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Effective Organisational Communication: Perspectives, principles and practices (4th edition)

Book

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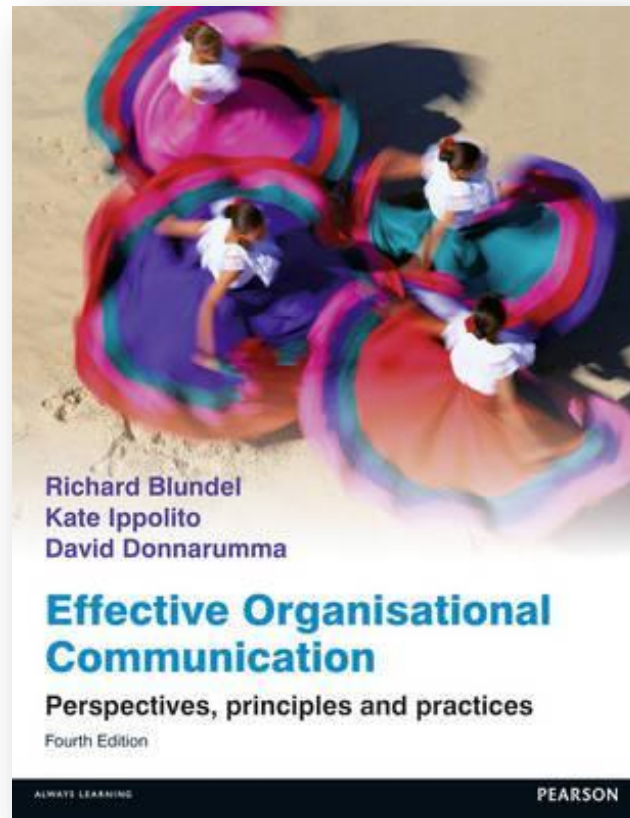
Preface to the fourth edition

There can be too much communication between people.
Ann Beattie, writer

Who is this book for?

Effective Organisational Communication has a number of audiences, including undergraduate and postgraduate students taking courses such as communication, professional communication skills, management skills, international management and organisational behaviour. The book's combination of accessibility, up-to-date theory and practical application will also make it a useful resource for students from other disciplines, such as biological science, computing or engineering, which often include organisational and managerial themes in their course programmes. It is suitable for students who have English as a first or second language. It should also be of value to practising managers who wish to review and develop their own approach to communication, or to coach other employees in this vital and often neglected subject.

How has it changed?

The fourth edition of Effective Organisational Communication sees the arrival of a third co-author, David Donnarumma. In revising the book, the authors have retained many popular features of the previous edition, whilst also taking account of feedback from readers and reviewers. Our major revisions have focused on further enhancing the international and inter-cultural perspectives, incorporating more of a focus on language development and the use of social media tools and on creating more opportunities for readers to reflect on their

personal experiences of organisational communication. Whether you are located in the UK, Scandinavia, or in another part of the world entirely, you are likely to be studying, working – or just spending time – in some diverse multinational and multi-cultural organisations. In the new edition we emphasise the practical implications of such diversity, with theoretical insights and compelling 'real-world' case studies that highlight contemporary challenges and opportunities, including those posed by continual advances in communication technologies. Here is a list of the key changes we have made to this new edition:

• **Key concepts**: we have continued to update and added more concise and easy-to-locate definitions of important communication concepts and terminology.
• Case Studies: These have been updated and refreshed with current, real world examples of communication challenges to support the development of your critical thinking.
• **Useful websites**: As websites are a dynamic source of information we have ensured that links are still 'live' and have added new, relevant online resources. This includes more links to web-based multimedia.
• **Internationalisation / globalization**: We have strengthened this theme throughout the whole book.
• **Social Media**: We have updated several chapters to include critique of social media tools such as Twitter and Facebook and we explore the challenges of using technologies such as video conferencing
• **Language Development**: We have strengthened and included more information on language development skills particularly in the areas of verbal communication and report writing.

What is it trying to achieve?

The purpose of this book is to help you become a more effective communicator. It is concerned with the complex and dynamic mix of written, spoken and visual communication that takes place within and between organisations. We look at people's efforts to communicate in a variety of challenging organisational settings, including: multinational corporations, international aid agencies, local governments, scientific research teams and start-up ventures. In contrast to many popular texts in this area, Effective Organisational Communication is more than simply an instructional manual. Throughout the book, you are encouraged to identify connections between the development of skills in specific communication practices (e.g. drafting more focused and readable reports, communicating more clearly and persuasively in meetings), and a broader set of communication principles. The text also introduces contrasting research perspectives, expanding the scope of the subject and challenging some unspoken assumptions about the central theme of 'effectiveness' in communication. By exploring the links between perspectives, principles and practices, you can begin to generalise from your own experiences of communication, develop a more flexible repertoire of skills and refine your critical faculties. As a result, you will be much better placed to deal with new communication challenges.

How is it structured?

Chapter 1 provides a general overview of the book. It introduces the communication process, reviews a number of perspectives and insights and introduces some key themes that are developed throughout the text. It is therefore essential to read this chapter thoroughly, before proceeding. After Chapter 1, the rest of the book is divided into two closely inter-related parts.

Part I – Principles of communication

Chapters 2 to 7 establish a coherent framework for exploring the communication process, drawing on relevant research findings and real-life case studies. Chapter 2 identifies the principal barriers to effective communication and considers how they can be overcome. Subsequent chapters consider the role of words and images in various forms of communication; the communicator's key tasks of developing arguments; and the challenge of securing

relevant feedback. The final chapter in Part I addresses the additional issues that arise when you attempt to communicate within and beyond the boundaries of organisations.

Part 2 – Communication in practice

Chapters 8 to 13 provide a comprehensive, practical and critical review of the main communication channels used in today's organisations. Each chapter follows a similar format, introducing the essential elements of the channel, including its strengths and weaknesses, showing how the generic principles of communication can be applied to improve effectiveness by working through examples of good and bad practice. Chapter 14 draws brief conclusions from the preceding chapters, discusses the challenge of evaluating (or 'auditing') organisational communication and points to some on-going challenges.

The Part I ('principles') chapters build on one another and are therefore best studied in sequence. Part II ('practice') chapters, with the exception of Chapter 14, are entirely self-contained, and can be worked through in any order, depending on your current interests and needs. Chapters 7 and 14 conclude each section, highlighting key themes and emerging issues. This flexible format allows you to explore the links between principles and practice by alternating between the Parts I and II. Each chapter contains several up-to-date case studies (including a 'face-to-face' example), practical exercises or discussion topics, annotated guides to further reading and useful websites, plus a full list of references. These features are designed to clarify your understanding, and to provide practice in applying what has been learnt.

How should I approach this subject?

'Effectiveness' in organisational communication is about the skilful application of knowledge. Just as in other fields, such as sports or the performing arts, the only way to improve your personal performance is to practise and the only way to excel is to keep on questioning your current approach, and to set yourself greater challenges. But there is more to this subject than simply enhancing personal capabilities. Organisations are strange and powerful beasts that have a profound impact on every aspect of our daily life. Though much of their impact is positive, organisations can also do a great deal of harm. The negative side is revealed in the controversies that we see almost every day in the media concerning organisations and their interactions with key stakeholders, such as employees, customers, suppliers and local communities. But is anyone learning from past mistakes? If organisations are to do less harm (and more good) in the future, part of the solution is to have a better informed debate about the ways that they communicate. We hope that this book encourages you to join in this argument by taking a continuing, critical interest in the communication practices of organisations and the people who inhabit them.

Richard Blundel, Kate Ippolito and David Donnarumma

'There is something refreshing about this text that derives from the breadth of the issues and perspectives addressed in the first half of the book, the worldview advanced through a willingness to engage with the complexity of organisations and communication, and the authors' rich yet succinct style of writing. They have managed to create a comprehensive text that addresses both the conceptual and the practical requirements of students, and even make topics like "meetings", "email", and "report writing" both instructive and engaging.'
Journal of Communication Management (2010)