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ORGANIZATIONAL COMMUNICATION
Values and Ethical Communication Behaviors

D E V E L O P I N G   C O M P E T E N C I E S   T H R O U G H . . .

KNOWLEDGE   Describing individual and organizational values

Defining ethical communication

Identifying criteria for the evaluation of ethical communication behaviors

SENSITIVITY   Awareness of our personal value systems

Understanding the complexity of ethical dilemmas

Distinguishing between what we would do and what we should do

SKILLS   Assessing personal value systems and behaviors

Applying skills to case and dilemma analysis

VALUES   Relating values to individual behavior and organizational effectiveness

Understanding ethical behavior as contributing to choice, growth, and development

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THE PRESIDENTIAL FACT-FINDING (WITCH-HUNT?) CASE

Alyne Carter was surprised to receive a call requesting her to come to the office of the president of Melton Corporation. Alyne had never had an appointment with the president, and she was concerned about what he wanted to discuss. The president was relatively new to Melton, and rumor had it that the board of directors had hired him as a "hatchet" man to terminate some long-term Melton managers who were associated with the failure of one of Melton's major land development projects. Alyne's boss, Jim Johnson, had received criticism from some board members, although he was not directly involved with the development project.

Melton had a long history of being a good place to work, with open communication and support for taking risks, even though risks sometimes resulted in failures. Management at Melton had traditionally believed that their speculative land development business would be most successful if they developed properties other companies had chosen to ignore. The strategy had generally worked, with the Briarwood project a major and important exception. The failure of Briarwood and the loss of several million dollars had upset important board members and had contributed to the resignation of Melton's president.

Alyne Carter did not work on the development side of Melton's business. She reported directly to the vice president in charge of personnel and human resource development, Jim Johnson. Alyne and Jim had a good working relationship based on mutual trust and admiration. Alyne was concerned when she heard criticism of Jim as well as the general rumors that people were going to be fired. The upcoming meeting with the new president increased her fears.

When Alyne left the meeting, she knew her concerns were real. The discussion with the new president had confused her and had left her wondering what to do. Although he had been perfectly pleasant, she knew he was looking for information to use against her boss. The president had begun the meeting by asking her to describe her work at Melton. He then said he needed to ask her some hypothetical questions about her department's management, recruitment, and promotional practices. Following several general questions, the president said that the rest of their conversation must stay within his office. He then proceeded to ask her if pressure had come from certain managers to hire several key individuals thought to be responsible for bad decisions in the Briarwood project. The president specifically asked if Jim Johnson had approved her hiring recommendations and whether any of her recommendations had been reversed in the last six months. Alyne attempted to answer the questions directly, although she felt as if she were walking into some unknown trap. She wished she had called Jim to tell him she had been asked to see the president. He might have been able to give her some insight about what was going on. The president closed the meeting by again suggesting that their conversation was not to leave the room. He also made a somewhat vague reference to his responsibility to make unpopular changes in the best interest of Melton. He said he hoped that she would understand and realize he had to do his job in the best way he saw fit.

Alyne could not believe that this type of meeting had taken place at Melton. The rumors about a hatchet man certainly seemed correct. She knew she had been told not to talk about her discussion with the president, but she thought that Jim should know. Was it unethical to break her promise to the president? Where did she owe her loyalty? Was the president engaged in fact-finding or in a witch-hunt?

INTRODUCTION

Alyne Carter faces a question of values and ethics. She has inadvertently become involved in a communication situation that makes her uncomfortable and violates what she believes to be basic Melton company values. Alyne has been told by the president of Melton that their conversation should be kept in confidence, yet she believes that her boss, Jim Johnson, should know about the president's fact-finding and veiled threats of future action. Alyne is caught between respecting directions from the president and valuing her loyalty to her boss. She has to decide about her values in this situation and what constitutes ethical behavior. Part of her decision will be based on a determination of whether Melton's president has engaged her in unethical communication.

Although an uncomfortable situation, Alyne's dilemma unfortunately repeats hundreds of times a day in all sizes and types of organizations. Individual and organizational values clash, making determinations of ethical behavior difficult. Organizational values appear to change, leaving employees perplexed about what communication behaviors are valued and what behaviors should no longer be exhibited. Individual organizational members try to determine whether personal ethics and business ethics can or should mix.

Corporate and government scandals intensify our questions about values and ethics. Do we have broad structural and decisional problems in the way organizations are governed and led, or are these high-profile problems based on individual defects? Regardless of the position taken, most would agree that communication is at the center of the political, legal, and social processes in which the scandals take center stage. The chapters that follow all, in one way or another, describe individual, group, and organization-wide processes with important value and ethical dimensions. From notions of individual performance to the relationship of the organization to its broader environment, values and ethics are a part of all that we and others experience.

This chapter is designed to help you think about how values and ethics influence human communication within organizations. The chapter also introduces you to value and ethical dilemmas commonly encountered by communication professionals. The chapter attempts to contribute to the development of *knowledge* by defining values and ethics, identifying individual and organizational values, and establishing frameworks for evaluating ethical communication behaviors. We develop *sensitivity* for relationships among organizational cultures, values, ethics, and decision making. We practice analysis *skills* through personal assessment of values, by identifying value themes in organizational philosophy statements, and by evaluating ethical behaviors in typical organizational communication situations. We encourage *values* development through an understanding of the importance to organizations of personal and organizational value systems and through discussions of the role of ethical communication behaviors for communication competency and effectiveness. We apply all four competencies—knowledge, sensitivity, skills, and values—to a case study, practical examples of value and ethical dilemmas, a decision-making simulation, and the development of a personal values and ethics statement for organizational communication.

VALUES IN ORGANIZATIONAL COMMUNICATION

Although most of us frequently use the word *value,* we often do not stop to thoughtfully consider what the concept really means to us. If asked, could you readily identify your value system for others? How did it develop? Who or what has influenced your choices? How does your value system influence your communication behaviors?

Values
The subjective assessments made about the relative worth of a quality or object.

Generally speaking, value refers to the relative worth of a quality or object. Value is what makes something desirable or undesirable. **Values** are subjective assessments. As Joseph DeVito (1976) suggests:

> A value is an organized system of attitudes. If, for example, we have a cluster of favorable attitudes pertaining to various issues relating to freedom of speech, then we might say that one of our values is that of free speech. In another sense, a value is an organizing system for attitudes. If we have a particular value, say financial success, then this will give us guidelines for developing and forming attitudes. Thus, we will have favorable attitudes toward high-paying jobs, marrying into a wealthy family, and inheriting money because of the value we place on financial success. Values also provide us with guidelines for behavior; in effect, they direct our behavior so that it is consistent with the achievement of the values or goals we have. (p. 416)

Richard Johannesen, in his important book *Ethics in Human Communication* (1983), states that "values can be viewed as conceptions of The Good or The Desirable that motivate human behavior and that function as criteria in our making of choices and judgments." Family belonging, achievement, financial security, prestige, and hard work are all values that have some degree of importance for most of us. Johannesen and others suggest that the importance of our personal values influences a wide variety of our decision-making activities and behavior choices. In other words, we are more likely to make choices that support our value systems than choices that will not. Let us say that financial security is a strong value for an individual. When faced with a choice of jobs, chances are the individual will carefully examine each organization for potential financial and job security. The job applicant who values financial security may well take a lower salary offer with a well-established company over a higher-paying offer from a new, high-risk venture. Another job seeker with different values, possibly adventure and excitement, might choose the newer company simply for the potential risk and uncertain future.

Values therefore become part of complex attitude sets that influence our behavior and the behavior of all those with whom we interact. What we value guides not only our personal choices but also our perceptions of the worth of others. We are more likely, for example, to evaluate highly someone who holds the same hard-work value we do than someone who finds work distasteful. We may even call this person lazy and worthless, a negative value label.

Before reading further in this chapter, stop for a few minutes and attempt to describe your personal value system. What are your priorities? Have you ever stopped to think about their influence on your activities and your evaluations of others? Think about how your personal values may influence your communication behavior.

Organizational Value Systems

Part of the unique sense of a place called organizational culture develops from the values held in common by organizational members. Leonard Goodstein (1983) goes so far as to suggest that

many persons who are seriously interested in organizational behavior now believe that organizations are best regarded as cultures, with all that the term "cultures," in an anthropological sense, implies. In my opinion, the most important implication of this position is that organizations, like persons, have values and that these values are integrated into some coherent value system. (pp. 203–204)

Milton Rokeach (1973) has defined a value system as "an enduring organization of beliefs concerning preferable modes of conduct or end-states of existence along a continuum of relative importance." Based on the Rokeach definition, Goodstein (1983) contends that "in any organization, the members generally have a set of beliefs about what is appropriate and inappropriate organizational behavior. Furthermore, these beliefs can be ordered in importance in a reliable fashion by the members of the organization." In other words, organizational value systems help organizational members to understand what the organization holds as important and how the unique sense of the place should influence their personal decision making and behavior.

Terrence Deal and Allen Kennedy (1982) describe organizational values as "the bedrock of any corporate culture" and link value systems to overall organizational effectiveness. They state:

As the essence of a company's philosophy for achieving success, values provide a sense of common direction for all employees and guidelines for their day-to-day behavior. These formulas for success determine (and occasionally arise from) the types of corporate heroes, and the myths, rituals, and ceremonies of the culture. In fact, we think that often companies succeed because their employees can identify, embrace, and act on the values of the organization. (p. 21)

Values are part of the shared realities generated through organizational communication. These shared values are reflected in organizational myths, stories, mission statements, physical surroundings, slogans, and decision making, for example. Indeed, it is fair to say that organizational values are transmitted, maintained, and changed through organizational communication processes.

Organizational values are seen in the decisions members make. Deal and Kennedy (1982) suggest that "if employees know what their company stands for, if they know what standards they are to uphold, then they are much more likely to make decisions that will support those standards." Research conducted by David Palmer, John Veiga, and Jay Vora (1981) supports the important link between values and decision making. They found that "value profiles were relatively successful in predicting managers' decision preferences and in providing further evidence of the linkage between personal values and decision making." In other words, an individual's value system, when coupled with the more general value system of the organization, influences the decisions individual organizational members will make. Deal and Kennedy contend that "shaping and enhancing values can become the most important job a manager can do." They further suggest that successful companies stand for something (clearly communicated values), that managers put effort into shaping and fine-tuning values, and that values are shared realities at all organization levels.

Organizational values not only influence the behaviors of current members but also contribute to the type of person who gets hired and the types of career experiences employees are likely to have. Some organizations value very specific types of educational backgrounds, whereas others are more likely to look for particular work experiences. Some

organizations value promotion from within, whereas their counterparts never fill important vacancies from among existing employees. During times of economic difficulty, organizations valuing long-term commitment to their employees may reduce work hours or salaries for everyone rather than lay off a portion of their workforce. Other organizations with less employee-centered values may decide that layoffs are the most efficient and effective way to deal with a business downturn. Arguments can be made for either position. The values of the organizations, however, are likely to guide the alternatives even considered by their respective management teams.

Organizational Values, Globalization, and Diversity

There is a danger, of course, in thinking about organizations as having singular sets of values reflecting the closely held beliefs of all organizational members. Within an organization, diverse functions, leadership, and histories all contribute to differences in what is desirable and important. Differences in values within and between organizations are only expected to increase. As discussed throughout this book, the diversity of the workforce combined with the forces of internationalization not only bring new challenges for working together and new organizational forms but also contribute to value diversity within organizations.

David Strubler (1993) provides an interesting illustration of value diversity within organizations in his study of what he calls hybrid companies for which large numbers of Japanese and Americans work together either in the United States of America or in Japan. Strubler suggests that the cultural and value dimensions of context, face saving, and truth can help us understand how value differences within and between organizations contribute to potential misunderstanding and difficulty. According to Strubler, the Japanese, coming from a high context culture, have a high volume of commonly shared information that makes implicit communication more desirable than more explicit information exchanges. By contrast, the U.S. workers' generally low context culture is heavily dependent on explicit information exchange, often supported by extensive written documentation. In addition, although both cultures are concerned with face saving, the Japanese generally place a higher imperative on face-saving behaviors than do Americans. Strubler relates:

> Consequently, high face-saving cultures view indirect (implicit) communication as preserving one's sense of dignity. Open argumentation in Japanese culture is considered unethical. Low face-saving cultures such as found in the U.S. view indirectness as unethical and typically favor argumentation as a method of settling difficulties. . . . In low context cultures, an emphasis is placed on the explicit written or spoken word. Truth is objective and absolute. When truth is violated (someone does not keep his or her word) guilt is experienced. In high context cultures, an emphasis is placed on relational (harmonious) communication. (p. 12)

Both Japanese and American cultures recognize the subjective and objective nature of truth, but value differences frequently have been observed. Strubler (1993) describes: "Japanese often accuse Americans of being brash. Americans accuse Japanese of being deceitful. Often there is a failure to understand one another's cultural imperatives." Obviously,

these types of cultural and value differences extend to numerous types of international work settings. Competent communicators therefore begin to appreciate their personal responsibilities to understand how value differences may influence a variety of important organizational communication settings.

Diversity in values does not occur solely in the global business environment. As the workforce includes increasingly diverse cultural groups, organizations, often attempting to have their own distinct value systems, will increasingly reflect value differences and similarities across groups. These value differences and similarities are important for both individuals and organizations. A large body of research, for example, continues to demonstrate that **value congruence** (the similarity between individual and organizational values) between employees and their organizations has a significant effect on organizational commitment, employee work satisfaction, and turnover. Taylor Cox (1993), in his work on cultural diversity in organizations, describes the importance of understanding this dynamic of value congruence and how it might work in multicultural organizations. Cox states:

Value congruence
The similarity between individual and organizational values.

> The message . . . of value congruence may seem somewhat ambiguous. It may seem to suggest that diversity results in lower organizational performance. However, this is only true if we make certain assumptions about organizations such as that they should seek to assimilate all entrants into a monolithic culture, which tends to produce culture clash for entering members who are different from the traditional norm. Instead, my intended message is that the importance of value congruence illustrates the need for multicultural organizations, one feature of which is that the organizational culture specifies alternatives that are equally appreciated rather than the one best way. Thus it is important to bear in mind that person-organization fit, in a cultural sense, is a function of the flexibility and inclusiveness of the organization as well as the individual. (p. 22)

Think about the values of your school. Can you describe these values in any order of priority? How do they influence the policies and procedures that you as a student are asked to follow? What kinds of formal and informal messages transmit these values to students? What values do students transmit to the administration and faculty?

Figure 4.1 provides three examples of organizational value statements. Each statement is taken from the new employee handbook of the three organizations. Without knowing anything else about these organizations, think about the value systems that you believe the messages represent.

Which of the three most closely fits your personal value system? Which least fits your values? Would value statements such as these make a difference in the organizations for which you would want to work? If so, why? If not, why not?

Individual Values

Most agree that value congruence even in a broad sense is important for allowing an individual to identify positively with the organization. In other words, a closeness between "this way is the way I believe things are" and "this way is the way I believe things should be" generally means that the individual is satisfied with the organization and can personally

FIGURE 4.1   Organizational Value Statements

COMPANY A

As a company, we want to share timely and accurate information on policies, programs, and activities. We want the information to be consistent and available to all employees. This is a goal that all managers should help to achieve. The company believes communication about our business creates a motivated and creative workforce.

COMPANY B

The mission of Company B is as follows: Command, control, and support the workforce. Modernize the workplace. Prepare to support other divisions of the company. Train, motivate, and maintain individual capabilities. Provide a motivated environment that will attract and retain motivated and challenged workers.

COMPANY C

Our philosophy in managing is to plan aggressively and anticipate events rather than let them drive us. Our program for our personnel must include fair compensation, appropriate benefits and working conditions, and an opportunity for advancement based on skills and ability. Our company will endeavor to participate in and offer educational programs necessary to ensure the qualified training of personnel, with a primary emphasis on improving customer service. All of these efforts are adopted to support our goal of excellence.

commit to organizational values and beliefs. One of the difficulties, of course, is thoughtfully understanding the real values of an organization before one becomes a member. The process of matching individual and organizational values also is complicated by the lack of individual understanding of how value systems relate to work life. (The self-analysis exercises for career planning in Chapter 12 are designed to help you think about your values as they might relate to career and job selection.)

Value Orientations

Gordon Allport, Philip Vernon, and Gardner Lindzey (1960) suggest that personal values can be described in terms of six orientations: theoretical, economic, aesthetic, social, political, and religious. Theoretical values focus on the discovery of truth, knowledge, and order, whereas economic values focus on the useful and practical and on material acquisition. We express esthetic values in our concerns for artistic experiences and in our desire for form and harmony. We express social values in our relationships with others and our love and service commitments. Political values relate to needs for power, influence, leadership, and domination, and religious values relate to needs for unity and meaningful relationships to the world.

Terminal values
Concerns for end states of existence or desirable goals.

Terminal and Instrumental Values

Milton Rokeach's (1973) value survey identifies terminal and instrumental values. **Terminal values** can be viewed as concern for "end

Instrumental values
Desirable behaviors or modes of conduct that are related to and influence terminal values.

states of existence," or desirable goals, and **instrumental values** are desirable behaviors or modes of conduct that relate to and influence terminal values. Figure 4.2 lists the terminal and instrumental values Rokeach identifies.

A possible relationship between terminal and instrumental values can be illustrated through the example of someone with a high priority on the terminal value of accomplishment and instrumental values of being ambitious, capable, imaginative, intellectual, logical, and self-controlled. That is not to suggest, of course, that these are the only instrumental values that go hand in hand with a sense of accomplishment. Obviously, there could be others. Terminal values, however, are generally accompanied by combinations of instrumental values that individuals perceive to be harmonious.

Work Values

The personal values discussed apply to all aspects of our lives, not just the time we spend in organizations. Few attempts have been made to explore personal values as they specifically apply to work environments. Roger Howe, Maynard Howe, and Mark Mindell (1982) identify five value dimensions that they believe affect our organizational lives: locus of control, self-esteem, tolerance of ambiguity, social judgment, and risk taking.

Locus of control refers to the value we place as organizational members on connections between our efforts and the success or failure of the organization. In other words, do

Locus of control
Value we place as organizational members on connections between our efforts and the success or failure of the organization.

we value personal control over success or failure, or do we value an organizational environment in which circumstances beyond our control contribute to success or failure? Do we, for example, want to be personally responsible for meeting sales quotas, or do we prefer to provide support to others who have the final quota responsibility? Our locus of control value also relates to whether we value organizational advancement as a result of our own efforts (personal control) or as the result of luck, politics, or random selection (external control).

Self-esteem
Value we place on recognition for work, positive feedback, and the use of our contributions.

The **self-esteem** dimension relates to the value we place on recognition for work, positive feedback, and the use of our contributions. This value represents our concern for being trusted and perceived as making worthwhile contributions to the organization.

Tolerance of ambiguity
Value or importance we place on structured or unstructured work environments.

Tolerance of ambiguity as a value refers to the importance we place on structured or unstructured work environments. Our preference for one right answer or our comfort with a variety of possible approaches for decision making relates to the level of ambiguity we personally value. Those with a low tolerance for ambiguity may value one right answer and structured environments, whereas those higher in tolerance for ambiguity may prefer less structure and more opportunity for creative and diverse approaches.

Social judgment
Value we place on the feelings of others and our general assumptions about why people work.

The value we place on the feelings of others and our general assumptions about why people work can be described as our **social judgment.** Our concerns for sensitivity, empathy, and social insight relate to the importance we place on working relationships with others.

FIGURE 4.2   Three Approaches to Describing Personal Values

VALUE ORIENTATIONS	WORK VALUE DIMENSIONS
Theoretical	Locus of control
Truth	Internal
Rationale	External
Order	Self-esteem
Knowledge	Recognition
Economic	Trust
Material acquisition	Worth
Usefulness	Tolerance of ambiguity
Pragmatism	Structured work
Aesthetic	Unstructured work
Artistry	Social judgment
Harmony	Assumptions about others
Form	Interpersonal sensitivity
Social	Risk taking
Love	Action-oriented
Concern for others	Uncertainty as challenging
Service	
Political	
Power	
Influence	
Domination	
Leadership	

Rokeach Terminal and Instrumental Values

TERMINAL VALUES	INSTRUMENTAL VALUES
A comfortable life	Ambitious
An exciting life	Broad-minded
A sense of accomplishment	Capable
A world at peace	Cheerful
A world of beauty	Clean
Equality	Courageous
Family security	Forgiving
Freedom	Helpful
Happiness	Honest
Inner harmony	Imaginative
Mature love	Independent
National security	Intellectual
Pleasure	Logical
Salvation	Loving
Self-respect	Obedient
Social recognition	Polite
True friendship	Responsible
Wisdom	Self-controlled

Risk taking
Value that explores the importance we place on quick rather than delibera- tive action and whether we prefer our own sense of job fulfillment as opposed to job security.

Risk taking concerns the importance we place on quick rather than deliberative action and whether we prefer our own sense of job fulfillment as opposed to job security. Our risk-taking value influences the degree of security we require in work situations, our tolerance for ambiguity in de- cision making, and whether we are willing to attempt tasks we have not previously encountered or have few qualifications for accomplishing.

Figure 4.2 summarizes the three value approaches that have been described. After reviewing these lists, consider which additional values you would add. Which of the three approaches best represents your personal value system? Could the three be combined?

APPRAISING YOUR INDIVIDUAL VALUE SYSTEM

Understanding what is important to us and what our values are contributes to our ability to identify the careers and organizations in which we can be most productive and satisfied. Personal value assessment also helps us identify the ways values influence behaviors and evaluations of whether communication is ethical or not. Before beginning to explore ethics in organizational communication, we provide a self-analysis of personal values to give you insight into your value system. This assessment exercise is based on the assumption that consistent behaviors reflect value systems. Our approach in Figure 4.3 is by no means the only valid measure of a value system. We present this scale as a useful way to begin to think about the relationship of values and behaviors. As you complete the appraisal, consider ad- ditional questions that might be asked and additional values not represented in the ap- praisal. The scoring form for your appraisal is located on page 137.

FIGURE 4.3   Values Appraisal Exercise

Instructions: Read the following twenty-four statements, which indicate six defined values. Circle the number for each question that is most descriptive of you. Use this scale:

    4 = definitely true
    3 = mostly true
    2 = undecided whether statement is true or false
    1 = mostly false
    0 = definitely false

1. I intend to retire by age fifty with enough money to live the good life.	4	3	2	1	0
2. I take pleasure in decision making, particularly when other individuals are involved.	4	3	2	1	0
3. I enjoy now, or have enjoyed in the past, a close relationship with one or both of my parents.	4	3	2	1	0
4. I especially enjoy and appreciate beauty and beautiful objects, events, or things.	4	3	2	1	0
5. I enjoy creating projects of my own.	4	3	2	1	0
6. I feel a rich life has many friends and much friendship in it.	4	3	2	1	0

(continued)

FIGURE 4.3   *(continued)*

7.	I am most valuable to clubs and groups when I am an officer rather than just a member of the group.	4	3	2	1	0
8.	I enjoy both giving and going to parties.	4	3	2	1	0
9.	I would choose a class in art, drawing, or sculpture over a class in math.	4	3	2	1	0
10.	I think holidays should be spent with family and close relatives.	4	3	2	1	0
11.	I like fine things and have expensive tastes.	4	3	2	1	0
12.	I think decorating one's apartment or house is a fun thing to do.	4	3	2	1	0
13.	I expect to earn more money than the common person on the street.	4	3	2	1	0
14.	I take pleasure in buying special gifts for members of my family.	4	3	2	1	0
15.	I am often considered a take-charge type of person in small groups and organizations.	4	3	2	1	0
16.	Had I the talent, I would write, draw, or create art of some kind.	4	3	2	1	0
17.	I have a close friend with whom I talk about almost everything.	4	3	2	1	0
18.	I enjoy owning good music, literature, and artwork.	4	3	2	1	0
19.	I think it is good and fun to make something out of nothing.	4	3	2	1	0
20.	I agree with the phrase that money can't buy happiness but it sure makes life much more comfortable.	4	3	2	1	0
21.	I think that spending time with one's family is an activity that is both necessary and enjoyable.	4	3	2	1	0
22.	I often have to aid those close to me in making choices regarding both important and unimportant things in life.	4	3	2	1	0
23.	I would give up sleep in order to spend time with some good friends.	4	3	2	1	0
24.	When I see a new building or house, I first think about how it looks and then how it will be used.	4	3	2	1	0

This scale was prepared and tested by Sherwyn P. Morreale.

ETHICS IN ORGANIZATIONAL COMMUNICATION

The Abuse of Ethics

Although we may not easily define what we mean by ethical behavior, most of us are aware that abuses are all around us. We know students who have engaged in plagiarism or

cheated on exams. We may have committed these or similar behaviors ourselves. We hear the excuses as reasons: "Everyone is doing it and no one ever gets caught"; "I was desperate. I didn't understand the material and the professor wouldn't help"; "I can't let my family down"; "I have to get a good job and a B won't do." The statements are troubling and the statistics are worse. In 2004 several research sources estimated that over one-third of undergraduate college and university students were using the "cut and paste" method of Internet plagiarism each year (McCabe, 2004). But the abuses certainly do not rest with students alone. The early years of the twenty-first century have seen a rash of corporate and government scandals. Enron, Global Crossing, Synergy, Xerox, Adelphia, Tyco, and WorldCom are but a few major corporations at which significant abuses resulted in the loss of billions of dollars, unemployment for thousands, and criminal charges leveled at leadership. Deceptive messages, illegal accounting practices, taking corporate profits for individual gain, creating phantom entities to record transactions and disguise debt, and a variety of strategies to avoid taxation were used to secure questionable and illegal advantage, resulting in scandal and public outrage. Although some of the most visible scandals could be linked to individual behavior, more and more organizational structures and cultures were assessed blame.

Stockholders and boards (organizational governance structures) were held accountable for permitting manipulation of performance for the interests of a powerful few. Short-term financial results as a mark of success crippled several well-known companies. The leaders of boards of directors were ousted for authorizing the acquisition of personal, private telephone records in an effort to investigate information leaks. A chief executive officer was fired for violating patent agreements with federal prosecutors. At the same time, chief executive officer (CEO) compensation made front-page news. As Michael Hackman and Craig Johnson (2004) report, "In the 1960s the compensation for U.S. CEOs was 40 times that of the average employee. By 2002 CEO compensation had increased to nearly 600 times the salary of the average workers." Corporate social and ethical responsibility has became a topic of discussion as never before. The remainder of this chapter provides ways to evaluate these critical ethical issues.

Defining Ethics

Ethics
Moral principles that guide judgments about good and bad, right and wrong, not just effectiveness or efficiency.

So far, this chapter has described values as that which make something desirable, a subjective assessment of worth that motivates human behavior and serves as a yardstick against which we measure choices. Ethics, although related to values, are the standards by which behaviors are evaluated for their morality: their rightness or wrongness. When applied to human communication, **ethics** are the moral principles that guide our judgments about the good and bad, right and wrong, of communication, not just communication effectiveness or efficiency.

Johannesen (1983) helps make the distinction between values and ethics:

Concepts such as material success, individualism, efficiency, thrift, freedom, courage, hard work, prudence, competition, patriotism, compromise, and punctuality all are value standards that have varying degrees of potency in contemporary American culture. But we probably would not view them primarily as ethical standards of right and wrong. Ethical judgments focus more precisely on degrees of rightness and wrongness in human behavior.

> In condemning someone for being inefficient, conformist, extravagant, lazy, or late, we probably would not also be claiming they are unethical. However, standards such as honesty, truthfulness, fairness, and humaneness usually are used in making ethical judgments of rightness and wrongness in human behavior. (p. 1)

From this perspective it is fair to say that our values influence what we will determine to be ethical. Values, however, are our measures of importance, whereas ethics represent our judgments about right and wrong. This close relationship between importance and right and wrong is thought to be a powerful influence on our behavior and how we evaluate the behavior of others.

Making Ethical Decisions

According to Gerald Cavanagh, Dennis Moberg, and Manuel Velasquez (1990), research in the area of ethics has emerged from three fundamental moral perspectives.[1] Each theory evaluates the morality of an action based on certain criteria. First, utilitarian theory evaluates behavior based on outcomes or consequences for those involved. Second, the theory of rights emphasizes individuals' entitlements or privileges as members of a society. Finally, a theory of justice emphasizes balance or equity. These three perspectives are a product of our cultural values, what we as a society agree on as right and wrong. It is important to note, especially in light of global business interests, that other cultures may have different values that define morally acceptable actions. Thus, ethics is not a concrete science. Even in our own culture, solutions to moral dilemmas are not always clear. Indeed the three perspectives that follow are potentially contradictory with one another.

Utilitarian Theory

Utilitarian theory rests on the principle that our actions are judged by their consequences or outcomes. The statement "The ends justify the means" is often used to describe this philosophical viewpoint. Utilitarianism charges decision makers with determining the various possible outcomes in a given situation and then determining which will benefit the greatest number of individuals. To illustrate, several years ago a textile factory in New England was destroyed by fire. This business employed many people in the area. Individuals were, of course, concerned that the company would relocate elsewhere rather than rebuild. Even if the company did rebuild, the employees were worried about how they would live in the meantime. The owners of the organization announced that they planned to rebuild in the same place and offered to pay workers during the downtime with the stipulation that they come back to work at the factory once the construction was complete. Thus, an entire community dependent on a key industry was spared economic disaster.

Was this moral behavior on the part of the owners of the organization? Of course it was. They could have perhaps moved the company to another city or even another country to save on rebuilding costs. What makes this an ethical decision is that the owners evaluated what would be best for the greatest number of individuals, not just the organization, and then took the related action.

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[1]This section was prepared by Maryanna Wanca-Thibault.

Theory of Rights

The theory of moral rights asserts that all individuals have certain inalienable rights that are defined by society and that these rights must be respected in all situations, including the workplace. The most familiar rights for Americans are those found in the U.S. Constitution's Bill of Rights. Cavanagh, Moberg, and Velasquez (1990) suggest the following as commonly accepted basic moral rights:

1. *The right of free consent.* Individuals have the right to be treated only as they freely consent to be treated.
2. *The right to privacy.* Individuals have a right to a private life outside the purview of the public.
3. *The right to freedom of conscience.* Individuals have the right to refuse to do anything that goes against their moral or religious beliefs.
4. *The right of free speech.* Individuals have the right to speak freely as long as what they say does not violate others' rights.
5. *The right to due process.* Individuals have a right to a fair and impartial hearing to avoid a violation of their rights.

This theory is fairly easy to use as a guideline if individuals agree that we all have the same entitlements. Unlike utilitarian theory, which has to weigh the effects of the decision for the majority, the theory of rights is more clear-cut. That is, if a right is being violated, the action is not ethical. For example, because the use of e-mail and the Internet has increased exponentially, there have been instances when employers have monitored employees' messages unbeknownst to employees. Court cases have upheld the monitoring of employee e-mail and Internet use, but the practice raises moral questions based partly on the theory of rights. Is it ethical to monitor employees' e-mail and Internet use according to the theory of rights? Most would answer that it is. Although individuals have a right to privacy, that right does not extend to their time on the job. Although monitoring one's correspondence without one's knowledge may lower trust levels, it is not unethical. An organization might even justify the practice using utilitarian theory by concluding that it would benefit the organization (the greatest number) to know what is being communicated by employees.

Theory of Justice

The theory of justice requires that all decision makers be guided by fairness, impartiality, and equity if their actions are to be considered ethical. Thus, treatment of individuals should not be based on arbitrary characteristics, and any differential treatment should be defendable. Treatment also should be consistent and impartially enforced. For example, most organizations have experienced some form of employee reduction or downsizing. One of the ethical issues an employer faces is deciding which departments or individuals will be let go. Do you make the decision based on performance or seniority?

The theory of justice would consider that whatever direction you take, you must be fair, equitable, and impartial. If organizations decide they will base layoffs on seniority, they must first develop a strong reason for their decision. Then, that criterion must be used in all termination decisions. Finally, any subsequent decisions that affect those who are laid off must apply equally to all (e.g., severance packages).

Think about an ethical decision you have had to make. Which of these perspectives did you use? Would your decision have been the same with each of the three theories? Why? Why not?

Defining Ethical Communication

Is it ever ethical to tell a lie? Am I being ethical if I deliberately withhold information I know you need but have not asked for directly? Should I compliment a person to be pleasant, even though the compliment may be insincere? Is it ethical to withhold from my boss information about a mistake I have made? How honest should someone be in giving criticism to another? Chances are you have had to answer several of these questions in your personal determination of ethical communication behaviors. Daily we come into contact with situations requiring us to make judgments or choices about what is right, ethical, or moral. In the case of a compliment, we may spend little time debating what is ethical, whereas a decision to withhold information from the boss requires serious consideration and considerable worry.

We all face the question of trying to determine ethical communication behavior. Our answers to ethical questions are based on our communication competencies—knowledge, sensitivity, skills, and values—and are related to our overall communication effectiveness. As previously discussed, ethical communication is an important prerequisite for effectiveness for both individuals and entire organizations.

Choice making
Selection of options based on knowledge of alternatives.

Ronald Arnett (1985), in synthesizing the status of ethics scholarship in communication, points to communication behaviors that support **choice making** as a "central component in the ethics of communication." DeVito (1976), in contrasting ethical and unethical communications, suggests that ethical communication supports individual choice based on accurate information about alternatives. Unethical communication prevents individuals from acquiring needed information important for choices. Examples of unethical behaviors include lying, extreme emotional appeals, and preventing communication.

Thomas Nilsen (1966) describes communication he believes to be morally right as that which provides the listener with the information needed to make a choice and the reasoning that would make a rational decision possible; it must then help the listener to make the most reasonable choice. As Arnett's (1985) status of ethics scholarship suggests, although there is disagreement about what is ethical, there is consensus about the centrality of choice making for ethical communication.

Paul Keller and Charles Brown (1968) suggest that ethical communication fosters conditions for growth and development. Keller (1981) further contends that it is possible to be committed to a position while at the same time remaining open to new information. This openness to new information is viewed as fundamental for growth and development. Ethical communication can also be described as based on values that support the innate worth of individuals. Communication is ethical when it values the essential dignity of human beings and supports the ability of individuals to realize their full potential. Christopher Lyle Johnstone (1993) suggests, "In communication that is ethically sound, the conversations in which we participate—our own inquiries—are always open-ended and inconclusive. While human participation in such conversations may be universal, the meanings of those dialogues are particular and emergent. None of us possess the 'truth.' It is to be found in the

'becoming' of dialogue." Whether ethical communication is described as supporting informed choice making, contributing to growth and development, or valuing the innate worth of human beings, it depends on individuals taking responsibility for personal behaviors. This personal responsibility underscores the importance of developing criteria or guidelines for ethical communication behaviors.

Influences for Ethical Organizational Communication

Individual value systems, organizational value systems and cultures, and the standards of given professions all influence the ethics of organizational communication. Employees have individual value systems and make individual judgments about the rightness or wrongness of communication behavior. Even in organizations in which openness is encouraged, an individual employee may choose not to notify a supervisor of a serious mistake. The individual judges this behavior as ethical because of his or her intent to correct the problem. The employee's supervisor, on the other hand, may consider it unethical to withhold information that could affect the productivity of the group. An absolute judgment about the rightness or wrongness of the employee's behavior is difficult. It is possible to understand, however, that individual and organizational values can differ, contributing to different interpretations of ethical behavior.

Organizational communication also is influenced by ethical standards of particular professions. In fact, developing ethical standards is central to any concept of professionalism, and according to Gordon Lippitt and Ronald Lippitt (1978), every profession has found it necessary to establish a code of ethics. Codes of ethics help individuals define behavior within a profession, articulate relationships between professionals and those with whom they come in contact, provide protection to users of the professionals' services against abuses of professionalism, and guide advancement in the state of knowledge in a discipline. The importance of ethical standards for the communication professional is underscored by W. Charles Redding (1979), who described the impact of consultants on the careers or earning capacities of large numbers of individuals. Specifically, Redding contended that irreparable damage can be done in these high-risk consultant–client situations. Jo Sprague and Lucy Freedman (1984) underscore this concern with the argument that professional consultants should be bound by a code of ethics as rigorous as those of all other helping professions. Redding (1991), in a continuation of his earlier concerns, categorizes common organizational messages that he classifies as unethical. Redding concluded that coercive, destructive, deceptive, intrusive, secretive, and manipulative messages all violate important ethical standards.

Formal codes of ethics such as those that guide the medical and legal professions are not as common in the communications professions. Codes of ethics for journalists do exist, but codes are yet to be developed for the more general organizational communication professions.

Evaluating Ethical Behavior

Most of us do not continually think about evaluating our own behavior and the behaviors of others along ethical lines. We do, however, tend to make conscious ethical evaluations when in doubt about what we should do or when the behaviors of others cause us concern about

the rightness or wrongness of their actions. An important part of our communication competency is therefore determining how we should approach evaluating ethical communication behaviors.

Karl Wallace (1955) developed a set of guidelines for the evaluation of behavior that he first applied to our political system and that Rebecca Rubin and Jess Yoder (1985, pp. 14–15) have extended to the assessment of communication skills in an educational setting. These guidelines are appropriate for consideration in most organizational communication situations.

Habit of search
Ethical communication that willingly explores the complexity of any issue or problem.

Habit of justice
Ethical communication that presents information as openly and fairly as possible with concern for message distortion.

Habit of public versus private motivations
Ethical communication based on sharing sources of information, special opinions, motivations, or biases that may influence positions.

Habit of respect for dissent
Ethical communication that encourages opposing viewpoints and arguments.

1. The **habit of search.** Ethical communication willingly explores the complexity of any issue or problem. This exploration requires generating valid information and evaluating new and often controversial findings.
2. The **habit of justice.** Ethical communication presents information as openly and fairly as possible and with concern for message distortion. Not only is information accurate, but information is also presented for maximum understanding. When we receive and evaluate information, the habit of justice requires that we examine our own evaluation criteria and potential biases that contribute to distortion in meaning.
3. The **habit of public versus private motivations.** Ethical communication is based on sharing sources of information, special opinions, motivations, or biases that may influence our position. Hidden agendas are discouraged for both message senders and receivers.
4. The **habit of respect for dissent.** Ethical communication not only allows but also encourages opposing viewpoints and arguments. This habit of respect for dissent in an open environment supports generation of the best ideas through thoughtful examination, disagreement, and new idea presentation.

When applied to the organizational setting, these guidelines suggest that individuals and groups engage in ethical communication behaviors when they thoughtfully analyze problems and issues, are open to diverse types and sources of information, conduct their deliberations openly without hidden agendas, and not only respect different viewpoints but also encourage disagreement and dissent to produce superior ideas and solutions. From this perspective, unethical organizational communication behavior suppresses the examination of issues, withholds relevant information to pursue personal interests or motivations, and uses dissent to press for personal rather than organizational advantage.

ORGANIZATIONAL CONUNDRUMS

The word *conundrum* refers to a problem or a puzzle. The organizational conundrums discussed here illustrate the problems and perplexing dilemmas that routinely raise ethical issues for all organizational members.

Carl Anderson (1997) identifies four organizational goals that are often framed as incompatible: economic performance, competence, the learning organization, and the organization as community. These incompatibilities are a foundation for ethical dilemmas. Economic performance refers to the goal of profit, with its inherent measurement and assumption that some organizations will succeed while others fail. Competence refers to the tangible or intangible assets that yield sustainable competitive advantage. To improve the competencies supporting efficiency, methods such as restructuring, reengineering, quality control, process redesign, and downsizing have been increasingly employed. The learning organization refers to an organization's capacity to change strategies, tactics, or performance. The organization as community refers to the respect for rights and fulfillment of duty. Anderson explains:

> These four goals are in fact interdependent. Over the long run, competence and learning are necessary to sustain economic performance. A strong community is fundamental to all three. Dilemmas occur because decisions that improve competence, learning, and performance can easily hurt community. (p. 28)

Ann Plamondon (1997) identifies organizational climates in which ethical dilemmas arise. Specifically, she describes a climate of broken organizational promises, a climate in which no one takes responsibility, a climate of denying participation and dissent, a climate requiring whistle-blowing, and a climate of cultural relativism. Broken promises occur when promises do not match organizational action. Promises of increased compensation, promotions, participation in decision making, and many other forms of desired change are often made to stimulate improvement and then are either ignored or cannot be fulfilled. Bureaucracies often encourage shifting responsibility from level to level or to no particular organizational position or person. No one is responsible for delaying needed action. "I was just following orders or policy" is a common statement used to deflect responsibility for bad decisions, poor actions, and unethical behaviors. Hierarchical structures often limit participation and dissent. Not only can this limitation contribute to poor decisions, but also it often becomes a form of control requiring employees to support decisions and actions with

Whistle-blowing
The exposure of illegal behavior to organizational outsiders.

which they have significant disagreement. Illegal behavior in a climate of control contributes to the need for **whistle-blowing,** the exposure of illegal behavior to organizational outsiders. Finally, a climate of cultural relativism suggests that in a global environment, ethical behavior will be different for different cultures. Certainly cultures vary in a global environment. A belief in a climate of cultural relativism, however, has been used as defense for selling products in other countries that are banned in the United States of America as well as for engaging in questionable workplace and environmental practices. Numerous examples can be found throughout the globe of leaders engaging in practices they know will harm others or the environment with the defense that they create jobs and profits critical for economic development. Can you think of recent examples in which any of these "climates" have gained public notoriety? What are the ethical issues involved in product recalls, environmental abuses, or whistle-blowing cases? Have you ever been caught in one of these climates? What did you do? What should you have done?

Hackman and Johnson (2004) identify ethical dilemmas for leaders and link courageous followership with ethical responsibilities. Hackman and Johnson suggest that

leaders are faced with questions of honesty, responsibility, power, and loyalty. What are the ethics of the organizational lie? Is it necessary? At times is it needed for motivation? Have you ever encouraged someone even though you thought they might not be able to perform well? Was that a lie or a necessary motivation? Hackman and Johnson contend:

> Positions of leadership are associated with social and material rewards. Leaders may reap social benefits such as status, privilege, and respect, as well as material benefits such as high salaries and stock options. Is it ethical for a leader to take advantage of his or her position to achieve personal power or prestige? Should a leader's concern always be for the good of the collective? (p. 319)

Issues of power are always present. All leaders are faced with daily decisions about how much power to exercise with regard to followers, peers, and even those above them in a chain of command. For example, what should a leader do about asking a follower for compliance when the follower has a moral objection to the leader's request? Finally, to what extent does the leader have an ethical responsibility for supporting followers who are censured, criticized, or otherwise held publicly responsible for following courses of action the leader may have developed?

Hackman and Johnson (2004) describe as courageous followership the ethical responsibilities of those who report to leaders. They suggest that assuming responsibility for themselves and taking accountable action are ethical responsibilities. Furthermore, the courage to serve refers to the ethical responsibility of supporting leaders through hard and sometimes unglamorous work. Followers also are asked to exhibit the ethical responsibility of challenge. As Hackman and Johnson state: "Inappropriate behavior damages the relationship between leaders and followers and threatens the purpose of the organization. Leaders may break the law; scream or use demeaning language with employees; display an arrogant attitude; engage in sexual harassment; abuse drugs and alcohol; and misuse funds. Courageous followers need to confront leaders acting in a destructive manner." Hackman and Johnson discuss the courage to participate in transformation, with followers identifying what needs to be changed, providing honest feedback, suggesting resources, creating a supportive environment, modeling openness to change and empathy, and providing positive reinforcement for positive new behaviors. Finally, Hackman and Johnson discuss the courage to leave: "When leaders are unwilling to change, courageous followers may take principled action by resigning from the organization. Departure is justified when the leader's behaviors clash with the leader's self-proclaimed values or the values of the group, or when the leader degrades or endangers others."

Many leaders and organization members are aware that the continued ability to carry out their operations occurs within a system (our world) that has limits. Issues such as climate change, natural resource depletion, and the energy crisis are hitting organizations head-on, requiring attention to aspects of the business beyond quarterly financial results. In order to deal with these challenges, many organizations have adopted the principles of sustainability as a guiding framework for operations. *Sustainability,* expressed in simple terms, suggests that every individual should "Leave the world better than you found it, take no more than you need, try not to harm life or the environment, make amends if you do" (Hawken, 1993, p. 139). For some, sustainability is a moral or

ethical mandate, others see it as a legal requirement, whereas others treat these issues as a cost of doing business. Some even consider sustainability practices and processes to be a business opportunity or competitive advantage. Regardless of the perspective taken, this new concept is strongly value-laden with ethical implications for leadership, decision making, employee involvement, education and training, and communication to networks of stakeholders. (For more information on sustainability, see Laura Quinn's essay and case study in the Workshop section.)

The organizational conundrums discussed all ask in one way or another the question of whether an organization can support a core of social values, act in ethical ways, and become or stay financially successful in an increasingly complex world. George Cheney (1999) uses the term *organizational integrity* to describe whether organizations can keep to humane and democratic commitments while growing, enjoying financial success, and perhaps even becoming more centralized and bureaucratized. The issues are complex and critical. They are not easy. In addition, the conundrums include us all. The remaining chapters in this book help you think about and build competencies to deal with these challenges. The next section specifically discusses common ethical dilemmas that we frequently face in our organizational lives.

ETHICAL DILEMMAS IN ORGANIZATIONAL COMMUNICATION

Although ethical issues can arise over virtually any type of communication, several recurring organizational communication situations have ethical implications. These situations—representing skills and abilities, communication behaviors related to money, communication behaviors related to information collection and dissemination, personal communication behaviors, communication behaviors related to technology, and planned organizational communication (internal policies and decisions and external communication)—are frequently encountered by the communication professional.

Representing Skills and Abilities

We present our skills and abilities to potential employers when seeking a job. The way in which we communicate what we know reflects an ethical decision about fair representation of our abilities. Most of us have known someone who has told an interviewer about a skill that we knew the individual did not possess. Although we would say that this behavior is not strictly ethical, we know our friend is highly motivated and will attempt to do a good job if hired. Does this motivation make the behavior acceptable, however? What is the ethical standard we should apply?

Once hired, we may attempt to seek good assignments designed to help us advance. How do we represent our abilities as compared with others in our work group? Do we keep information about mistakes from our supervisor to appear more competent than our peers? Do we blame others for problems even though we legitimately bear part of the responsibility? How can we behave ethically and still risk what others might think about our competencies if they know we have made a major mistake?

When in a supervisory or managerial position, we are responsible for giving feedback to others about their performance. Are we hesitant to give negative information to a problem employee, thereby creating a false sense of security? Are we making an important ethical decision, or are we making a realistic appraisal that the person in question can't handle bad news and would be demoralized if we were more direct?

The representation of skills and abilities also influences problem identification. Consultants and human resource development specialists are frequently asked to help define organizational problems and propose training and related development activities for problem solution. These professionals face the dilemma of defining a problem they may or may not have the skills to solve. When the consultant is external to the organization, defining a problem as needing skills other than those the consultant possesses costs the consultant potential earnings. The organization must hire someone else to meet its needs. On the other hand, defining the problem or need in terms of services the consultant can provide is subject to serious questions of integrity. The concerns are much the same for the internal communication professional.

An example from the development of the training plan of a major East Coast retailer can help to illustrate this dilemma. The company's personnel director, at the request of the president, designed and administered a company-wide training needs assessment survey to develop a training program for all employees. The company's previous training efforts had been sporadic and generally in response to requests from particular departments. As a result, sales employees had received more training than any other single group. The personnel director, who specialized in sales training, was sensitive to the president's request and interpreted it as an implied criticism of his past efforts. The training survey contained twenty-four items assessing needs relating to interpersonal relationships and ten items relating to specific areas such as performance appraisal, diversity, and administration of company benefits. Critics of the personnel director's efforts pointed out that the organization would continue to emphasize sales training based on the content items in the survey. They noted that most of the items relating to working relationships were covered in courses already offered through personnel. The personnel director's credibility with some of the president's staff was eroded because of their questions about his ethics in assessing the needs he was capable of meeting rather than the real needs of the organization. In reality, the personnel director may have been correct that the items represented in the survey were the most crucial for overall needs assessment. Our example does not define for us whether the personnel director engaged in ethical behavior. The example illustrates the dilemma the director faced and how his behavior was subject to the ethical evaluations of others.

Communication Behaviors Related to Money

Communication surrounding fees for services, salaries, and personal versus corporate money is subject to ethical evaluation. The communication consultant, in pricing a training program to a potential client, must base the worth of services on personal credentials, program complexity, general market value of the program, and fees the consulting organization expects to pay. Should a consultant, for example, charge different organizations different fees for essentially the same services? How should fees and services be described? How can the consultant establish charges for diagnosing a problem that is not fully understood? The answers to these and other questions represent decisions about ethical communication.

One ethical question is whether general salary information should be available to all employees or whether salaries should remain confidential to individual employees. The communication of performance review and wage administration information is also a management communication decision with ethical consequences. Individuals communicate their ethical standards regarding organizational money when they use expense accounts, buy services or products for the organization, and establish department budgets. One way to examine our communication behaviors relating to organizational money is to determine whether we would approve of our behavior if we were the sole owner of the company.

Many communication professionals face ethical dilemmas as a result of payment for services. It is not uncommon, for example, for a communication consultant to work simultaneously for competing organizations. Do both clients need to know that the consultant is employed by the other? Internal communication specialists encounter information concerning personal problems of employees such as alcoholism or drug abuse. Are these specialists ever entitled to withhold information from the organization that pays their salary? How should these decisions be examined? All these questions and more have ethical implications for the behaviors of individuals and for overall organizational policy.

Communication Behaviors Related to Information Collection and Dissemination

Most communication professionals are involved in collecting organizational information. They interview, conduct surveys, facilitate meetings, advise and counsel individuals, review documents, and in a variety of other ways generate data important to the conduct of their jobs. During data-collection activities, professionals make ethical decisions concerning what should remain confidential, who has a need to know, how accurate the information is, and what the criteria for interpretation are. These same ethical issues relate to information dissemination. Should sensitive information be kept private, going only to affected individuals? Does a guarantee of confidentiality prohibit the use of the information, even though the organization could be improved if the information surfaced? Who has a need to know? How accurate is the information, and is it subject to varying interpretations? Most experienced professionals know that their ability to handle these sensitive questions ethically contributes to their personal credibility. Even if ethical considerations were not important in and of themselves, practicing communication professionals find that the exercise of ethical standards is essential to their overall organizational effectiveness. Research on effective leaders supports this perspective. As we discuss extensively in Chapter 7, Warren Bennis and Burt Nanus (1985) found that a characteristic of effective leaders was their ability to generate trust and behave consistently. Outstanding leaders practiced their individual standards (ethics and values) in a manner that helped others accept the challenge of their organizational vision.

Personal Communication Behaviors

Thus far we have been talking about the ethics of organizational communication as related to specific types of organizational responsibilities. Although these areas include personal behaviors, there is yet another area of personal behavior important for consideration. This area,

broadly described as our personal communication style, refers to the ethics of our individual behaviors, regardless of our job responsibilities. Do we, for example, behave autocratically, attempting to win at any cost? Is this autocratic preference ethical when it stifles the good ideas of others? Do we, as a result of high communication apprehension or a preference for conflict avoidance, refuse to participate in decision making even though we have information appropriate to the decision? When we are employed by the organization, is it ethical to withhold the best of our thinking? Does our style help others to examine issues critically, or do we use the power of our positions or the force of our personalities to get our own way? How can we examine the ethics of our approaches?

Most of us have been either victims or carriers of gossip. We find talking about others interesting and exciting. We may not be as excited when we know others are discussing our personal or professional lives. Gossip is prevalent in most organizations. Gossip, however, carries important value and ethical implications. What responsibility do we have to verify the accuracy of our communication about others? What is the difference, if any, between gossip and truth not officially released by the organization? What are the implications of engaging in gossip? What should we do when we are the subjects of gossip, whether true or otherwise? Closely related to the gossip that occurs in most organizations is the subject of organizational confidentiality. Most organizations require at least some level of confidentiality from employees. Confidentiality is designed to protect organizational information necessary for competitive advantage. Confidentiality usually extends to information about customers and other types of product or service data. Many organizations require employees to sign confidentiality agreements providing security of information about customers, products, and services. Have you ever provided what you knew to be confidential information to others? What were your reasons? What would you do if your boss asked you to keep information about a major mistake confidential from others? These questions and others can be answered through self-assessment and understanding of our personal ethical standards.

Communication Behaviors and Technology

Maintaining confidentiality and security of information for e-business is an increasingly complex organizational responsibility. Disclaimers on the Internet and in other publications describe organizational commitments to confidentiality. Yet leaks of confidential information are frequent, and identity theft from breaches of electronic confidentiality occur for almost one in eight individuals every year. The breaking of confidentiality is a frequent and costly organizational occurrence. Indeed, the broad use of technology for purchases and exchange of important information carries both an ethical and legal responsibility for individuals and organizations.

As more and more workers use technology on a daily basis, issues about its workplace use increase. Many people have desktop access to e-mail, the Internet, organizational databases, videoconferencing, and a host of other programs and links. Some organizations regularly monitor the e-mail and Internet use of their employees. Others limit Internet access to only selected sites known to be associated with business needs. Still others publish policies directing the type of communication behaviors expected on e-mail and when using the Internet. Many organizations, for example, prohibit individual advertising when using company electronic resources. Others, by contrast, establish web pages for employee exchange of personal information, including the desire to sell personal property. All these

issues have ethical and trust implications. Do you know anyone who uses a corporate e-mail account for personal correspondence? How much time is devoted to this activity during a workday? Is that ethical? Why? Why not? How many people use their organization's Internet provider for personal Internet access? What are the implications of these behaviors?

In addition to the various uses made of organizational technologies, ethical questions can be asked about the approach to communication we select when using telemediated channels. Research consistently supports that many people will be more harsh and critical using e-mail than in face-to-face interactions. Others use e-mail to raise issues they will not raise in other forums. There are strengths and weaknesses to these approaches. The question to ask, however, is whether it is ethical to use a technology that distances us from our receivers to engage in an exchange we will not "own" in less distanced communication. How can we approach understanding this issue? What does your own personal behavior suggest?

Destructive Communication Behaviors

A number of communication behaviors such as deception, invasion of privacy, aggression, incivility, sexual harassment, and discrimination are almost universally considered unethical. Unfortunately, these behaviors occur daily within all types and sizes of organizations. In describing destructive behaviors, Craig Johnson (2007) contends, "Like the dangerous aspects of ourselves, the shadow side of organizations must be acknowledged and confronted. There is little hope of transforming organizational systems unless we first address the behaviors that undermine any change effort." Lying is the most obvious form of deception and is a deliberate attempt to either provide false information or mislead others with only marginally truthful information. But deception also occurs when individuals remain silent even though they have information that could alter understanding in particular situations. If we are honest with ourselves, most of us recognize we have engaged in deception at one time or another. We may not as readily recognize how deception lowers trust and impairs problem solving and decision making. In other words, many of us do not thoughtfully consider both the ethical and performance implications of deception.

We set boundaries around how much information we communicate in our work environment about our personal lives and private thoughts and positions. We worry about who has access to our personal information such as financial or medical records. Most of us consider it unethical when someone searches our desk, records a telephone conversation without our knowledge, or reveals information we have shared in confidence. The rise of technology surveillance in the workplace raises new issues about personal rights and privacy. But as Johnson (2007) points out, "Arrayed against privacy rights is the organization's right to gather information about its members. Employers are held liable for the sexist and racist messages sent through their e-mail systems, for instance. . . . Organizations also prevent employee fraud and theft by conducting investigations."

Aggression, incivility, sexual harassment, and discrimination are communication and physical behaviors with destructive and unethical consequences. Incivility usually refers to a broad range of behaviors that disregard and violate generally accepted norms of respect. Behaviors termed as lacking in civility range from discourteous driving to e-mails that demean or discount. According to Stephen Carter (1998), some studies indicate that the majority of us experience incivility weekly. A somewhat lesser number are believed to experience incivility on a daily basis. Can you think of a time when you have

been a victim of incivility? When have you engaged in a behavior others might consider lacking in civility?

Although incivility impacts performance, aggression is even more deliberate in its attempts to harm or injure. Aggressive behaviors include both physical and communication threats such as sabotage, insults, and refusing to interact or provide needed information. Johnson (2007) helps us understand the unethical and negative consequences of aggression:

> Not surprisingly, aggression can do extensive damage to both individuals and the organization as a whole. Victims may be injured, experience higher stress levels leading to poor health, become fearful or angry or depressed, lose the ability to concentrate, and feel less committed to their jobs. Observers who witness aggressive incidents may suffer some of the same negative outcomes. They, too, experience more anxiety and a lowered sense of well-being and commitment. At the organizational level, performance drops as a result of aggressive actions. Workplace aggression is correlated with lower productivity, higher absenteeism and turnover rates, lawsuits and negative publicity. (p. 218)

Sexual harassment and discrimination behaviors are both unethical and illegal. These behaviors inhibit or deny basic rights and opportunities to those victimized and often result in legal action against those engaged in harassing or discriminatory acts. Unethical and illegal behaviors harm individuals and organizations. Although most of us do not engage in the extremes of these behaviors, developing our personal communication competency requires we remain aware of our behaviors and learn to confront negative behaviors in others. Later chapters specifically address development of competencies for these difficult situations.

Planned Organizational Communication

Organizations regularly communicate a variety of policies and procedures with ethical implications. Hiring processes and decisions, promotional policies, assignment of work, and working conditions are all evaluated for their ethical consequences. Do organizations genuinely open positions and promotions to the most qualified, or are those in a close network of in-group relationships most likely to succeed? Are all employees given opportunities for development and challenging work assignments, or do entire segments of the workforce have little challenge and opportunity? Are working conditions free of hazards both physically and psychologically? Are employees able to engage in free statements of their concerns and positions? The answers to these questions and others become the ethical climate of the organization.

Organizations also communicate ethical decisions to their external publics. The quality of products and services can be evaluated for ethical dimensions. Planned organizational communication such as advertising, public relations, and government and stockholder interactions is more likely to be governed by formal codes of ethics or legal standards and requirements than other aspects of organizational communication. Advertising is subject to government regulations that include ethical standards about what constitutes truth in advertising. Full disclosure of financial information is required for stockholder and government relationships, and public relations efforts are subject to ethical standards established by the journalism profession. Despite these standards, we can all

think of times when we have questioned the ethics of advertising and can remember when organizations attempted to manipulate the public with less than full disclosure about products or services. The global environment places a special challenge on understanding ethical communication when ethical standards vary greatly across cultures.

Courage, Ethics, and Responsibility

Engaging in ethical behavior is both an individual and organizational responsibility. Increasingly, organizations seek individuals with ethics training and the ability to translate that knowledge into both formal and informal communication behaviors. Communication professionals are expected to behave ethically and have the capability to advise others in the development of messages, policies, and practices that support ethical standards. Communication professionals write press releases, develop Internet and e-mail policies, develop and guide organizational assessments of climate and culture important to problem solving and decision making, manage risk and crisis communication, and deal with numerous other situations involving significant ethical implications. Preparation for these responsibilities begins with self-awareness and clarity about personal values and ways to assess ethical communication behaviors. The following section provides specific opportunities to apply ethical standards.

DEVELOPING ETHICAL STANDARDS IN ORGANIZATIONAL COMMUNICATION

We discussed how to determine whether communication is ethical. We also identified some common ethical dilemmas faced by communication professionals. We have not, however, attempted to apply ethical standards to the behavior choices we can expect to encounter in organizational settings. Following are shortened versions of fifteen organizational dilemmas I encountered during my consulting experiences. For each dilemma, attempt to determine what you would actually do if faced by this situation and what you should do. If what you would do and should do are different, state why. Finally, after analyzing all fifteen situations, attempt to determine what criteria you used in applying ethical standards.

Ethical Dilemmas in Organizational Communication

1. You are the newly appointed personnel director for a large beverage distributor. Your new job responsibilities include screening all applicants for promotions to management positions. Your company's usual procedure is for the personnel director to screen applicants and select the top three for further interviews with management. You also know that the president of the company does not want a woman on his personal staff. Your current decision is difficult because your most recent vacancy is on the president's personal staff and your top three applicants are female. You can send the three applicants to the president and wait to see what happens. You can rethink your selection criteria and try to have a male applicant in the top three. You can reopen the position, hoping to attract additional qualified

applicants. You can confront the president about his discriminatory posture. You also have other options. What would you do? What should you do?

2. You are part of a team involved in administering and interpreting an in-depth set of surveys designed to help managers in your company better understand how their managers and subordinates view their effectiveness. The results of the surveys are intended to be developmental, and individual members of your team will meet with each manager to interpret the results and develop action plans for improvements. You are puzzled when you see the first computer printouts of the survey results. Managers who you know are well respected and effective are receiving low scores compared with a national sample of managers from similar industries. You contact the company that compiled the results and ask questions about its sample. Your contact does not provide satisfactory information. Your peers believe you should go ahead and interpret the results to the managers. You believe the results are suspect and question whether they should be presented. Your boss believes the results should be presented. After all, corporate headquarters uses the survey with no problems. You can do as your peers want you to do. You can ask for a meeting with your peers and your boss in hopes of convincing them of your concerns. You can present the results to your group of managers and tell them you don't have much confidence in the findings. You can refuse to participate further in the program. You have other options. What would you do? What should you do?

3. A crew member from the night shift's manufacturing group has come to you as her personnel liaison with a concern about drug use on the production line. She won't give you any specific details for fear of those involved finding out who has turned them in. She suggests that you should investigate immediately but warns against involving her in any way. She asks you not to tell the other personnel liaisons because the grapevine has it that one of them may be involved. You can go to your boss and work with her in deciding what to do next. You can try to investigate on your own. You can bring up the drug problems the plant is experiencing at a staff meeting and watch closely to see if there are any unusual reactions from your peers. You can tell your source to give you more specific information before you will do anything. You can ignore the problem because of lack of evidence. You have other options. What would you do? What should you do?

4. You are in the training department of a large West Coast hospital. Your department is responsible for all training for nonmedical staff and management training for medical department supervisors and nursing staff. Your boss has been in his position for twenty-two years. When you are asked to develop a five-year report of your department's activities, your analysis of the records shows that one consultant has been paid over $50,000 for approximately six training sessions a year. This fee schedule is more than twice what other consultants working in similar subject areas have charged the hospital. You decide to pull the consultant's file and investigate. Much to your surprise, there is no formal contract or course evaluations. You ask your boss about the consultant in question, only to be told he is none of your concern. The secretary in your department warns you that the consultant is a special friend of your boss and that you had better let the matter drop. You can forget the whole thing and finish the report. You can press your boss for more information. You can ask the secretary to help you locate the missing information. You can go to the finance department and ask for its copy of the contract. You can put this deficiency in your final report. You have other options. What would you do? What should you do?

5. You have overheard a conversation between your manager and the manager of a department in which your best friend is employed. From their conversation, it is apparent that your friend is not pleasing her manager and she will definitely be passed over for the promotion she badly wants. You don't want to see her hurt, and you happen to know she has a job offer from another group within your organization. Should you tell her about the conversation and urge her to take the new offer? Should you remain silent because of the manner in which you heard the information? Should you go to your boss and tell him that you accidentally overheard the conversation and are concerned because your friend might turn down a good job offer? Should you urge your friend to confront her boss? You have other options. What would you do? What should you do?

6. You are the lead copywriter in an advertising agency handling a major chemical products account. Your copy is frequently criticized by the chemical manufacturer's marketing director. He wants a stronger sell, even if that means omitting much of the disclaimer information associated with the safe use of the products. He contends that people buying chemicals should take individual responsibility for safety and that the company should not be required to devote scarce ad and package label space to full disclosure of the potential hazards. You realize that he may even be willing to test whether government regulating agencies will restrain his actions if he refuses to comply with industry product labeling requirements. The issue comes to a head when you receive copy proofs changed by the marketing director to omit disclosure information that you believe should remain in the new ad series. Your immediate boss is out of town on vacation and cannot be reached. You either have to let the changes go or confront the marketing director. You know he will not appreciate your interference. You can let the copy go as is. (You have documented evidence that the marketing director, not your agency, made the changes.) You can refuse to make the changes, thereby jeopardizing the account. You can ask to be removed from the account. You can go to the marketing manager's boss in the chemical company. You have other options. What would you do? What should you do?

7. You are a consultant specializing in management communication training programs. You have been hired by a prestigious building products manufacturer to conduct a series of programs for its top management staff. The programs go well, and you are excited about future business with other branches of the organization. The president of the company invites you to lunch and congratulates you on your work. He has recommended extending your contract and indicates that it will be the beginning of a long and mutually satisfactory relationship. He then tells you of an unwritten condition in your contract: he wants a quarterly report made directly to him on promising individuals in the branch offices. He believes your contact in the training classes will give you the opportunity to spot talent that he may have little opportunity to recognize. He insists the report should be confidential because his personnel department would object. You can do as the president requests. You can advise him of your concerns about evaluating people during training sessions not designed for that purpose. You can object to the need for secrecy in your appraisals. You can say nothing and think about what to do next. You have other options. What would you do? What should you do?

8. You have received a job offer from one of your current employer's principal competitors. The offer was unsolicited and has come as a surprise. Although this type of offer is not uncommon in the advertising business, you are unsure how to respond. The vice president

urging you to come to work for her also mentioned that one of your current employer's largest accounts is talking with her group about changing agencies. You have reason to believe that the account is pleased with your work and wonder if her offer is not aimed at increasing the chances of taking business away from your employer. So far, the vice president has not asked you any questions about the account. You are scheduled to meet her for lunch next week. Should you tell your employer that you are considering another position? Should you refuse to discuss the account in question if the vice president mentions it? How can you learn whether the offer has a hidden business agenda? Do you have a responsibility to your current employer to tell him a major account is being solicited by another firm? What would you do? What should you do?

9. You are the newest member of your company's field sales staff. Before being assigned to your own group of accounts, you spent three months making sales calls with experienced sales personnel. During that time, you became aware of customer complaints about quality defects in two of the six product lines you represent. The salespeople you worked with assured you that the company was aware of the problem and was working hard to lower the defective shipments. In your first solo presentation, your potential customer asks you about rumors that some of your product lines are having defect problems. He wants to know very specifically what he can expect if he places a large order. You want to make the sale. You have not investigated the extent of the defects problem or when the company expects to have it solved. You know your manager expects you to secure an order from this customer. How should you answer the customer? Can you make the sale if you admit the defects problem? What will happen if you don't? What would your manager have you do? What are your other options? What would you do? What should you do?

10. You are the member of a task force asked to recommend to the city council how the city's Park and Recreation Department can better serve low-income members of your community. Two members of your group believe the city government should reduce its budget, and they view your assignment as an ideal way to make that statement. You disagree. The task force is charged with making programming recommendations. The Park and Recreation Department is charged with incorporating those recommendations into their budget, which must be approved by the council. You support more programs for low-income areas of your community and hope some of your recommendations will be part of the final report. Several group members agree with you, two strongly disagree, and several are undecided. At the next-to-last task force meeting before the report is due to council, a reporter asks to interview a member of the task force in order to get a progress update. The two members with whom you have had the most disagreements are late to the meeting. Others in the group suggest you talk with the reporter. You agree, hoping for an opportunity to express your support for low-income programming. As the interview begins, you wonder whether your remarks should reflect the various perspectives present in the group or whether it is appropriate to represent your personal view. Should you tell the reporter that members both support and disapprove of increased park and recreation programming? Should you tell the reporter that the final report to council is very likely to contain a dissenting opinion and you are not sure which side of the issue will receive majority support? Will this type of dissent weaken the effectiveness of the report? Should you represent your position because the other two members are late and would have had an opportunity to speak to the press had they arrived on time? What would you do? What should you do?

11. You are a member of a project team charged with designing a new service support training program for your organization's 150 customer support representatives. The representatives are generally knowledgeable but resistant to a new training program. Your team members include two of your peers from the training department and two customer support representatives. The initial design meetings have been productive but you become aware that the two customer support representatives expect you and your coworkers to do the work. They will critique what you propose. Further, you know that at least one of the customer support representatives is talking with others in his work group about your ideas. You have learned that some representatives think you don't know what the work really is and can't possibly design a good program. You want the program to be good but are concerned with the rumors and lack of work from two members of your team. Should you confront the representatives? Should you ask team members for more effort? What would you do? What should you do?

12. You are a member of a self-directed work team charged with processing travel requests for over 3,000 salespeople worldwide. Your team has been praised for quality work and cost savings. In fact, your group has reduced processing costs by 40 percent over previous groups. One longtime member of your team is not pulling her share of the load. Jane is excellent with her accounts but is not helping other team members when they are overloaded. Jane is popular with management and many of the salespeople you support. Other team members have asked you to talk with Jane. You think that the entire team should engage in this conversation. To make matters worse, you learn that Jane, but not the rest of the team, has received a coveted customer support award. Jane has not mentioned this award to the team. Should you ask Jane about the award? Should you insist the team join you in talking to Jane? What would you do? What should you do?

13. You are a senior member of a management team that has just learned one of its major products may have a serious electrical defect. Two consumer deaths are associated with product use. Your corporate attorneys suggest that the company must immediately deny any responsibility. Your public relations people need to issue a statement. Your manufacturing manager reports that he believes there are no problems for which the company is liable. Most of your peers want to take a strong denial position based on long-term consumer loyalty to the product in question. You remember an accident in the lab while the product was under development. The accident resulted in severe burns to two testing technicians. You are assured there is no connection. You are pressured to agree to a course of action that will permit the public relations people to issue a release supporting the product. Should you talk with the president of the company? Should you resign? What would you do? What should you do?

14. You have been asked by your boss to evaluate the e-business strategy the marketing department of your company proposes. You have reason to believe that your boss doesn't really understand the proposal because she has little experience with the Internet. You don't have the experience to do the evaluation but know you must make a response within the next week. You decide to review the Internet strategies of your major competitors. To your surprise, you find that your company's marketing proposal ignores several features for customer service that all your competitors are using. When you discuss this omission with the director of marketing, he laughs at you for what he considers your lack of experience and

suggests that you have no right to question his judgment. You are concerned about your lack of experience but believe you have some valid concerns. You don't want to put your boss in a bad position by opposing a proposal from another department. Should you talk with your boss? Should you present your concerns despite the marketing director's opposition? What would you do? What should you do?

15. You are a senior member of an international marketing team charged with developing a major promotion for your organization's new line of consumer products. The products are intended to be introduced simultaneously in eighteen countries including the United States of America, several European countries, and large segments of Asia. The company's international marketing director prefers that your team develop a single promotional theme for, as he puts it, "the globe." You are concerned because team members from Asia contend this is dangerous and culturally inappropriate. Several team members consider the initial promotional copy brash and insulting. You and some of your European counterparts believe the copy is direct and will gain instant attention from potential consumers. You must present a proposal to the marketing director within a week. You can ask the director for more time. You can present the significant disagreement to the director even though you know he will not be pleased. You can have the team vote, knowing that the majority will support the theme some find offensive. What other options do you have to resolve this dispute? What would you do? What should you do?

After analyzing these examples, are the behaviors you would do and should do always the same? If they were different, what caused the difference? What contributed to similarities? Was it difficult to determine what was ethical in a given situation? Can you identify the standards you used as your criteria? After considering these examples, can you see the relationship between competency and ethics?

CHAPTER HIGHLIGHTS

Values are the subjective assessments we make about the relative worth of a quality or object. These assessments are thought to guide our behavior in making choices and judgments. Both individuals and organizations have value systems that are expressed through communication behaviors. **Ethics** are the standards by which behaviors are evaluated for morality, for rightness or wrongness. When applied to human communication, ethics are the moral principles that guide our judgments about the good and bad, the right and wrong of communication, not just communication effectiveness or efficiency. Values and ethics are a part of all communication and organizational experiences.

W O R K S H O P

1. Divide into groups of four or six members each and discuss the fifteen ethical dilemmas presented in this chapter. Compare your individual responses with those of other group members. As a group, what would you do? What should you do?

2. Either individually or in small groups, write a statement describing the values of your ideal organization. Describe your organization's ethical communication behaviors.

3. "People, Planet, and Profit: Sustainability and the Triple Bottom Line" by Laura Quinn examines the ethical basis of the concept of sustainability. As you read her essay, prepare to discuss as a class the value and ethical implications of using sustainability as part of organizational strategy and organizational communication.

4. The "GreenBean Coffee, Inc.—Is It Our Responsibility?" case by Laura Quinn helps us assess how the concept of sustainability might influence problem solving and decision making in the example of a company seeking to uphold high values while operating as an industry leader. Discuss as a class what the case suggests about individual and corporate social responsibility.

People, Planet, and Profit: Sustainability and the Triple Bottom Line

Laura Quinn, Ph.D.[2]

Imagine a world in which organizations participate in the global economy in ways that enhance the safety and well-being of all individuals and protect our natural habitats while creating a fair and equitable state of wealth for everyone. Wouldn't this be wonderful? Is it possible? With innovation, creativity, and a commitment to expanded values, there is a new framework, called sustainability, helping businesses make this dream a reality.

We all know our current state of global affairs isn't in the best condition. In fact, issues of global warming, ozone depletion, pollution, unemployment, and unfair labor practices, to name just a few, are daily elements of our local, national, and international news. Indeed, the future of our planet and its inhabitants (us!) is in question; some would say it is in a state of jeopardy. However, dwelling on our current state of "doom and gloom" will not help the situation. What will help is identifying a way of working and living that is financially feasible, fair and equitable to all, and, at the same time, protects our planet—this is what sustainability is all about.

All types of organizations from countries around the world are taking on what some would call a revolutionary approach to running their day-to-day operations. This new approach, referred to as sustainability, asks organizations to go beyond the traditional evaluation of success, profitability, and the bottom line to expand these measures to include the triple bottom line (TBL). The TBL Perspective asks businesses to look beyond profits as the main measure of success and also to include the impact their operations have on people and the planet. While still focusing on the economic value an organization produces, the TBL expands to measure the social and environmental value the organization creates or, unfortunately, destroys. Organizations adopting a triple-bottom-line stance consider the impact of their operations, strategies, and decisions on their employees, their industry, their community, their environment—the "whole system" of the organization.

Certainly, this expanded viewpoint requires organizations to pay attention to a complex, integrated network of factors. When using the TBL, it is not enough to ask "How much does it cost?" or "What will our profit be?" Organizations implementing the TBL will employ a broader scope of questioning to include (but not limited to) the following:

TO ADDRESS PEOPLE
- Do we treat our employees with respect?
- Do our employees earn "livable" wages and have good working conditions?
- Are we a diverse organization, treating people of all types in a fair manner?
- Do we ensure the health and safety of our people? Our communities?
- Do our stakeholders trust us?
- Does our organization uphold ethical values and practices?

TO ADDRESS PLANET
- What is the impact of our product or services on the environment?
- Do our operations create pollution and harmful waste?
- Are we efficient and effective in our consumption of energy and resources?
- Do we recycle?

TO ADDRESS PROFIT
- Can we make and sell our products or services for a profit?
- What do we need to do to maintain our profitability?
- Are we competitive in the marketplace?
- How can we ensure continued innovation and competitive advantage?

Of course, paying attention to the triple bottom line is not necessarily easy; the TBL requires integration, openness, and thoroughness within an organization's communication systems. The TBL requires strong leadership, a commitment to ethics and values, and patience. It is important to recognize that as organizations pursue the TBL, the emphasis on each factor is not always the same or equal. The TBL factors are linked and require different levels of consideration at different times and in different situations. For example, a decision on employee policies may come up that doesn't have a strong environmental impact but does have a definite impact on employees, wages, and jobs (people and profit). This decision would not have an equal emphasis on the environmental factor. Yet another decision may be needed on the new types of chemicals used in the manufacturing process of an organization; this decision would clearly involve all three factors. In this case, the organization would want to know: How much does the new chemical cost? Is it toxic? If so, what can be done with the waste? What impact does this waste have on the environment? Where will this waste be dumped? Who will this affect? Most important, do we have an alternative that isn't toxic, or is there another process that doesn't require a toxic chemical? The complexity added by the TBL factors requires organizations to rethink and reconfigure their organizational communication processes in ways that address triple-bottom-line effects. Specifically, consideration must be given to the following:

- *Leadership*—Leaders must create a new vision for the organization that expands beyond traditional values and approaches. Instead of focusing on short-term strategies,

leaders must think of the legacy of their organization's impact on the world. Goals and objectives must incorporate a whole-systems perspective, with a focus on innovation, interconnections, and long-term impact.

■ *Values/Ethics*—The TBL Perspective requires the adoption of a broader, more encompassing set of organizational values and ethics. Instead of being driven by the single value of creating shareholder wealth, organizations must also place value on factors such as social justice, environmental quality, fair employment and trade practices, and community involvement.

■ *Decision Making/Problem Solving*—As the three factors of the TBL are incorporated, they necessitate that new criteria be developed for evaluating effective decisions and solutions to problems. Decision criteria must expand, beyond considering costs, to consider the impact of decisions on people, including vendors, employees, and community members, and on the environment, including the efficient use of natural resources, the creation of waste and pollution, and the effect on the supply chain.

■ *Employee Involvement/Employment Practices*—In order to implement the TBL, it is imperative that employees at all levels of the organization be involved. Addressing the factors of the TBL is a complex process, and ensuring the participation of all employees will help provide a whole-systems perspective for decisions, processes, and strategies. Also inherent in the triple-bottom-line perspective is the fair and inclusive treatment of employees. Employment practices must contribute to the employee's sense of safety, well-being, and respect.

■ *Education/Training*—Certainly, the TBL requires a new way of thinking and behaving. To ensure that everyone has a shared understanding of the principles and perspectives of the TBL, some form of continuous training and education will be needed to teach everyone about the different factors, as well as the skills needed to deal with a new and greater level of complexity.

■ *Communication Networks/Stakeholder Engagement*—As the TBL addresses complex issues within and beyond the organization's boundaries, organizations must ensure that communication networks are broad and diverse and include the entire system of the organization. Creating frequent forums for dialogue with stakeholders such as employees, vendors, customers, community members, environmental groups, nonprofit groups, and government officials is an essential part of understanding and managing the TBL.

So what do organizations get when they adopt a TBL stance? Of course, the main benefit of adopting the TBL is that of becoming a responsible global citizen. In addition, there are strategic advantages, cost savings, and the building of goodwill that develop around an organization's efforts with the TBL. Any time an organization is more comprehensive and forward-thinking in its strategies and operations, it can compete more effectively in its own market, whether it is a manufacturing organization or a community nonprofit organization. TBL organizations have been shown to experience the following advantages as a result of their efforts toward sustainability:

■ Increased stakeholder satisfaction and loyalty
■ Ease in hiring and maintaining talented employees
■ Increased productivity

- Increased employee morale
- Reduced expenses and waste
- Increased revenue and market share
- Better risk management
- Increased capability for adapting to market/industry/customer changes
- Improved innovation
- Positive community relations

Although much technological and scientific knowledge helps organizations transition to this new way of conducting business, the organizational communication challenges of the TBL are just beginning to be addressed. The field of organizational communication can and must play a significant role in helping these organizations move forward to sustainability with the triple bottom line. The TBL organization's ultimate goal is to participate in commerce as a first-class global citizen, helping to make the world a better place for current and future generations. The field of organizational communication can play a significant role in helping organizations along on this worthwhile and necessary journey.

GreenBean Coffee, Inc. — Is It Our Responsibility?

Laura Quinn, Ph.D.

GreenBean Coffee, Inc. currently holds the number one position in the U.S. coffee market; they have surpassed their industry competition with the growth of their neighborhood coffee shops, grocery store retailing, and online marketing and sales. No one ever thought GreenBean could pull this off, but with a reputation for quality and value, employer-of-choice practices, and progressive environmental policies, many customers traded in their loyalties to other coffee retailers and committed to GreenBean's products and business practices. Indeed, GreenBean's mission and values emphasize their commitment to being "good global citizens," treating people fairly and not harming the environment while running a profitable business. As of today, GreenBean has retail shops in all fifty states, with a handful of international locations. They are planning to grow internationally.

Recently, an international environmental organization, Groovy Planet, came to GreenBean to address the issue of beans growing in South America. Groovy Planet's studies have confirmed the use of toxic pesticides in the coffee farming practices in South America. Residues from these pesticides are contaminating the water supply in South America; in addition, the employees of the South American coffee growers are experiencing increased asthma, respiratory, and dermatological health issues as a direct result of contact with these pesticides. Groovy Planet has not gone to the press with this information but indicates it will in order to get the U.S. coffee industry to take action. Groovy Planet has contacted GreenBean Coffee first because of its role as industry leader, as well as its company values. South American coffee farmers supply GreenBean, Inc. with 100 percent of their raw beans.

As GreenBean's senior staff gets together to address this issue, the product development team presents the following facts: GreenBean's coffee bean supplier, not GreenBean, is the purchaser/user of the toxic pesticides; GreenBean purchases the beans with the stipulation that the beans will be washed prior to shipment to the United States of America so the pesticides will not affect GreenBean's customers; the employees with health issues are

not employees of GreenBean. GreenBean has found an organic pesticide with the same protective qualities of the toxic pesticide, but the coffee growers require GreenBean to pay the additional costs for the use of this product. Using the new organic product would result in a need for a reduction in profit margin or an increase in price. (NOTE: Because of Green-Bean's quality and reputation, it is already the price leader in the coffee market.)

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Is dealing with the toxic pesticides GreenBean's responsibility?
2. Is GreenBean violating any company values? If so, which ones?
3. How should GreenBean communicate with its coffee suppliers? With Groovy Planet? What should this communication entail?
4. Is GreenBean's reputation at stake?
5. What should GreenBean do?

TIPS FOR EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

1. Evaluate your communication for its honor and respect for all persons.

2. Listen actively and ask for clarification when you believe you may not understand.

3. Ask others for input even when you are fairly certain you will disagree.

4. Provide information openly and honestly.

5. Encourage others to participate in difficult discussions.

6. Support civil disagreement.

7. Challenge behavior that devalues others.

8. Apologize and correct personal negative behaviors.

9. Support others to confront wrongs.

10. Provide credit and support for ethical behaviors.

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Scoring the Values Appraisal Exercise (Figure 4.3, p. 109)

Instructions (Part 1). Below are the six defined values indicated by the twenty-four statements in Figure 4.3. Enter the number you circled for each statement next to the number for that statement. Then total your score for each value.

Values:	Money	Power	Family	Aesthetic	Creative	Social
	1____	2____	3____	4____	5____	6____
	11____	7____	10____	9____	12____	8____
	13____	15____	14____	18____	16____	17____
	20____	22____	21____	24____	19____	23____
Totals:	____	____	____	____	____	____

Instructions (Part 2). Now plot your own personal values profile. Use the preceding totals for each of the six values and plot them on the chart that follows.

Money	Power	Family	Aesthetic	Creative	Social

16 _____

15 _____

14 _____

13 _____

12 _____

11 _____

10 _____

 9 _____

 8 _____

 7 _____

 6 _____

 5 _____

 4 _____

 3 _____

 2 _____

 1 _____

 0 _____