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Simply stated, you must think before you speak and you must speak with readable non-verbal cues. Choosing a rich medium will more effectively convey a complex message.

Your message delivery method is just as important as the medium you choose. How you say something can be as easily misunderstood as what you say, so giving careful consideration to how a message is communicated is vital. Words exchanged at the coffee machine race through an office; rumours often take on a life of their own, doing irreparable harm to reputation and integrity.

Diversity in the modern workplace exacerbates the difficulty in using readable facial expressions and body language. Each culture has its own rules governing the messages conveyed by non-verbal language, and the meanings of these are culture bound and vary widely.

Facial expressions are perhaps the most visible yet most misinterpreted carriers of meanings. The Japanese "recognize the importance of face perhaps better than people of any culture", explains psychologist D. Matsumoto of the Culture & Emotion Research Laboratory at San Francisco State University (Matsumoto, 2002). But all cultures "read" meanings into various facial expressions; for instance, a yawn can be interpreted as sleepiness or boredom and a grimace can be read as concern or fear, among a variety of other emotions.

Interaction with people of different cultures and ethnicities requires an awareness of what is conveyed in these mannerisms, which may not be what the sender intended. Taking the time and effort to research and learn about the various cultures of fellow workers is the hallmark of an effective communicator and good leader.

Body language and facial expressions convey sincerity and truthfulness, but non-verbal language can undermine a message if it is not congruent with the words spoken.

### Telephone and voice mail

A telephone call is often a wise communication choice when you have a complex message to deliver, especially if it would take several exchanges using email or another form of communication to accomplish.

The telephone has advanced beyond the dreams of Alexander Graham Bell and his 1900 invention. Today, workplace telephones form intricately connected systems that

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act as call managers. A sophisticated system routes calls, takes messages, screens callers, relays automatic messages, saves phone numbers, automatically dials numbers and reroutes callers. Mobile or cell phones do all these functions and more, such as display time and date, provide calendars and a world clock, take pictures, send text messages and browse the Internet.

People using mobile phones call people, not places, as traditional landlines do. This brings a new set of contextual cues to a phone conversation. One of the first questions a caller asks is, "Where are you?" This sets the stage for the ensuing conversation. Is the person outside or in a public place? Is the person on the other end able to concentrate, or is he or she engaged in some other activity like driving that might distract his/her attention?

Other considerations, such as is the caller en route and in jeopardy of losing the connection or outside noise, are not necessary when calling a landline but often provide the contextual background for a cell call.

**Voice mail** helps business people stay connected. As soon as an airplane lands on the runway, business people turn on their cell phones and check for messages. What do you do when your class is dismissed? Check for messages!

Cell phone technology has changed the work habits and accessibility and business/private time of workers in every corner of the world. Telephone etiquette is expected, and speaking clearly over a phone, whether talking to a person or leaving a message, is good manners. People dislike asking someone to repeat information as if it somehow reflects on their comprehension skills. They would rather pretend they heard and hope they can figure out what is being said. Many voice mail calls are left unreturned because names, numbers and message content are spoken so rapidly or incomprehensively they cannot be deciphered.

### Voice mail message guidelines:

1. Be brief.
2. Put the most important information first.
3. Speak slowly.
4. Speak clearly.
5. Repeat any forwarding numbers.
6. Change your message to reflect an extended absence.
7. Be professional.

## Meetings

Most employees see meetings as a necessary evil. However, evidence suggests that the number of business meetings and the length of those meetings have grown over the past few years. Psychologist Steven Rogelberg, interviewed on an NPR-affiliated radio station in the USA, believes business meetings have increased because of the "tendency for inclusiveness" on the part of both managers and employees (Rogelberg, 2006).

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Researchers gathered information from employees in Australia, the UK and the USA and found that many managers spend as much as 60 % of their workday in meetings. Participants' perceptions of meetings varied from them being considered extremely valuable to them being considered a waste of time.

The study found that perceptions of business meeting also varied with the "type" of worker. People who were focused on task completion goals saw meetings as distractions. But employees who had more social-oriented goals viewed meetings as opportunities to interact with others, while gathering information to help them understand different perspectives.

It also asked employees about how meetings related to their well-being and health. Some individuals reported "meeting burn-out", but many said meetings added to their sense of accomplishment at the end of the workday. Other study participants said meetings helped create a focus for their business-day agenda and most employees wanted at least one meeting per day.

None of the participants wanted no meetings. Bosses liked meetings, while the extent to which employees liked meetings had a direct correlation to how much talking they did and whether they directed the meeting or participated in it. Rogelberg concluded that encouraging participation is crucial to effective meetings (Rogelberg, 2006).

Keeping employees informed may help keep controversial company actions out of the news. Many organizations use employee councils or other such groups to provide input on changes to company policy or practices, such as pensions. Scottish & Newcastle, an international beer-beverage company, consulted with its Employee Council before announcing arrangements for a new pension plan. As a result of this consultation, the company initiated employee briefings, pension workshops and question and answer sessions to address and explain the proposal. This employee communication plan helped the company and its workers cope with changes in the pension programme (Park, 2006).

As meetings have the prospect of conveying both positive and negative messages, preparation and groundwork decrease the possibility of ambiguity.

To plan for a quality meeting, consider these guidelines:

1. Decide if the meeting will be useful, not just for you, but for your employees.
2. Outline what you hope to accomplish.
3. Establish realistic, doable goals.
4. Keep the meeting on focus.
5. Encourage participation.
6. Make sure all needed participants will be present.
7. Distribute any prework, such as data, charts, sales figures or minutes of prior meetings, to employees in advance.



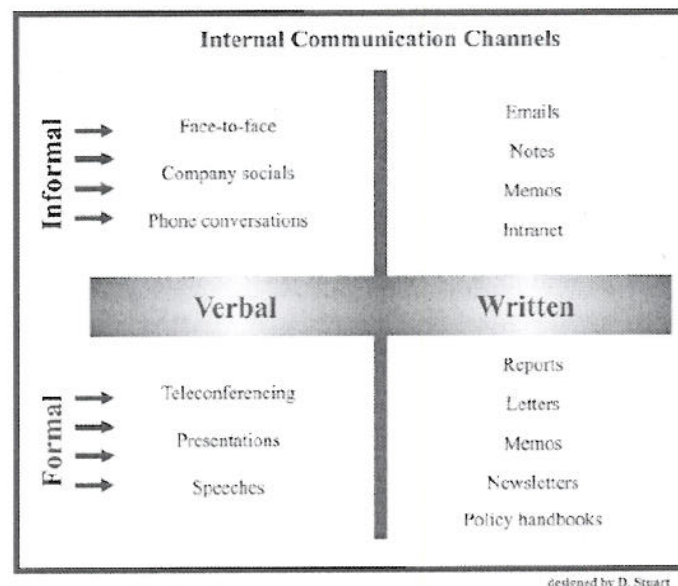
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Meetings that make effective use of employees' time create an enthusiasm for future meetings and add to their feelings of accomplishment.

To achieve this objective you should:

- Set a positive tone for the meeting that stimulates a feeling that the meeting will be productive.
- Start with a statement of the meeting's goals. Present the meeting's agenda and expectations.
- Integrate the prework into the meeting. It will set the precedent for reviewing prework information for future meetings.
- Involve attendees in the meeting by soliciting their input; make them feel they have a vested interest in accomplishing the objectives of the meeting.
- Summarize what goals were reached or what actions will be taken because of the meeting.



designed by D. Stuart

Figure 8.2 Internal communication channels fall into two categories: informal and formal.

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Studies have shown that employees who get follow-up reports on decisions made in meetings feel more committed to company actions and more willing to attend future sessions.

Before the next scheduled meeting you should:

1. Distribute the minutes of the previous meeting within 24 hours.
2. Observe any deadlines set in the previous meeting for further discussion, implement any agreed upon actions and develop a timetable for further action.
3. Establish the precedent for commitment to the plan. Make each employee accountable for his or her portion of the plan. Ask for progress reports that can be presented at the next meeting.
4. Periodically solicit feedback about meetings and their effectiveness. Let employees know you are open to suggestions and sincerely want to improve the meeting quality. Reflect as a group on evaluation information.

Making employees part of the meeting process adds to feelings of inclusiveness.

### Videoconferencing

Technology has brought videomessaging into everyday business. The transmission of live conferences via computer cameras or satellite transmission gives messages a sense of interactivity.

**Videoconferencing** employs two-way communication by sending both video and audio data in real time over distance. Participants act as both senders and receivers of information.

Technology providers have developed handbooks delineating procedures and protocols for videoconferences. Use this information wisely to ensure videoconference success.

### Special events for employees

The idea that employees should and could enjoy going to work is relatively new. Whereas twentieth-century thinking

#### Advantages of videoconferencing:

- saves money;
- has benefits of face-to-face communication;
- saves time;
- allows for frequent global contact;
- builds relationships;
- keeps participants focused on the meeting.

Videoconferencing Europe is an initiative in which students from schools in six European countries (Spain, France, Sweden, Norway, Belgium and the Netherlands) communicate with each other. They share information via webcams in French, Spanish, English and German (Videoconferencing Europe, 2006).