

# Important Business Communication Skills

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“The single biggest problem in communication is the illusion that it has taken place.”  
---George Bernard Shaw (1856-1950)

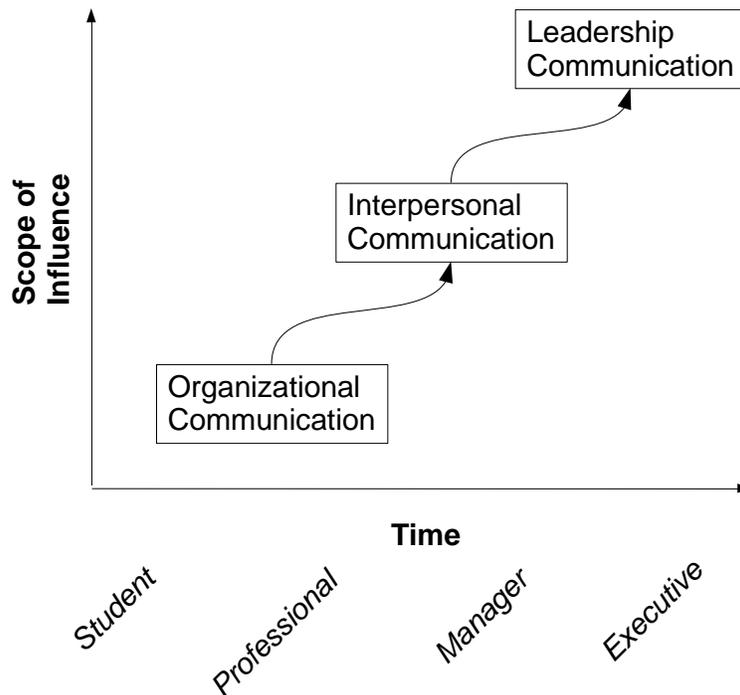
## Purpose

The purpose of this document is to help business students understand the deep communication skills, knowledge, and abilities that will be expected of them as they enter and develop careers in a professional and management community.

## Communication Skills over a Career

At each stage of an individual’s career, one improves her or his various communication skills. An individual *masters* all of one type of communication skills, *knows* some of another type of communication skills, and is *aware* of an additional type of communication skills. As the figure below suggests, each skill type builds upon the other skill types in various ways.

This accretion process is very subtle, and for an individual to be successful, this process must be mastered. Finally, despite its importance, it is entirely possible that there may not be any further formal training or education provided on this subject.



## **Organizational Communication Skills**

With few exceptions, business students are interested in a career as a professional. Professionals excel at *organizational* skills. They understand internal and external constituencies, and are especially fluent in areas of specialized, technical knowledge.

Professionals have an eye on interpersonal skills too because they are future-focused and want a manager to know that they are promotable and can obtain interpersonal, and eventually, leadership skills. Shrewd students learn this now.

| # | Skill Summary                   | Skill Detail                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|---|---------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1 | Initiating open discussion      | The ability to create discussion and dialogue, explore opposition by individuals who advocate their positions, and convince others to adopt those positions through logic, argument, or debate.              |
| 2 | Resolving conflict              | The ability to employ a range of processes aimed at alleviating or eliminating sources of conflict through processes including negotiation, mediation, and diplomacy.                                        |
| 3 | Creating information networks   | The ability to design and institute formal or informal systems for managing the flow of information and providing person-to-person relationships through which information flows.                            |
| 4 | Teaching important skills       | The ability to provide skill remediation to employees in areas such as job performance, technical competency, interpersonal communication, and problem-solving.                                              |
| 5 | Using information technology    | The ability to employ equipment (usually computers) that enables managers and staff to access ongoing and relevant company information including reports, planning data, and employee and customer feedback. |
| 6 | Providing performance feedback  | The ability to assess employee performance and provide performance feedback as a review of employees' performance.                                                                                           |
| 7 | Negotiating                     | The ability to produce an agreement on courses of action, to bargain for individual or collective advantage, or to craft outcomes to satisfy various interests.                                              |
| 8 | Writing business correspondence | The ability to produce written communication used in business including letters, memos, bulletins, and reports.                                                                                              |
| 9 | Making convincing presentations | The ability to provide informal or formal talks delivered to decision-making groups to convey information or make a point.                                                                                   |

## ***Interpersonal Communication Skills***

Managers, in general, delegate tasks, often to professionals. Managers excel at *interpersonal* skills because they are constantly involved in ensuring task engagement, providing performance feedback, and resolving operational and tactical work-related issues that arise in a typical organizational environment.

Many managers have their eye on leadership skills as well because they are future-focused and often desire to be promoted; however leadership communication skills are often needed by front-line and “middle” managers too. Some might argue that leadership skills are needed often by professionals as well both at work and in other service contexts. Shrewd students learn this now.

| # | Skill Summary                             | Skill Detail                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|---|-------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1 | Active Listening                          | The ability to employ an interpersonal and interactive process to actively focus on, interpret, and respond verbally and nonverbally to messages.                                                                            |
| 2 | Building rapport                          | The ability to create a harmonious relationship, bond, or kinship based on mutual respect, friendship, camaraderie, or emotional ties making someone feel comfortable and accepted.                                          |
| 3 | Demonstrating emotion self-control        | The ability to display balanced models through retaining, mastering, and dominating one’s reactions provoked by pleasant or unpleasant emotion.                                                                              |
| 4 | Building trust                            | The ability to construct the reciprocal faith in others’ intentions and behavior through a shared belief that you can depend on each other to achieve a common purpose.                                                      |
| 5 | Relating to people of diverse backgrounds | The ability to recognize and respect differences in people and communicate appropriately in verbal and nonverbal exchanges.                                                                                                  |
| 6 | Demonstrating respect                     | The ability to show esteem for or a sense of the worth or excellence of a person, a personal quality or ability, or something considered as a manifestation of a personal quality or ability.                                |
| 7 | Building relationships                    | The ability to establish a relatively long-term association between two or more people based on liking, trust, and respect creating regular business interactions, interdependence, or some other type of social commitment. |

## **Leadership Communication Skills**

Leaders are often—but not always—senior executives with organization-wide responsibility. Top managers and senior executives excel at *leadership* skills related to strategy, vision, change, complex problem resolution, and long-term goals.

When one peels off the layer of executive-level skills, one finds that an “executive” is really more of a *perspective* than a *title*. Even a volunteer in a non-for-profit organization or a minimum-wage employee can take an executive perspective with 1), the proper support from a manager, 2), continuing educational growth, and 3), deep reflections on organizational experience. Shrewd students learn this now.

| # | Skill Summary            | Skill Detail                                                                                                                                                                         |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1 | Arousing enthusiasm      | The ability to inspire a whole-hearted devotion to an ideal cause, study or pursuit, or merely being visibly excited about what one’s doing.                                         |
| 2 | Being a change catalyst  | The ability to initiate change through providing information to employees that will convince them of why a change is necessary and will compel them to embrace it.                   |
| 3 | Creating group synergy   | The ability to compel organizational members to interact and produce a joint effect that is greater than the sum of the members acting alone.                                        |
| 4 | Building team bonds      | The ability to establish team cohesiveness, which is the extent to which members stick together and remain united in the pursuit of a common goal.                                   |
| 5 | Expressing encouragement | The ability to provide support and confidence, raising or increasing an individual’s self-esteem and confidence to make choices and decisions.                                       |
| 6 | Providing motivation     | The ability to move a person or group toward desired goals by increasing his or her willingness to exert effort and energy to achieve the goals.                                     |
| 7 | Being persuasive         | The ability to guide people toward the adoption of an idea, attitude, or action by rational and logical means relying on appeals rather than coercion.                               |
| 8 | Building optimism        | The ability to create a disposition or tendency to look on the more favorable side of events or conditions and to expect that most favorable outcome despite obstacles and setbacks. |

The material on these pages was excerpted and adapted from the following source:

Conrad, D., and Newberry, R. (2012), “Identification and Instruction of Important Business Communication Skills for Graduate Business Education”, *Journal of Education for Business*, 87, 112-120.