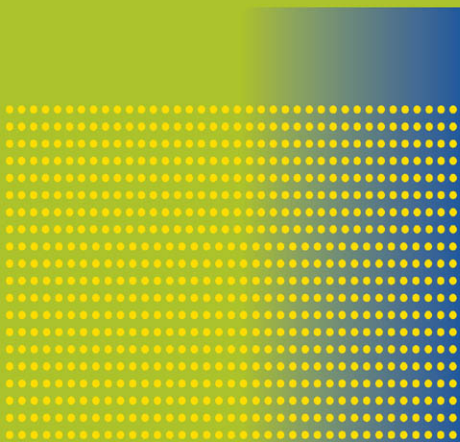


PEARSON NEW INTERNATIONAL EDITION

Guide to Managerial Communication
Mary Munter Lynn Hamilton
Tenth Edition



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Communication Strategy

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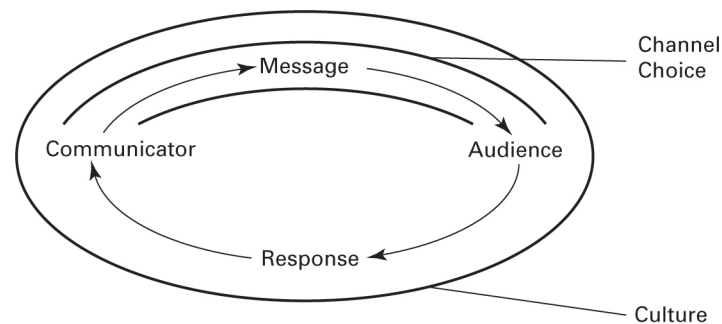
CHAPTER OUTLINE

- I. Communicator strategy
 - 1. What is your objective?
 - 2. What communication style do you choose?
 - 3. What is your credibility?
- II. Audience strategy
 - 1. Who are they?
 - 2. What do they know and expect?
 - 3. What do they feel?
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- III. Message strategy
 - 1. Harness the power of beginnings and endings.
 - 2. Overcome the retention dip in the middle.
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 - 4. Connect through stories.
- IV. Channel choice strategy
 - 1. Written-only channels
 - 2. Oral-only channels
 - 3. Blended channels
- V. Culture strategy

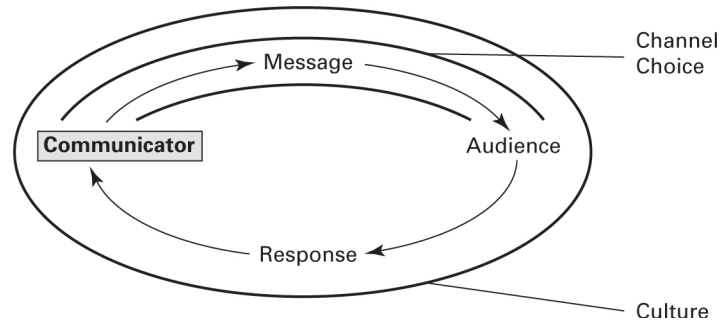
Communication Strategy

Managerial communication is different from other kinds of communication. Why? Because in a business or management setting, the most brilliant message in the world will do you no good unless you achieve your desired outcome. Therefore, instead of thinking of communication as a straight line from a sender to a receiver, visualize communication as a circle, as shown below, with your success based on achieving your desired audience response.

To get that desired audience response, you need to think strategically about your communication—before you start to write or speak. Strategic communication is based on five interactive variables: (1) communicator (the writer or speaker) strategy, (2) audience strategy, (3) message strategy, (4) channel choice strategy, and (5) culture strategy. These variables may affect one another; for example, your audience analysis affects your communicator style, your channel choice may affect your message, and the culture may affect your channel choice—in other words, these variables do not occur in a lockstep order.



I. COMMUNICATOR STRATEGY



One element of your communication strategy has to do with a set of issues involving you, the communicator. Regardless of whether you are speaking or writing, your communicator strategy includes your objectives, style, and credibility.

I. What is your objective?

It's easy to communicate and receive a random response from your audience—because their response might be to ignore, misunderstand, or disagree with you. However, effective strategic communicators are those who receive their desired response or desired outcome. To clarify this outcome, hone your thoughts from the general to the specific.

General objective: This is your broad overall goal toward which each separate communication will aim.

Action objectives: Then, break down your general goal into a consciously planned series of action outcomes—specific, measurable, time-bound steps that will lead toward your general objectives. State your action objectives in this form: “To accomplish a specific result by a specific time.”

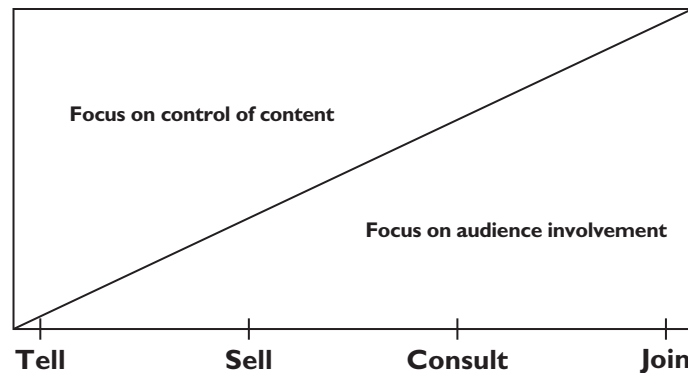
Communication objective: Your communication objective is even more specific. It is focused on the result you hope to achieve from a single communication effort (or episode)—such as a report, email, or presentation. To create a communication objective, start with the phrase: “As a result of this communication, my audience will. . . .” Then complete the statement by identifying precisely what you want your audience to do, know, or think as a result of having read or heard your communication.

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EXAMPLES OF OBJECTIVES		
General	Action	Communication
Keep management aware of new HR initiatives.	Report two times each quarter.	As a result of this presentation, my boss will learn the results of two new HR programs.
Increase customer base.	Sign 20 new clients each month.	As a result of this letter, the client will sign and return the contract.
Develop a sound financial position.	Maintain annual debt-to-equity ratio no greater than X.	As a result of this report, the board will approve my debt reduction recommendations.
Increase the number of women hired.	Hire 15 women by March 31, 2014.	As a result of this meeting, we will come up with a strategy to accomplish our goal. As a result of this presentation, at least 10 women will sign up to interview with my firm.
Maintain market share.	Sell X amount by X date.	As a result of this memo, my boss will approve my marketing plan. As a result of this presentation, the sales representatives will understand the three new product enhancements.

2. What communication style do you choose?

As you define your communication objective, choose the appropriate style to reach that objective. The following diagram, adopted from Tannenbaum and Schmidt, displays the range of communication styles used in virtually everyone's job at various times. Instead of trying to find one "right" style, use the appropriate style at the appropriate time and avoid using the same style all of the time.



When to use the tell/sell style: Use the tell/sell style when you want your audience to learn from you. In the *tell* style, you are informing or explaining; you want your audience to understand something you already know. In the *sell* style, you are persuading or advocating; you want your audience to change their thinking or behavior. In tell/sell situations:

- You have sufficient information.
- You do not need to hear others' opinions, ideas, or input.
- You want to control the message content.

When to use the consult/join style: Use the consult/join style, sometimes called the "inquiry style," when you want to learn from the audience. The *consult* style is somewhat collaborative (like a questionnaire); the *join* style is even more collaborative (like a brainstorming session). In consult/join situations:

- You do not have sufficient information.
- You want to understand others' opinions, ideas, or input.
- You want to involve your audience and gain their buy-in.

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When to use a combination of styles: In an ongoing communication project, you may need to use a combination of styles: for example, *join* to brainstorm ideas, *consult* to choose one of those ideas, *sell* to persuade your boss to adopt that idea, and *tell* to write up the idea once it becomes policy.

EXAMPLES OF OBJECTIVES AND STYLES	
Communication Objective	Communication Style
As a result of viewing this online training program, employees will be able to compare and contrast the three benefits programs available in this company. As a result of this presentation, my boss will learn the seven major accomplishments of our department this month.	TELL: In these situations, you are instructing or explaining. You want your audience to learn and to understand. You do not need your audience's opinions.
As a result of reading this proposal, my client will sign the enclosed contract. As a result of this presentation, the committee will approve my proposed budget.	SELL: In these situations, you are persuading or advocating. You want your audience to do something different. You need some audience involvement to get them to do so.
As a result of reading this email, employees will respond by answering the questionnaire. As a result of this question-and-answer session, my staff will voice and obtain replies to their concerns about the new vacation policy.	CONSULT: In these situations, you are conferring. You need some give-and-take with your audience. You want to learn from them, yet control the interaction somewhat.
As a result of reading these meeting materials, the group will come to the meeting prepared to offer their thoughts on this specific issue. As a result of this brainstorming session, the group will come up with a solution to this specific problem.	JOIN: In these situations, you are collaborating. You and your audience are working together to come up with the content.

3. What is your credibility?

Another aspect of communicator strategy involves analyzing your audience's perception of you (their belief, confidence, and faith in you). Their perception of you has a tremendous impact on how you should communicate with them.

Five factors (based on social power theorists French, Raven, and Kotter) affect your credibility: (1) rank, (2) goodwill, (3) expertise, (4) image, and (5) common ground. Once you understand these factors, you can enhance your credibility by stressing your initial credibility and by increasing your acquired credibility.

Initial credibility: "Initial credibility" refers to your audience's perception of you before you even begin to communicate, before they ever read or hear what you have to say. Your initial credibility, then, may stem from their perception of who you are, what you represent, or how you have related to them previously.

As part of your communication strategy, you may want to stress or remind your audience of the grounds for your initial credibility. Also, in those lucky situations in which your initial credibility is high, you may use it as a "bank account." If people in your audience regard you highly, they may trust you even in unpopular or extreme decisions or recommendations. Just as drawing on a bank account reduces your bank balance, however, drawing on your initial credibility reduces your credibility balance; you must "deposit" more to your account, perhaps by goodwill gestures or by further proof of your expertise.

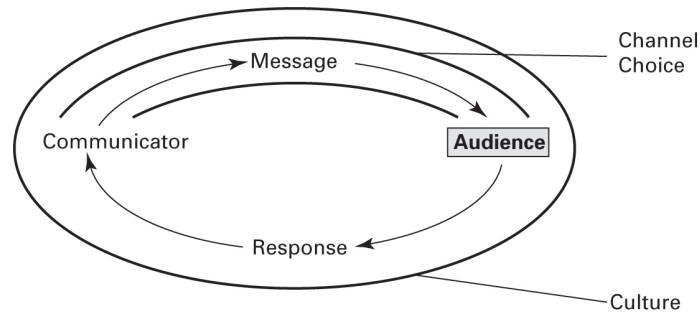
Acquired credibility: By contrast, "acquired credibility" refers to your audience's perception of you as a result of what you write or say. Even if your audience knows nothing about you in advance, your good ideas and your persuasive writing or speaking will help you earn credibility. The obvious way to heighten your credibility, therefore, is to do a good job of communicating.

You might also want to associate yourself with a high-credibility person, acknowledge values you share with your audience, or use another technique listed on the chart on the facing page.

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FACTORS AND TECHNIQUES FOR CREDIBILITY			
Factor	Based on . . .	Stress initial credibility by . . .	Increase acquired credibility by . . .
Rank	Hierarchical power	Emphasizing your title or rank	Associating yourself with or citing a high-ranking person (e.g., by his or her cover letter or introduction)
Goodwill	Personal relationship or "track record"	Referring to relationship or "track record"	Building your goodwill by emphasizing audience benefits, "what's in it for them"
	Trustworthiness	Offering balanced evaluation; acknowledging any conflict of interest	
Expertise	Knowledge, competence	Sharing your expert understanding Explaining how you gained your expertise	Associating yourself with or citing authoritative sources
Image	Attractiveness, audience's desire to be like you	Emphasizing attributes audience finds attractive	Associating yourself with high-image people
	Authenticity, sincerity	Communicating openly, sincerely connecting with audience, showing appropriate emotion	
Common ground	Common values, ideas, problems, or needs	Establishing your shared values or ideas Acknowledging similarities with audience Tying the message to your common ground	

II. AUDIENCE STRATEGY



Audience strategy—that is, gearing your message toward the audience’s needs and interests—is perhaps the most important aspect of your communication strategy. Writing experts often equate a good audience strategy with taking “the you attitude”—seeing things from the reader’s point of view. Such an attitude underscores Peter Drucker’s wise words: “Communication takes place in the mind of the listener, not of the speaker.” The more you can learn about your audience—who they are, what they know, what they feel, and how they can be persuaded—the more likely you will be to achieve your desired outcome.

I. Who are they?

“Who are they” sounds like a fairly straightforward question, but in business, this question is often a subtle and complex one. You’ll need to think about who all of your possible audiences might be, even your hidden ones; who your key decision-maker is; and whom you might want to add to your audience.

Primary audience: Your primary audience is defined as those who will actually receive your message directly.

- *When your audience is unknown*, find out about their (1) *demographics*, such as age, education, organization or department, geographic location, organizational rank, and language fluency; (2) *knowledge and beliefs*, such as their background or values; (3) *preferences*, such as level of formality and preferred channel choice (e.g., email versus face-to-face).
- *When your audience is familiar*, your job will be easier, but nevertheless, take the time to analyze them. Keep in mind not only their demographics, knowledge, and channel preference but also their likes and dislikes, typical behavior, preferred level of detail, and tendency to be challenging or withdrawn.

Key influencers: Usually one or more audience members have more control over the outcome of the communication (that is, your communication objective): (1) *decision-makers*, such as your client or customer, make the decision directly; (2) *opinion leaders* affect the decision indirectly because of their high credibility or their ability to shape opinion; and (3) *gatekeepers*, such as your boss or an assistant, have the ability to either expedite or block your message. For example, if your boss has to approve your slides or memo in advance, she or he may be just as important as your primary audience.

Secondary audiences: Do not overlook people who will receive your message indirectly. For example, (1) colleagues or clients who may be cc'd on an email you send or receive a copy of your slide deck from someone who forwards it; (2) bosses who may need to approve communications in advance, such as slides prepared for a committee or client; (3) employees who have the power to undercut your message later, perhaps by not implementing your recommendations; or (4) assistants and intermediaries who have the power to block your message, perhaps by not passing along your document.

In addition, think about how your audience members may communicate with one another or others; they may forward your email or slide deck, text or tweet during your presentation, comment about your report or other document on a blog or website, or post something you've written on Facebook.

2. What do they know and expect?

Before you decide what to tell them, you need to think about what your audience already knows and expects. Think about their age, education, occupation, ethnic origin, gender, and culture.

Questions to analyze might include the following: What do they know already and how much background material do they need? What do they need to know (a lot or just a little)? How much new information do they really need? What are their expectations in terms of style (e.g., formal or informal, straightforward or indirect)? How well do they speak the language? Once you have given those questions some thought, you'll want to . . .

Remember the “problem of knowing too much.” If you have worked for weeks or months on a project, you may know so much more than even a well-informed audience that you forget to share necessary background knowledge.

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- *Identify and define the jargon*, lingo that may be so commonplace to you that you may forget you're even using it.
- *Simplify the information*. Focus on the ideas that are essential instead of those that aren't needed to grasp the main point. Use familiar examples to explain difficult concepts. Try comparing a complex procedure to an everyday activity or incorporating several concrete examples to make an abstract idea less confusing.

Deal with mixed background needs. You may often find yourself having to communicate with a mixed audience. In these cases, you might choose to . . .

- *Provide background material* for novices. Consider sending an article or file in advance or adding a glossary of technical terms or an email attachment.
- *Acknowledge the experts* by saying something like "As those of you who have been through this before know . . ." or "Just to bring our visitors up to date . . ."
- *Aim your message* toward your key decision-maker but don't leave out anyone.

Consider their format expectations. Format refers to everything from logistical considerations to communication norms. Find out what's expected in terms of . . .

- *Timing*: How long should your presentation or document be? Where does it fit on the agenda? When do breaks occur? When should the document be distributed?
- *Visual aids*: Find out what's expected and what technology is available.
- *Formality*: Ask how to address audience members, what dress is appropriate, and whether to use a formal or informal wording or non-verbal delivery style.

Address second-language issues. Here are some techniques you can use to help the non-native speakers in your audience.

- *Check your use of idioms and metaphors*. Common expressions may seem perplexing to someone new to a language. So rather than reminding people to "dot their *i*'s and cross their *t*'s," consider asking them to "check the details." Similarly, sports metaphors can cause confusion if your listeners aren't familiar with the sport; for example, they may not know that a "slam dunk" is a sure thing.

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- *Avoid sarcasm and be careful with humor.* Sarcasm depends on vocal tone; it often does not make sense to someone from another culture. Similarly, humor based on puns or culturally based information may not be understood.
- *Adjust your delivery.* Enunciate clearly and speak a little slower, especially at the beginning. Use visual aids, with simple, clear “take-aways,” so people can both see and hear your important points.

3. What do they feel?

Remember, your audience’s emotional level is just as important as their knowledge level. Therefore, in addition to thinking about what they know, empathize with what they feel. Answering the following questions will give you a sense of the emotions your audience may be bringing to the communication.

What emotions do they feel? What feelings may arise from their current situation or their emotional attitude?

- *What is their current situation?* Is there anything about the economic situation, the timing, or their morale that you should keep in mind? How pressured for time are they?
- *What emotions might they feel about your message?* Many communicators mistakenly think that all business audiences are driven by facts and rationality alone. In truth, they may also be driven by their feelings about your message: they may feel positive emotions (such as pride, excitement, and hope) or negative ones (such as anxiety, fear, or jealousy).

How interested are they in your message? Is your message a high priority or low priority for your audience? How likely are they to choose to read what you write or to listen carefully to what you say? How curious are they and how much do they care about the issue or its outcomes?

- *If their interest level is high:* In these cases, you can get right to the point without taking much time to arouse their interest. Build a good logical argument. Do not expect a change of opinion without continued effort over time; however, if you can persuade them, their change will be more permanent than changes in a low-interest audience.
- *If their interest level is low:* In these cases, think about using a consult/join style, and ask them to participate; one of the strongest ways to build support is to share control. If, however, you are using

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a tell/sell style, use one or more of the techniques discussed earlier in this chapter to persuade them. In addition, keep your message as short as possible; long documents are intimidating and listeners tune out anything that seems like rambling. Finally, for low-interest audiences, act quickly on attitude changes because those changes may not be permanent.

What is their probable bias: positive or negative? What is their probable attitude toward your ideas or recommendations? Are they likely to favor them, be indifferent, or be opposed? What do they have to gain or lose from your ideas? Why might they say “no”?

- *Positive or neutral:* If they are positive or neutral, reinforce their existing attitude by stating the benefits that will accrue from your message.
- *Negative:* If they are negative, try one or more of these techniques: (1) Convince them that there is a problem, then solve the problem. (2) State points with which you think they will agree first; if audience members are sold on two or three key features of your proposal, they will tend to sell themselves on the other features as well. (3) Limit your request to the smallest one possible, such as a pilot program rather than a full program right away. (4) Respond to anticipated objections; you will be more persuasive by stating and rejecting alternatives yourself, instead of allowing them to devise their own, which they will be less likely to reject.

Is your desired action easy or hard for them? From their perspective, what will your communication objective entail in terms of their immediate task? Will it be time-consuming, complicated, or difficult for them?

- *Easy or hard for them:* Whether your desired action is easy or hard, always show how it supports the audience’s beliefs or benefits them.
- *Hard for them:* If it is hard, try one of these techniques: (1) Break the action down into the smallest possible request, such as a signature approving an idea that someone else is lined up to implement. (2) Make the action as easy as you can, such as distributing a questionnaire that they can fill in easily or providing them with a checklist they can follow easily.