Chapter 2

Organizational Communication Ethics

Why Ethics

In this chapter we examine how the philosophical world of ethics can be applied to organizational communication. When people hear the word "ethics" used in modern society, many different images and incidents quickly come to mind. Sadly, the 21st Century has already been plagued with many ethical lapses in the business sector. Turn on any major global news station, newspaper, magazine, or podcast and you're likely to hear about some business that is currently in a state of crisis due to lapses in ethical judgment. Table 2.1 "Modern Ethical Lapses" contains a short list of organizations and their various ethical lapses in judgment.

Table 2.1 Modern Ethical Lapses

Organization	Ethical Lapse
Arthur Andersen	Accounting Fraud & Shredding documents wanted in a criminal investigation
Boeing	Industrial Espionage
Bridgestone-Firestone	Delaying a recall of defective tires
Catholic Church	Sex Abuse and cover up
Coca-Cola	Taking groundwater from local farmers in India

Organization	Ethical Lapse
Enron	Accounting Fraud
Halliburton	Overbilling for products and services
Martha Stewart, Inc.	CEO committed insider trading with her sell of her ImClone stock.
McDonald's	8 individuals provided winning game pieces from McDonald's Monopoly game to family and friends.
Merrill Lynch	Lying to investors
Napster	Digital copyright violations
Parmalat	Italian dairy company's fraudulent accounting practices
Sanlu Group Co.	Chinese based company knowing distributes tainted baby formula.
Tyco	CEO was caught embezzling funds.
US Military	Prisoner Abuse in Iraq and Afghanistan
WorldCom	Accounting Fraud
Xerox	Exaggerating Revenues

In this chapter, four distinct areas of ethical understanding will be explored: nature of ethics, business ethics, communication ethics, and organizational communication ethics.

2.1 Nature of Ethics

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LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Define the term "ethics" and how it relates to both means and ends.
2. Explain the four different ethical frameworks discussed in the ethical matrix.
3. Differentiate among the eleven philosophical perspectives of ethics and how they apply to both business ethics and communication ethics.

According to the Oxford English Dictionary (1963)*The Oxford English Dictionary*. (1963). Oxford, Britain: At the Clarendon Press., the word "**ethics**[1]" is derived from the Greek ethos or the nature or disposition of a culture. Ethics is further characterized as both a field of study concerned with moral principles and the moral principles that govern or influence human behavior. Parhizgar and Parhizgar (2006)Parhizgar, K. D., & Parhizgar, R. (2006). *Multicultural business ethics and global managerial moral reasoning*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America. define ethics as the:

...critical analysis of cultural values to determine the validity of their vigorous rightness or wrongness in terms of two major criteria: truth and justice. Ethics is examining the relation of an individual to society, to the nature, and or to God. How do people make ethical decisions? They are influenced by how they perceive themselves in relation to goodness and/or excellence. (p. 77)

Based on this definition, the study of ethics is "concerned with cultural value systems that are operable, either with intending to do something or actually doing something in the realm of goodness" (Parhizgar & Parhizgar, 2006, p. 77). As we shall see in this chapter, making this determination of "goodness" is not always black and white. To help illustrate this point, we will now examine four scenarios:

1. The philosophical study and evaluation of the means and ends of human behavior.

1. In an effort to win a new client for your business, you deliver a presentation about how your business is more suited for the client

than your competitors. You develop a well-honed argument based on the facts at hand. Ultimately, your business is able to really help the client expand her or his market share.

2. In an effort to win a new client for your business, you lie to a prospective client during a presentation. The client is impressed with your presentation and decides to sign a contract with your business. Unfortunately, the lying catches up with you and you end up doing the client more harm than good and the client starts to lose part of her or his market share.

3. In an effort to win a new client for your business, you lie to a prospective client during a presentation. The client is impressed with your presentation and decides to sign a contract with your business. Even though you lied to your client, your business is ultimately able to really help the client expand her or his market.

4. In an effort to win a new client for your business, you deliver a presentation about how your business is more suited for the client than your competitors. You develop a well-honed argument based on the facts at hand. After the client signs a contract with your business, you discover that one of your competitors is better suited for the client's specific interests. Ultimately, your business ends up doing your client more harm than good and the client starts to lose part of her or his market share.

When examining these four ethical scenarios, you'll notice that each scenario can be broken down into two clear parts: means and ends. According to McCroskey, Wrench, and Richmond (2003)McCroskey, J. C., Wrench, J. S., & Richmond, V. P. (2003). *Principles of public speaking.* Indianapolis, IN: The College Network. "**means**[2]" are the tools or behaviors that one employs to achieve a desired outcome, and "**ends**[3]" are those outcomes that one desires to achieve. Both "means" and "ends" can be evaluated as either good or bad. Remember, the definition of ethics by Parhizgar and Parhizgar (2006) involves the intention to behave or actual behavior in the realm of goodness. McCroskey (2006)McCroskey, J. C. (2006). *An introduction to rhetorical communication: A Western rhetorical perspective* (9th ed.). Boston: Allyn & Bacon. takes the idea of ethics one step further and explains that examining the intent of the behavior is only half of the ethical equation. McCroskey believes that examining the "goodness" of the outcome of the behavior is also important when examining ethics. McCroskey's (2006) ethical frame work, which was later expanded upon by McCroskey, Wrench, and Richmond (2003), can be seen as the combination of "good vs. bad means" and "good vs. bad ends" (<u>Figure 2.1 "The Ethical Matrix"</u>).

Figure 2.1   The Ethical Matrix

2. Component of ethical analysis where one examines the tools or behaviors that an individual or group of individuals employ to achieve a desired outcome.

3. Component of ethical analysis where one examines the outcomes that an individual or group of individuals desire to achieve.

Good Means—Good End—Ethical Behavior

The first ethical dilemma discussed earlier is an example of a "good" mean leading to a "good" end, or what is termed **ethical behavior**[4] in the ethical matrix. In this case, the presenter developed a clear argument based on facts in an attempt to persuade a client (mean). As a result of signing on with the presenter's company, the client increased her or his share of the market (end). In essence, the presenter had a good mean (persuasive argument) that lead to a good end (increased market share). Behavior that contains both a good mean and a good end is considered ethical behavior.

Bad Means—Bad End—Unethical Behavior

In the second ethical dilemma, we have an example of a "bad" mean leading to a "bad" end, or what is termed **unethical behavior**[5] in the ethical matrix. Specifically, in order to gain business, the presenter lied to the client (mean). Unfortunately, after the client was duped into signing with the presenter's company, the client lost part of the market share he or she had before getting involved with the presenter's company (end). In this case, the presenter had a bad mean (lied to client) that lead to a bad end (decreased market share). When a bad mean leads to a bad end, the behavior is considered unethical.

The first two quadrants in the ethical matrix are obvious and are easily discerned in the world of business. Often times, however, determining the ethical nature of behavior is not as clear as the first two examples. The next two examples provide the last two variations of means and ends combinations.

Bad Means—Good End—Machiavellian Ethic

In the third example, there was a "bad" mean that lead to a "good" end, or what is termed the **Machiavellian ethic**[6] in the ethical matrix. In this case, the presenter purposefully lied to the client in an effort to sign the client. After the client signed with the presenter's business, the client's share of the market increased. Here we have a situation where there was a bad mean (lied to client) that lead to a good end (increased market share). When a bad mean leads to a good end, we refer to this as the Machiavellian ethic. According to Wrench, Thomas-Maddox, Richmond, and McCroskey (2008)Wrench, J. S., Thomas-Maddox, C., Richmond, V. P., & McCroskey, J. C. (2008). *Quantitative methods for communication researchers: A hands on approach.* New York: Oxford University Press., the term "Machiavellian ethic" derives its name from:

4. Component of the ethical matrix where an individual employs good means that lead to a good end.

5. Component of the ethical matrix where an individual employs bad means that lead to a bad end.

6. Component of the ethical matrix where an individual employs bad means that lead to a good end.

...Niccolò Machiavelli [who] believed that the ends justify the means. Machiavelli's greatest work, The Prince, written in 1513, created much controversy because Machiavelli wrote that princes should retain absolute control of their lands and should use any means necessary to accomplish this end, including deceit. This notion was so outlandish that Pope Clement VIII described it as heretical. (pp. 27–28).

Some ethicists claim that a bad mean is always unethical while others claim that the end result is what matters when determining the goodness of a behavior.

Good Means—Bad End—Subjective Ethic

In the final ethical scenario, there was a "good" mean that lead to a "bad" end. In this case, the presenter developed a clear argument based on facts in an attempt to persuade a client (mean), or what is termed the **subjective ethic**[7] in the ethical matrix. Unfortunately, after the client signed with the presenter's company, the client lost part of the market share he or she had before getting involved with the presenter's company (end). When a good mean (well-honed argument) leads to a bad end (decreased market share), we refer to this as the subjective ethic. This specific ethical stance is deemed "subjective" because the intent of the presenter is ultimately only known to the presenter. In essence, under the subjective ethic, there are two possible implications. In one case, the presenter used a perfectly good mean (well-honed and honest argument) to sign the client and then purposefully decreased the client's market share; whereas in the second case the presenter used a good mean and the subsequent decreased market share was an unintended outcome. In the first case there is evidence of malice on the part of the presenter, and in the second case there are uncontrollable outcomes.

While a discussion of means and ends is a helpful way to frame ethical thoughts, there are many philosophical traditions that have explored the nature of ethics. Table 2.2 "Major Ethical Perspectives" lists eleven major philosophical perspectives used to determine what is and what is not ethical.

Table 2.2 Major Ethical Perspectives

Ethical Perspective	Basic Premises	Business Application	Communication Application
Altruism	The standard is based on doing what is best or good for others.	Ethical business behavior must be good for other people.	Communicative behavior must lead to a good end for the receiver.

7. Component of the ethical matrix where an individual employs good means that lead to a bad end.

Ethical Perspective	Basic Premises	Business Application	Communication Application
Categorical Imperative / Deontology	The standard is based on the notion that moral duties should be obeyed without exception. This perspective is very clear on what is good and what is bad—no middle ground.	There are clear business behaviors that are and are not ethical, so all individuals should avoid behaving unethically in business.	There are some communicative behaviors that are never ethical (e.g., deception).
Communitarianism	The standard is based on whether behavior helps to restore the social fabric of society.	Business must behave in a manner that helps the social fabric of society.	Communicative behavior must help the social fabric of society.
Cultural Relativism	The standard is an individual's cultural or legal system of values. These standards differ from culture to culture.	1) The law determines business ethics.	Our legal system and cultures/co-cultures define ethical communication.
		2) One's nationalistic culture determines what is ethical.	
		3) One's organizational culture determines what is ethical.	
Ethical Egoism	The standard is an individual's self-interest. Emphasis is on how one *should* behave, or it encourages people to look out for their own self-interests.	People in business should behave in whatever manner is most effective to achieve their self-interests.	People should communicate in whatever manner is most effective for achieving their communicative goals.
Justice	The standard is based on three principles of justice: 1) each person has a right to basic liberties; 2) everyone ought to be given the same chance to qualify for offices and jobs; and 3) when inequalities exist, a priority should be given to meeting the needs of the disadvantaged.	Business decisions should be made on how the decisions will affect all relevant stakeholders equally. However, when stakeholders' needs are in conflict, priority should be given to meeting the needs of those in subjugated stakeholder groups.	People should communicate in a manner that is consistent with a range of stakeholders.

Ethical Perspective	Basic Premises	Business Application	Communication Application
Nihilism	Ethics innately prevent individuals from creating new ideas and values that challenge the status quo, so individuals of superior intellect should disavow any attempt by others to subject them to an ethical perspective.	Smart business people should not be hampered in their behavior by any archaic or contemporary notions of good and bad business behavior.	Smart communicators know that what matters is achieving one's communicative goals, so they should not adhere to any prescribed notions of good and bad communicative behavior.
Psychological Egoism	The standard is an individual's self-interest. Emphasis is on how one *actually* behaves, or in everything we do is influenced by self-interested motives.	People in business actually behave in whatever manner is most effective to achieve their self-interests.	People actually communicate in whatever manner is most effective for achieving their communicative goals.
Social Relativism	The standard is the interests of my friends, group, or community.	People in business should behave in a manner that is consistent with the interests of their social networks and communities.	People in business should communicate in a manner that is consistent with the interests of their social networks and communities.
Subjectivism	The standard is based on an individual's personal opinion of moral judgment. For this reason, perceptions of ethics differ from person to person.	Whatever an individual in business determines is ethical for her or his behavior is ethical for that individual.	Individual communicators determine what is and is not ethical from their own individual vantage point.
Utilitarianism	The standard is the greatest good for the greatest number of people.	People in business should behave in a manner that does the greatest amount of	People should communicate in a manner that does the greatest amount

Ethical Perspective	Basic Premises	Business Application	Communication Application
		good for the greatest number of people.	of good for the greatest number of people.

The eleven philosophical traditions discussed in <u>Table 2.2 "Major Ethical Perspectives"</u> help to illustrate how varied the perspectives on ethics have been by various philosophical thinkers (Lewis & Speck, 1990). Unfortunately, there is not one clear determination for what is or what is not ethical. The rest of this chapter will focus on three contexts where ethical thought has been applied: business, human communication, and organizational communication.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The term "ethics" is a complicated one and has been defined by a wide range of scholars over the years. Ultimately, ethics is an examination of whether an individual uses "good" or "bad" means in an attempt to achieve a desired outcome that could be deemed "good" or "bad". As simplistic as this may sound, actually studying and determining whether behavior is ethical can be a daunting task.
- The ethical matrix examines the intersections of means and ends by examining four distinct categories where ethical behavior may occur. First, behavior is deemed ethical if an individual uses a good mean to achieve a good end. Second, behavior is deemed unethical if an individual uses a bad mean to achieve a bad end. Third, behavior is referred to as the Machiavellian ethic when an individual uses a bad mean to achieve a good end. Lastly, when an individual uses a good mean to achieve a bad end, the behavior is referred to as the subjective ethic.
- There are many different philosophical traditions in the study of ethics. <u>Table 2.2 "Major Ethical Perspectives"</u> above outlines eleven different ethical perspectives. This table is designed to briefly explain the philosophical perspective and then demonstrate how it can be applied in both a business context and to organizational communication specifically.

EXERCISES

1. Look at a recent copy of *Business Week*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *Fast Company*, *Forbes Magazine*, or any other business-oriented publication. Find articles that specifically discuss ethical areas in modern business. How would you apply the definition of ethics to these articles?
2. Look at a recent copy of *Business Week*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *Fast Company*, *Forbes Magazine*, or other business-oriented publication. Find examples of each of the four different types of ethical possibilities described by the ethical matrix.
3. Look at the list of major ethical lapses in business discussed at the beginning of this chapter. Analyze one of the ethical lapses listed using three of the eleven philosophical perspectives on ethics. How does filtering one's ethical framework based on a specific philosophical perspective alter how you view those ethical lapses?

2.2 Business Ethics

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LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Identify Cherrington and Cherrington's (1992) typology of ethical lapses in business.
2. Understand how Cherrington and Cherrington's (1992) typology of ethical lapses applies to the modern workplace.

In Table 2.1 "Modern Ethical Lapses" at the beginning of this chapter, we listed a number of ethical lapses that have been perpetrated by various organizations during the first decade of the 21st Century. Business ethics has become such a hot item that there have been over 1,000 books written with the phrase "business ethics" in the title since the 21st Century began. One could easily be misled into thinking that the idea of ethical business behavior and practices is a creation of the 21st Century, but the discussion of ethical and unethical business behavior is as old as the marketplace itself. As for the formal study of business ethics, the Center for Business Ethics was founded in 1976 at Bentley College, which then held the first academic conference on the subject in 1977 (Hoffman, 1982)Hoffman, W. M. (1982). Introduction. *Journal of Business Ethics, 1*, 79–80.. The information generated at that first conference was bundled into a text titled *The Proceedings of the First National Conference on Business Ethics: Business Values and Social Justice—Compatibility or Contradiction?*, which was the first business ethics text and an international best-selling book (Hoffman, 1977)Hoffman, W. M. (1977). *The proceedings of the first national conference on business ethics: Business values and social justice—compatibility or contradiction?* Waltham, MA: Center for Business Ethics.. In 1982, *The Journal of Business Ethics* began publishing four issues per year devoted to the analysis and understanding of ethics in modern organizations. We mention this brief history in order to illustrate that the idea of ethics and ethical violations in organizations is hardly a new academic endeavor or a new corporate phenomenon. To help us more fully understand the arena of business ethics, we will examine the most common ethical lapses in organizations and then we will discuss the current state of business ethics.

Typology of Ethical Lapses

While most organizations believe that their specific ethical dilemmas are unique, J.O. Cherrington and D. J. Cherrington (1992) found that most organizations face very similar ethical dilemmasCherrington, J. O., & Cherrington, D. J. (1992). A menu of moral issues: One week in the life of the *Wall Street Journal. Journal of Business Ethics, 11*, 255–265.. Specifically, J.O. Cherrington and D. J. Cherrington found that most organizations will face a specific list of twelve different ethical issues.

1) Taking things that do not belong to you (stealing)

Whether stealing a package of Post-It ® notes for home use or skimming millions of dollars out of a corporate account, the first major ethical hurdle many organizations have to face is theft. Sometimes the issue of theft is not clear cut. For example, is using company time for personal business theft (J.O. Cherrington & D. J. Cherrington, 1992, p. 256)? One area that has recently received attention is the use work computers for non-work/personal business, such as playing games online or chatting on Facebook.

2) Saying things that you know are not true (lying)

Gregory House, main character on the hit Fox television series House, frequently utters his basic mantra, "Everyone lies." Whether someone is lying to get a job, keep a job, or advance in a job, people often use deception as a method for enhancing occupational options. Some occupations even require deception as an integral part of the occupation (Shulman, 2007)Shulman, D. (2007). *From hire to liar: The role of deception in the workplace*. Ithaca, NY: ILR Press.. Could a spy really commit espionage without a little deception?

3) False impressions (fraud and deceit)

For the purposes of the list of 12 ethical issues, J.O. Cherrington and D. J. Cherrington (1992) differentiate between general lying and what they refer to as "false impressions." False impressions occur when an individual purposefully represents herself or himself as something that he or she is not. The authors note, "Are you responsible for correcting others' false impressions such as not accepting unearned praise or not letting others take the blame for your mistakes? … Are you being deceitful when you dress for success or pretend to be successful so clients will have confidence in you?" (p. 256).

4) Conflict of interest and influence buying (bribes, payoffs, & kickbacks)

According to Desjardins (2009)Desjardins, J. (2009). *An introduction to business ethics* (3rd ed.). Boston: McGraw-Hill., a conflict of interest occurs when an individual's personal interest in a business decision interferes with her or his professional judgment. Influence buying, on the other hand, is when an external party offers a bribe, payoff, or kickback to a decision maker in order to influence her or his decision.

5) Hiding versus divulging information

Information is one of the most important commodities in any organization. Ultimately, who has information and how they chose to disseminate that information can have very positive or negative ramifications for an organization and its stakeholders. For example, would you sell a product to a client, allowing them to believe that the version you are selling them is the latest technology, when you know a newer, better version is being released the following week? When is divulging information about your corporation "whistleblowing" and when is it "industrial espionage?"

6) Unfair advantage (cheating)

The idea of unfair advantage occurs when one person clearly has more power to control the outcome of a situation. For example, if you are dying of a disease and a business has the only cure, they hold all the cards. In essence, they have the ability to charge anything they want for their "magical pill" because the patient has no other options. Is this practice fair and ethical? Is it fair when CEOs are paid multi-million dollar bonuses when thousands of employees are being laid off? Is it fair when a CEO promotes her son, when the son is not the most qualified applicant in the pool? In all three of these situations, we see individuals taking advantage of the positions they hold.

7) Personal decadence

In the summer of 2008, the major players in the United States' auto industry flew on their private jets to Washington, DC to ask for a multi-billion dollar bailout from the U.S. Congress. When most people think of personal decadence, this type of over-the-top self-indulgent behavior comes to mind. However, decadence can also include the process of decreasing the state of oneself. For example, in the business world there are many people who work slower than necessary, turn in sloppy work, use drugs or alcohol at work, and engage in many other behaviors that clearly impact an organization's ability to perform.

8) Interpersonal abuse

While some actions within the organization, like personal decadence, impact the larger organization, other actions directed at coworkers have direct effects on personal performance. J.O. Cherrington and D. J. Cherrington (1992) note that "physical violence, sexual harassment, emotional abuse, abuse of one's position, racism, and sexism" are all examples of interpersonal abuse occurring in modern organizations (p. 256).

9) Organizational abuse

While interpersonal abuse includes targeted action from one member of an organization toward another member of the organization, organizational abuse stems from the organization toward the organizational members. For example, "inequity in compensation, performance appraisals that destroy self-esteem, transfers or time pressures that destroy family life, terminating people through no fault of their own, encouraging loyalty and not rewarding it, and creating the myth that the organization will benevolently protect or direct an employee's career" are examples of how organizations abuse employees (J.O. Cherrington & D. J. Cherrington, 1992, p. 256–257).

10) Rule violations

Every person within a society or within an organization is governed by a long list of rules. Some of these rules come in the form or religious commandments and other rules come in the form of laws set down from the judicial or legislative system. Other rules are created for specific organizational settings and are handed down in the form of an employee manual. Are there ever legitimate reasons to break these rules? Are some rules more important than other rules? When the rules in one set of documents (workplace policies) contradicts the rules in another set of documents (religious tenants), which rules should be followed?

11) Accessory to unethical acts

An accessory to an unethical act is an individual who knows that an ethical violation has occurred by another individual. This knowledge of ethical violation could come either in the form of witnessing the ethical violation or somehow helping the individual commit the ethical violation. Ultimately, individuals who find themselves in the accessory position are faced with the ethical dilemma of whether or not to report the ethical violation.

12) Moral balance (ethical dilemmas)

The idea of "**moral balance**[8]" stems from a philosophical debate about individuals who are faced with the possibility that a good outcome of her or his behavior or decisions will lead to a secondary outcome that is bad. For example, an issue of moral balance is at stake when an organization wants to produce a new product that will save hundreds of thousands of lives (primary outcome), but will destroy the fragile ecosystem of a village and make it uninhabitable for the indigenous people who live there (secondary outcome). An inverse moral dilemma could also exist: if the company does not produce the product, the fragile ecosystem of the village will be saved (primary outcome) but hundreds of thousands of lives will not be saved by the product (secondary outcome). How do you decide which option is ethical? Unfortunately, these types of ethical decisions are often the most complicated to make.

Business Ethics Today

In the previous section, we introduced you to J.O. Cherrington and D. J. Cherrington's (1992) typology of organizational ethical issues. In this section, we will examine how these different issues are played out in the modern organization. The following statics are derived from the annual Ethics & Workplace Survey conducted by Deloitte (2006Deloitte. (2006). *Business ethics and compliance in the Sarbanes-Oxley era: A survey by Deloitte and* Corporate Board Member *magazine.* Online Available at: http://www.deloitte.com, 2007Deloitte. (2007). *Leadership counts: Deloitte & Touche USA 2007 Ethics & Workplace survey results.* Online Available at: http://www.deloitte.com, 2008Deloitte. (2008). *Transparency matters: Deloitte LLP 2008 Ethics & Workplace Survey results*. Online Available at: http://www.deloitte.com, 2009Deloitte. (2009). *Social networking and reputational risk in the workplace: Deloitte LLP 2009 Ethics & Workplace Survey results*. Online Available at: http://www.deloitte.com, 2010Deloitte. (2010). *Trust in the workplace: Deloitte LLP 2010 Ethics & Workplace Survey results*. Online Available at: http://www.deloitte.com).

1) Taking things that do not belong to you (stealing)

- 30% of employees believe there is nothing unethical about taking office supplies for personal use.
- 66% of employees see no ethical problems with taking a sick day when they are not actually ill.
- 72% of individuals see no ethical problems with using company technology for personal use in the workplace.
- 4% of employees admit to misusing company finances.
- 15% of employees use social networking websites for personal reasons during work hours.

8. The philosophical debate that occurs when an individual is faced with the possibility that the outcome of her or his behavior or decisions will lead to a secondary outcome that is equally bad.

2) Saying things that you know are not true (lying)

- 13% of employees have admittedly lied about the number of hours they have worked on a time-card.

3) False impressions (fraud and deceit)

- 6% of employees have admittedly taken credit for someone else's work.

4) Conflict of interest and influence buying (bribes, payoffs, & kickbacks)

- 43% of full-time workers and 47% of part-time workers report that they make unethical workplace decisions because of financial rewards (e.g., bonus or salary increase).

5) Hiding versus divulging information

- 84% of respondents believe that openness of leadership with information contributes to an ethical workplace culture.
- 15% of employees would have no problem posting company information online if they disagreed with their employer.

6) Unfair advantage (cheating)

- 65% of individuals note that when it comes to flex-time options, leaders tend to set different rules for themselves.
- 20% of employees have admittedly treated subordinates differently due to their personal relationships and not the subordinate's performance.

7) Personal decadence

- Only 33% of employees have never seen their supervisors performing unethical behaviors.
- 24% of employees believe there is nothing unethical about coming into work hung-over.

8) Interpersonal abuse

- 25% of employees believe it is ethical to tell a racist/sexist/ heterosexist/ageist joke in the workplace.
- 9% of employees have harassed a fellow employee at work.

9) Organizational abuse

- While 92% of individuals believe that having work-life balance leads to ethical behavior, 30% of employees believe that their job does not offer them enough time to achieve work-life balance.
- 28% of individuals believe their organization causes high levels of stress.
- 13% of individuals report rigid, inflexible schedules.

10) Rule violations

- 9% of individuals believe that their personal values conflict with their organization's values.
- 67% of employees do not see an ethical problem with dating a subordinate in the workplace.

11) Accessory to unethical acts

- Employees regularly see a variety of ethical violations in the workplace: personal advantage (57%), misuse of company property (51%), taking credit for someone else's work (49%), lying about worked hours (39%), interpersonal abuse (32%), and misuse of company finances (18%).
- However, when confronted with an ethical violation in the workplace, 17% of employees would do nothing about the violation, 42% would inform an immediate supervisor, 17% would call a company ethics hotline, and only 4% would go so far as to contact someone outside of the organization.

12) Moral balance (ethical dilemmas)

This category is more difficult to quantify because the balancing of decisions is very much entrenched in many of the other categories. According to the 2007 Deloitte & Touche USA LLP Ethics & Workplace Survey, workers engage in ethical behavior for five basic reasons: behavior of management (42%), behavior of direct supervisor (35%), positive reinforcement of ethical behavior (30%), compensation (29%), and behavior of peers (23%). The study also noted five basic reasons why employees engage in unethical behavior: lack of personal integrity (80%), job dissatisfaction (60%), financial rewards (44%), pressure to meet goals (41%), and ignorance of ethical codes of conduct (39%). Overall, 87% of workers surveyed believed that a company's values can promote an ethical workplace environment.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- J.O. Cherrington and D. J. Cherrington's (1992) created a typology of 12 ethical lapses that are common in modern business: (1) stealing, (2) lying, (3) false impressions, (4) conflicts of interest, (5) hiding/divulging information, (6) cheating, (7) personal decadence, (8) interpersonal abuse, (9) organizational abuse, (10) rule violations, (11) accessory to unethical acts, and (12) moral balance.
- In a series of studies conducted by Deloitte Development from 2006 to 2010, the researchers found examples of all of J.O. Cherrington and D. J. Cherrington's (1992) typology of ethical lapses. While some of the ethical lapses are clearly more common (e.g., 77% of participants admitted to stealing corporate time by using technology for personal uses), others did not appear to be frequent ethical lapses (e.g., 6% took credit for someone else's work, 4% misused corporate finances, etc.).

EXERCISES

1. Which of the ethical lapses in modern business described by J.O. Cherrington and D. J. Cherrington (1992) contain communication components?
2. Of the 12 ethical lapses discussed by J.O. Cherrington and D. J. Cherrington, which one is the most systematic in your current workplace? Which one is the least systematic in your current workplace? If you were the CEO of your organization, what you would you do to combat the ethical lapses you identified as most systematic?
3. Look at a recent copy of *Business Week*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *Fast Company*, *Forbes Magazine*, or any other other business-oriented publication. Find examples of the different ethical lapses discussed by J.O. Cherrington and D. J. Cherrington (1992).

2.3 Communication Ethics

PLEASE NOTE: This book is currently in draft form; material is not final.

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LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Explain Johannesen, Valde, and Whedbee's (2008) three factors for understanding ethics in human communication.
2. Understand Andersen's (2007) three audiences for communication ethics.
3. Differentiate among the three ways individuals understand ethics described by Arnett, Harden Fritz, and Bell (2009).

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Johannesen, Valde, and Whedbee (2008) note that ethical issues may arise in human communication when three factors exist: 1) when the communicative behavior "could have a significant impact on other persons;" 2) when the communicative behavior "involves conscious choice of means and ends;" and 3) when the communicative behavior "can be judged by standards of right and wrong" (p. 1). The notion that human communication ethics is multi-faceted is also noted by McCroskey (2006) who wrote that an endless debate about means and ends is not sufficient for a "viable systems for evaluating the ethics of human communication" (p. 239). Andersen (2007) also notes that "ethics is a dimension in all the communication process" (p. 132).Andersen, K. E. (2007). A conversation about communication ethics with Kenneth E. Andersen. In P. Arneson (Ed.), *Exploring communication ethics: Interviews with influential scholars in the field* (pp. 131–142). New York: Peter Lang. Andersen goes on to explain, "It [ethics] is a dimension that is relevant to all the actors in the communication process—the source or the originator, the person that initiates communication; the person who receives, interprets, hears, reads the communication; and the people who, in effect, are further agents of transmission" (p. 132). In essence, Andersen sees communication ethics as something that needs to be examined from both the source and receiver's point of view, but he also realizes that understanding ethics from a societal viewpoint is important.

The *source's* ethical choices involve her or his basic intent toward her or his receiver(s). The first individual to really write about the ethical nature of

communication from a source's perspective was Aristotle. Aristotle realized that depending on the originator of the message, a message could be either virtuous or used for mischief. Aristotle's writings on source ethics were summed up by McCroskey (2006) who noted, "The effect of a message cannot be used as the primary means of evaluating the ethical quality of an act of communication. Furthermore, the means of persuasion themselves are ethically neutral" (p. 295). Instead, "ethical judgments in rhetorical communication should be based exclusively on the intent of the source toward the audience" (p. 295). In other words, when determining whether a specific communicative interaction was ethical from a source's perspective, the goodness of the source's intent is what should be examined instead of examining the message itself.

The *receiver's* ethical choices involve how the individual decides to process the message being sent by the source. The idea of a receiver ethic starts with the notion that being a receiver of a message should be an active process and not a passive process. As Andersen (2007) notes, "So you [the receiver] have a 100% responsibility to listen, to be critical, to evaluate, to reject, to demand more information, to reject, whatever the case may be" (132). However, there is another aspect to receiver ethics that must also be considered. As noted by McCroskey, Wrench, and Richmond (2003), receivers must attend to a message objectively. Quite often receivers attend to messages depending on either their initial perception of the message or their initial perception of the sender. When these initial perceptions interfere with our ability as a receiver to listen, be critical, evaluate, or reject a message, we are not ethically attending to a message.

The *larger society* is the term Andersen (2007) uses to discuss the idea of third-party individuals who are not directly involved in the communicative exchange, but nonetheless are ethically attending to messages being sent by a source to a receiver. Whether eavesdropping on a conversation at a table next to you in a restaurant or inadvertently hearing the neighbors fighting at 3AM in the morning, third-party receivers of messages also have ethical considerations. In both of these cases, the overarching ethical dilemma is what should one do with the information they are receiving. If you overhear gossip at the table next to you, is it ethical to pass on that information to others? If you hear one partner physically abusing another partner, do you have an ethical obligation to call the police? Andersen (2007) realizes that these situations call for different responses, "Now those responsibilities in every case will be unique to the situation, unique to one's ability to fulfill the role of intermediary" (p. 133).

Overall, Andersen (2007) summarizes his position by stating, "So, one begins to say that in all the activity of communication, in whatever role we may happen to be in at the moment, there is an ethical dimension" (p. 132). While clearly each of the roles described by Andersen has different ethical responsibilities, an individual's

perception of her or his ethical responsibilities created differently. Arnett, Harden Fritz, and Bell (2009) believe that an individual's ethical schemata is derived by a combination of commonsense, theories, and learningArnett, R. C., Harden Fritz, J. M., & Bell, L. M. (2009). *Communication ethics literacy: Dialogue and difference*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage..

Common Sense

The term "commonsense" is used quite readily in modern society. Whether the issues are commonsense to drive on the right side of the road or commonsense to not lie to a police officer, individuals rely quite heavily on their perceptions of commonsense. Arnett et al. (2009) define **commonsense**[9] as "the commonly understood, taken-for-granted assumptions about the way the world works and expected communicative behaviors one will meet in navigating that world in daily life" (p. 62). Unfortunately, commonsense can be historically and culturally based assumptions. Commonsense communicative behaviors of the 1300's are not the same behaviors that are perceived as commonsense today. Furthermore, what is considered commonsense can vary greatly from culture to culture. It is commonplace in many Middle Eastern cultures for woman to not speak to men that they do not know. One of our co-authors favorite examples of the problem of "commonsense" comes from the MTV television show Road Rules: The Quest. In one episode, one of the contestants, Ellen, is walking around in Marrakech, Morocco wearing very short shorts. In an Islamic country, woman wearing revealing clothing is a violation of Islamic law. Ellen was clearly violating the culture's "commonsense" dress code. To this end, some of the villagers in Marrakech took it upon themselves to correct Ellen's nonverbal behavior by throwing rocks at her. Ultimately, the "loss of agreed-upon commonsense expectations is neither good nor bad, but simply a defining reality of our time" (Arnett et al., 2009, p. 68).

Theories

Ethical theories are an abstract step above the commonsense approach to communication ethics. "A communication ethics theory, like any theory, both opens the world, permitting us to see with clarity, and simultaneously occludes our vision. A theory both illuminates and obscures" (Arnett et al., 2009, p. 70). As we saw in Table 2.2 "Major Ethical Perspectives", there are many different theoretical perspectives an individual can adhere to when determining whether a communicative behavior is ethical. Each of these different theories shapes how communicative behavior is viewed and understood.

9. "The commonly understood, taken-for-granted assumptions about the way the world works and expected communicative behaviors one will meet in navigating that world in daily life" (Arnett et al., 2009, p. 62).

Learning

Arnett et al. (2009) argue that learning is the first principle of communication ethics because "we cannot trust the old 'commonsense' notions" of ethics. "If we fail to connect the loss of agreed-upon commonsense with learning, we fall prey to discounting or making fun of those different from ourselves, those with dissimilar backgrounds, experiences, and practices" (p. 68). In essence, ethical communicators must avoid perceiving their commonsense perceptions of ethics as being universal perceptions of ethics adhered to by all people. Therefore, individuals need to seek out and analyze how varying cultures perceive and understand communicative ethics. Ultimately, ethical communicators need to see that "learning and understanding different standpoints is a pragmatic communication ethics act" (p. 62).

Clearly, the study of communication ethics is simply not a black-and-white endeavor. Often there are clear-cut, easy answers to determining ethical communicative behavior. For example, while some may think lying is always unethical (this is the 9th Commandment of the Bible after all), is it always unethical to lie? Would it be ethical to lie to someone to save his or her life? While having ethical absolutes may make life easier, in today's world drawing these fabricated lines in the sand make no sense. As Arnett et al. (2009) discussed, the best way to learn how to be an ethical communicator in today's world is to explore and learn. To help with this learning process, the National Communication Association (NCA) approved a Credo for Ethical Communication in 1999. In <u>Note 2.22 "National Communication Association Credo for Ethical Communication"</u>, you will see a copy of the NCA credo. While more fully fleshed out in this form, most of the items discussed within the credo have been referenced earlier in this section.

National Communication Association Credo for Ethical Communication

Questions of right and wrong arise whenever people communicate. Ethical communication is fundamental to responsible thinking, decision making, and the development of relationships and communities within and across contexts, cultures, channels, and media. Moreover, ethical communication enhances human worth and dignity by fostering truthfulness, fairness, responsibility, personal integrity, and respect for self and others. We believe that unethical communication threatens the quality of all communication and consequently the well-being of individuals and the society in which we live. Therefore we, the members of the National Communication Association, endorse and are committed to practicing the following principles of ethical communication:

- We advocate truthfulness, accuracy, honesty, and reason as essential to the integrity of communication.
- We endorse freedom of expression, diversity of perspective, and tolerance of dissent to achieve the informed and responsible decision making fundamental to a civil society.
- We strive to understand and respect other communicators before evaluating and responding to their messages.
- We promote access to communication resources and opportunities as necessary to fulfill human potential and contribute to the well-being of families, communities, and society.
- We promote communication climates of caring and mutual understanding that respect the unique needs and characteristics of individual communicators.
- We condemn communication that degrades individuals and humanity through distortion, intimidation, coercion, and violence, and through the expression of intolerance and hatred.
- We are committed to the courageous expression of personal convictions in pursuit of fairness and justice.
- We advocate sharing information, opinions, and feelings when facing significant choices while also respecting privacy and confidentiality.
- We accept responsibility for the short- and long-term consequences for our own communication and expect the same of others.

For the purposes of this chapter, we are concerned with providing guidance about organizational communication ethics. Previously, the basics of the philosophical field of ethics, business ethics, and communication ethics were discussed. In the next section, we will turn our attention toward organizational communication ethics.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Johannesen, Valde, and Whedbee's (2008) noted three factors for understanding ethics in human communication: (1) when communicative behavior impacts others, (2) when communicative behavior is a conscious choice of means and ends, and (3) when communicative behavior can be judged as either right/wrong, good/bad, moral/immoral, etc.
- Andersen (2007) argues that ethical decisions about communicative behavior must analyzed at the source of the message's level of understanding and interpretation of ethical behavior., the receiver of the message's level, and the greater society's level.
- Differentiate among the three ways individuals understand ethics described by Arnett, Harden Fritz, and Bell (2009).

EXERCISES

1. Look at a recent copy of *Business Week*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *Fast Company*, *Forbes Magazine*, or another business-oriented publication. Find an example of communication ethics and then evaluate that example through each of the three levels of ethical understanding (source, receiver, & society) discussed by Andersen (2007).
2. Why do you think Arnett, Harden Fritz, and Bell (2009) argue that learning is the first principle of ethics? Why is learning more valuable than either commonsense or theories?

2.4 Organizational Communication Ethics

PLEASE NOTE: This book is currently in draft form; material is not final.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Explain Reinsh's (1990) nine basic ethical findings in organizational communication.
2. Differentiate among the components of Redding's (1996) typology of unethical organizational communication.
3. Understand the four phases of the feminist perspective of organizational communication ethics proposed by Mattson and Buzzanell (1999).
4. Describe why Montgomery and DeCaro (2001) believe that human performance improvement can help organizations in improving organizational communication ethics.
5. Assess the implementation of an organizational communication ethics intervention using a human performance improvement model.

The preponderance of everyday problems that plague all organizations is either problems that are patently ethical or moral in nature, or they are problems in which deeply embedded ethical issues can be identified. And this proposition is ethically significant, of course, when we recall the axiom that communication is a prerequisite for the very existence of any organization. (Redding, 1996, p. 18).

W. Charles Redding published this statement in a book he wrote about organizational communication ethics shortly before his death. While Redding did not believe that organizational communication students and researchers need to become trained ethicists, he did believe that anyone studying organizational communication should have a working knowledge of the differing theoretical perspectives of ethics (as were proposed earlier in this chapter). Redding's call for increased attention to ethics includes four basic questions:

1. "What messages or other communication events are perceived by which perceivers as unethical?"
2. "Why? That is, what criteria are cited for making specific ethical evaluations?"

3. "In what respects do these criteria appear to be grounded in organizational (or other) cultures?"
4. "What are the consequences of unethical communication? What, in other words, are the relationships between unethical communication and other organizational and societal phenomena?" (Redding, 1996, p. 24).

Redding's four questions are very similar to the list Johannesen, Valde, and Whedbee (2008) provided for examining human communication as a general construct. Seeger (2001)Seeger, M. W. (2001). Ethics and communication in organizational contexts: Moving from the fringe to the center. *American Communication Journal, 5* (1), Retrieved from: http://acjournal.org/holdings/vol5/iss1/special/seeger.htm noted that applying ethics in the organizational communication context, "focuses on norms and guidelines of professional practice, methodologies for promoting ethical decision-making, various codes of conducts and how these function to promote discussion, informal decisions, and resolve practical ethical problems" (18). To help us achieve Seeger's concept of applied organizational communication ethics, the rest of this section will focus on Reinsh's (1990) nine basic ethical findings in organizational communication, Redding's (1996) typology of unethical organizational communication, Mattson and Buzzanell's (1999) extension of Redding's Typology, and Montgomery and DeCaro's (2001) ethical performance improvement perspective.

Reinsh's Nine Basic Ethical Findings in Organizational Communication

In 1990, ReinschReinsch, N. L., Jr. (1990). Ethics research in business communication: The state of the art. *The Journal of Business Communication, 27*, 251–272. examined the state of ethics research in business communication by examining the empirical research conducted on this subject. Based on his analysis of 28 different research articles, Reinsch found nine basic areas of agreement:

1. Communication behaviors vary in moral worth, and various groups (e.g., advertising executives, general public) demonstrate a relatively high level of consensus about the moral weight of many specific practices.
2. Blatantly unethical behaviors sometimes occur in business organizations.
3. Unethical business communication can be effective in the short run.
4. A person's behavior is related to his or her ethical beliefs.

5. The concept of business communication ethics is relevant to many different aspects of business including direct mail marketing, management, and consulting.
6. The concept of business communication ethics is related to other significant concepts such as honesty and trust.
7. Persons differ in ethical values, beliefs and behaviors, and the differences may be associated with variables such as gender, age, perceptions of an employer as typical or "generous," and the values, beliefs and behaviors of one's cohorts.
8. Ethical analysis in business communication has sometimes been impressionistic; consistent, careful attention to the work of ethicists in other fields (e.g., philosophy, interpersonal communication) is desirable.
9. Business communication ethics should encompass oral communication as well as written. (p. 265)

In light of the earlier discussions in this chapter, the majority of this list is consistent with other perspectives on ethics. However, there is one major idea in this list that had not been previously discussed in this chapter. Reinsch (1990) concluded that sometimes unethical communicative behavior can be effective in the short-run. If unethical behavior was never effective, there would be no reason for anyone to engage in unethical behavior. The simple fact is, quite often unethical behavior can help people get ahead in life and in business. Reinsch noted that individuals interested in organizational communication ethics tend to agree that unethical behavior is effective in the short-run, but there is disagreement about the effectiveness of unethical behavior in the long-run. Basically, the longer someone engages in unethical communicative behavior, the greater the likelihood that others will start to notice, thus establishing clear diminishing returns to unethical behavior (to use an economics term).

Redding's Typology of Unethical Organizational Communication

As part of Redding's (1996)Redding, W. C. (1996). Ethics and the study of organizational communication: When will we wake up? In J. A. Jaksa & M. S. Pritchard (Eds.), *Responsible communication: Ethical issues in business, industry, and the professions* (pp.17–40). Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press. call for the field of organizational communication to "wake up" and start studying ethics, he created a basic typology of unethical organizational communication. The resulting typology of unethical organizational communication consisted of six general categories: coercive, destructive, deceptive, intrusive, secretive, and manipulative-exploitative.

Coercive

The first category of unethical organizational communication discussed by Redding (1996) is coercive acts. He defined **coercive**[10] acts as:

...communication events or behavior reflecting abuses of power or authority resulting in (or designed to effect) unjustified invasions of autonomy. This includes: intolerance of dissent, restrictions of freedom of speech; refusal to listen; resorting to formal rules and regulations to stifle discussion or to squash complaints, and so on. (pp. 27–28)

When one looks at this list of unethical communicative behaviors, the clear pattern of supervisor abuse of power is evident. In essence, the supervisor is either preventing messages from being sent by her or his subordinates or is refusing to attend to messages that her or his subordinates are sending. Notice that this process is being done mindfully on the part of the supervisor, which goes back to the intent issue raised by Andersen (2001) and McCroskey (2006).

Destructive

The second category of unethical organizational communication discussed by Redding (1996) is **destructive**[11] acts. He defined destructive acts as:

Communication events or behavior attack receivers' self-esteem, reputation, or deeply held feelings; reflecting indifference toward, or content for, basic values of others. This includes: insults, derogatory innuendoes, epithets, jokes (especially those based on gender, race, sex, religion, or ethnicity); put-downs; back-stabbing; character-assassination; and so on. It also includes the use of "truth" as a weapon (as in revealing confidential information to unauthorized persons, or in using alleged "openness" as a façade to conceal the launching of personal attacks. It also can include silence: failure to provide expected feedback (especially recognition of good work), so that message senders (e.g. managers) are perceived as being cold, impersonal, unfeeling, self-centered, and so on. (pp. 28–29)

When looking at Redding's explanation of destructive communicative acts, there are clearly two parts: aggressive communication and use of information. The first part of his definition focuses on how individuals can use aggressive forms of communication in an attempt to make others feel inferior. These types of communicative acts are commonly referred to as verbally aggressive acts and we will explore them in more detail in Chapter 15 "The Dark Side of Organizational Communication". The second aspect of destructive communication is about how people use information within an organization. Information is commonly seen as a

10. Category of unethical acts descrbied by W. Charles Redding (1996) that describes communication events or behavior reflecting abuses of power or authority resulting in the diminishing of another person's autonomy.

11. Category of unethical acts descrbied by W. Charles Redding (1996) that describes communication events or behavior that attacks a receivers' self-esteem, reputation, or deeply held feelings.

commodity in many organizations, so the hoarding of information as well as using information in manipulative manners is quite common. This category is similar to the fifth typology of business ethics created by J.O. Cherrington and D. J. Cherrington (1992). Issues related to destructive uses of information will be explored in more detail in Chapter 5 "Communicating Between and Among Internal Stakeholders".

Deceptive

The third category of unethical organizational communication discussed by Redding (1996) is **deceptive**[12] acts. He defined deceptive acts as:

...communication events or behavior reflecting a "willful perversion of the truth in order to deceive, cheat, or defraud" (Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary, 1998, s.v. "dishonesty"). This includes: evasive or deliberately misleading messages, which in turn includes equivocation (i.e., the deliberate use of ambiguity) ...; also bureaucratic-style euphemisms designed to cover up defects, to conceal embarrassing deeds, or to "prettify" unpleasant facts. (p. 30).

In this category of unethical behavior, we have non-truthful and misleading messages. The first part of this definition examines how some individuals lie in order to get what they want at work. The second part of the definition examines how some individuals within organizations use messages in order to alter a receiver's perception of reality. The messages, in this case, are not explicitly not-true, but are manipulated in a fashion to alter how receivers interpret those messages. This category encompasses the second and third categories of J.O. Cherrington and D. J. Cherrington's (1992) typology of business ethics.

Intrusive

The fourth category of unethical organizational communication discussed by Redding (1996) is **intrusive**[13] acts. He defined intrusive acts as:

...communication behavior that is characteristically initiated by message receivers. For example,...the use of hidden cameras, the tapping of telephones, and the application of computer technologies to the monitoring of employee behavior; in other words, surveillance. The fundamental issue, of course, revolves around the meaning and legitimacy of "privacy rights." (p. 31)

The issue of intrusion has become important in the 21st Century because modern technology has made intrusion into individuals' private lives very easy. Whether

12. Category of unethical acts descrbied by W. Charles Redding (1996) that describes communication events or behavior reflecting a willful perversion of the truth in order to deceive, cheat, or defraud.

13. Category of unethical acts descrbied by W. Charles Redding (1996) that describes communication events or behavior that are used by someone in attempt to monitor another person.

potential employers are looking at your private Facebook information prior to interviewing you or employers install software on your computer that monitors every key stroke you make, corporate "big-brother" is definitely watching you. According to a 2005 survey conducted by the American Management AssociationAMA E-Policy Institute. (2005). 2005 electronic monitoring and surveillance survey. American Management Association. Retrieved from: http://www.amanet.org, 36% of respondents had some amount of monitoring of their computer key-strokes by their organizations and 50% of respondents had some or all of their computer files monitored by their organizations. 76% of respondents noted that their workplace monitored their internet activity. In fact, 26% of the respondents indicated that their organizations had fired workers for misusing the internet and another 25% had terminated employees for e-mail misuse. Corporate intrusion does not stop with computer activity. 3% of the respondents said that all of the employees in their organization have their telephone calls recorded while 19% said that only selected job categories had their telephone calls recorded. Some companies go so far as to track their employee's physical whereabouts via global positioning systems and satellite technology in company vehicles (8%), company cell phones (5%), and employee identification cards (8%). We should mention that there are court cases within the United States that have legalized all of these processes without requiring a forewarning to employees. In the European Union, however, employees must be notified prior to monitoring, but organizations can still legally monitor their employees.

Secretive

The fifth category of unethical organizational communication discussed by Redding (1996) is **secretive**[14] acts. He defined secretive acts as:

...various forms of nonverbal communication, especially (of course) silence and including unresponsiveness. It includes such behaviors as hoarding information (I call this "**culpable silence**[15]") and sweeping under the rug information that, if revealed, would expose wrongdoing or ineptness on the part of individuals in positions of power. (p. 32)

In essence, this category is a further break down of J.O. Cherrington and D. J. Cherrington's (1992) fifth category of business ethics. However, Redding goes further than J.O. Cherrington and D. J. Cherrington by noting that even nonverbal unresponsiveness can be a form of unethical communication. For example, if the sender of the message purposefully manipulates her or his nonverbal behavior in an attempt to skew how a receiver interprets a message, then the sender of the message is preventing the receiver from completely and accurately interpreting the message. Furthermore, Redding believes that many employees engage in culpable silence, which occurs when someone purposefully prevents information from being

14. Category of unethical acts descrbied by W. Charles Redding (1996) that describes communication events or behavior that is undisclosed even when disclosing the information could be in an organization's best interest.

15. When someone purposefully prevents information from being given to receivers who need the information.

given to receivers who need the information. While culpable silence is not lying in the strictest of senses, culpable silence is clearly a version of deception.

Manipulative-Exploitative

The final category of unethical organizational communication discussed by Redding (1996) is **manipulative-exploitative**[16] acts. He defined manipulative-exploitative acts as those where the source purposefully prevents the receiver from knowing the source's actual intentions behind a communicative message. A term that Redding finds closely related to these unethical acts is **demagoguery**[17]:

Of central importance is the notion that a demagogue is one who, without concern for the best interests of the audience, seeks to gain compliance by exploiting people's fears, prejudices, or areas of ignorance. Closely related to, if not a variant of, demagoguery is the utterance of messages that reflect a patronizing or condescending attitude toward the audience—an unstated assumption that audience members are dull-witted, or immature, or both. (pp. 33–34)

As you will learn in Chapter 3 "Classical Theories of Organizational Communication", much of the early writing on how managers should interact with their employees centered on the clearly manipulate-exploitative organization.

Mattson and Buzzanell's Feminist Organizational Communication Ethic

In 1999, Mattson and Buzzanell used Redding's (1996) Mattson, M., & Buzzanell, P. M. (1999). Traditional and feminist organizational communication ethical analyses of messages and issues surrounding an actual job loss case. *Journal of Applied Communication Research, 27*, 49–72. organizational communication ethic typology to analyze a specific case study. Through using the specific case, Mattson and Buzzanell came to believe that Redding's "system is linked to managerialist outcomes of individual and organizational effectiveness (i.e., to communicate unethically would create situations in which managers do not receive crucial information and would leave the firm vulnerable to productivity problems, strikes, and litigation)" (p. 62). Mattson and Buzzanell believe that some individuals would focus primarily on Redding's categories and not see the possible positive outcomes of some of the unethical communicative behavior. In essence, is there ever a time when deception is ethical and profitable? For this reason, Mattson and Buzzanell followed Steiner's (1997)Steiner, L. (1997). A feminist schema for analysis of ethical dilemmas. In F. L. Casmir (Ed.), *Ethics in intercultural and international communication* (pp. 59–88). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum. approach to understanding feminist ethical dilemmas. Mattson and Buzzanell opted for the feminist ethical approach

16. Category of unethical acts descrbied by W. Charles Redding (1996) that describes communication events or behavior that takes place when the source purposefully prevents the receiver from knowing the source's actual intentions behind a communicative message.

17. Person who has no concern for the best interests of a receiver or group of receivers and seeks to gain compliance by exploiting people's fears, prejudices, or areas of ignorance.

because feminist ethics "differ from other ethical approaches in their vigilance toward a vision of value transformation (equitable power sharing and decision making) and instance on present community (meaning that "doing" ethics involves being a part of the envisioning and struggling)" (p. 62). We should note that the Mattson and Buzzanell perspective clearly falls in line with the critical perspective of organizational communication research discussed in Chapter 1 "Introduction to Organizational Communication". Ultimately, Mattson and Buzzanell created a four phase framework for ethical analysis.

Definition of the Situation

The first phase of Mattson and Buzzanell's (1999) framework for ethical analysis is the definition of the situation. Mattson and Buzzanell explain what occurs in this phase when they write "identification of problematic ethical issues in context; description of power struggles, particularly those cause by gender imbalances; attempts to silence and marginalize vulnerable individuals and groups" (p. 63). The first phase of this framework focusses specifically on ethical dilemmas and then examines how some people within the dilemma are being subjugated by those with power. One of the fundamental issues in critical theory is the innate existence of power imbalances within organizations. Therefore, finding where these imbalances exist is important for determining ethical behavior.

Values and Ideals

The second phase of Mattson and Buzzanell's (1999) framework for ethical analysis is examining values and ideals. Mattson and Buzzanell explain what occurs in this phase when they write "identification of feminist values and ideals relevant to a particular case: voice, community, and fairness" (p. 63). Voice is "the ability both to construct and articulate knowledge and to make choices and act in situations" (Mattson & Buzzanell, 1999, p. 64). In essence, this perspective believes that any time an individual is forced to withhold her or his opinion, knowledge, and perspectives, her or his voice is being muted by those individuals with power, and thus creates an unethical situation.

The second value discussed by Mattson and Buzzanell is community, which recognizes that "there are diverse standpoints but common issues—commitment to multiple stakeholders, caring behaviors, and community-maintaining strategies." These commitments to others, self, values, and to the organization "challenge members to engage in authentic dialogue" (p. 65). Unethical communicative behaviors that would violate the standard of community standards include messages that "maintain boundaries, trivialize or diminish others contributions (e.g., humor, put-downs, terms of address), patronize individuals, and exclude members from participating in discussions about organizational concerns" (p. 65).

The final feminist value is that of fairness, or how the decision making process influences all stakeholders involved. According to Mattson and Buzzanell, "Decision making that does not contribute to the empowerment of marginalized persons and to the visibility of power imbalances is unethical" (p. 66).

Ethical Principle

The third phase of Mattson and Buzzanell's (1999) framework for ethical analysis is applying the ethical principle. Mattson and Buzzanell explain what occurs in this phase when they write "inclusion of emotion in ethical considerations; refusal to develop or use single rules for identifying and resolving ethical dilemmas; utilization of values and ideas that empower, give voice, and emancipate people" (p. 63). According to Steiner (1997), "feminist inquiry is generally unsympathetic to rule-based ethical theories or theories that—as they usually do—exclude consideration of emotion" (p. 74). Mattson and Buzzanell argue that it is important to include individual's emotional responses when thinking about ethical dilemmas because "these responses indicate what people care about and might be willing to change" (p. 66). In the end, many aspects of organizational life are accompanied with complex emotions, which should be considered when examining the ethical nature of organizational communication.

Development of a Solution

The final phase of Mattson and Buzzanell's (1999) framework for ethical analysis is developing a solution. Mattson and Buzzanell explain what occurs in this phase when they write "reanalysis of options so that those most vulnerable entail the least harm; exclusion of alternatives based on ethical principles and probable harm to major stakeholders" (p. 63). The first part of this phase is the generation of possible solutions. At this point, all solutions are taken seriously. However, once the different solutions have been proposed, the next step is to eliminate any solutions that either violate ethical principles or could cause harm to vulnerable stakeholders. The differing solutions should then be analyzed in terms of both stakeholder needs and corporate success.

While the Mattson and Buzzanell (1999) four phase framework for organizational communication ethical analysis is theoretically intriguing, we are still left with ambiguity about the difference between ethical vs. unethical behavior. On the other hand, if Redding's (1996) typology of unethical organizational communication behavior is concrete, we are still left with an absolutist perspective on ethics that may not always match the intent of the source. Unfortunately, this is the nature of ethics; there will always be ambiguity when examining and understanding ethics. The final section of this chapter proposes a brief process that can be implemented when attempting to increase ethical communication within an organization.

Montgomery and DeCaro's (2001) Ethical Performance Improvement Perspective

While the previous section introduced you to both concrete and abstract views of determining the ethicality of organizational communication, this section will examine a perspective on increasing ethical organizational communication as proposed by Montgomery and DeCaro (2001). Montgomery and DeCaro proposed that one of the best ways increasing organizational communication ethics is to use a human performance improvement approach. "Ethical problems or dilemmas have behavioral consequences. Analysis can measure and monitor the behaviors leading to the unethical act, or the act, itself. By analyzing the antecedents and consequences, they can then design an intervention to correct the behavior" (32). Often, human performance interventions related to ethics happen in hindsight: an ethical violation occurs first and then the human performance improvement experts backtrack to determine how and why the ethical violation occurred. At other times, human performance interventions related to ethics start with a code of ethics (e.g., National Communication Association's Ethical Credo in <u>Note 2.22 "National Communication Association Credo for Ethical Communication"</u> or the International Association of Business Communicators Code of Ethics in <u>Note 2.35 "International Association of Business Communicators (IABC) Code of Ethics"</u>) and then follow with suggestions for action in order to ensure that the ethical codes are followed.

International Association of Business Communicators (IABC) Code of Ethics

Preface

Because hundreds of thousands of business communicators worldwide engage in activities that affect the lives of millions of people, and because this power carries with it significant social responsibilities, the International Association of Business Communicators developed the Code of Ethics for Professional Communicators.

The Code is based on three different yet interrelated principles of professional communication that apply throughout the world.

These principles assume that just societies are governed by a profound respect for human rights and the rule of law; that ethics, the criteria for determining what is right and wrong, can be agreed upon by members of an organization; and, that understanding matters of taste requires sensitivity to cultural norms.

These principles are essential:

- Professional communication is legal.
- Professional communication is ethical.
- Professional communication is in good taste.

Recognizing these principles, members of IABC will:

- Engage in communication that is not only legal but also ethical and sensitive to cultural values and beliefs;
- Engage in truthful, accurate and fair communication that facilitates respect and mutual understanding;
- Adhere to the following articles of the IABC Code of Ethics for Professional Communicators.

Because conditions in the world are constantly changing, members of IABC will work to improve their individual competence and to increase the body of knowledge in the field with research and education.

Articles

1. Professional communicators uphold the credibility and dignity of their profession by practicing honest, candid and timely communication and by fostering the free flow of essential information in accord with the public interest.
2. Professional communicators disseminate accurate information and promptly correct any erroneous communication for which they may be responsible.
3. Professional communicators understand and support the principles of free speech, freedom of assembly, and access to an open marketplace of ideas and act accordingly.
4. Professional communicators are sensitive to cultural values and beliefs and engage in fair and balanced communication activities that foster and encourage mutual understanding.
5. Professional communicators refrain from taking part in any undertaking which the communicator considers to be unethical.
6. Professional communicators obey laws and public policies governing their professional activities and are sensitive to the spirit of all laws and regulations and, should any law or public policy be violated, for whatever reason, act promptly to correct the situation.
7. Professional communicators give credit for unique expressions borrowed from others and identify the sources and purposes of all information disseminated to the public.
8. Professional communicators protect confidential information and, at the same time, comply with all legal requirements for the disclosure of information affecting the welfare of others.
9. Professional communicators do not use confidential information gained as a result of professional activities for personal benefit and do not represent conflicting or competing interests without written consent of those involved.
10. Professional communicators do not accept undisclosed gifts or payments for professional services from anyone other than a client or employer.

11. Professional communicators do not guarantee results that are beyond the power of the practitioner to deliver.
12. Professional communicators are honest not only with others but also, and most importantly, with themselves as individuals; for a professional communicator seeks the truth and speaks that truth first to the self.

Source: http://www.iabc.com/about/code.htm

According to Beich, Holloway, and McGraw (2006), **human performance improvement**[18] (HPI) "is a results-based, systematic process used to identify performance problems, analyze root causes, select and design actions, manage workplace solutions, measure results, and continually improve performance within an organizations" (p. 1)Beich, E., Holloway, M., & McGraw, K. (2006). *Improving human performance: ASTD learning system—Module 3*. Alexandria, VA: American Society for Training and Development.. In essence, HPI is the field of study concerned with how individuals take academic information from various fields that study business and then help individuals within organizations apply those ideas in actual practice. One area that HPI professionals can be instrumental is "in identifying knowledge gaps when it comes to business ethics. Does the workforce know how the organization's code of ethics applies to them? Do they know what to do if they become aware of a violation of the code of ethics? Does the organization's code of ethics meet accepted standards? Does a code of ethics even exist?" (Rothwell, Hone, & King, 2007, pp. 180–181)Rothwell, W. J., Hohne, C. K., & King, S. B. (2007). *Human performance improvement: Building practitioner competence* (2nd ed.). Boston: Butterworth-Heinemann.. In essence, human performance improvement is ideally situated within many organizations to help organizations adopt a more ethical approach to organizational communication.

According to Willmore (2004)Willmore, J. (2004). *Performance basics*. Alexandria, VA: American Society for Training and Development. HPI professionals commonly take on four basic roles: analyst, intervention specialist, change manager, and evaluator. The first role an HPI professional takes on is that of **analyst**[19], which helps determine relevant gaps that exist in individuals' behavior, knowledge, and/or attitudes. When determining relevant gaps in behavior, knowledge, and/or attitudes, an HPI professional must first make sure that the analyzed gaps adhere to the organization's larger goals and values. If the identified gaps do not coincide with the organization's goals and values, the HPI professional will have a much harder time attempting to achieve buy-in later on in the improvement process. For example, if an HPI professional is working to improve organizational

18. A results-based, systematic process used to identify performance problems, analyze root causes, select and design actions, manage workplace solutions, measure results, and continually improve performance within an organizations" (Beich, Holloway, & McGraw, 2006, p. 1)

19. Role taken on by a human performance improvement specialist when he or she helps determine relevant gaps that exist in individuals' behavior, knowledge, and/or attitudes

communication ethics, the individual would start by analyzing any ethical lapses in organizational communication and where the organization should be in terms of ethical communication. In addition to determining what the knowledge and behavioral gaps are, the HPI professional needs to determine what the causes of the gaps are. For example, people in the organization communicating may be engaging in an unethical manner because they are unfamiliar with the organization's code of conduct. Another possibility is that people may be communicating unethically because the organization rewards them for success and not ethics. A last possibility is that people may communicate unethically because they do not have a predisposition towards ethical communication. Depending on which root-cause an HPI practitioner finds, the resulting intervention strategy will differ.

Once an analysis has been completed, the HPI professional slips into the second role or the **intervention specialist**[20]. In the intervention specialist role, the HPI professional determines what would be the most appropriate method for getting the organization to either reach its goal or to at least decrease a performance gap. Generally, it is important for the HPI professional to have expertise in the area of interest or to consult with subject matter experts. For example, if you are a student of organizational communication, you would be ideally situated to help an organization think through its intervention if the topic related to organizational communication. Some common types of interventions include training, the creation of employee policies and procedures, process mapping, etc. For the purpose of organizational communication ethics, the intervention may come via training in organizational communication ethics or developing an organization-wide code of organizational communication ethics.

The third role an HPI professional takes on is that of change manager. A **change manager**[21] "coordinates implementation and roll out of solutions, especially complex or big efforts that may involve multiple initiatives. A change manager also works to build buy-in and support" (Willmore, 2004, p. 20). In the interventionist role, the HPI professional determines what should be done, in the change manager role the HPI professional actually implements the intervention. One of the most important aspects of this phase is getting buy-in from the people who matter within the organization. If an HPI professional attempts to roll-out a new code of organizational communication ethics while top management does not support the new code, the intervention will never take hold and will eventually fail. For this reason, it is very important for HPI professionals to first ascertain which stakeholders must support the intervention and then get that support prior to rolling-out an intervention.

The last role an HPI professional inhabits is that of **evaluator**[22]. Interventions can be very useful, but the success of the intervention must also be determined. HPI professionals must evaluate the intervention for two reasons: to improve the

20. Role taken on by a human performance improvement specialist when he or she determines what would be the most appropriate method for getting the organization to its goal or decreasing the performance gap.

21. Role taken on by a human performance improvement specialist when he or she coordinates implementation and execution of solutions while building buy-in and support from all levels of an organizaiton's hierarchy.

22. Role taken on by a human performance improvement specialist when he or she: (1) examines if intervention is actually improving performance, and (2) demonstrates the effectiveness of the intervention to the organization.

intervention and to determine organizational value. The first reason HPI professionals must evaluate an intervention is to determine whether or not the intervention is actually improving performance. For example, if you measure an organizational communication ethics intervention and find that people are just as unethical in their communication as they were before the intervention, the intervention has not worked and must be reevaluated. In this case, the data that you gather about the intervention can help the HPI professional make changes to improve the next the intervention. Often interventions are organic and change periodically in order to keep us with changing human performance. This can only be determined by evaluating interventions. The second reason HPI professionals should evaluate an intervention is to demonstrate the effectiveness of the intervention to the organization. In world that is marked by discussions of "the bottom-line," most aspects of the modern organization need to clearly demonstrate a return on investment, including how the time and money spent on an intervention actually helped the organization.

Now that the basics of Human Performance Improvement have been discussed, we can articulate a basic model for improving organizational communication ethics within an organization (Figure 2.2 "Human Performance Improvement Model"). The following model is based on both the American Society for Training and Development's (ASTD) HPI Model and the International Society for Performance Improvement's (ISPI) Human Performance Technology Model (for a description of both models, see Rothwell, 2000)Rothwell, W. J. (2000). *ASTD models for human performance improvement: Roles, competencies, and outputs* (2nd ed.). Alexandria, VA: ASTD Press..

Figure 2.2   *Human Performance Improvement Model*

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Reinsh's (1990) developed nine basic ethical findings in organizational communication: (1) communication behaviors vary in moral worth, (2) unethical behaviors sometimes occur in organizations, (3) unethical communication can be effective in the short run, (4) a person's behavior is related to her or his ethical beliefs, (5) communication ethics is relevant to a wide range of business activities, (6) there are many closely related concepts to ethics (e.g., honesty, trust, etc.), (7) persons differ in ethical values, beliefs and behaviors and these differences can be culturally based, (8) studying communication ethics must involving looking at how other fields discuss ethics, and (9) communication ethics is concerned with both oral and written communication.
- Redding's (1996) typology of unethical organizational communication consists of six distinct types of communicative acts: (1) coercive, abuse of power or authority; (2) destructive, behavior that attacks a receiver; (3) deceptive, behavior that is intentionally false; (4) intrusive, monitoring behavior; (5) secretive, purposefully not disclosing information; and (6) manipulative-exploitative, .
- Mattson and Buzzanell (1999) proposed that organizational communication should be examined through four basic phases. First, you should define the situation by identifying ethical issues in context. Second, examine values (voice, community, & fairness) and ideals. Third, apply the ethical principle while paying attention to a person's emotional reaction. Last, develop a solution paying special attention that vulnerable people are least effected.
- Montgomery and DeCaro's (2001) argue that human performance improvement can help organizations with improving organizational communication ethics because this perspective is designed to help organizations systemically think through change.
- The Human Performance Improvement (HPI) Model provides organizations with a specific and systematic tool for determining the effectiveness of organizational change. When applied to changing an organization's approach to ethical communication, the model can help ensure that the project is analyzed, articulated, and evaluated to ensure the best results possible for an organization.

EXERCISES

1. In today's world of social media and technological advances in human communication, are Reinsh's (1990) nine basic ethical findings in organizational communication still applicable? Why or why not?

2. Thinking about your own organization, which of Redding's (1996) typology of unethical organizational communication do you think is the most common? If you were the top leader in your organization, how would you go about stopping this specific lapse in ethical communication?

3. Look at a recent copy of *Business Week*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *Fast Company*, *Forbes Magazine*, or another business-oriented publication. Look for a discussion of an issue that has ethical overtones and then walk through Mattson and Buzzanell's (1999) four phases of feminist thinking when determining a specific solution. How do you think Mattson and Buzzanell's (1999) four phases would lead you to different decisions than if you took a more traditional stance on decision making?

4. Using an organization that you belong to, think about a specific business or communication ethical dilemma your organization is facing. Walk through the Human Performance Improvement Model and think about how you could implement a change in your organization's thinking about ethics.

2.5 Chapter Exercises

PLEASE NOTE: This book is currently in draft form; material is not final.

Real World Case Study

In the February 6–12, 2012, edition of the business magazine *Business Week* the editors decided on a shocking cover. The cover story for the magazine was about the merger of United and Continental Airlines. In an interesting twist, the cover of the magazine had a United Airlines plane being mounted by a Continental Airlines plane with the tag line "Let's Get it On" (http://www.businessweek.com/magazine/12_06.html). Sexual overtones of this cover shocked many readers. In the following weeks, many readers wrote into Business Week conveying their dismay at the organization's choice run this cover.

One reader put it this way, "Offensive ... displeasing ... indecent ... abominable ... obscene ... objectionable ... that's what I have to say about your Feb. 6–12 cover. You should be ashamed."Feedback: Out cover story on United-Continental merger draws some pationate reactions. (2012, February 20). *Business Week*. iPad version. Another subscriber had this to say, "Your cover page is so subtle it should have a condom over the dominant top plane (should be United) and a diaphragm shield inside the tail of the submissive bottom one (should be Continental) You will lose several subscriptions ... Who was the genius who sent this around legal without thinking?" Furthermore, Joseph T. Cirillo, VP for reporting and planning at Blyth, had this to say about the cover "Your Feb 6–12 cover page was in extremely poor taste. You made it even worse with the headline 'Let's Get It On.' Surely you could have described the business events going on between Continental and United in a better fashion, and not by showing two planes having sex with each other on the cover of an important business magazine." While there were some people who found the cover humorous, the negative reactions to the cover clearly outnumbered the positive.

1. Why do you think so many people reacted so negatively to the sexual portrayal of a merger of two major airlines? Was this move unethical or just in bad taste on the part of the editors of *Business Week*?
2. Using Andersen's (2007) three audiences f or ethics (sender, receiver, and society-at-large), analyze this cover from an ethical perspective.
3. Would this cover have received as many negative responses if it had been on the cover of a fitness magazine, comic book, etc...?

End-of-Chapter Assessment Head

1. Paul is preparing to deliver an address to his board of directors. He knows that if he explains the full costs of a new project, the board will block the project. However, Paul realizes that the project will have a huge return on its investment. As such, Paul decides not to disclose the actual cost of the project. Which of the types of ethics discussed in the Ethical Matrix is Paul representing?

   a. Ethical Behavior
   b. Unethical Behavior
   c. Machiavellian Ethic
   d. Subjective Ethic
   e. Rejective Ethic

2. When Maxine interacts with various stakeholders in her company, she is always very even handed and treats everyone the same. In fact, people often remark at how consistent her communicative behavior is with all people. What philosophical perspective most closely resembles Maxine's approach to communication?

   a. Communitarianism
   b. Altruism
   c. Ethical Egoism
   d. Justice
   e. Social Relativism

3. Hiro knows that his coworker is stealing from the petty cash fund at work. However, reporting this behavior to his superiors will only result in increased paperwork and decreased trust from his peers around the office. As such, Hiro decides not to tell anyone and instead just wait for his coworker to get caught. Hiro's behavior is an example of which of J.O. Cherrington and D. J. Cherrington's (1992) typology of 12 ethical lapses common in modern business?

   a. accessory to unethical acts
   b. rule violations
   c. stealing
   d. false impressions
   e. unfair advantage

4. As a CEO, Danna believes everyone under her is an idiot. As such, her primary mode of leadership involves manipulating people to do her bidding by exploiting her followers' fears, prejudices, or areas of ignorance. Which of Redding's (1996) typology of unethical organizational communication is Danna illustrating?

    a. coercive
    b. destructive
    c. deceptive
    d. intrusive
    e. manipulative-exploitative

5. Which of the three values described by Mattson and Buzzanell (1999) refers to the ability to both construct and articulate knowledge?

    a. community
    b. fairness
    c. hope
    d. voice
    e. wisdom

Answer Key

1. c
2. d
3. a
4. e
5. d