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## A Review of Business Communication Under the Leadership Function

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# **A REVIEW OF BUSINESS COMMUNICATION UNDER THE LEADERSHIP FUNCTION**

**Reginald L. Bell, Prairie View A & M University  
Clive Muir, Stephen F. Austin State University**

## ***ABSTRACT***

*An effective way to perpetuate an academic discipline is to identify and to define its intellectual and historical roots, then to set such roots in the foundation textbooks and courses of the discipline. In that regard, Business Communication still struggles to establish its roots when compared to other disciplines in business schools, particularly Management. For this study, we undertook an extensive review of significant scholarly works on Business Communication as a discipline. We discovered there are prevalent themes in the broader context of rhetoric, technology, culture, dissemination, and impression; and this was confirmed by our examining the tables of contents for five leading Business Communication textbooks. We also found in the tables of contents for five leading management textbooks that all professional communication areas were placed under the leading function. Based on these findings, we recommend that Business Communication scholars, authors, and teachers embrace the five themes of business communication under the leading function to better establish and promote Business Communication as a discipline.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

One of the authors of this article recalls a luncheon conversation at his first ABC annual meeting where a table mate commented that a newly hired business communication instructor in his department had a master's degree in recreation and had owned a dance studio before turning to full-time teaching. As you might imagine, we took turns discussing how such qualifications might be useful in practicing business communication or in acquiring a job teaching business communication. One table mate offered that the intense listening, looking, speaking, and body language required in dance do provide powerful lessons on effective coordination. Another said she had seen a similar type of hire where the spouse of an incoming administrator was hired even though she had a social work degree. Soon, the servers brought our entrees and speakers moved to the dais, so our conversation faded and my first lesson on the disciplinary challenges in business communication ended.

Most of us would agree that there has been a problem defining business communication and the consequences of it not fitting neatly into business schools. Two decades after that luncheon and several more years of teaching experience between the two authors and we still

need to clarify the meaning of business communication, the principles and philosophies of our roots, and the topics and themes that should be included in the textbooks of our foundation course. Indeed, our lack of discipline means that business communication is still a stand-alone course in most business schools, and is likely the only discipline in academia that is defined by a single course. Our disciplinary problem has hindered our ability to effectively stipulate the education and training required of prospective business communication instructors; negotiate course loads, faculty status, and remuneration at our various schools; and the proficiency to negotiate our standing as scholars and researchers among disciplines. The basic arguments of us as a standalone discipline (Krapels, & Arnold, 1998) and “who we are, and what we do” can be refined, if not resolved (Cyphert, 2009).

We, the authors, believe that in order for business communication to survive and thrive like other disciplines in business schools, we must identify and define our intellectual and historical roots, and then firmly establish such roots in our foundation textbooks and courses.

The outcomes of such efforts would drive the scholarly research undertaken by our members and improve the image of our journals. To those ends, we conducted an extensive review of significant scholarly works on business communication as a discipline to identify the themes that could constitute a business communication typology. Next, we examined the extent to which the themes appear in the leading textbooks used in foundation management undergraduate courses, a discipline to which business communication is most closely aligned in business programs. Based on the findings, we made a recommendation about the direction that scholars and instructions should take to better establish and promote business communication as a discipline.

**This study sought to answer these two research questions:**

- Q<sub>1</sub> Why has business communication been unable to find a broadly accepted definition, similar to say, the broadly accepted definition of management?*
- Q<sub>2</sub> Why have there not been a set of universal themes (functions of business communication) developed in the past that constitute a business communication typology?*

**MAJOR WORKS ON DISCIPLINING BUSINESS COMMUNICATION**

A number of recent works that have lamented our lack of discipline, but more importantly why defining the discipline might help gain credibility in academia. In this study, we reviewed key articles and textbooks as a basis to operationalize our methodology, develop meaningful research questions, and map a path of progress towards addressing discipline. This was done through a search of descriptor terms in library databases and the Sage electronic catalogue. Table 1 illustrates the number of citations each of the main articles had received as of

January 6, 2014 in the Google Scholar search, with the average citation of 18.416. Also included in the table are authors, journals and titles of the articles, and research focus. The citation frequency of the 12 articles is low, with Shelby's (1993) article receiving 46 citations or 20.814% ( $46/221 * 100$ ) of the total citations for all 12 articles. Despite the limited number of citations, these articles are essential for understanding business communication scholarship addressing discipline; therefore, we will discuss them further in some detail.

The renewed search for definitions of the discipline is nothing new; some scholars see business communication as a hybrid discipline with broad theoretical traditions in rhetorical theory, communication theory and management theory making business communication the intersection of such (Shaw, 1993; Smeltzer, Glab, & Golen, 1983); while others argue that to identify the field of business communication, the conceptual problematic underlying its intellectual inquiry should be examined, rather than by its instructional practices or vocabulary (Murphy, 1998). At least one scholar has her focus on the professional communication areas that make up the bulk of business communication content by using survey research methods, trying to make sense of disagreement among them and she seems to be rebuking scholars on the nuances of these disagreements concerning, "who we are, and what we do" (Cyphert, 2009).

**Table 1**  
**Citations and Research Focus of Key Articles on Business Communication Discipline**

Citations*	Article Information	Research Focus of Articles
46	Shelby, A. (1993). Organizational, business, management, and corporate communication: An analysis of boundaries and relationship, <i>Journal of Business Communication</i> 30(3), 241-267.	Contrary to most papers that explore relationships between and among the disciplines, this paper likewise focuses on differences between and among the communication types (p. 245)
31	Smeltzer, L. R. (1993). Communication within the manager's context. <i>Management Communication Quarterly</i> , 10(1), 5-26.	The discipline can best distinguish itself by conducting research within the managerial context, which is difficult for professors to understand because managers and academics operate in such different environments. Also, serious obstacles exist to conducting valuable management communication research. The challenge remains to conduct rigorous, valid communication research within the managerial context that results in relevant implementation guidelines (p. 5).
26	Hagge, J. (1989). The spurious paternity of business communication principles. <i>Journal of Business Communication</i> , 26(1), 33-55.	The few researchers who have investigated the matter date the advent of current business communication principles such as the 'Seven C's' and reader adaption from about 1906-1916. This article emends that research; demonstrates that principles supposed to have been specifically developed for the field are also found in English composition textbooks, several of which antedate 1906; and suggests that J. Willis Westlake, who enunciated similar principles in 1876, has as much right to the title of "pioneer" writer on business communication principles as do, say, A. G. Belding, Sherwin Cody, or George Burton Hotchkiss (p. 33).

**Table 1**  
**Citations and Research Focus of Key Articles on Business Communication Discipline**

Citations*	Article Information	Research Focus of Articles
23	Zorn, T. E. (2002). Converging with divergence: Overcoming the disciplinary fragmentation in business communication, organizational communication, and public relations. <i>Business Communication Quarterly</i> , 65(2), 44-53.	As researchers, we often overstate the distinction between our own specialties and those fields that are clearly related, thus dismissing or ignoring research outside our specialties. Similarly, we too often fragment our teaching to focus on particular communication processes and competencies that fit our notions of what is appropriate for our chosen sub-disciplines. Such fragmentation, however, diminishes our teaching and research. To overcome this problem, we should work toward structural realignments in our universities to encourage cross-disciplinary work (p. 44).
20	Smeltzer, L. et al. (1983). Managerial Communication: The Merging of Business Communication, Organizational Communication, and Management. <i>Journal of Business Communication</i> , 20(4), 71-78.	A review of the nature of the structure, function, and system aspects of communication and the impact of the technological revolution, or information society, indicates why a merging of the discipline is important and an integrated approach is warranted (p.73).
20	Shaw, G. (1993). The shape of our field: Business communication as a hybrid discipline. <i>Journal of Business Communication</i> , 30(3), 297-313.	The field of business communication suffers from a lack of cogency as a discipline. The renewed search for definitions of the field, the wrangling for primacy in its intellectual traditions, and the paucity of robust research reflect continuing confusion over the nature our field. The author argues that business communication is a hybrid discipline... a melding of interests and characteristics in a new form. (p. 297).
14	Forman, J. (1998). More than survival: The discipline of business communication and the uses of translation. <i>Journal of Business Communication</i> , 35.1 (Jan 1998): 50-68.	To consider translation as a powerful heuristic for posing new questions about the research agenda for business communication and, ultimately, about its disciplinary character. The term "translation" refers to (1) metaphoric notions of translation considered movement between instruction and research in business communication, between discourses, or between disciplines and (2) translation studies, or complex ideas of translation drawn from histories, theories, and practices of literary translation (p. 50).
13	Dulek, R. E. (1993). Models of development: Business schools and business communication. <i>Journal of Business Communication</i> 30(3), 315-331.	Colleges of business develop by following one of two models. The first model, the vertical, involves functional specialization and the scientific examination of a specific discipline. The second model, the horizontal, stresses breadth rather than depth. This latter model examines what is often called the 'softer" side of management—leadership, communication, entrepreneurship, and strategy. Awareness of these two models is important to all business communication faculty, especially to those housed in business schools (p. 315).
13	Sherblom, J. C. (1998). Transforming business communication by building on Forman's translation metaphor. <i>Journal of Business Communication</i> , 35(1), 74-86.	The present essay envisions translation as a bi-directional, dynamically negotiated process that occurs within and between communities of scholars and that transforms the language, the person of the translator, the communities involved, and the cultural expectation (p.74).

**Table 1**  
**Citations and Research Focus of Key Articles on Business Communication Discipline**

<b>Citations*</b>	<b>Article Information</b>	<b>Research Focus of Articles</b>
<b>10</b>	Cyphert, D. (2009). Who we are and what we do, 2008. <i>Journal of Business Communication</i> , 46 (2), 262-274.	Granted, the search for a disciplinary identity might well be “hopelessly old fashioned” in the contemporary educational climate and might even represent a nostalgic yearning for a romanticized academic existence that doesn’t actually exist in any discipline. Still, it would be nice to have a recognizable and impressive self-identifier ready for cocktail party conversations (p. 267).
<b>3</b>	Murphy, M. A. (1998). Re-viewing business communication: A response to Carmichael, <i>Journal of Business Communication</i> , 35(1), 128-137.	The paper advocates the view that business communication, management communication, and organizational communication are not, as suggested by the three articles, separate disciplines but interdependent areas of study nested within the domain of the mother discipline of communication (p. 128 ).
<b>2</b>	Krapels, R. H & Arnold, V. D. (1998). Response to Murphy's "Re-viewing business communication, <i>Journal of Business Communication</i> , 35(1), 149-153.	To provide a foundation for viewing the discipline in which we teach as a stand-alone field within the academic arena. Our intent was to include the many facets of communicating in the business environment under one all-encompassing discipline since executive communication, management communication, organizational communication, as well as presentation courses and many others, are all part of communicating in business (p. 149).

\*Google Citations average for the 12 disciplining articles as of January 6, 2014 = 221/12 = 18.416

Dulek (1993) used a two model approach (vertical and horizontal) to determine if business schools adoption of either model makes it possible for business communication faculty to be promoted and tenured similar to other faculty in the business schools. Although business communication was viewed by Dulek as a softer side of management, his view was that The Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) standards at the time made it more possible that business communication faculty could receive tenure. This implies the belongingness of Business Communication in the business curriculum and schools.

Krapels and Arnold (1998) advocated that business communication is better off if people teaching in the field view themselves as members of a specific discipline, rather than a hodgepodge mixture of academics teaching in a sub-area or as a stepchild of a larger academic field. These two authors saw the potential for business communication to become a standalone discipline. In contrast to this argument, Murphy (1998, p. 128) argued “business communication, management communication, and organizational communication are not separate disciplines but interdependent areas of study nested within the domain of the mother discipline of communication.” In fact, five years earlier, Shelby (1993) was decrying a communication-focused theory based analysis of the boundaries and relationships of communication subjects taught in business schools resulted in four key areas: 1) organizational communication, 2) business communication, 3) management communication, and 4) corporate communication. Yet,

she argued that managerial communication connect organizational communication to business communication and to corporate communication.

In this same vein, Smeltzer, Glab, and Golen (1983) 10 years earlier decided that managerial communication should integrate appropriate communications skills with strategy development; these skills include grammar, knowledge of behavioral science covered in basic management courses and the functional areas of planning, leading, organizing, and controlling. Their belief was that managerial communication is where business communication, organizational communication and management merge. And, consistent with Smeltzer, et al (1983) and others' views of managerial communication, Bell and Martin (2008, p. 130) defined management communication as "*the downward, horizontal, or upward exchange of information and transmission of meaning through informal or formal channels that enables managers to achieve their goals.*" This argument includes cross-disciplinary approaches to teaching business communication content (Laster, & Russ, 2010). Despite this, business communication is still viewed as a fragmented discipline that diminishes teaching and research in the discipline; resolving the problematic will require structural realignment from the top of the university organizational structure to all the constituent parts (Zorn, 2002). More recently, ancient rhetorical principles is seen as having congruence between systems of ancient rhetoric and modern business communication. There is argument that now the main branches of business communication is management, public relations, advertising, and marketing (Haase, 2012).

In terms of rhetorical principle, oral and written communication will always be a part of business communication (Haase, 2012). Moreover, Forman (1993) espoused factors that may profitably influence research in business communication: 1) the historical and theoretical study of composition as a discipline, 2) multicultural and literacy studies, and 3) contemporary critical and social theory. Thus, rhetoric, culture, impression management, and dissemination remain to be recurring themes in business communication instruction and research and the concept of writing in the disciplines (WID) is not likely to be removed (Hagge, 1989; Russell, 2007).

Another recurring theme in the literature is the use of technology (Penrose, 1984) and teaching business communication subjects using social media; especially since multivariate analysis of variance tests show no difference was found between male and female college professors or among the ranks of faculty concerning the advantages and concerns of social media usage in business communication instruction (Roebuck, Samia, & Bell, 2013). As a stream of research from an integrated communication approach, business communication faculty should focus on social media (Meredith 2012). The argument for a cross-disciplinary approach as a means for structural realignment seems plausible as a solution (Zorn, 2002). Translation metaphors also seem plausible (Sherblom, 1998). Forman (1998) put it two ways: 1) Metaphoric translation involves movement between instruction and research and 2) the way translation studies relay ideas drawn from theories, histories, and practices.

Therefore, this study moving forward will accomplish four things. First, we will provide more details as to how we arrived at the six enduring themes. Second, we will discuss

communication under the leading function and how this has been extremely helpful in the scientific investigation of communication theories applicable to the leading function. Third, we will present a plausible of business communication. And fourth, we will answer the aforementioned research questions and provide a recommendation.

### ENDURING THEMES

There are six themes with enduring relevance to business communication today. The 12 articles featured in Table 1 addressing discipline discussed the following themes directly or indirectly, explicitly or implicitly stated: rhetoric, technology, culture, dissemination, motivation, and impression. Anyone who has taught business communication knows these themes are abundant themes in the textbooks and supplemental materials they use as well.

*Rhetoric* includes creating and composing of messages; style and format are also included. Sophistic Rhetoric is really the bedrock of practical/technical rhetoric as we know it today with some of the same unfounded criticisms. Note the entry in Wikipedia "being persuasive could lead to political power and economic wealth" and then notice at the bottom the link to Business Speak. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sophists>

Bitzer's Rhetorical Situation is "the context of a rhetorical event that consists of an issue, an audience, and set of constraints. Two differing views of the rhetorical situation are that a situation determines and brings about rhetoric, and that rhetoric creates 'situations' by making issues salient." [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rhetorical\\_situation](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rhetorical_situation)

Stephen Toulmin's another philosopher who has influence the writing side of the discipline. His view of practical argument is when people use qualifiers and warrants as opposed to merely trying to find an absolute argument is useful in crafting all sorts of business documents where the object is to persuade readers of the plausibility of your position. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stephen\\_Toulmin](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stephen_Toulmin)

*Technology* includes technology, especially social media, and other channels to create the message and deliver it. Business Communication has always been technology-driven, but especially now with computer and other internet and office technologies.

*Culture* includes the context of the message whether local or intercultural. Business communication *as taught in the classroom* has not always been strong on diversity of culture as we tend to teach the *standard* American business communication models (of writing and delivery).

*Dissemination* is related to technology but also includes matters of efficiency and effectiveness. Claude E. Shannon, an engineer for the Bell Telephone Company, and then Shannon and Warren Weaver (1949) on the Mathematical Theory of Communication - this is the foundation of communication studies in general, but it would also provide the scientific balance that would increase the credibility of the discipline, which includes a source to receiver with feedback. Now, this model can be criticized for its mechanistic conception of human

communication, but it does contribute to the physical and logical flow of information. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A\\_Mathematical\\_Theory\\_of\\_Communication](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A_Mathematical_Theory_of_Communication)

*Motivation* includes the motivation of the sender and the needs of the audience.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs - this addresses the motivation that people have in general, and how you can appeal to such needs. Much of our communication in the workplace would consider the higher level needs (social/belonging, esteem, self-actualization) but especially these days to lower level needs (physiological and security). [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abraham\\_Maslow](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abraham_Maslow)

*Impression* includes how the sender is seen and wants to be seen by audience. Erving Goffman's book "The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life" (1959) has aspect of interpersonal communication which is probably the most crucial to business communication. It is very important to employment/career/client communication in terms of making first impressions. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Impression\\_management](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Impression_management)

## COMMUNICATION UNDER THE LEADING FUNCTION

Textbook analysis for emergent themes is not new. In fact, Aronoff (1975) examined 28 general management textbooks published between 1910 and 1974 for common themes; he found human relations and consumer behavior to be paramount themes in the textbooks he examined. Villere and Stearns (1976) used 19 organizational behavior textbooks published between 1964 and 1974, using the Flesch Reading Ease Score as a measure of readability, and found the average Flesch readability index score was 32 for all 19 books. Any textbook is nothing more than a culmination of scholarly writings in a discipline. Textbooks can be a guidepost for what is considered relevant in a discipline or field because they are used to train people interested in the field. They should contain the culmination of knowledge in the field.

The reason management as a discipline has prospered with fervor of scientific activity is because of its broadly accepted definition. The broadly accepted generic definition of management (the one found in some version in nearly every modern management textbook) follows:

*Management is the process of planning, organizing, leading, and controlling the material, informational, financial, and human resources of an organization in order to efficiently and effectively achieve stated goals.*

In this study we found that five modern general management textbooks, published between 2007 and 2013, each has chapters that are centered on the common themes (functions of management) of planning, organizing, leading and controlling. Table 2 illustrates a cross-comparison of five leading principles of management textbooks with chapters that cover substantial content on the four enduring themes of planning, organizing, leading, and controlling in a matrix. Notice in Table 2 that each textbook has a 50% or more of the total chapters which cover content that neatly falls within each of the main themes of management.

All five of the management textbooks we examined had a derivative of the same definition and all included in their tables of contents the functional areas of management as main parts of their textbook. Any theory testing done in management discipline, therefore, can be neatly placed into one of these areas of inquiry—including the science they do on communication subjects that they place neatly under the Leading function. The Daft's (2013) book has 78.6% or 11 of 14 total chapters covering content within the four main themes. Daft also gives the leading function 35.7% of his emphasis ( $5/14 * 100$ ); the next highest is Hill and McShane (2007) who give the leading function 33.3% of their emphasis ( $5/18 * 100$ ). For all five textbooks, the leading function is clearly emphasized the most with it representing 25.4%, while the controlling function received least emphasis with 10.3% coverage. The four themes represent 68.9% of the total content for all five books. Moreover, most research done in the management discipline can be neatly categorized into one of these themes. Each of the themes is also associated with a pioneering philosopher scholar (Max Weber's - bureaucracy; Henri Fayol's - administrative principles; Chester I. Barnard's - coordinated systems of control through authoritative communications; Frederick W. Taylor's - scientific management; Elton Mayo & Fritz Roethlisberger's - social control and human relation perspective; and others) whose works contributed greatly to a main perspective driving themes further, thus, pushing the management discipline scientifically further.

The functional areas were first proposed by Henri Fayol (1916), and four functions of management survive today. For example, among them, four of five management textbooks examined cover professional communication under the leading function: Hill/McShane-chapter 17, Robbins/Coulter-chapter 15, Bateman/Snell-chapter 15, and Daft-chapter 13. (See Appendix A for table of contents for the five leading management textbooks).

Therefore, it is no surprise that recent research shows just how important communication is to the Leadership Function. Communication is the link to frontline leadership (Ahmed, et al, 2010). Bell (2009) argued that leaders use communication to stay dialed into the formal and informal networks of their organizations. Without proper leadership communication, organizational networks gone awry can steer an entire organization towards moral depravity. Thus, it is through communication that leaders stay dialed into these networks. In addition, leaders disseminate the long-term direction (strategic goals) of the organization to the technical core by emphasizing the component parts of the strategy and using face-to-face communication (rich channels) to reward individual contributions employees' make to achieving the larger strategy (Bell, 2012). Leaders use communication skills to cut through rhetorical obstructions of delegation so they can properly assign responsibilities and authority to the right individual at the right time (Bell & Bodie, 2012a). It is also clear that leaders are the catalyst for organizational change because change starts from the top to bottom, and leaders must continually monitor the change agenda (Bell & Bodie, 2012b). We also know that Frederick Taylor's Scientific Management Principles are prevalent for modern workers and they are infused in work that requires machine-like precision of the persons; instructing these employees on the importance of

being machine like is a leadership responsibility and largely done with interpersonal communication between the boss and the worker (Bell & Martin, 2012). Therefore, management scholars appear to be correct in placing the subject matter of all the professional communication disciplines under the Leading Function. Communication that leaders do can be scientifically tested.

**TABLE 2**  
**CROSS-COMPARISON OF FIVE LEADING MANAGEMENT TEXTBOOKS WITH FOUR MAIN THEMES (FUNCTIONS OF MANAGEMENT)\***

	Planning	Organizing	Leading	Controlling	% of book
Text 1 <sup>a</sup>	7, 8, 9	10, 12	13, 14, 15	11	9/18= 50.0%
Text 2 <sup>b</sup>	5, 6	7, 8, 9	10, 11, 12, 13, 14	15	11/14= 78.6%
Text 3 <sup>c</sup>	4, 5, 6	8, 9, 10, 11	12, 13, 14, 15	16, 17, 18	14/18= 77.8%
Text 4 <sup>d</sup>	7, 8, 9	10, 11, 12, 13	14, 15, 16, 17	18, 19	13/19= 68.4%
Text 5 <sup>e</sup>	5, 6	8, 10, 11	12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17	7, 9	13/18= 72.2%
<b>% of book</b>	<b>13/87= 14.9%</b>	<b>16/87= 18.4%</b>	<b>22/87= 25.4%</b>	<b>9/87= 10.3%</b>	<b>60/87=68.9%</b>

\*Arabic numeral denotes which chapter in the textbook that includes substantial coverage of a theme.

a. Contemporary Management, 7/e, (2011), by Gareth Jones and Jennifer George, ISBN: 0078112699

b. Understanding Management, 8/e, (2013), by Richard L. Daft, ISBN-10: 1111580243

c. Management : Leading & Collaborating in the Competitive World, 10/e, (2012), by Thomas Bateman and Scott Snell, ISBN: 9780071318037

d. Management, 11/e, (2010), by Robbins, Stephen P. and Mary Coulter, ISBN-13: 9780132163842

e. Principles of Management, (2007), by Charles W. L. Hill and Steven McShane, ISBN13: 9780073530123

## PLAUSIBLE DEFINITION OF BUSINESS COMMUNICATION

We used the tables of contents from five business communication textbooks to help us determine how the themes suggested by articles addressing discipline featured in Table 1 are used. Similar to Aronoff (1975) and Villere and Stearns (1976), in this study we used content analysis as a method to derive six themes derived from the business communication literature and in five business communication textbooks. Table 3 illustrates a cross-comparison of the five leading business communication textbooks with five of the six original themes in a matrix. Motivation was presented sporadically in tables of contents and could not be attributed to any of the other themes, so we dropped motivation as an enduring theme.

The contents of any chapter needed to fit into the broader context of one more so than any of the others in order to be located into a particular theme. For example, report writing, virtual meetings, and the like are technology issues. Positive and negative messages are impression issues because the writer following the prescribed techniques wishes to leave a desired image on the reader. Techniques taught for presenting positive and negative messages is always for impression management of the writer. This is why for the Guffey (2014) book, chapter 7 was assigned to technology theme and chapters 8 and 9 were assigned to the impression theme. Similarly, for Lehman and DuFrene (2011) chapters 5, 9, 10, and 11 were assigned to technology theme, while chapters 6, 7, 13 and 14 were assigned to the impression

theme. What's clear is impression in the five Business Communication textbooks is about achieving a desired image or outcome via communication. (See the tables of contents for the five Business Communication textbooks in Appendix B).

**TABLE 3**  
**CROSS-COMPARISON OF FIVE LEADING BUSINESS COMMUNICATION TEXTBOOKS THAT CONFIRM FIVE THEMES\***

	<b>Rhetoric</b>	<b>Technology</b>	<b>Culture</b>	<b>Dissemination</b>	<b>Impression</b>	<b>% of Book</b>
Text 1 <sup>a</sup>	4, 5, 6, 10	1, 7, 11, 12, 13	3	2, 14	8, 9, 15, 16	<b>16/16= 100%</b>
Text 2 <sup>b</sup>	12, 15	5, 21, 23, 24	3	1, 2, 17, 19, 20	6, 7, 10, 11, 27, 28, 29, 30	<b>20/30= 67%</b>
Text 3 <sup>c</sup>	3, 4, 8	5, 9, 10, 11	2	1	6, 7, 13, 14	<b>13/14= 93%</b>
Text 4 <sup>d</sup>	2, 3, 4, 5, 8, 13, 14	10, 11, 12, 17	15, 16	1	6, 7, 9	<b>17/18= 94%</b>
Text 5 <sup>e</sup>	4, 5, 6, 10	7, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17	3	1, 2, 11	8, 9, 18, 19	<b>19/19= 100%</b>
<b>% of Book</b>	<b>20/97= 20.6%</b>	<b>24/97=24.7%</b>	<b>6/97= 6.2%</b>	<b>12/97= 12.4%</b>	<b>23/97= 23.7%</b>	<b>85/97= 87.6%</b>

\*Arabic numeral denotes which chapter in the textbook that includes substantial coverage of a theme.

a. Business Communication: Process and Product, 8/e, (2014), by Mary Ellen Guffey, ISBN-13: 9781285094069

b. Business Communication: Building Critical Skills, 5/e, (2011), by Kitty Locker, ISBN: 0073403156

c. Business Communication, 16/e, (2011), by Carol M. Lehman and Debbie D. DuFrene, ISBN-13: 9780324782172

d. Business Communication, 12/e, (2010), by Kathryn Rentz, Marie Flatley, Paula Lentz, ISBN13: 9780073377797

e. Business Communication Today, 11/e, (2011), by Courtland Bovee and John V. Thill, ISBN-13: 9780132539555

When authors contributed an entire chapter or large portion of a chapter to a theme we considered it substantial. Thus, when a chapter or large portion of it was identified with one of the themes the book's content was documented in the matrix shown in Table 3. We identified confirmed that only five of the six original themes constitute the contents of the five business communication textbooks we examined substantially. Moreover, five themes in Table 3 account for 87.6% of content in all five books. Technology (24.7%) and Impression (23.7%) are clearly the most covered content in the five business communication textbooks.

### Answers to Research Question 1

*Q<sub>1</sub> Why has business communication been unable to find a broadly accepted definition, similar to say, the broadly accepted definition of management?*

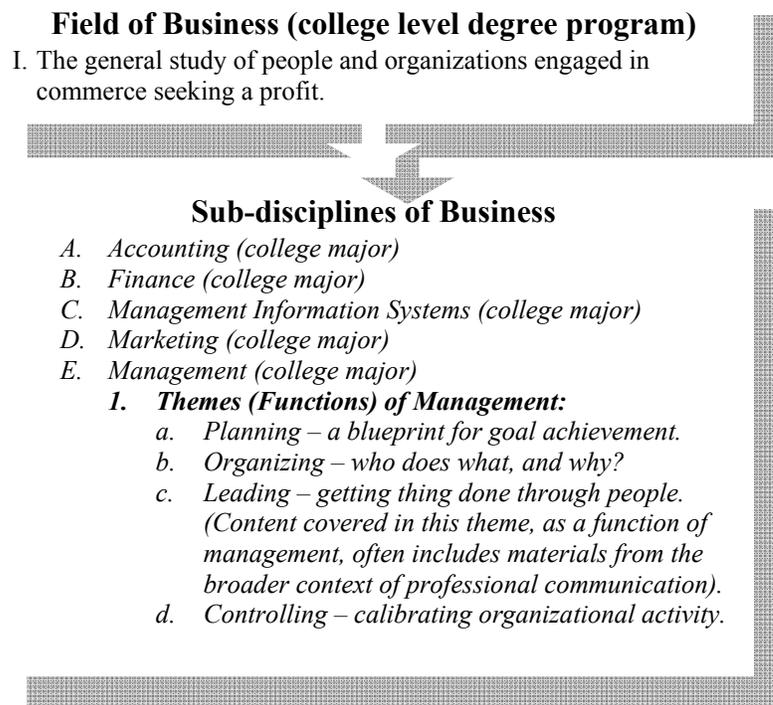
Figure 1 illustrates the broadly accepted typology of the broader context of business, to the more narrow sub-disciplines, to the thematic content of the management functions. We now know why there has been no broadly accepted definition of business communication as a discipline.

The evidence shows there remains too much fragmentation in the discipline. A typology of the business field compared to the professional communication fields shows proof of just how fragmented Business Communication is. The business field at the college level is often the

degree program, the sub-disciplines of business are often the college majors, and the themes are covered in the various courses. There is an unquestionable fluidity between the business field and its sub-disciplines. Therefore, in this study we can define business communication the following way:

*Business communication involves creating and disseminating work-related messages through appropriate channels, while being sensitive to the needs of the audience, the context and culture in which the message is conveyed, and the impression that the audience has on the sender.*

**FIGURE 1**  
**TYPOLOGY OF BUSINESS AS A FIELD, ITS SUB-DISCIPLINES AND MANAGEMENT'S THEMES**



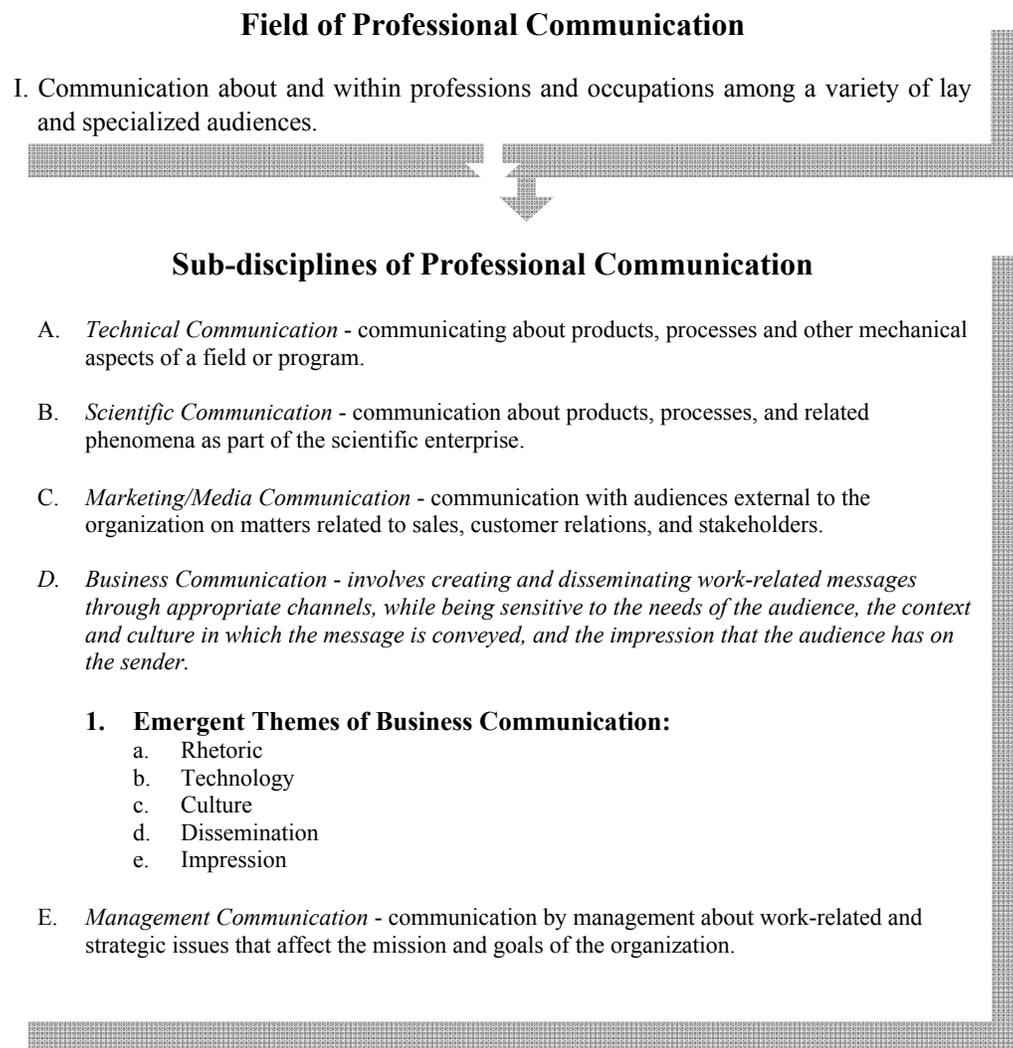
## Answers to Research Question 2

*Q<sub>2</sub> Why have there not been a set of universal themes (function of business communication) developed in the past that constitute a business communication typology?*

Figure 2 illustrates the current typology of professional communication as a field, its sub-disciplines and business communication themes based on the five leading business communication textbooks and what is commonly known in the literature—meaning approaches to teaching and research. The professional communication typology goes from a broad context of

professional communication to the narrow sub-disciplines to the themes of business communication. Rarely is business communication a college degree program. And in only a handful of cases business communication is a major in business degree programs in collegiate schools of business. Aronoff's (1975) study, although a bit old, sheds light the fact that 40 years ago management as a discipline that had begun to define its boundaries as a discipline, thus establishing methodological (scientific) approaches acceptable to the discipline had begun to infuse human relations and consumer behavior as prominent themes.

**FIGURE 2**  
**TYOLOGY OF PROFESSIONAL COMMUNICATION AS A FIELD, ITS SUB-DISCIPLINES AND BUSINESS COMMUNICATION THEMES**



The work-related part of our aforementioned proposed definition of business communication captures the operational and interpersonal aspects of the discipline, yet differentiates it from other sub-disciplines of professional communication. However, business communication falls under professional communication, and managerial communication might be viewed as a subset of business communication or vice versa. Obviously, there is no way to eliminate the overlaps and blurriness, depending on the situation, but for our purposes it helps to see the distinctions so that we can produce a reasonable argument for the construct of the discipline. Under the leadership function, professional communication has been shown to be a scientific subject matter.

Science is a process of inquiry. Quigley (1979) provides perhaps the most succinct illumination of science as a process and what science achieves. He explicates three steps to scientific inquiry. First, observe and gather evidence. Second, write a very specific hypothesis about the evidence that has been gathered. Third, test the hypothesis and accept the simplest explanation of the evidence that makes the fewest assumptions. This practicable advice is also known as Occam's razor, derived from 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> century medieval European philosopher of science (William of Ockham, 1287 - 1347) that challenged Plutonian abstractions and religious dogma that put constraints on free inquiry and halted knowledge creation for centuries. Science is a process that tests theories to create new knowledge; although scientists know ultimate truth can never be achieved in any discipline because theories will always evolve, all knowledge is tentative, they, however, continue to strive towards truth (Quigley, 1979). Figure 2 illustrates our typology consistent with the aforementioned business communication definition addressing discipline.

Business communication can create fervor in scientific inquiry with a broadly accepted definition and themes, or what might be called the function of business communication; such as the case with how management developed as a discipline through exploring scientifically the themes laid down by Henri Fayol decades earlier. Teachers of management agree that the functional areas of scientific inquiry in management (planning, organizing, leading, and controlling) can be attributed to Henri Fayol's (1916) book *General and Industrial Administration*, also listed by Bedeian and Wren (2001) as one of the 25 most influential management books of the 20<sup>th</sup> century; they write:

*An extraordinary little book that offers the first theory of general management and statement of management principles. Fayol's ideas so permeate modern management thinking that they have become an unquestioned part of today's received knowledge on how organizations should be designed (p. 223).*

As of January 6, 2014, Google Scholar reported for *General and Industrial Administration* 2655 citations. Over the decades, these functions of management have paved the way for thousands of studies in the discipline, with the Academy of Management, founded in 1936, boasting on its

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website a membership of 18,000. The Association for Business Communication was founded in 1936 and has less than 1,000 members.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

An effective way of perpetuating an academic discipline is by identifying and defining its intellectual and historical roots, then ensuring that such roots are set in the foundation course of the discipline. In that regard, business communication still struggles to find its footing compared to other disciplines in business schools, where it is mainly taught. For this study, we undertook an extensive review of significant scholarly works on business communication to determine the main canonical themes that would emerge. We identified six themes, but confirmed that five is what we believe constitute a business communication typology. Next, we examined the extent to which the six themes are included in leading textbooks used in foundation business communication undergraduate courses in the United States. We found substantial variation in where and how such themes are used in the textbooks.

Thus, we recommend that business communication scholars, authors, and teachers make concerted efforts to adopt the themes as functions of business communication to better establish and promote business communication as a discipline. The functional areas are rhetoric, technology, culture, dissemination, and impression. Professional communication as a field seems to encompass business communication as a discipline and all the professional fields are located under the leading function in the management discipline. Therefore, to further the discipline this study's proposed business communication definition should be adopted for research consideration and teaching as well as textbook writing by members of the profession.

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## APPENDIX A

### Table of Contents of Management Textbooks Used in Study

Gareth R. Jones, Texas A&M University -- College Station and Jennifer M. George, Rice University  
Contemporary Management, 7/e, ISBN: 0078112699, Copyright year: 2011

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##### PART ONE Management

CHAPTER ONE Managers and Managing

CHAPTER TWO The Evolution of Management Thought

CHAPTER THREE Values, Attitudes, Emotions, and Culture: The Manager as a Person

##### PART TWO The Environment of Management

CHAPTER FOUR Ethics and Social Responsibility

CHAPTER FIVE Managing Diverse Employees in a Multicultural Environment

CHAPTER SIX Managing in the Global Environment

##### PART THREE Decision Making, Planning, and Strategy

CHAPTER SEVEN Decision Making, Learning, Creativity, and Entrepreneurship

CHAPTER EIGHT The Manager as a Planner and Strategist

CHAPTER NINE Value-Chain Management: Functional Strategies for Competitive Advantage

##### PART FOUR Organizing and Controlling

CHAPTER TEN Managing Organizational Structure and Culture

CHAPTER ELEVEN Organizational Control and Change

CHAPTER TWELVE Human Resource Management

##### PART FIVE Leading Individuals and Groups

CHAPTER THIRTEEN Motivation and Performance

CHAPTER FOURTEEN Leadership

CHAPTER FIFTEEN Effective Groups and Teams

##### PART SIX Managing Critical Organizational Processes

CHAPTER SIXTEEN Promoting Effective Communication

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN Managing Conflict, Politics, and Negotiation

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN Using Advanced Information Technology to Increase Performance

Richard L. Daft Vanderbilt University and Dorothy Marcic Vanderbilt University  
Understanding Management, 8th Edition, ISBN-10: 1111580243, ISBN-13: 9781111580247  
720 Pages Paperback

Previous Editions: 2011, 2009, 2006

© 2013 Published

College Bookstore Wholesale Price = \$220.75

#### TABLE OF CONTENTS

##### Part I: INTRODUCTION.

1. Innovative Management for a Changing World.

##### Part II: THE ENVIRONMENT.

2. The Environment and Corporate Culture.

3. Managing in a Global Environment.

4. Managing Ethics and Social Responsibility.
- Part III: PLANNING.
5. Managerial Planning and Goal Setting.
6. Managerial Decision Making.
- Part IV: ORGANIZING.
7. Designing Adaptive Organizations.
8. Managing Change and Innovation.
9. Managing Human Resources and Diversity.
- Part V: LEADING.
10. Understanding Individual Behavior.
11. Leadership.
12. Motivating Employees.
13. Managing Communication.
14. Leading Teams.
- Part VI: CONTROLLING.
- 15: Managing Quality and Performance.
- Appendix A: Managing Small Business Start-Ups.
- Appendix B: Continuing Case.

Thomas Bateman and Scott Snell

Management: Leading and Collaborating in the Competitive World, ISBN: 9780071318037

Division: Higher Education

Pub Date: FEB-12, Pages: 800, Edition: 10/e

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Part One Foundations of Management

1. Managing
  - Appendix A The Evolution of Management
2. The External Environment and Organizational Culture
3. Managerial Decision Making

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5. Ethics and Corporate Responsibility
  - Appendix B The Caux Round Table Principles of Ethics
  - Appendix C Managing in Our Natural Environment
6. International Management

Part Three Organizing: Building a Dynamic Organization

7. Entrepreneurship
8. Organization Structure
9. Organizational Agility
10. Human Resources Management

Part Four Leading: Mobilizing People

11. Managing the Diverse Workforce
12. Leadership
13. Motivating for Performance
14. Teamwork

Part Five Controlling: Learning and Changing

15. Communicating
16. Managerial Control
17. Managing Technology and Innovation
18. Creating and Managing Change

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Stephen P. Robbins, San Diego State University and Mary Coulter, Missouri State University  
**Management, 11/E**, ISBN-10: 0132163845 • ISBN-13: 9780132163842

©2012 • Prentice Hall • Cloth, 672 pp

Published 12/27/2010

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Part I: INTRODUCTION TO MANAGEMENT

Chapter 1: Management and Organizations Management History Module

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Chapter 4: Managing Diversity

Chapter 5: Managing Social Responsibility and Ethics

Chapter 6: Managing Change and Innovation

Part III: PLANNING

Chapter 7: Managers as Decision Makers

Chapter 8: Foundations of Planning

Planning Tools and Techniques Module

Chapter 9: Strategic Management

Part IV: ORGANIZING

Chapter 10: Basic Organizational Design

Chapter 11: Adaptive Organizational Design

Chapter 12: Managing Human Resources Managing Your Career Module

Chapter 13: Managing Teams

Part V: LEADING

Chapter 14: Understanding Individual Behavior

Chapter 15: Managers and Communication

Chapter 16: Motivating Employees

Chapter 17: Managers as Leaders

Part VI: CONTROLLING

Chapter 18: Introduction to Controlling

Chapter 19: Managing Operations

Charles W. L. Hill and Steven McShane

Principles of Management, ISBN13: 9780073530123, ISBN10: 0073530123

Division: Higher Education

Edition: 1

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PART THREE ORGANIZATIONAL ARCHITECTURE

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Chapter 11 Developing High Performance Teams  
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Chapter 13 Motivating and Rewarding Employee Performance  
Chapter 14 Managing Employee Attitudes and Wellbeing  
Chapter 15 Managing through Power, Influence and Negotiation  
Chapter 16 Leadership  
Chapter 17 Communication  
PART FIVE CHANGE  
Chapter 18 Managing Innovation and Change

## **APPENDIX B**

### **Table of Contents of Business Communication Textbooks Used in Study**

Mary Ellen Guffey Los Angeles Pierce College and Dana Loewy California State University, Fullerton  
Business Communication: Process and Product, 8th Edition, ISBN-10: 1285094069, ISBN-13: 9781285094069  
704 Pages Hardcover, Previous Editions: 2011, 2008, 2006, © 2015 Available January 2014  
College Bookstore Wholesale Price = \$192.00

#### UNIT I: COMMUNICATION FOUNDATIONS.

1. Business Communication in the Digital Age.
2. Professionalism: Team, Meeting, Listening, Nonverbal, and Etiquette Skills.
3. Intercultural Communication.

#### UNIT II: THE WRITING PROCESS.

4. Planning Business Messages.
5. Organizing and Writing Business Messages.
6. Revising Business Messages.

#### UNIT III: WORKPLACE COMMUNICATION.

7. Short Workplace Messages and Digital Media.
8. Positive Messages.
9. Negative Messages.
10. Persuasive and Sales Messages.

#### UNIT IV: Reports, Proposals, and Presentations.

11. Report and Research Basics.
12. Informal Business Reports.
13. Proposals, Business Plans, and Formal Business Reports.
14. Business Presentations.

#### UNIT V: EMPLOYMENT COMMUNICATION.

15. The Job Search, Résumés, and Cover Letters.
16. Interviewing and Following Up.

Appendix A. Grammar and Mechanics Guide.

Appendix B. Document Format Guide.

Appendix C. Documentation Guide.

Appendix D. Correction Symbols.

Kitty O. Locker, The Ohio State University and Stephen Kyo Kaczmarek, Columbus State Community College  
Business Communication: Building Critical Skills, 5/e, ISBN: 0073403156, Copyright year: 2011

Unit 1 Building Blocks for Effective Messages

1. Business Communication, Management, and Success
2. Adapting Your Message to Your Audience
3. Communicating across Cultures
4. Planning, Writing, and Revising
5. Designing Documents, Slides, and Screens

Unit 2 Creating Goodwill

6. You-Attitude
7. Positive Emphasis
8. Reader Benefits

Unit 3 Letters, Memos, and E-Mail Messages

9. Formats for Letters and Memos
10. Informative and Positive Messages
11. Negative Messages
12. Persuasive Messages
13. E-Mail Messages and Web Writing

Unit 4 Polishing Your Writing

14. Editing for Grammar and Punctuation
15. Choosing the Right Word
16. Revising Sentences and Paragraphs

Unit 5 Interpersonal Communication

17. Listening
18. Working and Writing in Teams
19. Planning, Conducting, and Recording Meetings
20. Making Oral Presentations

Unit 6 Research, Reports, and Visuals

21. Proposals and Progress Reports
22. Finding, Analyzing, and Documenting Information
23. Short Reports
24. Long Reports
25. Using Visuals

Unit 7 Job Hunting

26. Researching Jobs
27. Résumés
28. Job Application Letters
29. Job Interviews
30. Follow-Up Letters and Calls and Job Offers

Carol M. Lehman Mississippi State University and Debbie D. DuFrene Stephen F. Austin State University  
Business Communication, 16th Edition, ISBN-10: 0324782179, ISBN-13: 9780324782172  
656 Pages Hardcover, Previous Editions: 2008, 2005, © 2011 College Bookstore Wholesale Price = \$205.50

Part I: COMMUNICATION FOUNDATIONS.

1. Establishing a Framework for Business Communication.
2. Focusing on Interpersonal and Group Communication.

Part II: COMMUNICATION ANALYSIS.

3. Planning Spoken and Written Messages.
  4. Preparing Spoken and Written Messages.
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  6. Delivering Good- and Neutral-News Messages.
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- Part IV: COMMUNICATION THROUGH REPORTS AND BUSINESS PRESENTATIONS.
9. Understanding the Report Process and Research Methods.
  10. Managing Data and Using Graphics.
  11. Organizing and Preparing Reports and Proposals.
  12. Designing and Delivering Business Presentations.
- Part V: COMMUNICATION FOR EMPLOYMENT
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- Appendix A: Document Format and Layout Guide.  
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Appendix C: Language Review and Exercises

Kathryn Rentz, Marie Flatley and Paula Lentz

Lesikar's Business Communication: Connecting in a Digital World

ISBN13: 9780073377797, ISBN10: 0073377791

Division: Higher Education, Pub Date: APR-10, Publish Status: Limited stock, Pages: 688, Edition: 12

Price: A\$ 139.95 / NZ\$ 165(Incl. GST)

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Chapter Seventeen: Technology-Enabled Communication  
Chapter Eighteen: Business Research Methods

Courtland Bovee and John V. Thill,  
Business Communication Today, 11/E  
Communication Specialists of America, ISBN-10: 0132539551, ISBN-13: 9780132539555  
©2012, Prentice Hall, Cloth, 720 pp, Published 08/04/2011

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