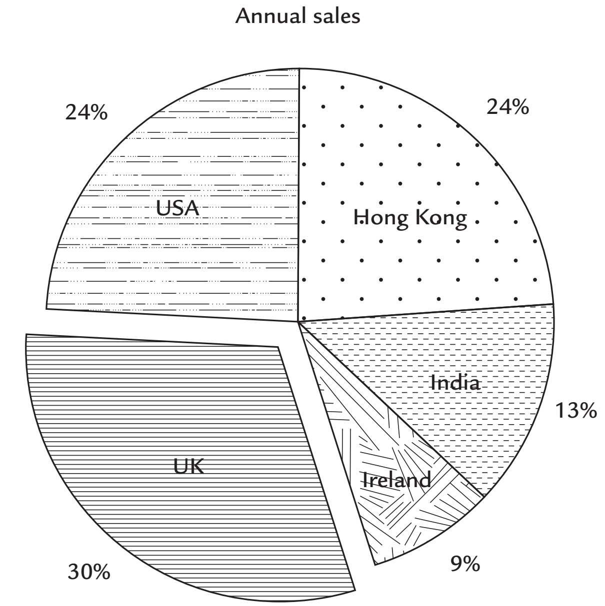


Figure 15.2 A pie chart: annual sales by geographical region

3.3 Bar charts

Bar charts are used to show comparative values, for example sales of different products. Each bar on the chart represents a particular value measured against a scale outlined on an **axis**. As in pie charts, the constituent elements can be colour coded or shaded to identify the component values, and the colour or shading scheme explained in a key.

axis
Reference lines used to identify values on, or elements of, graphics such as bar charts and line graphs.

More complex data can be presented using either multiple or component bar charts, which might, for example, indicate sales of different products in two or more regions (see Figure 15.3). In this case, the second axis is used to identify the component parts. The bar/s can be shown either horizontally or vertically.

Bar charts are a good alternative to pie charts when presenting and comparing quantities. Being able to read individual values using the scale can be an advantage where the data is more complex.

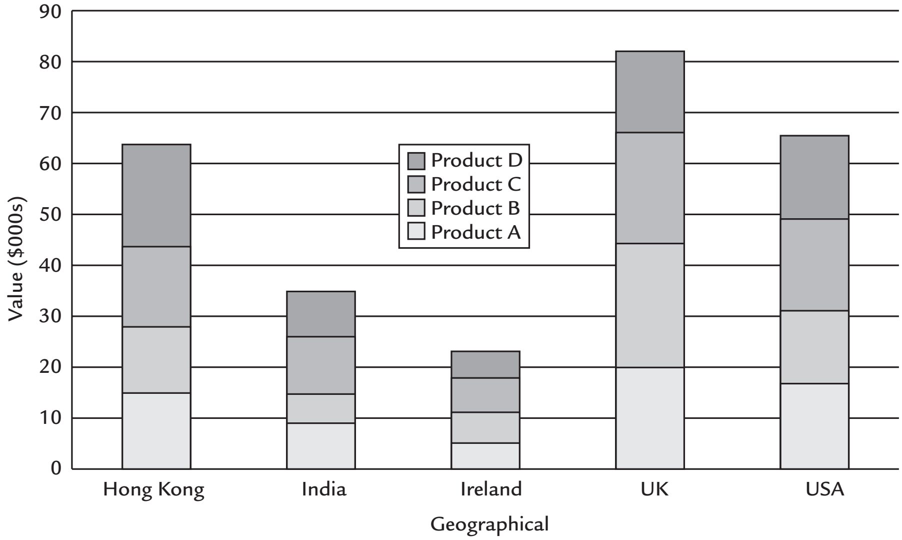


Figure 15.3 A multiple bar chart: sales of products by geographical region

3.4 Graphs

Graphs indicate the relationship between two series of numerical data, for example sales over a particular period. Like component bar charts, the data is measured by scales shown on the two axes. Because they can be used to present continuous data, graphs are particularly useful when communicating trends, for example whether sales are increasing or decreasing over a particular period. More complex graphs may plot different data on the same axis, for example sales of different products over a particular period.

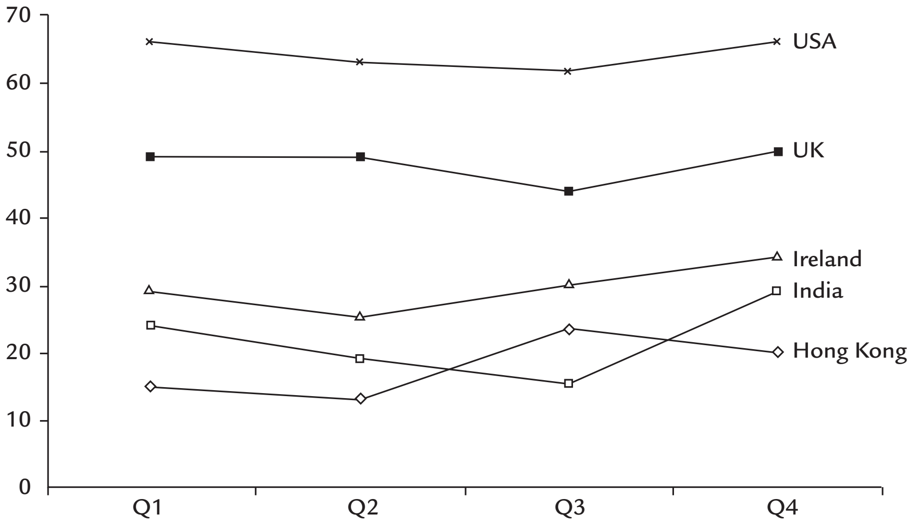


Figure 15.4 A multiple line graph: sales trends by region (Q1–Q4)

3.5 Pictograms

Like bar charts, pictograms plot quantities against a scale, but the values are represented by an image rather than a simple bar. For example, the number of people working in an organisation may be represented by images of desks, with each desk representing a particular number of staff. Pictograms are a very visual way of showing quantities, but are best used only for presenting only simple information. It is easy for the overall picture to be distorted by lack of clarity over scale or confusion over quantity, for example the need to use part desks to indicate finer values.

3.6 Presentation and layout

Whatever graphical device is used, there are some general presentation and layout issues which should be borne in mind:

- Do not overload the graphic with too much data. Often, two graphs work better than one more complex one.
- Maximise the visibility of the information they display:
  - in an appropriate size
  - using colours and/or shading to identify components.
- Add the appropriate annotation, in terms of both the text that appears on the graph itself and anything that is separate, such as a key at the foot of the page.

These days, most graphs and charts will be created using software such as Microsoft Excel®, which uses a Chart Wizard to automatically create a variety of graphs and charts. This makes it easier to experiment with a variety of graphical formats for the presentation of numerical and other data. However, such functionality also brings with it the danger of focusing on the format to the detriment of the message as a whole. A compromise is sometimes necessary between the perfection of a lovingly created graph and the time and cost of producing it. And, as always, the message itself as well as the means by which it is communicated must be appropriate for the audience.

Test *yourself* 15.1

Identify three components of a bar chart.

4 Spreadsheets

A spreadsheet is an electronic method of calculating and presenting information. It can present any kind of information, but is usually associated with numbers. A spreadsheet is the computer equivalent of a blank piece of accounting paper. It consists of grids made up of columns and rows which combine to create worksheets. These can perform a range of automatic calculations. A column is defined as the vertical space going up and down the window. In most cases, letters are used to designate each column's identity and location. A row is defined as the horizontal space going across the window. Numbers are used to designate each row's identity and location. Columns and rows of a spreadsheet intersect at points called cells, identified by the column and row reference (for example C2 or F12).

4.1 Types of data

There are three basic types of data that can be entered in a spreadsheet:

- labels: text with no numerical value
- constants: just a number – a constant value
- formulas: a mathematical equation used to calculate.

Labels are text entries. They do not have a value associated with them, and are used to identify and annotate, and to communicate with the user.

Constants are entries that have a specific value, expressed in a variety of ways such as a currency unit, a percentage or simply a number of items. These are typed into the computer with just the numbers and are changed to display their type of number by formatting. Constants are used to enter fixed number data.

Formulas are mathematical equations that calculate the value to display. Rather than entering the actual values, an equation is used to calculate the value that will be displayed. Because the calculations outlined in formulas are based on cell references (sometimes in combinations with numbers) rather than individual values, the calculation will remain the same even if the values are changed. Once a particular calculation is created, the spreadsheet's calculator automatically updates the figures so that, provided the formula is correct, the 'total' or 'balance' figure is also always correct.

4.2 Using spreadsheets

The use of the electronic spreadsheet makes number manipulation easy and fairly painless. Spreadsheets have many mathematical functions built into them as well as the standard ones enabling you to multiply, divide, add and subtract. These operations follow a logical order of operations, just as in any other mathematical equation. At a basic level of functionality, many people use programs like Microsoft Excel® as an alternative to a calculator. Probably the most popular function in any spreadsheet is the SUM function, which takes all of the values in each of the specified cells and totals their values.

Other functionality will depend on the particular software used. In Microsoft Excel®, for example, the Paste Function dialog box offers a list of standard formulae for functions such as averaging. Spreadsheets can also be used to sort data by either ascending or descending value or alphabetically. The autofill function is a feature that allows you to fill cells quickly with repetitive or sequential data such as chronological dates or numbers, and repeated text.

Once you have a working spreadsheet you can save your work and use it at a later time. Because the calculations relate to cells rather than the actual values, the spreadsheet can be amended by adding in new figures without having to start from scratch. For example, the same basic spreadsheet can be used to track actual sales vs budget on a regular basis.

Making it work 15.3

Basic calculations in Microsoft Excel®

The most basic Excel® calculations are expressed as follows:

Addition	= C1+C2
Subtraction	= C2−C1
Multiplication	= C1*C2
Division	= C2/C1

These can be used in combination with each other and with other numbers. For example:

= C2−(C1+C3)*2

= (C1−C3)/.75

The = sign is always used to open a formula.

Presentation

Spreadsheets are a useful tool when it is necessary to present numbers in a professional format. As well as taking the hard work out of the actual calculation, they also help with presentation. Standard formatting tools allow for variation in font style and size, alignment and the use of colour, bold, italic and underlining. This can help create clarity and emphasis. As outlined above, the same programs which create spreadsheets also enable you to present numerical data in a range of graphical formats.

Summary

- There are three key elements to communicating numbers:
  - selecting the right information
  - communicating it effectively
  - presenting the information in an appropriate format.
- The graphical presentation of numbers helps the receiver by encoding the message in some kind of visual image.
- Numbers are rarely used in isolation, and generally require explanation. Using the right words to accompany numbers can make a difference to understanding. Comparisons can also help.
- The various forms of graphics that can be used include tables, pie charts, bar charts and graphs. It is important to select a format that is appropriate for the data and the audience and enhances or reinforces the message. The inappropriate use of graphs and charts serves to obscure rather than clarify.
- A spreadsheet is an electronic method of calculating and presenting information.
- There are three basic types of data that can be entered in a spreadsheet:
  - labels: text with no numerical value
  - constants: just a number – a constant value
  - formulas: a mathematical equation used to calculate.
- The use of the electronic spreadsheet makes number manipulation easy and fairly painless. Software programs such as Microsoft Excel® not only take the hard work out of calculation but also enable professional presentation.

Part Four Practice Questions

Section A

2-mark questions:

4.1 What are the ways to show emphasis in written communication?

4.2 Correct this sentence:
Theirs a lot off mistakes weighting to happen out their witch you're spellchecker mite miss!

4.3 Identify two differences between a business letter and a memorandum.

4.4 In the context of emails, what is an *attachment*?

4.5 Define a *report*.

4.6 Describe one popular advertising format.

4.7 What is a *spreadsheet*?

4.8 What needs to be added to the statement 'Sales are up 10%' to make it meaningful?

4-mark questions:

4.9 Describe three of the specific advantages that make *written communication* the right medium for certain types of communication.

4.10 Describe briefly three types of widely used business letter.

4.11 What is the purpose of a *mission statement*? List the three essential conditions it should fulfil.

4.12 Choose one way to present numbers graphically and describe its important features.

Part B

Note: the questions below are indicative only and represent 15 marks each. In the Business Communications examination, each Section B question is a multi-part question worth 30 marks in total.

4.13 The senior staff of Hilltopp Hotel are preparing to publicise the hotel when all the changes are completed. Bearing in mind the many different ways you may need to communicate, what aspects of written communication would you familiarise yourself with if you were a member of the hotel's management team?

4.14 Draft a letter from the staff of Hilltopp Hotel's reception office to guests who are about to check out. The study text gives an example of bad practice in Chapter 13; after reading the text, you should be able to do much better.

4.15 Imagine you work for an advertising agency about to be employed by Hilltopp Hotel, where an advertising campaign to coincide with the completion of all the alterations and building work is under active consideration. Write some briefing notes to help the staff to understand more about the nature of advertising as they plan their campaign.

4.16 How does communicating with numbers differ from other forms of written communication? Why are numbers important, and what techniques are available to help deal with them?

Suggested Answers to Practice Questions

Part One

Suggested answers to Section A

1.1 Sender – the person who takes the initiative and originates the message, chooses the way the message will be sent, to whom and in what form.

1.2 Message – the idea, thought, instruction the sender wishes to communicate.

1.3 Mode – the package into which the message is encoded or packed. An example would be a letter.

1.4 Channel – the means by which the message is sent – the phone line, the mail service or the world wide web.

1.5 Noise – anything which gets in the way of a successful transmission of the message, such as a crackle on a phone line, smudged ink on a letter, or a language the receiver cannot understand.

1.6 Receiver – the person for whom the message is intended. Without a receiver, there is no communication.

1.7 Feedback – the message the receiver sends back to the original sender, which indicates that the message has been received, and, hopefully, that it has been understood and acted upon.

1.8 Telephone – synchronous – despite the distance there is the opportunity to obtain immediate feedback, although there is no face-to-face element

Face-to-face meeting – synchronous – feedback can be instantaneous and two-way, and can consist of body language, gesture and facial expression, as well as verbal means.

Presentation – synchronous – feedback can be instantaneous, although more likely to be slightly delayed, e.g. to the end of the presentation, and two-way, and can consist of body language, gesture and facial expression, as well as verbal means.

1.9 Email – asynchronous – feedback is delayed, or even non-existent, although it can be rapid if the receiver happens to be online and replies as soon as the email arrives. It can only be verbal, however.

Letter – asynchronous – feedback is delayed, or even non-existent, and can only be verbal.

Report – asynchronous – feedback is delayed, or even non-existent, and can only be verbal.

1.10

a) Physiological – message is not received because of physical disabilities such as deafness or blindness or environmental factors such as background noise.
b) Cultural – the message is not understood because the recipients are not members of the sender's particular cultural group.
c) Technological – the message cannot be sent or is not received because of technical breakdown.

d) Language – the message is in an unfamiliar language, accent, dialect, jargon or technical language, or unclear because of waffling, overloading or poor articulation

Suggested answers to Section B

1.11

a) Instructions or ideas: A message consists of thoughts, words, ideas or instructions. For communication to exist, something of value has to be communicated – passed on to the chosen receiver. If the message is of no value to the receiver, than true communication will not happen. In Jane's case, she will be working with a number of groups, each of which may have a different requirement from her. Her staff, for instance, will certainly need instructions, but she will want to share more than just instructions with them as she determines the needs of the firm's clients; the clients will expect her to share ideas and thoughts as she works through their requirements.
b) Encoding: The message has to be put into a form that the receiver will understand. This means using the same language as the receiver, avoiding jargon or technical vocabulary with which the receiver will not be familiar, and achieving a clarity which will help to make sure the message is clearly understood by the receiver. Jane will have to travel extensively to meet clients all over the world; she will find it useful to learn as much as possible about these clients – their language, culture, history. In her communication with them she will need to use an interpreter if they do not speak English, and she will have to be very aware of their cultural and social beliefs and needs. Encoding does not take place in a vacuum – the message has to be encoded into a mode – a letter, a conversation, a report, etc.
c) Transmission: Once a message has been decided upon and encoded into a mode, it has to be sent or transmitted. This might be by speech, by a letter, by a telephone conversation, or by a report. Jane will have to use a number of methods, especially as her clients are scattered all over the world. Communication with her staff will be just as important, though, and for this, meetings (face-to-face), emails, memos and telephone conversations will all be employed. For her clients, emails and letters may help prepare for more detailed communication, and then on her travels conversations and meetings will be the preferred method. Whatever is the appropriate method, Jane will need to be aware of the barriers and filters which can affect communication – noise, cultural, social and language differences and so on.
d) Understanding: The last link in the communication chain. The message has been received, but has it been understood? Without understanding, there is no communication. The way that understanding is conveyed is called feedback. Feedback is the return message sent by the receiver to the original sender. It may take the form of a statement, a question, or an action; whatever its form, it will help the sender to judge the extent to which his/her message has been understood.

1.12

1. With whom am I going to communicate? What do I know about them that may affect the way I communicate?
2. What form am I going to use? Is a face-to-face meeting appropriate? Should I send a brief memo or a detailed report? How complex are the ideas I need to convey?
3. Is it really necessary to communicate? (Since Jane has been asked to report her findings to her manager on this occasion, this question need not concern her for long.)
4. Why am I communicating? (Again, since she has been instructed to communicate, this question will not require much thought to answer this time.)
5. Who needs to receive this communication? Patrick Kaye, of course, since he has instructed her to investigate and report on this matter, but is there anyone else who needs to know?
6. Have I thought through and clarified exactly what I am going to say? Is it as concise and clear as I can make it? Have I structured it so that it is logical for the recipient?
7. Is there anyone else who could help me with this communication? Can any of my staff, for instance, make a valuable contribution?
8. Have I looked carefully at my message to make sure it carries no overtones – that it cannot be misinterpreted because of shades of meaning and hidden meanings? Have I determined what it *actually* says rather than what I think it says?
9. Have I taken into account the context in which I am communicating? For instance, this is the first major piece of work I have been asked to produce since my promotion – it will be examined far more critically than work I will produce in the future.
10. How will I know that my communication has been successful? That Patrick has actually understood the message I wish to convey? Can I plan a way or ways to get feedback from him to test this out? Should I book a meeting with him soon after he receives the report, for instance? Can I safely leave it to him to get in touch with me?

Part Two

Suggested answers to Section A

2.1 Morality – the distinction between right and wrong.

2.2 Style, the way a communication is spoken or written, is one of the main ingredients in making that communication convey a favourable impression.

2.3 Value barrier, usage barrier, risk barrier.

2.4 Polite, Efficient, Respectful, Friendly, Enthusiastic, Cheerful, Tactful.

2.5 Bluetooth technology is a system which allows different devices (e.g. computers, telephones) to be linked together without being physically connected.

2.6 Choose from:
- generating income and saving money
- enhancing performance from people
- improving the use of physical resources
- increasing productivity
- streamlining processes
- assisting with money management.

2.7 Governance – the act, manner, fact or function of governing.
Management – the administration of a business concern or public undertaking.

The essential difference is that governance is concerned with policy and the overall supervision of an organisation, while management is concerned with the practical running of the organisation.

2.8 The text lists six stages, any of which could be chosen (see Chapter 4). Two suggested answers are given here:

Listen. The complaint cannot be properly handled until it is clear what has happened. The person listening to the complainer must make it clear that they really are listening, and must be prepared to allow the complainer to say everything they wish. The listener must be careful not to make assumptions.

Provide an answer. The person complaining wants to be heard, but they also want action. They expect the complaint to be cleared up with as little difficulty as possible. The person handling the complaint must not try to lay blame or make excuses, and must be empowered to take whatever action is called for, from a simple replacement of faulty goods to the payment of compensation.

2.9
- Patents – protecting inventions
- Trade marks – protecting identity
- Design registration – protecting appearance
- Copyright – protecting literary, musical or artistic works.

Suggested answers to Section B

2.10 James will need to be aware of language, planning, style and making contact. Although he will make sure that his new staff are competent in English, even if it is not their first language, there are some extra elements he will need to take into account. Anyone moving into a business with which they do not have a long experience will have to acquire an extended vocabulary – the words of that particular trade. Communicating on a business level is not exactly the same as communicating with friends and family, so depending on their experience, they may need some pointers in this direction, too. Even the experienced among them may need help just to keep up with the changes and developments that are always happening to the English language as used in the business context.

James will need to be aware of the need for preparation and planning in good communication. Before starting to communicate, it is essential to determine exactly what it is you wish to convey, and to analyse and organise the material available with this purpose in mind. The material needs to be split into as small segments as possible, because small segments are more readily absorbed and understood, and will make the structure of the whole easier to grasp. The material needs to be presented in a logical order, making sure nothing essential is missed, and nothing superfluous included.

The style of the communication is important. This covers how what is said or written is presented, and takes in such things as good written English, as well as the look of the publication or letter. It is important in speech, too, for the way something is said can have a great influence on how easy it is to understand.

Finally, the way his new staff make contact with new or existing customers is vital. Whether in person, by letter, or by telephone, the first contact will leave an impression that will last for a long time. A friendly greeting, a firm handshake, a voice on the phone which conveys approachability, or a letter which is written in friendly terms will make customers much more ready to deal with James and his staff in their new enterprise.

2.11 a) Marketing research: Marketing research is the search for the information needed to identify marketing problems and opportunities, and to assist with the formation of answers to the problems and opportunities so identified, informing the decision-making process. It involves defining the specific problem to be solved, and setting the research objective; selecting the appropriate data collection and sampling method or methods; developing a plan with an estimate of the time and resources needed.

b) Marketing communications research: Marketing communications research looks at one of four areas.

1 effectiveness: the effectiveness of advertising, promotion, public relations

2 media selection: identifying suitable publications or media for the placing of copy, features or advertising

3 copy testing: investigating the effectiveness of the creative aspects of advertising and promotional material

4 representation: planning sales and representation and determining territories.

c) Marketing plan: A marketing plan is a document which covers all aspects of a business's activities, including implementation and control. It is one of the most important ways of communicating with staff, and it offers a 'map' for implementing the business's strategies and achieving its objectives; it assists in management control and monitoring how management strategy is implemented; it informs new staff or new participants in the plan of their role and function; it specifies how resources are to be allocated; it stimulates thinking and makes better use of resources; it assigns responsibilities tasks and timing; it increases awareness of problems, opportunities and threats.

2.12 IT requirements:

1 With a sales force dealing in a new product being offered to new customers, James will wish to be able to offer as much support as possible. He will, therefore, need the best in mobile technology, and the ability to meet his staff in the field without having to bring them together in one place – in other words, teleconferencing technology. He will want the mobile technology to be able to integrate seamlessly with all the other IT services on offer in the organisation – i.e. Bluetooth technology.

2 James will need the most up-to-date office technology. This will mean not only state of the art machines loaded with the latest software versions, but also networking among James' staff, and between James' staff and the rest of the organisation. This will not only facilitate communication, but also make expensive equipment readily available without unnecessary duplication.

3 The internet will be an essential tool for James. He will need to use it as another communication tool for him and his staff – emails, file transfer, networking over distance – and as a way to communicate with his customers – existing, new and potential. This will mean emails, of course, and a website, designed to make it as easy as possible for customers to find out about the organisation, the product on offer, the staff they need to speak to, and how to contact them.

Challenges: The developments in IT have brought about considerable improvements in communication, and organisations wonder, now, how they ever managed without all the facilities they have. The great challenge presented by these improvements, however, is that staff become too reliable on them. Emails, often using a new form of jargon, are preferred to letters and telephone calls, even when these would be more suitable for conveying a particular message. Communication always using a machine becomes impersonal. Some staff are so enthusiastic that they embrace the technology totally, forgetting what it is for in their pursuit of the technology. Others greet the new technology with rather less enthusiasm. The greatest challenge the new technology brings is that of achieving balance – making sure staff are fully engaged with all the means of communication on offer.

Part Three

Suggested answers to Section A

3.1 Projection – the way in which you convey to others your approach, character, personality, authority; the way in which you hope to impress others.

3.2 Silence can be used in the form of a pause to emphasise a point, or, if prolonged, to encourage a comment from the other side.

3.3 Meetings, if not prepared and well run, are a waste of time in which nothing will be achieved.

3.4 Closed questions are used to check or elicit facts, and can be answered very briefly, often with a simple yes or no. Open questions are used to find out about attitudes and opinions, or to encourage the interviewee to think. They are phrased so that a short answer is not possible.

3.5 Support.

3.6 Speak clearly, holding the telephone correctly, so that the caller has no difficulty in understanding you. Listen carefully, so that noise on the line or the way the caller speaks do not become barriers to understanding.

3.7 Features are factual points in the argument you are making.
Benefits are positive gains which will accrue if the argument is accepted.
They are part of making an attractive case – helping to convince the other person.

3.8 There are number of techniques which might be listed – any two from the following would be satisfactory:

- Silence: A pause may make a point or prompt a comment.
- Keep track: Concentrate on the details. Summarise regularly and make notes.
- Be seen to be reasonable: Keep the perception of your attitude and progress positive by the tone of voice and phrase you adopt.
- Read between the lines: Nothing may be quite what it seems – or sounds – and you need to watch for 'danger phrases' from the other side.
- Focus on the arrangements: Proceed as if there is a deal to be had.
- Concentrate: Keep thinking and make the conversation allow for this, building in pauses where necessary. Never be rushed.
- Consider matters in the round: Be careful not to go for final agreement only to find out that the other party is still introducing new issues. There is a particular danger in agreeing to parts of the proposition as they arise and then finding you are left with nothing to bargain with towards the end.
- Regard timing as a variable: Deadlines, duration and every other aspect of time are almost always negotiable.
- Question what is described as fixed: What seem like constraints can often be made into variables and included in the trading.

3.9 By answering for themselves two questions: 'What can I contribute and how?' and 'What can I get from the meeting?'

3.10
- Recruitment: An interview held with external candidates, although sometimes internal candidates are also interviewed, to determine who will be appointed to a vacant post.
- Promotion/placement: An interview with the same objective as a recruitment interview, but the candidates will all be internal.
- Appraisal: Interviews in which managers discuss with individual members of their staff the progress and performance of that person since the last interview.
- Disciplinary/grievance: Interviews held in response to a problem, or unacceptable behaviour, and raised by either the manager (disciplinary) or the employee (grievance).

3.11 The signs a speaker or presenter gives to his audience, by the way he stands in front of them, by his body language and by the way he dresses.

3.12
- Full name of caller.
- Which organisation they represent.
- Date and time of the call.
- Do they want the call to be returned?
- When will they be available to take a call?
- Caller's telephone number, email address, fax or mobile phone number.
- What were they calling about – full message.

Suggested answers to Section B

3.13 Persuasion: using an argument or putting a case to encourage the receiver to respond positively to a proposition, or to act in the way the persuader wishes.

Negotiation: the process of making a deal and agreeing the terms on which it is arranged.

Persuasion is a technique, negotiation a process. The technique of persuasion usually precedes negotiation, but may also be employed within it. Persuasion is used to get the other party to come to a general agreement. Negotiation takes the overall agreement and arranges the details. In agreeing such detail, persuasion will come into play, being used by both sides as they try to achieve their aims. In trying to improve one's powers of persuasion, it is necessary to look at aspects of the other person – their feelings, their wants, how they take decisions and the thinking involved. By contrast, the three key factors in negotiation are information, power and time – both parties to the negotiation seek to know as much as possible about each other, try to work to a deadline because that puts pressure on the process, and attempt to ensure that they have at least as much power, if not more, than the other party.

3.14
1. Compile a list of the delegates – those attending from outside Spare Parts plc – and produce a profile for each, to assist the speakers, chairs and facilitators from Spare Parts plc to know their audience.
2. Set an overall agenda and an agenda for every session determining its objective and the time available.
3. Prepare – content and environment. Chose and brief the presenters. Check out the hotel, and especially its conference facilities.
4. Decide for each event whether a chair or facilitator is needed, and if so what specific role they will perform.
5. Check that what each presenter is preparing fits the objective for that session and for the whole event.
6. Check with each presenter what equipment they will require. Cross-check, especially if sessions coincide, overlap or are simply adjacent, on multiple availability of popular items.
7. Near the time rehearse as many sessions as possible – e.g. all the

presentations – and brainstorm those which cannot be rehearsed to prepare the Chair/facilitator for any eventuality. Check final content of each presentation for relevance to original brief.

8 Organise a permanent record of each session and of the whole event.

3.15 The following are examples – more could be devised.

1 Closed: 'Are you reasonably fluent in any foreign language?
Open: 'As you will know, the representatives attending this launch, one of whom you will be looking after if you are successful here, come from all over the world. Can you tell me how you come to be fluent in *(the language claimed)*, and what you know of the people, their culture and lifestyle?'

2 Closed: 'Are you aware of *xxx* (the new product)?'
Open: 'Where do you think that *xxx* fits into our current portfolio of products, and do you think that there is anything more we can do, anything we may have missed, in our effort to make *xxx* successful?'

3 Closed: 'Are you happy to work long hours over a long weekend?'
Open: 'Not only will long hours be involved – you will also have to look after one of the delegates – one of the people on whom the future of the company may depend. This is a great responsibility, as I am sure you realise. Can you think of anything that you have achieved in your career which will show me I can put such trust in you?'

Part Four

Suggested answers to Section A

4.1 Bold, italics, underlining.

4.2 There are a lot of mistakes waiting to happen out there, which your spellchecker might miss!

4.3 A business letter is used mainly externally, a memorandum is used internally. A business letter is formal in tone, a memorandum informal.

4.4 An attachment to an email is a file which is *attached* electronically to the email to be transmitted at the same time. It can be used to send additional information in most computer file formats.

4.5 A report is a formalised way to present a series of facts on a specific subject for a particular purpose.

4.6 Table 14.1 describes six popular advertising format. Example: Aspirational – enhancing a brand's identity by the use of imagery, or suggesting to the target audience that purchase of the product will help them obtain some desirable or even fantasy lifestyle.

4.7 A spreadsheet is an electronic method of calculating, presenting and storing information.

4.8 The figure is given without context. It should relate to a period of time or another value – 'Sales are up 10% in the last year' or 'Sales are up 10% compared with the same period last year'.

4.9 Choose three from:

1. No personal contact is involved. This may sound more like a disadvantage, but if contact is necessary with a number of receivers, the written word can save both time and money.
2. It is more formal than most spoken forms, and carries an innate authority.
3. It is better suited than the spoken word for conveying long and complex messages.
4. The risk of distortion during transmission is less than with spoken word.
5. It provides a record of the whole sequence of transactions.

4.10 Table 8.1 describes nine. Examples:

- promotional letter: sent by the Marketing Department to a prospective customer to increase brand awareness and stimulate sales
- credit control letter: sent by the Accounts Department to a customer who has not paid an invoice to persuade the customer to speed up payment
- redundancy notice: sent by Human Resources to an employee for information, to meet the company's legal obligations, and to offer appropriate support.

4.11 A mission statement is a brief statement which describes and encapsulates what an organisation aims to achieve. It should be:

- short
- clear
- focused externally.

4.12 Five methods are described in detail in the text.

Example: Pie charts: show the composition of a whole divided into some or all of its constituent parts. The largest part is usually at the top of the pie, with the other slices getting smaller as they progress clockwise around the pie. An example would be to divide sales by geographical region.

Suggested answers to Section B

4.13 A great advantage of written communication is that, by its very nature, it can be well thought-out and planned beforehand, thus ensuring that the communication is accurate, clear and gives the right impression.

Planning is essential. Consideration should be given first to the purpose of the communication, what it is meant to convey, and to whom. Then consider how formal it should be, and in what sort of language it should be written: technical or layman's? The material must be thoroughly researched, gathered together and put into a logical order.

Style is an important part of written communication. Style is an awareness of the totality of the writing, of the way words and phrases combine, and how they can be combined in an unambiguous, informative way. This is enhanced if the writing can be made natural and lively, resembling, but not slavishly following, natural speech patterns.

Whatever the message, the way it is presented must be appropriate, with the right degree of formality and courtesy. Jargon should be avoided as much as clichés and colloquialisms. Well chosen metaphors and similes can enrich the writing, however.

The writing must be developed, with a logical flow through the arguments to be presented; sentence construction, openness and pace all contribute to this. Be as brief as is consistent with saying everything that needs to be said. Be aware of the words you use and the 'tone' they convey.

Finally, remember the importance of proofreading the work. Proofreading involves checking for a number of things, and the writing may need to be read through more than once. Grammar, syntax, spelling and punctuation, correct use of vocabulary and the overall impression of the work must all be checked. Finally, edit out anything that is unnecessary, and make sure nothing is missed.

4.14 Dear Guest

We would like to thank you for choosing the Hilltopp Hotel and hope that you have been comfortable and happy during your stay. Our records show that you are due to leave us today. We hope the following information will be useful to you.

Our check-out time is 12 noon. Please let us know if this will cause you any difficulty. If you are catching a later flight, please get in touch with any member of our front desk staff, who will be happy to assist you with a late check-out. You might find it useful, too, to book one of our luxury Mercedes limousines for your journey to the airport; a list of charges is included with this letter. If you let us know, we will reserve one for you, or, alternatively, we can book a taxi for you using a company we know to be reliable.

So that your check-out later today is as smooth and quick as possible, we have taken this opportunity to present you with a copy of your charges so far; you may like to check them at your leisure. Of course, if you find anything wrong or have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact us.

We hope the rest of your journey is pleasant, and that, should you visit this area again, you will choose the Hilltopp Hotel for your stay; we will be pleased to welcome you back and we will try to look after you as well as possible once again.

Sincerely yours

Jim Jones
Front Office Manager

4.15 Advertising: Advertising can consist of anything from a single sheet handout to two minutes on television or a full page in a newspaper.

Before advertising, you need to consider the following:

- The target: Who is it that you seek to persuade?
- The medium: Where does it need to appear for the target audience to find it?
- The impact: How big does it need to be, what 'gimmick' is needed, how often must it appear?

Formats – there are a number of formats in use:

- Lifestyle: Linking a product with a specific lifestyle. It is the lifestyle that does the selling rather than the product.

- Humour: Visual or verbal, sometimes as a way of getting attention, but sometimes, by the type of humour, targeting a specific audience.
- Aspirational: Enhancing the identity of a brand by the use of imagery, or suggesting that purchase will help aspire to a fantasy lifestyle.
- Endorsement: Using a well loved and trusted figure to lend gravitas to a product.
- Demonstration: Showing the product in use – useful for new products or products whose function may be hard to understand.
- Postmodern: Bizarreness or self-parody – the message is obscure, the imagery is what grabs attention.

Purpose: The purpose of advertising is not as straightforward as might be thought:

- Information: Simply reminding readers that a product exists.
- Persuasion: Buy it again, or buy it for the first time; change brands to this one.
- Cognitive dissonance: Create uncertainty about rivals' products to persuade readers to change to, or at least try, your brand.
- Reinforcement: Competing with competitors' advertising to reinforce the idea that the current brand in use is best.
- Reducing uncertainty: The uncertainty felt after making an important or valuable purchase, reassuring the purchaser that they have made the correct choice.

Intention: summarised by the acronym 'AIDA':

- Attention: To get attention the advert must appear in the correct media for the purpose and must be able to attract the attention of your target audience.
- Interest: Giving the target information – what the benefits are from purchasing the product, what problems the product might solve – which builds the case for purchasing.
- Desire: Prompting and maintaining the desire the target feels for a product.
- Action: Pushing the target towards action. Urgency is often employed – 'buy now while stocks last!' – as is emphasising the benefits of taking the action.

4.16 One of the principal differences between numbers and words is that, while most people understand words without a problem, may think that they do not understand numbers. There are a number of reasons why this is so, including poor mathematical education and lack of self-confidence; the result, however, is that numbers need to be presented even more carefully than words if the message they contain is to be passed on successfully. If not well presented, they will tend to confuse far more than to clarify. Fortunately, there are a number of graphic devices that can be used in the presentation of numbers; aptly chosen and correctly used, they will make numeric communication more effective and allow the receiver to visualise information that might otherwise be difficult to interpret.

Numeric information is important. Say 'This is profitable and that is not' and, while the meaning is clear, the scale is not. Say 'This is 20% more profitable than that' and the meaning is enhanced with a sense of the scale of the profitability. Numbers can confuse, however, and choosing the right numbers to get over the message is very important. Too many figures can obscure meaning. Communicating numbers verbally can be extremely difficult, and the pace at which the numbers are spoken, and the pauses allowed for the numbers to be absorbed, are both vital. In writing, there are a number of devices, such as emboldening, which can help.

The techniques available for presenting numbers are:

- Tables: A way to list information in an ordered and logical way, used particularly, but not exclusively, when the information is mainly numeric. There are also very specialised uses for tables, such as train or bus timetables.
- Graphs: The best-known and most effective way of illustrating the relationship between two series of numerical facts. They are easily understood and relatively simple to prepare.
- Pie charts: Used to show proportions, e.g. sales by geographical region.
- Histograms: Used to describe groups of numbers. A histogram consists of a series of narrow rectangles, the area of each bearing a relationship to the frequency of the value it represents, and to the spread of the values.
- Bar charts: A variation on the histogram and often easier to understand. They are used to make comparisons, e.g. sales of different products.
- Pictograms: Show trends by using graphics, and are especially good if only basic information is needed, rather than detail.
- Spreadsheet: A term used to cover both a computer program and the result of using that program. A spreadsheet can be many things, including a database handling totally non-numeric data. In the context of dealing with and presenting numbers, however, it is a way of storing, on a computer, numeric data in an ordered and versatile way; the data can be manipulated, the way of presentation can be varied, many calculations can be made automatically, and graphs, histograms, pie charts – all the usual and a number of less usual visual methods of presentation – can be created very easily.

Sample Examination Paper and Suggested Answers

BUSINESS COMMUNICATIONS

Important Notice

When reading these suggested answers, please note that the answers are intended as an indication of what is required rather than a definitive "right" answer. In many cases there are several possible answers/approaches to a question. Be aware also that the length of the suggested answers given here may be somewhat exaggerated from what might be achieved in the reality of an unseen, time constrained examination.

This Examination Paper consists of TWO sections. Section A is compulsory and carries 40 marks. Candidates are required to attempt TWO questions from Section B, all of which carry 30 marks each.

Total time allowed: 2 hours 15 minutes (inclusive of 15 minutes' reading time). Please note that candidates must not write anything during the 15-minute reading time.

SECTION A – COMPULSORY

You should allow yourself approximately 50 minutes in total to answer the questions in Section A.
Answer all parts of question 1 (2 marks for each part), and all parts of question 2 (4 marks for each part)

1.

a) Identify and explain two common barriers to effective communication.
(2 marks)

Suggested answer:

Choose 2 from:
Language differences; cultural differences e.g. different ideas of personal space; physical barriers e.g. bad handwriting or poor telephone lines; external distractions e.g. environment.

b) Describe any two duties a participant at a meeting has to fulfil and why.
(2 marks)

Suggested answer:

Choose 2 from:
Pay attention rather than thinking about what to say next; listen as opposed to just hear; take notes as an aid to concentration as well as a record; contribute because that's why you are there.

c) What is organisational communication? Identify and explain any one major problem encountered within it. *(2 marks)*

Suggested answer:

Organisational communication covers PR, corporate affairs and internal and external communication.

Choose 1 from:
Timing - choosing the right moment to communicate, right for those involved or right within the organisation's environment; overload - too much communication, either being received or sent by you; grapevine - the unofficial communication channel which can be damaging, but can also be used positively; short-circuiting - missing out parts of the normal communication path, which may be necessary, but must be used sparingly; distortion - message being affected by noise e.g. bad telephone line, bad writing, wrong use of language; filtering - allowing your understanding of the message to be affected by irrelevancies e.g. your own beliefs and prejudices.

d) In interviews, what is the difference between an 'open' question and a 'closed' question? Illustrate the importance of distinguishing between the two. *(2 marks)*

Suggested answer:

Open questions require a full narrative reply or statement of opinion. Closed questions can be answered with yes or no, or with a simple statement of fact. Closed questions are used to establish quickly required facts, while open questions establish attitudes, beliefs, breadth of experience, etc.

e) Identify and briefly explain two of the main elements of communication. *(2 marks)*

Suggested answer:

Choose 2 from:
Sender - originator of idea; medium - method chosen to convey the message; message - original idea encoded; recipient - person chosen to receive the message; feedback - return message to originator indicating message received, understood and acted on.

f) Identify the two principal methods by which numerical data can be used to convey information in spreadsheets. When is each method most suitable? *(2 marks)*

Suggested answer:

Numeric ideas can be organised in tabular form, which is good for a clear presentation of data, or as a chart or graph, which are very effective ways of presenting more complex data.

g) Define "The Net" and "The Web" and explain the difference between the two. *(2 marks)*

Suggested answer:

The "Net" is the physical network e.g. wires and switches, over which communication happens. The "Web" is the combination of documents, servers and browsers, which comprise the information, its storage and transmission and its retrieval. One is physical, whereas the other is virtual.

h) Describe two visual aids available for use at meetings and in presentations. Explain one specific benefit of each. *(2 marks)*

Suggested answer:

Choose 2 from:
Pictures, photographs, charts, diagrams, flipcharts, whiteboards, electronic whiteboards, chalkboards, displays, magnetic boards, slides, film, OHP, audiotape, CD, video, DVD, multimedia and computer programmes.

Pictures, photographs, charts, diagrams, slides, films, video and DVD:
BENEFIT - enable a point to be made graphically or visually - "a picture is worth a thousand words".

Flipcharts, whiteboards, electronic whiteboards, chalkboards, magnetic boards and OHP:
BENEFIT - enable immediate emphasis or clarification of a particular point.

Audiotape and CD:
BENEFIT - enable an audible enhancement of a particular point e.g. interview with someone. Occasionally music might be used.

Displays, multimedia and computer programmes:
BENEFIT - provide combinations of the individual benefits above, with the possibility of a very flexible approach, especially with regard to the last two.

i) Identify two important factors in achieving successful written communication and provide a brief justification for those you have chosen. *(2 marks)*

Suggested answer:

Choose 2 from:
Planning, researching, assembling, style, presentation and layout, editing and proofreading.

Planning - gives a direction to the work.
Researching - enables all facts to be checked and given in full.
Assembling - brings together all relevant material.
Style - makes sure the work reads clearly.
Presentation and layout - makes sure the work is visually clear and pleasing.

Editing - removes any irrelevant or extraneous material and re-orders what is left. Necessary to improve meaning and clarity.
Proofreading - final check removes any typing errors and errors of grammar and is the last opportunity to check overall impression.

j) Explain briefly the meaning of the following and their purpose:

(i) Firewalls;
(ii) Anti-virus software. *(2 marks)*

Suggested answer:

A firewall is a piece of software designed to prevent unauthorised access and the placing of viruses etc; Anti-virus software is software designed to detect and remove all forms of virus attack. *(Total: 20 marks)*

2. a) Why should participants at a meeting be aware of body language? *(4 marks)*

Suggested answer:

Body language reflects the mood of a person, the emotions a person is feeling, the reaction of a person to a statement or argument, how attentive the person is and may give a clue to whether or not the person is telling the truth.

b) Why are planning and preparation important in effective communication? *(4 marks)*

Suggested answer:

Planning and preparation are the foundation on which good work is based. Planning makes sure all aspects will be covered and gives a sense of direction and purpose to the whole work, whereas preparation makes sure all facts are assembled, checked and organised.

c) Identify four positive lessons in communication to be learned from handling customer complaints. *(4 marks)*

Suggested answer:

Staff training, source of information, free market research and public relations.

d) Identify and explain four important aspects of best practice in written communication. *(4 marks)*

Suggested answer:

Appropriateness; grammar; brevity and conciseness; and clarity.

e) "Challenges and dangers to individual rights are a fundamental feature of the electronic communications revolution." Identify and explain any two of them. *(4 marks)*

Suggested answer:

Choose 2 from:
Moral risks - ease with which the internet can be perverted to unacceptable usage, or can be used to commit crime; ethics - must allow individuals choices to guide their behaviour; social issues - like earlier technologies (e.g. steam power) can be used to achieve social change; information rights - the rights that individuals or organisations have with respect to information about themselves; data protection - the legal framework protecting the information rights of individuals and organisations and the necessary systems to uphold this. *(Total: 20 marks)*

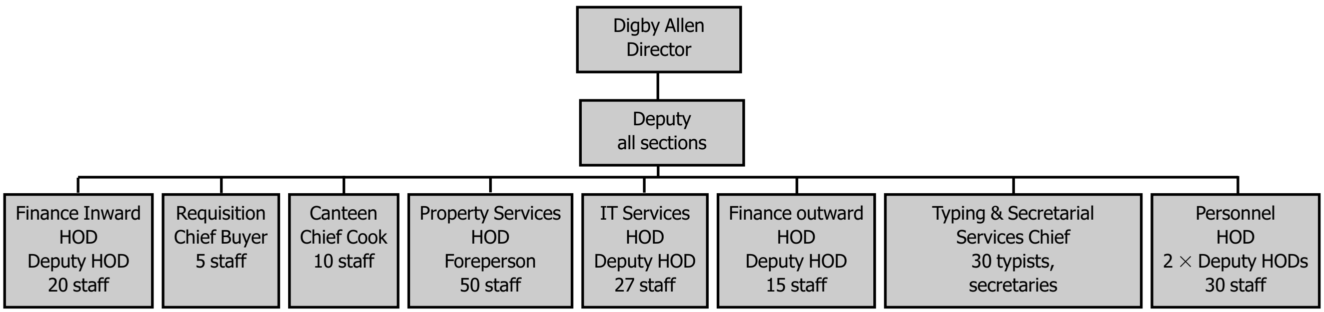
SECTION B

Questions 3 to 7 are based on the pre-seen case study

The Acme Insurance Company

The Acme Insurance Company was in crisis. Its profits were falling and the directors knew that everything possible had to be done to streamline the company. As part of this exercise, the Managing Director (MD) soon began to look more closely at the company's Administration function, which accounted for a large proportion of the overall salary costs. The department comprised the following staff:

Acme Insurance Company
Administration Department



The imminent retirement of Digby Allen as Director of Administration was therefore timely and the MD began to write a new job description for the pending vacancy. Without any reference to his Personnel Department, he drafted an advertisement and placed it in a number of journals. Although he gave some thought to possible internal candidates, he rejected them all and decided the best thing was "a new beginning" with an experienced person brought in from outside the company. He dispensed with any open short-listing methods and interviewing panels, determining to undertake the appointment by himself.

In due course, the MD appointed Magnus Lee and introduced him to the rest of the company as “his Personal Assistant”. Even before Digby Allen had retired, Lee was encouraged by the MD to begin work in secret on restructuring the Administration Department.

A confidential list of proposed actions identified as the key to success was placed by Lee on the MD's desk. It read:

1 Identify a new structure combining units in the department, with fewer Heads and Deputies. Consult them on details.

2 Create a new structure, keeping in touch with senior staff as it develops. Then inform the rest of the staff, taking their views into account in doing so.

3 Since some redundancies and early retirements will be inevitable, minimise them by making mainly internal appointments to new posts. Decide on the most appropriate methods of advertising them, selecting candidates and conducting interviews.

4 Inform the successful and unsuccessful candidates of the results.

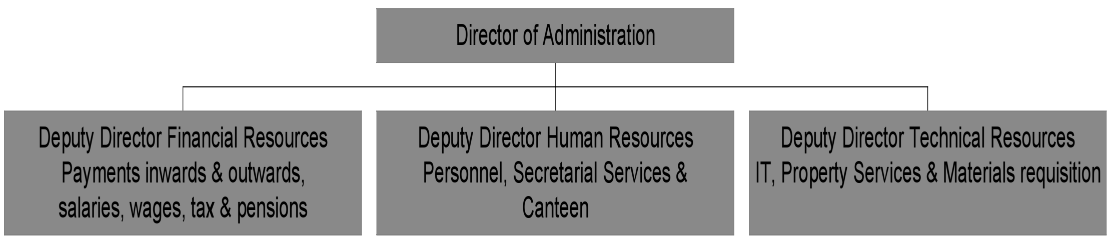
5 Prepare an action plan for the establishment and implementation of the new structure in consultation with new appointees, keeping all staff in the department informed and taking their views into account, where appropriate.

6 Implement the plan in full and continue consultation, starting with those most immediately affected.

7 After a suitable interval, review the working of the new structure, revising it as necessary.

This action plan was accompanied by Lee's proposed outline of the new structure:

Revised Structure



Lee added the following footnote to the MD:

“No formal Deputies, just 'Team Leaders' according to function. We must keep the structure as flat as possible.”

As soon as Digby Allen retired, Lee was announced as the new Director of Administration and began to implement his plan. His first appointment was Ann Macintosh, an existing member of the team, to the post of Deputy Director of Technical Resources. Within a few days of her appointment Lee received a report from her, pointing out that the company “scarcely had a presence on the internet” and recommending a course of action which made full use of the resources of the IT section, which she insisted would make the company more profitable.

Lee was very pleased and felt that he had made a good start.

Section B – Questions

Answer TWO questions from the five in Section B. You should allow yourself approximately 35 minutes to answer each of the questions in this section. Each question is worth 30 marks.

The following questions place you in a different relationship with, or within, the Acme Insurance Company and present you with issues relating to communications in the business.

3. You are an external communications consultant. The MD chose to conduct the recruitment of the new Director of Administration himself, without any help from his Personnel Section. Offer him some assistance by completing the following tasks:

a) Draft an advertisement for the new post of Director of Administration.
(5 marks)

Suggested answer:

The case study is vague about the nature of the duties undertaken by the Director of Administration, mentioning only "internal and external relations". This question is set to test the candidates' knowledge of the format and style of an advert, to communicate information appropriately and effectively. It is not a test of their grasp of the duties of a senior management post, the material for which can be drawn, and embellished upon, from the case study. Internal and external relations should be included, as well as any other duties which might be found in a senior post of this nature. The format, style, layout and accuracy of content of the advert are of prime importance in the examination answer.

ACME INSURANCE

DIRECTOR OF ADMINISTRATION

The Acme Insurance Company, an old established company, is looking for a new Director of Administration. Directly responsible to the Managing Director, the new appointee will be in overall charge of the Department of Administration, with a staff of nearly 200.

Day-to-day responsibility lies with Deputy Directors, and the new Director of Administration will be expected to take a more strategic role, including internal and external relations, and will work with the Managing Director to streamline the department and its functions, to create effective systems and networks to serve a dynamic 21st century, forward-looking company.

A remuneration package commensurate with the responsibilities of the post will be discussed with the successful candidate and will include a pension plan, bonuses and company car.

Initial enquiries and applications, which must include an up-to-date, detailed CV should be sent to the Managing Director, Acme Insurance Company plc, Assurance Lane, Newtown, Worcestershire NN1 1AB.

b) Draft a briefing paper in a suitable format for external candidates, to be sent to anyone who responds to the advertisement expressing an interest in the post. Describe the views of the MD and what he wishes to achieve. *(15 marks)*

Suggested answer:

The task is to draft a brief. As in part a), the question is designed to test the candidates' knowledge of format, and skills, in effective communication appropriate to the task, rather than material content. The brief is for potential candidates for the post of Director of Administration, to show in greater detail what they will have already gleaned from the preceding advertisement. It will cover the cost of the administration department, the staff structure and the problem of overstaffing, grades and the illogical pay structure, overlaps in and misplacement of responsibilities – all implied in the case study. The correct format would be an adaptation of the report format, with an introduction, statement of findings and details of conclusions (but not recommendations in this case), with appropriately identified headings for the briefing. The writing should be clear and simple, the sections of the brief clearly differentiated and the whole proofread for accuracy.

INFORMATION FOR CANDIDATES FOR THE POST OF DIRECTOR OF ADMINISTRATION

Background to the Vacancy

Used to describe the background to the problem or situation the brief is meant to address. In this case, it will contain a statement of the background to the formation of the Directorate of Administration - a new department to arise out of the reformed Administration Department. It will show just how far the MD has actually moved things along - this appointment being the main achievement so far.

The Issues

This is used as the main body of the brief, setting out all the pertinent facts. In this instance, it will state what the MD had determined with regard to the old department, (that it was over-staffed and bureaucratic); that a complete restructure was called for i.e. flatter, with fewer sections and section heads; that deputies were unnecessary for every section; and that the retirement of the current postholder presented an opportunity to conduct the requisite re-organisation.

What We Expect from the Postholder

The decisions and actions following on from the findings - for this brief a list might be constructed along the lines of:
1. Identify a new structure combining units in the department, with fewer Heads and no Deputies;
2. Create a new structure;
3. Minimise the inevitable redundancies and early retirements by making mainly internal appointments to new posts;
4. Decide on the most appropriate methods of advertising, selecting candidates and conducting interviews;
5. Prepare an action plan for the establishment and implementation of the new structure in consultation with new appointees;
6. Implement the plan in full;
7. Review the working of the new structure;
8. At all stages inform and consult all staff, especially those most involved and affected;
9. Take over the responsibility for the day-to-day running of the new department as it is established, helping staff as appointed to commence their new duties;
10. In all respects, the successful candidate will be expected to work closely with the MD.

c) Draft a brief memorandum to the MD stating what you think of his communication methods in securing a new Director of Administration.

(10 marks)

Suggested answer:

The task is to draft an appropriately worded memorandum, with the right tone. A firm, but diplomatic message is called for, commenting on the high-handed and secretive way in which the exercise has been conducted.

MEMORANDUM

TO: MANAGING DIRECTOR
FROM: HEAD OF DEPARTMENT - PERSONNEL
SUBJECT: RESTRUCTURING DATE: 2 JANUARY 2006

Telling the MD that he had gone about the whole restructuring exercise in an high-handed and secretive way, calls for a great deal of tact from someone much lower down the management chain. The points the memo would need to cover would be that the MD:

- Concluded, without reference to anyone in the department, that it was too bureaucratic;
- Drafted the new job description for the Director of Administration's post and placed the advert, without consulting his Personnel Department;
- Rejected internal candidates, again without any consultation;
- Dispensed with shortlisting and interview panels and did it all himself.

The writer would need to find an approach which would allow him/her to point out that the MD's methods were wrong, without antagonising him - perhaps by saying that the MD might like to consider making more use of the people there to do such a job as this, to make full use of available expertise and to save his time. The writer might also say that he/she is aware of a number of people currently employed by the company who would have expected to be considered. The final point would be that, although the writer has no doubt of the MD's ability and prerogative to make the final choice of the right person for the job, the method chosen for selection might not be seen to be fair by either internal or external candidates, and could lead to problems for the company in the future.

(Total: 30 marks)

4. You are an external communications consultant. The attitudes of the MD and his new appointee, Magnus Lee, towards communication are very different.

a) Discuss the benefits and drawbacks of each approach. *(10 marks)*

Suggested answer:

- The MD is dictatorial and secretive.
- He fails to consult at a high level, let alone those further down.
- He does not communicate enough.
- A possible benefit may be that he makes things happen quickly, but this depends very much on his ideas being entirely correct.
- It is more likely that his staff work around him and despite him.
- This style may just about be possible in a very small company, but is unlikely to be effective in a large one, where one man cannot hope to keep control of everything going on.
- Lee is the opposite, as he communicates and consults at every possible opportunity.
- This is preferable to not communicating enough and his staff will certainly feel involved.
- If consequently, things do not work out as well as everyone might have hoped, the staff will still hold Lee responsible, however unfair this might seem.
- Too much consultation may simply result in delays and could be, or at least could be seen to be, a sign of inability to make decisions.

b) Describe the likely impact of each approach. *(10 marks)*

Suggested answer:

- The MD's approach will almost certainly restrict his staff's willingness to cooperate and could result in outright obstruction.
- Staff will certainly feel undervalued and excluded and will be forced either to work and take decisions without the information they need, or to refer everything back to the MD for him to take all the decisions. Both eventualities will lead to frustration.
- Lee is more likely to get cooperation and his staff will certainly not be unaware of the facts they need to do their job, but they may also be overloaded with too much information.
- Lee may also get a reputation for procrastination and indecisiveness. His staff may simply ignore some of the communication because there is too much, which could be dangerous.
- The fact that they have been consulted over and over again will not necessarily mean they feel they own the decisions that have been made.

c) Explain any differences you would advise in the methods of the MD and Lee. *(10 marks)*

Suggested answer:

- Both Lee and the MD should be aware of balance i.e. the need to communicate as much as people need to know, without either overloading or starving them of information.
- This is also true on consultation. It is necessary and desirable to consult, but to do so over and over again and about every little decision will not build confidence in the staff. They may feel the management are failing to do what they are paid for.
- Both need to be more aware of the effect their actions will have on their staff and to take this into account far more in their own actions and decision making.
- They both need to build up the trust their staff have in them, because this will mean that they can take some decisions without consultation, knowing that their staff will be with them.
- This will be especially useful if things need to be done quickly. *(Total: 30 marks)*

5. You are Ann Macintosh, the newly-appointed Deputy Director of Technical Resources. Soon after taking up the post, you realise that the Canteen should have been placed under you and not with the Human Resources section. Firstly you inform Magnus Lee, the Director of Administration, of your opinion. He replies, expressing some surprise and asking for more information to justify your argument. You supply him with this and after consultation and due consideration, he announces his decision to you, to the Deputy Director of Human Resources and to the staff involved.

a) What methods would you consider for expressing your initial case to Magnus Lee, which would you choose and why? *(10 marks)*

Suggested answer:

Memo - the normal method of internal formal communication, which also constitutes a permanent record. Does not allow immediate feedback to be given and is unsuitable for the expression of an opinion when you are seeking clarification of the other party's views.

Letter - a formal written method, but one not usually used internally in a context like this. Much more suited to giving information than expressing or seeking an opinion from a colleague. Constitutes a permanent record.

Face-to-face meeting - less formal than written methods and the one most likely to be chosen because of the opportunity for immediate feedback, discussion and interaction. It would need to be recorded, not necessarily at the time it happens, but (probably) by Ann Mackintosh circulating notes afterwards.

Phone call - although allowing for interaction and feedback (but lacking the face-to-face contact), it is too informal and lacks a permanent record.

Ann Mackintosh would most certainly choose to meet Lee face-to-face to discuss the matter. She might send a memo to arrange the meeting and give him some idea of what it is to be about, so that he is not taken by surprise.

b) What methods would you consider for supplying Lee with the further information he seeks, which would you choose and why? *(10 marks)*

Suggested answer:

Memo - too brief and informal for the presentation of a well argued case backed up by facts and investigation.

Report - formal and recorded and can be shared with others as required. Correct report format requires that all information to be passed on is organised, that arguments are made and conclusions are reached.

Meeting - too informal and without a written record. Potential to get heated, if the parties disagree on fundamental principles.

The most likely scenario would be the presentation of a full, formal report, possibly followed a day or two later by a face-to-face meeting, so that Ann can clarify her report where necessary and Lee can deliver feedback.

c) What methods would you advise Lee to consider for the announcement of his decision to the staff involved, which should he choose and why? *(10 marks)*

Suggested answer:

A single memo copied to every member of staff involved - formal and recorded, but impersonal.

Letters as above, but memo is the usual chosen medium for this type of communication. Impersonal if the same duplicated letter is used, but time-consuming and unnecessary to do individual letters to everyone.

Phone calls and meetings considered, but rejected because not formal and permanent enough for the recording of a decision like this.

Emails are too informal and not always picked up.

Ideal would be an identical memo to every member of staff, preceded by letters to those most affected, explaining in greater detail what has been discussed and what decisions have been taken. This is especially important if anyone is going to suffer adverse effects. *(Total: 30 marks)*

6. You are a Human Resources consultant on recruitment and selection techniques.

a) Advise Magnus Lee, the Director of Administration, on the communications issues he must address when contacting the five shortlisted applicants for the new post of Deputy Director of Technical Resources. *(10 marks)*

Suggested answer:

- Internal communication - organise time and date of interview, book room, check availability of the rest of the panel and inform them of the arrangements.
- External communication - inform candidates of time and date and ask if they need any accommodation or travel arrangements, organise any useful material (annual report, etc.) to be sent to them, including job description and personnel specification (even though already sent).

- Meeting and greeting - make sure candidates will be greeted and organise any tour of the organisation or meeting with any member of staff thought desirable/useful. Organise domestic arrangements, e.g. meals.
- Preparation for interview - prepare lines of questioning, familiarise yourself with the applications and CVs. Agree on sharing the main lines of questioning with the rest of the panel, agree timeframe and division of time for each candidate among the panel. As chair of panel, prepare introduction for each candidate.

b) Advise a shortlisted candidate on the preparations he/she needs to make prior to the interview, to present his/her case in the most effective way. *(10 marks)*

Suggested answer:

- Research the company (annual report, company literature or newspapers) and main personnel e.g. MD. Consider the sort of questions you might expect in the light of your findings.

- Study job description and personnel specification again and consider questions, which might arise about your qualifications, experience, etc.
- If success will require a move, research the location and housing, schools, general facilities etc.
- If daily travel rather than a move is required, research travel facilities.
- List all the questions you think most likely to be asked and rehearse answers.
- Think of question(s) you need to ask the panel when given the opportunity.

c) Advise Lee on two questions he might ask interview candidates, how he would phrase them and why. *(10 marks)*

Suggested answer:

There are a large number of possible questions, but in this instance they should be based on the case study, which relates to the structure of the organisation. The question asks for two only, but a selection has been provided.

- What do you see as the main advantages of defining a flat structure which combines different functions into a very few directorates? What problems can you foresee with this type of structure?
- Have you ever worked with a structure similar to the one envisaged here? Does your experience suggest any problems which might arise from the fact that there are no formal deputies?
- Although the structure has been made very flat at the directorate level, the whole is still very much a traditional vertical structure. Do you think this is an effective way to tackle the problems in a forward-looking, modern company?
- Do you think the proposed arrangements will facilitate or hinder communication throughout all levels of the Administration Department?

Should assume a high level of expertise on the part of the candidate, so as to search out any shortcomings.
Must provoke discussion of the proposed arrangen
Should encourage the candidate to criticise and make them feel comfortable in doing so. *(Total: 30 marks)*

7. You are Ann Mackintosh, the newly-appointed Deputy Director of Technical Resources. Write a report for the Director of Administration, outlining your ideas for a new website for the company.

a) Outline how you will ensure the new website is an effective advertisement for the company. *(5 marks)*

Suggested answer:

- Ease of use - layout and instructions;
- Overall attractiveness - each page should attract the eye and make the user want to look further;
- Style - use of colour, choice of fonts, illustrations;
- Clarity - uncluttered pages;
- Content - informative and interesting.

b) Describe ways the new website can be organised to enable customers, potential and actual, to communicate and do business with the company.
(10 marks)

Suggested answer:

This should cover the practical aspects of websites:

- Security - keeping data supplied by customers protected. Includes details of legislation e.g. Data Protection Act or local equivalent.
- Passwords and encryption - security on data being supplied by and to customers, including during transmission.
- The consideration of loading to avoid frustration i.e. speed. Offering trimmed down version for users without broadband.
- Frames versus no frames - versatility versus speed.
- Use of "Flash" - effect versus speed.

c) Identify the ethical and moral implications in designing a website.
(10 marks)

Suggested answer:

Should cover the following:

- Ethics - the need to allow the users to make free choices; the site must not be designed in such a way as to lead them.
- Morals - the internet can easily be perverted to unacceptable usage and can be used to commit crime.
- Social issues - the internet has a great potential to effect social change and responsible companies should be aware of the potential of their sites to affect people's behaviour.
- Information rights - the rights that individuals or organisations have with respect to information about themselves.
- Intellectual property rights - i.e. copyright.

(The remaining marks will be awarded if the answers to 7a) b) & c) are well laid out and satisfactorily proofread.) *(Total: 30 marks)*

Glossary

Abstract Brief statement of the contents of a book, report, etc.

Acronym A word which is an abbreviation of a longer expression, formed from the initial letters of the original.

Agenda The document setting out topics for discussion at a meeting, the sequence in which they will be dealt with and administrative information such as timing and location.

Appraisal The process by which an employee's performance in his job is assessed by a superior, usually in conjunction with the employee himself.

Asynchronous Out of step; not occurring together.

Attachment A document or file sent with a letter or email.

Axis Reference lines used to identify values on, or elements of, graphics such as bar charts and line graphs.

Bargaining The process of trading during negotiation.

Benefits The positive aspects of a product, service or situation that do something for or mean something to someone.

Bluetooth technology A system that allows separate devices such as computers or phones to be linked together operationally without physically being connected by wires.

Body language Non-verbal yet complex signals given (usually unconsciously) by participants in communication to accompany what is being said. Although body language is used throughout the world, it is greatly influenced by culture.

Bogeys Red herrings, elements apparently a significant part of the negotiation, which are introduced only to distract or confuse the issue.

Business planning The process of establishing objectives and formulating, evaluating and selecting the policies, tactics and strategies to achieve these objectives.

Call centres Groups of people working exclusively by telephone on a range of repeating service and/or enquiry calls in sectors such as banking or insurance.

Channel The means by which the *mode* is transmitted – the phone line, the mail service, the world wide web.

Cliché A phrase whose effect has lost its meaning through overuse.

Close To actively *ask* for someone's agreement in order to obtain a commitment or prompt an action and lead towards a conclusion of the conversation.

Closed questions Questions which require short, simple answers, often 'yes' or 'no'. Useful for gaining factual answers to specific questions, but can limit useful dialogue.

Communication The process by which messages (thought, idea, instruction) are transferred from one person to another through the use of a common set of symbols.

Communication barriers External factors which prevent successful transmission or reception of the message.

Communications audit A way of assessing the effectiveness of an organisation's communication channels, and of identifying barriers to and filters of communication.

Concession In negotiation, a variable that is offered to the other party (usually in a way that balances the total picture) as part of the to-and-fro process of agreeing a total arrangement of variables.

Data projector A device which projects an image from a computer onto a display screen.

Domain name The part of an email or website address that identifies the name of the organisation, what type of organisation it is and, often, which country the organisation is from.

E-commerce The buying and selling of goods online.

Empathy The ability to see things from another's point of view. More than that, it is the ability to *be seen* to see things from other people's point of view.

Encoding The way the thought, idea or instruction is transferred from the mind of the sender to the mode they select for its transmission. Encoding will involve the use of language if the mode is spoken or written, or pictures in some form if the mode is visual; for some modes, words *and* pictures are needed.

Ethics The science of morals, moral principles and rules of conduct.

Excessive conformity A social psychological phenomenon in which the norms, values and behaviours of an individual increasingly follow those of a wider group. Members of the group are unquestioning in their belief in the rightness of the group, and there is considerable pressure to conform, with minority views being suppressed.

Extranet A secure computer network based on internet technology that facilitates communication between an organisation and a defined group of external customer and/or suppliers.

Features The factual aspects of something, for example a product or service, or a situation.

Feedback The return message sent by the receiver to the original sender, confirming at the very least that the message has been received, and hopefully that understanding of the message has taken place.

Filters External factors which affect the effectiveness of the way a message is sent and received.

Firewall A computer security system which prevents unauthorised computer use and access.

Governance The act, manner, fact or function of governing.

Grammar The rules which govern the use of language – phrases, sentences, paragraphs.

Grapevine An unofficial informal communication channel based on rumour, gossip and hearsay.

Homonym A word which sounds the same as another, but means something different, e.g. *bear* and *bare*.

Hyperlink An electronic cross-reference. The user clicks the link, which is highlighted on a web page, to access related information either on the same website, or on a different site altogether.

Hypothetical questions Questions which ask the recipient to apply their knowledge and experience to hypothetical (i.e. imaginary) situations.

Idiom A form of words or expression specific to a group of individuals or language.

Instant messaging An internet application that allows a predefined sender and receiver to exchange messages almost instantaneously.

Initial stance The starting point or first offer in a negotiation, one that is almost always pitched high, sometimes clearly unreasonably high.

Intangible assets Assets which do not take a physical form, such as development costs, goodwill or intellectual property rights.

Integrity Soundness, uprightness, honesty.

Internet A global network of computers that enables people throughout the world to communicate with each other.

Internet service provider A company that provides access to the internet.

Intranet A secure, private computer network based on internet technology standards used within a single organisation, effectively as an internal internet.

Kinesic communication Use of posture, gesture, facial expression and body language.

Leading questions Questions which steer the recipient into responding in a particular way, in line with the answer the interviewer either wants or expects.

Legitimacy A case has *legitimacy* if is supported by factual evidence: the better the evidence, the higher the legitimacy and the stronger the case.

Management The administration of business concerns or public undertakings.

Market research The systematic gathering, recording and analysing of information relating to the marketing of goods and services and covering the broad scope of marketing activities.

Marketing Making goods or services available in the marketplace; putting goods and services up for sale.

Marketing communications The process by which a business can enter into dialogue with its clients and customers.

Mentor Someone from the organisation, not the employee's line manager, who provides advice, guidance and support to a newly appointed employee.

Message The thought, idea or instruction that the sender wishes to communicate.

Metaphor A word or expression with the qualities or character you want to attribute to your subject, which is used as a substitute.

Minutes A written record of the decisions and action points agreed at a meeting.

Mission statement A generalised statement of the overriding purpose of an organisation.

Mode The package into which the message is encoded. It may be a letter, a telephone call, an email, or any of the numerous ways in which a message can be transmitted.

Morality The distinction between right and wrong.

Negotiation The process of making a deal and agreeing the terms on which it is arranged to the satisfaction of everyone involved.

Noise Anything which interferes with or distorts the transmission and receipt of a message.

Objections Doubts or reservations, either in someone's mind or voiced, that add weight to the negative side of the 'decision-making balance' which will in turn lead to a failure to persuade.

Objectives A clear specification of the *result* you want from the negotiation: what it is, its timing.

Open punctuation Where full stops and commas are omitted from the address, opening and closing in a letter.

Open questions Questions which prompt reflective answers, instead of a simple 'yes' or 'no'. Useful for prompting discussion.

Paralinguistic communication Use of a range of non-verbal sounds which accompany spoken language.

Personal data In data protection terms, the data relating to a living individual.

Point of balance The point where the 'deal' can be agreed by both parties, though it may not reflect the best hopes of either.

Press (news) release A precisely written communication designed to prompt a mention of something that can be described as news about an organisation in various media.

Probing questions Questions which ask for additional information or clarification based on a previous response. Depending on the information required, they can be open or closed.

Probity Uprightness, honesty.

Projection The way in which a person presents themselves to others. The combination of a person's approach, personality, authority and charisma.

Promotional mix The range of channels an organisation might use to communicate with the external environment.

Prosodic communication The stress and pitch patterns used in speech, such as pauses and intonation.

Public relations (PR) A planned and sustained effort to establish and maintain goodwill and mutual understanding between an organisation and its publics.

Quorum The minimum number of appropriate attendees who must be present at a formal meeting (for example a board meeting) for its decisions to be valid. The number will be set out in its constitution.

Receiver The person for whom the message is intended. Next in importance only to the sender, because without a receiver the communication loop is left unclosed, and there is no communication.

Record Any information captured in reproducible form which is required for conducting business, and generated or received by a business as evidence of its organisation, functions, policies, decisions, procedures, operations and transactions.

Records management The logical and practical approach to the creation, maintenance, use and disposition of records, and of the information those records contain.

Report A written document which presents a series of facts on a specified subject for a particular purpose.

Resolution The way in which a decision is proposed and passed at a formal meeting, such as a board meeting or annual general meeting of a company.

Sans serif Typeface that is straight with no serifs or small extensions on letters, generally used for headings.

Serifs Small extensions on letters which make the type easier to read.

Signposting Identifying and communicating in advance the content or nature of what is coming next.

Stakeholder Any group or individual who can affect, or is affected by, the achievement of an organisation's objectives.

Strategic plan A document or strategy indicating in detail the timescale for an organisation's longer-term strategy and the resources available to achieve it.

Style The approach and choice of words and expression which can be adjusted to suit specific circumstances.

Synchronous Existing or occurring at the same time; simultaneous with.

Syntax The rules of sentence construction.

Team A group of people, each with different roles and responsibilities, working together to manage a specific project or task.

Teleconferencing The means of talking to a number of different people on the telephone at the same time.

Terms of reference The detailed objectives, specifications and remit of, for example, a particular report or a regular committee.

Trading variables The process of deciding how factors are decided and agreed in relation to each party to the negotiation.

Variables Those factors that can be varied and arranged in different ways to create different potential deals.

Visual aids Examples such as pictures, diagrams or even sample products which add interest and aid understanding of a presentation.

Voicemail An automated telephone answering machine system commonly used in organisations to allow individuals to create personalised outgoing messages and receive and manage their own incoming messages.

Web browser A computer program that decodes information from the internet so that it can be read on an individual's computer screen.

Win-win negotiation The best negotiating outcome, in which both parties are satisfied and have an agreement with which they can feel comfortable, even if it is not the ideal 'best deal'.

'What if' questions In negotiation, the process whereby adjustments are made by making suggestions that offer new ways of rebalancing matters: 'What if . . .I do this and you then accept (or do) that?'

World wide web Information-sharing software that provides a way of accessing information from the internet.

Directory

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Web resources

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Association for Business Communications: www.businesscommunication.org

Business Communication Resource Links: www.mhhe.com/business/buscom/lesikar10e/student/index.html – A companion website for an American textbook which includes a selection of links to useful resources.

International Association of Business Communicators: www.iabc.com

International Communication Association: www.icahdq.org

Writers Write: www.writerswrite.com/buscomms – Includes a useful set of links, including a business letter tutorial, an article on email etiquette and advice on copywriting.

Index