

# **Chapter 2: Foundations of Communication?**

## *Lecture Notes and Teaching Suggestions*

### **CHAPTER SYNOPSIS**

To be a strategic communicator requires a number of skills and abilities as well as certain knowledge; some might say it requires a certain mindset. These skills and abilities include understanding principles and concepts considered to be the foundation of effective communication, especially a high level of self-awareness, an ability to understand other people (who often have differing experiences, values, and interests from our own, including cultural differences), a basic knowledge of the complexity of the communication process itself, and the ability to think critically—to analyze and evaluate situations, and use that information to formulate effective communication strategies. How can you develop your analytical and critical thinking abilities so that you are better able to heighten your skills as a strategic communicator?

### **LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

- I. Approach communication from a more complex perspective that embraces a strategic and ethical focus.
- II. Understand the process of perception and the way it affects the way information is interpreted.
- III. Understand the importance of self-awareness as a foundational element of effective communication and the understanding of others.
- IV. Identify obstacles to strategic and ethical communication.

### **LECTURE OUTLINE**

#### **I. Requirements for Strategic Communication**

*PowerPoint slide 2*

Content:

- A. Personal literacy: understanding of self-awareness and self-esteem.
- B. Social literacy: ability to understand other people (diverse) to be able to engage and challenge them.
- C. Business literacy: understanding of the organization's business environment, culture, and processes.
- D. Cultural literacy: valuing and leveraging cultural differences.

Notes:

**Role Play Exercise:** Divide the class into four groups. Assign each of the four requirements for strategic communication to each group. Each group would be charged with the task of searching the Internet to provide examples that would best describe the requirement for strategic communication assigned.

Watch a YouTube video related to Strategic Communication:

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=qWvi-jI6DMc](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qWvi-jI6DMc)

Hold a discussion about the main points discussed in the video.

## II. Models of Communication (p. 17)

*PowerPoint slide 3*

Content:

- a. Information Transfer: Assumes communication is transmitted without distortion from sender to receiver
- b. Transactional: Assumes sender and receiver are focused on achieving shared meaning, without interest in own perspective
- c. Strategic Control: Assumes sender is entirely focused on own interest, possibly to the detriment of honest ethical communication
- d. Dialogic: Assumes communication is a process of joint creation of reality, focused on audience and context, allows different points of view

Notes:

- A. Communication as information transfer.
  - Assumes that communication can be achieved without distortion.
  - Flaws: interpretation and distortion are unavoidable. Nonverbal communication is ignored.
- B. Communication as transactional process.
  - Acknowledges that both senders and receivers are active and simultaneous interpreters of messages.
  - Flaws: emphasis on shared meaning. It does not emphasize the political nature of many organizations.
- Communication as strategic control.
  - Assumes that communication is a tool that individuals use to control their environment.
  - Flaws: it recognizes that people should not be expected to communicate in any objectively rational way, thus ignoring the goals of clarity and honesty.

- Communication as dialogic process.
- Mitigates against many of the problems associated with the other three models discussed earlier.
- Focuses on the contribution of the “receiver’s” perspective to an interpretation and course of action that are jointly formulated.
- Audience analysis should drive strategy and message formulation.
- Does not assume that meaning is shared, but instead recognizes the interplay between difference and similarity of those involved in the communication process.
- Does not assume that we are isolated individuals, but instead that we live in groups and communities and that our actions affect others.
- Requires an understanding of the socially constructed nature of reality—individuals create meaning through communication—and the possibility for a strategic approach to communication to go awry in an ethical sense.
- Perceives others as interdependent partners capable and deserving of their own voice to influence the organizational dialog.
- Is considered an index of the ethical level of communication to the degree that participants in communication display the preceding attributes.
- Supports systems theory, plurality, and intercultural communication.

*PowerPoint slide 4*

Content:

Monologue v. Dialogue

A. Monologue

- Talking to oneself
- Deception
- Superiority
- Exploitation
- Pretense
- Coercion

B. Dialogue

- Joint creation of reality
- Trust

- Sincerity
- Lack of pretense
- Humility
- Directness
- Open-minded
- Honest

Notes:

**Exercise:** Visit <http://www.scribd.com/doc/17878315/Models-of-Communication> and play the PowerPoint presentation. Then, divide the class into groups of five students. Each group will be responsible for explaining each of the models presented in the PowerPoint file.

**Exercise:** Show the video found at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fpkm7D4Bn6I> and ask students to present five things that stood out the most to them. Follow it by holding a meaningful discussion.

### III. Perception (p. 22)

*PowerPoint slide 5*

Content:

1. **Stereotypes** cause us to focus on certain cues
2. We make **attributions** about who or what is responsible for what we sense
3. All the factors we sense are compiled into a coherent whole to form an **impression**

Notes:

- A. Because everything is interpreted through our own experiences, beliefs, and values, it is difficult to understand what is really “out there.”
- B. Because we all have different life experiences, value systems, worldviews, and beliefs, we thus may perceive reality differently.
- C. These differences can be enormous obstacles to effective communication, particularly if we are unaware of them. Today’s diverse workplace adds a more complex dimension to this problem.
- D. Perceptual differences may lead to additional problems:
  - Stereotyping
  - Attribution
  - Impression formation
  - Culture

**Exercise:** Ask students to view the stereotyping video found at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vXzKLtgKJj0> and hold a meaningful discussion.

### IV. Self-awareness and Communication (p. 24)

*PowerPoint slide 6*

Content:

- A. What is my “EQ”?
  - a. Self
    - i. Am I aware of my feelings:
    - ii. Can I manage my emotions and impulses?
    - iii. Do I persist in the face of setbacks and failures?
  - b. Others
    - i. Can I sense how others are feeling?
    - ii. Do I have the ability to handle others emotions?

Notes:

- A. To become effective communicators, we must know ourselves, including our strengths and weaknesses, which affect the way we interact with others.
- B. Self-concept refers to how we think about ourselves and how we describe ourselves to others.
  - How we view ourselves
  - How we view the other person
  - How we believe the other person views us
  - How the other person views himself/herself/themselves
  - How the other person views us
  - How the other person believes we view him/her/them
- C. Self-awareness and communication concepts.
  - Self-fulfilling prophecy
  - Self-awareness
  - Intrapersonal communication
  - Intrapersonal intelligence
  - Reflexivity
  - Interpersonal intelligence
  - Self-esteem
  - Emotional intelligence

**Exercise:** Show the video found at [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pfp\\_ti1NQZ8](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pfp_ti1NQZ8) and hold a meaningful discussion.

## **V. Obstacles to Strategic Communication (p. 28)**

*PowerPoint slide 7*

Content:

Obstacles to Strategic and Ethical Communication

1. Perceptual mindset
2. Inferential Errors
3. Thinking Style

Notes:

- A. Perceptual mindsets.
  - Confirmation bias
  - False dichotomies
  - Inferential errors

*PowerPoint slide 8*

Content:

Ways to combat confirmation bias

- Confirmation bias: A tendency to distort information that contradicts the beliefs or attitudes we currently hold.
  1. Actively seek out disconfirming information
  2. Vigorously present and argue disconfirming evidence to others
  3. Play devil's advocate
  4. Gather allies to challenge confirmation bias

*PowerPoint slide 9*

Content:

Ways to combat false dichotomies

- A. False dichotomy: A dichotomy that is not jointly exhaustive or that is not mutually exclusive.
  1. Be suspicious of absolutes. Look for alternatives to the one or two suggestions recommended
  2. Employ the language of qualifications. Speak in terms of degrees
    - Sometimes
    - Rarely
    - Mostly
    - Occasionally

**Exercise:** Show the false dichotomies video found at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F4x4nmeNlxw> and hold a meaningful discussion.

*PowerPoint slide 10*

Content:

What causes inferential errors?

- Vividness: “I heard about a terrible tragedy that happened to someone who did that...”
- Unrepresentativeness: “That restaurant is no good, I went there one time and I didn’t like it...”
- Correlation: “Every time I’ve gotten sick, I was wearing these shoes...”

*PowerPoint slide 11*

Content:

Other perceptual errors

- Oversimplifying: Tendency to prefer simplicity over complexity because it is less effort
- Imposing consistency: Tendency to impose patterns where they don’t exist
- Focusing on the negative: Tendency to perceive negative characteristics as more important than positive
- Making a fundamental attribution error: Tendency to assume that others’ failures are their own fault, but that success is due to situational factors
- Exhibiting a self-serving bias: Tendency to assume that our own failures are due to situational factors, but our success is due to our personal qualities

Thinking styles

- Sponge:
  - Indiscriminant absorption of information
  - Passive
  - No method for deciding usefulness
- Filter:
  - Critical absorption of relevant information
  - Active processing
  - Ask questions of material to determine usefulness

## **ANSWERS TO CHAPTER DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

- 1. Explain each of the four models of communication and what distinguishes them, including their strengths and weaknesses. Why might the dialogic model better meet the needs of today’s workplace?**

A. Communication as information transfer.

- Assumes that communication can be achieved without distortion.
  - Flaws: interpretation and distortion are unavoidable. Nonverbal communication is ignored.
- B. Communication as transactional process.
- Acknowledges that both senders and receivers are active and simultaneous interpreters of messages.
  - Flaws: emphasis on shared meaning. It does not emphasize the political nature of many organizations.
- C. Communication as strategic control.
- Assumes that communication is a tool that individuals use to control their environment.
  - Flaws: it recognizes that people should not be expected to communicate in any objectively rational way, thus ignoring the goals of clarity and honesty.
- D. Communication as dialogic process.
- Mitigates against many of the problems associated with the other three models discussed earlier.
  - Focuses on the contribution of the “receiver’s” perspective to an interpretation and course of action that are jointly formulated.
  - Audience analysis should drive strategy and message formulation.
  - Does not assume that meaning is shared, but instead recognizes the interplay between difference and similarity of those involved in the communication process.
  - Does not assume that we are isolated individuals, but instead that we live in groups and communities and that our actions affect others.
  - Requires an understanding of the socially constructed nature of reality—individuals create meaning through communication—and the possibility for a strategic approach to communication to go awry in an ethical sense.
  - Perceives others as interdependent partners capable and deserving of their own voice to influence the organizational dialog.
  - Is considered an index of the ethical level of communication to the degree that participants in communication display the preceding attributes.
  - Supports systems theory, plurality, and intercultural communication.



The dialogic model better meets the needs of today's workplace because of its numerous advantages discussed above. In short, it mitigates against many of the problems associated with the other three models.

Tags:

BUSPROG: Communication | Diversity

DISC: Stakeholders | Conclusion

LO: 2-1 | 2-4

Bloom's: Evaluation

Difficulty: Difficult

Topic: A-Head: Models of Communication

2. **Identify examples of the use of moral exclusion and describe the intent and effect of their use. Based on this analysis, discuss whether such practices are ethical. Support your response with evidence.**

Moral exclusion occurs when the application of moral values, rules, and fairness is not considered necessary for particular individuals or groups. The practice of moral exclusion results in individuals being perceived as nonentities, expendable, or undeserving. The result is that harming such individuals becomes acceptable, appropriate, or just.

Persons who are morally excluded are thus denied their rights, dignity, and autonomy. Examples include showing the superiority of oneself or one's group by making unflattering comparisons to other individuals or groups; characterizing people as lower life forms or as inferior beings; placing the blame for any harm on the victim; justifying harmful acts by claiming that the morally condemnable acts committed by "the enemy" are worse; misrepresenting harmful behaviors by masking or conferring respectability on them through the use of neutral, positive, technical, or euphemistic terms to describe them; and justifying harmful behavior by claiming that everyone is doing it or that is an isolated case.

Tags:

BUSPROG: Ethics

DISC: Conclusion

LO: 2-4

Bloom's: Analysis

Difficulty: Moderate

Topic: A-Head: Models of Communication

3. **How have differing perceptions affected your communication with others? What steps might you take to avoid misunderstandings created by perceptual differences?**

A. Because everything is interpreted through our own experiences, beliefs, and values, it is difficult to understand what is really "out there."

- B. Because we all have different life experiences, value systems, worldviews, and beliefs, we thus may perceive reality differently.
- C. These differences can be enormous obstacles to effective communication, particularly if we are unaware of them. Today's diverse workplace adds a more complex dimension to this problem.
- D. Perceptual differences may lead to additional problems:
  - Stereotyping: can be a label for making sense out of what we perceive by categorizing or generalizing about it or it can be an oversimplified way of labeling people with the intention of denigrating them in some way.
  - Attribution: the assignment of meaning to other people's behavior.
  - Impression formation: process of integrating a variety of observations about a person into a coherent impression of that person.
  - Culture: the totality of what is learned by individuals as members of a society and shared by others of that society. It is a way of life, a mode of acting, feeling, and thinking.

To avoid misunderstandings, we must recognize the contested perceptual nature of reality and our interpretation of it. It thus requires openness to others' views and opinions, if we are to communicate effectively to reach anything approaching shared meaning.

Tags:

BUSPROG: Analytic

DISC: Conclusion | Consequences

LO: 2-2

Bloom's: Application

Difficulty: Moderate

Topic: A-Head: Perception

**4. What are three different errors that may occur due to our perceptual mindsets? How might these be avoided?**

Perceptual mindsets lead to the following errors:

- Confirmation bias
- False dichotomies
- Inferential errors
  - Vividness
  - Unrepresentativeness
  - Correlation

- Other perceptual errors
  - Oversimplifying
  - Imposing consistency
  - Focusing on the negative
  - Making a fundamental attribution error
  - Exhibiting a self-serving bias

To avoid these errors, we must become critical thinkers. Critical thinking is discussed below.

### Critical Thinking:

In the past, the focus on feelings went too far. The result is the neglect of thinking. We must answer that neglect. Students must be taught how to sort out their feelings, decide to what extent their feelings have been shaped by external influences, and evaluate them carefully when those feelings conflict among themselves or with the feelings of others. In short, students must be taught to think critically.

Feeling and thought are complementary. Feeling is an excellent beginning to the development of a conclusion. Thought provides a way to identify the best and most appropriate feeling. Students must acquire the intellectual skills necessary to solve the challenging problems of today and tomorrow.

The critical thinking strategy may be summarized as follows:

1. Knows oneself and remains mindful of the ways in which own habits of mind undermine own treatment of issues.
2. Is observant and reflects on what is seen and heard.
3. When an issue is identified, clarification is sought by listing its subheadings and raising probing questions about each.
4. Conducts a thorough inquiry, obtaining all relevant facts and informed opinions.
5. Evaluates own findings, and then forms and expresses own judgment.

Generic guide for facilitating critical thinking:

- A. What do I think about this matter?
- B. What line of reasoning led me to that conclusion?
- C. What evidence supports my position?
- D. Can I give an example?
- E. How typical is that example?
- F. In what way does my experience support or challenge my idea?
- G. What additional information can help me reach a conclusion? Where can I find that information?
- H. What objections could be raised to my idea?
- I. Are any of these objections wholly or partially valid? Explain.
- J. What other views of this issue are possible? Which of those is most reasonable?

*Ruggiero, V. (1998). Beyond feelings. A guide to critical thinking. Mountain View, CA: Mayfield Publishing Company.*

Tags:

BUSPROG: Analytic

DISC: Conclusion

LO: 2-4

Bloom's: Application

Difficulty: Moderate

Topic: A-Head: Obstacles to Strategic and Ethical Communication

**5. What are some examples of black-and-white, or dichotomous, thinking from recent news reports or opinion columns you have seen or read? What other possibilities may exist to broaden the views or options presented in these reports?**

Student responses should discuss how dichotomous thinking is basically the tendency to see the world in terms of "either-or." Such thinking is typically false because there are almost always more than two possibilities in our complex world. This tendency creates a false dichotomy, which blinds people to other possibilities.

To avoid the pitfalls of false dichotomies, individuals should:

- A. Be suspicious of absolutes. Look for alternatives to the one or two suggestions recommended.
- B. Employ the language of qualifications. Speak in terms of degrees by using such terms as *sometimes*, *rarely*, *occasionally*, *mostly*, *usually*, and *moderately*.

Tags:

BUSPROG: Analytic

DISC: Conclusion

LO: 2-4

Bloom's: Application

Difficulty: Moderate

Topic: A-Head: Obstacles to Strategic and Ethical Communication

**6. What are the benefits of thinking critically?**

Critical thinking is an important skill with many benefits. Critical thinkers communicate ethically to the extent that their acknowledgement of multiple possible hypotheses or sources of information allows them to communicate a position honestly and clearly. In addition, being a critical thinker allows individuals to learn to deal with ambiguity and appreciate the complexity of our world. Finally, thinking critically can help an individual gather better information, and ultimately make better decisions. This skill results in increased credibility for the critical thinker.

Tags:  
BUSPROG: Analytic  
DISC: Conclusion | Consequences  
LO: 2-4  
Bloom's: Comprehension  
Difficulty: Moderate  
Topic: A-Head: Obstacles to Strategic and Ethical Communication

## APPLICATIONS

1. **Use a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) analysis to determine your career goals. This is an exercise in analysis, evaluation, and ultimately, strategic thinking. First, identify the opportunities available to you and the possible risks; second, identify your strengths and weaknesses; third, identify the resources available to you to attain these opportunities; and fourth, match the opportunities available to you with those that are attainable. From this analysis should emerge an attainable career goal. It should also help you identify personal characteristics that you may leverage in a career search as well as those liabilities that you may set goals to eliminate or reduce.**

Student responses should include a thorough SWOT analysis to identify the opportunities available to them and the possible risks; identify their strengths and weaknesses; identify the resources available to them to attain these opportunities; and match the opportunities available to them with those that are attainable. The end result should be the establishment of an attainable career goal and a better understanding of themselves.

Tags:  
BUSPROG: Analytic  
DISC: Conclusion  
LO: 2-3  
Bloom's: Analysis  
Difficulty: Moderate  
Topic: A-Head: Self-Awareness and Communication

2. **Using the Internet, search for free online self-assessments of emotional intelligence, locus of control, leadership traits, and self-monitoring. One place to start is at [www.queendom.com](http://www.queendom.com). After completing the assessments and reading the results, summarize them and then write three goals for self-improvement for each personality measure, including your plan for achieving each of them.**

Student responses should include a summary of the results of completing the assessments and a statement related to three goals for self-improvement, including their plan for achieving such goals.

Tags:

BUSPROG: Analytic

DISC: Conclusion

LO: 2-3

Bloom's: Analysis

Difficulty: Moderate

Topic: A-Head: Self-Awareness and Communication

3. **Using YouTube, identify examples of persons who you think exemplify a leader. Make a list of your observations: What does the person do that exemplifies leadership? You may look at the way he or she speaks, looks, or behaves. From this list, what traits of a leader did you infer from your observations? What did you notice about the way this person communicated? Set some personal goals for yourself to help you to begin to incorporate the traits you identified in your own communication practices.**

Student responses should discuss how an effective leader is an effective strategic communicator. This leader requires a number of skills and abilities as well as certain knowledge; some might say it requires a certain mindset. These skills and abilities include understanding principles and concepts considered to be the foundation of effective communication, especially a high level of self-awareness, an ability to understand other people (who often have differing experiences, values, and interests from our own, including cultural differences), a basic knowledge of the complexity of the communication process itself, and the ability to think critically—to analyze and evaluate situations, and use that information to formulate effective communication strategies.

Tags:

BUSPROG: Analytic

DISC: Conclusion | Consequences | Patterns

LO: 2-1

Bloom's: Analysis

Difficulty: Moderate

Topic: A-Head: Self-Awareness and Communication

4. **Choose a culture that differs from your own and then describe your benefits and attitudes about and perceptions of this culture. Now conduct research to find out as much about the culture and its values, beliefs, and practices as you can. You may also wish to interview someone from this culture, if this opportunity is available. After learning more about the culture, what perceptions did you hold about it? Has your research changed your attitudes and beliefs about the culture?**

Student responses should include that, most likely, after conducting research about the chosen culture, their perceptions changed about that culture. In other words, ethnocentric behavior is our natural tendency. Upon gaining of a better understanding of a given culture, we begin to move from ethnocentrism to cultural relativism. Cultural relativism refers to seeing a particular culture through the eyes of that culture, as opposed to the eyes of our own culture.

Tags:  
BUSPROG: Analytic | Diversity  
DISC: Conclusion  
LO: 2-2  
Bloom's: Analysis  
Difficulty: Moderate  
Topic: A-Head: Perception

## CASE ANALYSIS

### A. Kaplan University: The Business of Education

#### Answers to Discussion Questions

1. **Moving forward, how should the Washington Post Company communicate:**
  - To the public?
  - To investors?
  - To students?

Student responses will vary but might mention that their communication with ALL groups involved should be open and honest and should encourage dialogue. Specifically:

- To the public: Acknowledging and listening to concerns without getting defensive.
- To investors: Honestly disclosing the difficult situation and clearly explaining how they are approaching the issues that could impact investors
- To students: Recognizing the unique difficulties Kaplan students are facing on an individual level and communicating their commitment to helping these students deal with their issues and prevent similar issues going forward.

2. **Does the perception of conflict of interest damage the *Washington Post's* credibility?**

Student responses will vary. Many will argue that it does damage the *Post's* credibility though some will suggest that it doesn't. People may argue that if the *Post* communicated strategically, it would not damage credibility *as much*. Students that make this argument should elaborate on what a strategic communication-based response to this situation would look like.

3. **Should Kaplan University change its business model?**

Student responses will vary. There's no absolute right answer to this. There's a compelling argument for changing the business model, especially given the ethical and legal missteps that the company took under their existing model. But

students may argue that Kaplan should keep its current business model and change their practices. Students should support either argument with evidence.

4. **What can Kaplan University do to build more credibility for its academic programs?**

Student responses will vary. One key (communication-related) action that would be an important step toward building more credibility for its academic programs would be to engage in a rich dialogue with its most important audience—past, current, and potential students—and then develop plans for change based on this feedback. Demonstrating that the company is truly listening and responding to its most important audience would begin to develop some of the credibility the company has lost.

5. **What should be done by the Washington Post Company or Kaplan, Inc. in response to the online petition to close Kaplan University?**

Student responses will vary but good responses will note that the one thing Washington Post Company and Kaplan, Inc. should *not* do is ignore the online petition to close Kaplan University. Ignoring the petition could make it look like Kaplan either finds the issue to be insignificant (which could be a big mistake given the growth in attention to the issue) *or* doesn't know how to manage/deal with the petition (which could make the company look incompetent).

6. **What steps can the Washington Post Company and Kaplan University take to prepare for future communication challenges?**

Student responses will vary, but they should include some of the steps that Washington Post Company and Kaplan University might take in developing the infrastructure that would simplify future communication challenges. These might include establishing regular dialogue with key stakeholder groups or improving communication metrics and integrating these metrics into regular organizational planning.

7. **Who are the key stakeholders?**

Student responses will vary but might include:

- Students (past, current, potential future)
- The public
- Investors in the Washington Post Company
- Policy makers (and perhaps policy *influencers* like Change.org)
- Possibly other for-profit universities
- The media