Technology in the Workplace
Google, the world’s largest internet search site, is one of the best tech companies to work for in 2018, according to employees. Glassdoor scanned its massive database of company reviews and ratings from current and former employees. The employees considered Google to have “extremely intelligent and competent coworkers, exciting products, [and] great management” (Gillett, 2017). With the help of technology at the workplace, communication is becoming more and more convenient. However, with the added convenience of instant communication and feedback, there are drawbacks as well. Nonverbal communication becomes even more difficult to analyze with the lack of nonverbal cues in computer-mediated communication (Ivy & Wahl, 2014; Wahl & Scholl, 2014). Although face-to-face computer technologies such as Skype are now available, the cues in these online communication interactions are still lacking in richness.

In this chapter, you will learn how people have attempted to compensate for the difficulties associated with emotional communication when using technology, as well as the potential drawbacks of using technology to communicate as a professional. After reading this chapter, you should have the tools needed to adapt in the ever-changing technological landscape.

Communicating excellence through technology is a necessary skill in today’s workforce. Learning to communicate effectively while using technology is important for the following reasons: (1) The way you communicate when using technology influences the impressions other people have of you, which is central to achieving professional excellence; (2) communication and technology help you establish contact and maintain professional networks and relationships with coworkers, leaders, and clients; and (3) communication and technology can lead to a number of obstacles that can hinder professional excellence. Recall the important role that professional excellence played...
when you were entering and developing in the workplace. Put simply, the KEYS process will help bridge professional excellence with communication and technology and help you excel in the workplace.

COMMUNICATION AND TECHNOLOGY: TOOLS FOR PROFESSIONALS

When you communicate by using any form of technology, you are taking part in computer-mediated communication (CMC) (Diaz, Chiaburu, Zimmerman, & Boswell, 2012; Li, Jackson, & Trees, 2008; Walther, Loh, & Granka, 2005). Your methods of communicating with clients, colleagues, and managers with technology must be thought out carefully.

Communication and technology have helped people to conduct business virtually instead of needing to communicate face-to-face (Couch & Liamputtong, 2008; Langan, 2012). No doubt, many of you are or will be members of a virtual work team—a group of coworkers who use CMC to accomplish tasks and professional projects traditionally completed face-to-face, in order to save on time and travel (Schiller & Mandviwalla, 2007; Staples & Webster, 2007; Watson-Manheim, Chudoba, & Crowston, 2012). When team members are located all around the country or the world, technology is an excellent tool to enhance communication. But if you use technology to avoid face-to-face communication with people in your office, technology can become a barrier to effective communication.

If you decide to use technology, how do you determine which communication channel works best for a given situation? Is email the best way to get a message out? Is a text the best way to make an urgent request? Is your cell phone the best device to use when participating in a phone conference or interview? Table 8.1 features the
## TABLE 8.1

Selecting the Channel: Pros and Cons

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHANNEL</th>
<th>PROS</th>
<th>CONS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Desktop/network email</td>
<td>• Robust software provides a full range of features and functions</td>
<td>• Limited mobility: must use desktop/laptop computer or be signed in to network to access software</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Provides lots of storage for your email messages</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Provides offline access to your email; you don’t have to be</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>connected to an email provider to compose new messages or read</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>replies</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Web email</td>
<td>• Freedom of movement: don’t have to be logged on to own computer</td>
<td>• Limited features and functions compared with desktop email software</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>to send and receive email</td>
<td>• No offline access to email</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Access to attachments is limited to the computer or network you</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>are using at the time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instant messaging/texting</td>
<td>• Instant give-and-take associated with phone chat: unlike standard</td>
<td>• Incompatibility issues between competing instant-messaging software</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>email, which involves composing and sending messages and then</td>
<td>providers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>waiting for replies, instant messaging takes place in real time</td>
<td>• Lack of basic email features and functions available on most desktop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>or web email programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smartphones/tablets</td>
<td>• Portability: slip it into your pocket or briefcase, and off you</td>
<td>• Inconsistent coverage: if you are out of cell phone range, you are</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>go</td>
<td>probably out of range to transmit and receive wireless email</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Offline access to email received and messages being composed</td>
<td>messages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Ability to sync smartphones/tablets to desktop computer so that</td>
<td>• Although manufacturers are beginning to offer keypads that enhance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>email can be transferred between hardware devices</td>
<td>ease of use, many smartphones/tablets have small keypads, while</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Touch-screen technology</td>
<td>others have no keypad at all; to write messages, you write or tap</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>letters on the screen with a stylus or your thumb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two-way text pagers</td>
<td>• Portable</td>
<td>• Inconsistent coverage: unlike one-way pagers (which never have</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Small and lightweight</td>
<td>great coverage), the coverage for two-way pagers is about the same</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard cell phones</td>
<td>• Portability and convenience: one device handles phone calls and</td>
<td>• Small keypads: most people learn to type with their thumbs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>text messages</td>
<td>• Limited message size</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

pros and cons of many common devices designed to help us stay connected and manage information as professionals. Review the table and think about your technology preferences.

Maintaining Professional Excellence Online

Social networking can be a wonderful tool for sharing information and maintaining professional connections. However, you should be especially mindful of the kinds of information about you that others can retrieve from the internet.

Important to your study of business and professional communication is learning to assess and improve your effectiveness when utilizing technology in your communication (Hewett & Robidoux, 2010; Shipley & Schwalbe, 2008). Since much of our communication occurs through technology, you must make sure to present yourself as a professional both online and in person (Ivy & Wahl, 2014; Jovin, 2007; Locher, 2010; Walther et al., 2005; Wright, 2004).

The way people present themselves online does matter in professional life. Remember, even “private” electronic communication can easily become public. Genova (2009) argues that employers have legitimate business interests in monitoring workplace internet use: to minimize legal exposure, to increase productivity, and to avoid proprietary information loss. Since employees arguably have no expectation of privacy in their work on employers’ computers, there are few grounds for complaint if they are disciplined for straying from corporate policy on such use.

In this heavily scrutinized work environment, it is no small wonder that employees crave a place to unwind and play “electronically” after hours. In unprecedented numbers, America’s workers are visiting online social networking sites and posting tidbits that their employers might not consider job appropriate. Here, many observers postulate that they do have an expectation of and, indeed, a right to privacy, especially in arenas that are used to express personal freedoms and exercise individualism and have no bearing on the workplace. Whether employers agree with this stance or not, an increasing majority are using employees’ presence on these sites to support discipline, termination, or simply not hiring of an individual. But is this fair if those actions are based on off-the-clock internet use? What do your Facebook page, text messages, and email address say about you? What impression will others have of you based on what you post to online social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter? Is your image online different from the image you present in person? If they are different, how are they different? What does each say about you as a professional? Understanding the impact of technology on your communication is critical to achieving professional excellence.
Electronic Communication

Have you thought about how communication has changed as a result of technology such as email, instant messaging, social networking, and texting? With each change in technology, there are changes to our communication as professionals (Barley, Meyerson, & Grodal, 2011; Hermes, 2008; Ivy & Wahl, 2014; Yee, Bailenson, Urbanek, Chang, & Merget, 2008). And, as noted earlier, some of the changes that result from technology positively influence our communication, while others have a negative influence.

As we move into the sections that follow, there are a number of things to keep in mind about technology, especially when writing and sending email professionally. Before composing and sending an email, consider the information provided in Tools for Professional Excellence 8.1. These rules also apply to text messages, blogs, and other electronic messages.

Using an email system, as well as many other forms of technology, allows a sender to avoid some of the unpleasant parts of face-to-face confrontation. For example, if you had to fire an employee, you would not have to see anyone cry if you delivered the bad news via email, nor would you have to worry about the physical side of an angry outburst over the telephone (Li et al., 2008; Locher, 2010). Getting fired over email is just one example of a change resulting from increased accessibility to and affordability of technology. How we communicate with one another in professional settings continues to evolve. Some people welcome the constant evolution and emergence of new communication technology, whereas others find it difficult to adjust to these changes and feel pressured to keep up. Clearly, advantages and disadvantages emerge when it comes to the use of technology in managing our professional relationships. You've likely heard great stories about making professional connections online, then face-to-face, and then negotiating a big contract. You've probably also heard stories about employees shopping online or viewing porn on the company computer when they should be working.

Blogs now have a presence in a variety of business and professional settings. In fact, some executives are now using blogs as a way to share information about topics such as organizational change or as a way to launch new initiatives.
Being Aware of Email

To use email effectively in the workplace, remember these critical points:

- Email is never secure.
- Email can lead to misunderstanding.
- Inappropriate email can lead to workplace lawsuits.
- Your email may be monitored by your employer.
- Spending too much time on email can hinder your productivity and focus.
- Email abuse can lead to employee termination.
- Sending inappropriate emails can harm your reputation as a professional.

Source: Flynn (2009).

People working in businesses and professional organizations increasingly rely on their email systems to communicate with colleagues and accomplish their work (Ivy & Wahl, 2014; Kibby, 2005; Lawson & Leck, 2006; Shipley & Schwalbe, 2008; Thompson, 2008; S. Young, Kelsey, & Lancaster, 2011). Considering how prevalent email usage is in business and professional communication, let’s examine how this form of technology impacts professional image.

As we suggested in Chapter 4, you should review and perhaps change your email address when applying for jobs. Think about the impression a job recruiter would have when receiving an email message from pimpinout@university.edu versus gabe.martinez@university.edu (Ivy & Wahl, 2014). Which address implies more professionalism? Which address communicates a better first impression? You

Checklist for Appropriate Email Content

To compose and send professional emails, make sure your messages:

- Are spell-checked to clean up mechanical and grammatical errors
- Are free of jokes
- Do not contain harassing, negative, or aggressive language
- Illustrate professional excellence
- Are free of racist, sexist, or discriminatory language
- Are free of sexual language, violence, and pornographic images

Source: Flynn (2009).
need to think about the perception of you that others may form based on your email (Byron & Baldridge, 2007; Ivy & Wahl, 2014; Welch, 2012).

But communicating effectively through email involves much more than just having a professional email address. The checklist in Tools for Professional Excellence 8.2 also applies to other forms of electronic communication, such as text messages and blogs. Unfortunately, many people fail to put the same level of
professionalism into their email messages. This can lead to the start of conflicts or the escalation of existing conflicts. According to Wollman (2008), electronic conflicts are common. Can you think of a time when you sent an email message that was less than professional? How could you have changed the message to present yourself with professional excellence?

Professional excellence requires you to know yourself as a communicator. Using the KEYS approach, you must know what kind of email style you have, in both sending and receiving, to see what impression you communicate through your emailing behavior. You also need to expand that self-analysis to all forms of CMC. For example, do you have a habit of using smiley faces and “lol” with friends? Have you carried those habits into your professional texts? Do you carefully proofread your memos but send text messages and emails full of typos and errors? Do you forward things you think are funny or inspirational to colleagues or other professional contacts? Now ask yourself, “Would I pass that same information on in hard copy? Would I repeat that joke in person?” As you analyze yourself online, remember that you want to portray the same image and the same level of communication professionalism electronically that you would portray in person or in written, hard-copy correspondence, because the need for professionalism is the same. This is a different channel, but the same rules apply. Similarly, remember that you must evaluate the audience or the receiver of the message. For example, some people love to text, and others love virtual meetings, but some people and some topics require face-to-face communication. If you apply the KEYS approach and carefully select the communication channel you use, you will be one step closer to communication excellence with technology.

Making Social Media Choices

As you read the passage below, consider what would be a more effective communication strategy in this situation.

Anne is interviewing applicants for a vacant position at her company. A new component of the interview process is examining applicants’ social media accounts, so as to get a better idea of who they really are when not on the job. Based on the process thus far, Anne has narrowed down the candidates to three applicants: Jen, Brian, and Jack. After some searching, Anne manages to find the Facebook pages for all three applicants and begins her examination. Because of privacy settings, Anne can only see each page’s profile picture and a limited number of photos and posts. On Jen’s page, Anne notices that her profile picture features her posing with her dog, while the first post that appears shows Jen and a group of friends partying and chugging bottles of beer. On Brian’s page, Anne sees that his profile picture features him posing with a small child whom he identifies as his nephew, while further down the page is a series of pictures from a weekend he spent with his fraternity brothers in Las Vegas, some of which feature heavy drinking and gambling. On Jack’s page, Anne finds that he is wearing a T-shirt with an expletive written on it in his profile picture, while in another post he mentions how much fun he had volunteering at the local animal shelter. Anne spends a bit more time looking over each page, and then logs off.

Questions to Consider

1. Do you think Anne has enough information to decide whom to hire? Why or why not?
2. Based on each candidate’s profile, whom would you hire? Why?
3. What suggestions would you give to the candidates regarding what they post on their profiles?
4. How important do you think social media profiles are in the hiring process?
DRAWBACKS OF TECHNOLOGY

We recognize that communication and technology will help you to be more productive, to network, and to excel as a professional. However, part of professional excellence is also being able to recognize the drawbacks of technology and avoid violating professional etiquette (explained further in Chapter 4). Those of you who excel into leadership positions should be aware of the drawbacks of technology, as the need for more workplace policies is emerging to help manage risks associated with technology (e.g., security breaches, privacy violations, decreased production, employee conflict, viewing of pornography, miscommunication; Diffle & Landau, 2007; Kelleher & Hall, 2005; Roberts & Wasieleski, 2012).

Employee Surveillance

How privacy is managed in the workplace is certainly part of the organizational culture that you need to get to know (Cozzetto & Pedeliski, 1996; Langan, 2012; Rule, 2007). Be aware of the private information you communicate to other people (e.g., relationship problems, health, money troubles), as well as the private information or activities you might manage at work (e.g., personal email, virtual communities, online banking; Cho & Hung, 2011; Solove, 2008). In fact, companies and organizations are using workplace surveillance systems in an effort to monitor and track employee behavior in terms of the information they access or communicate while at work.

Mr. Billig’s Nasty Email

As you read this passage and answer the questions, consider how the way you communicate has an ethical dimension.

A new associate sends a request to her team leader for information on a work project that she did not understand during the team meeting. Examine the email exchange that follows.

(NEW HIRE, SHAWANA)

Dear Mr. Billig,

This is Shawana. I’m the new hire on your special projects team. Can you explain the harmful effects of our product on pregnant women? I am having a difficult time understanding the effects. Thanks for your time.

Sincerely,

Shawana

(MANAGER, MR. JERRY BILLIG)

SHAWANA, I KNOW WHO YOU ARE. DID YOU NOT GET TRAINED IN THIS AREA DURING ORIENTATION? WE HAVE DEADLINES AND LITTLE TIME TO PLAY CATCH-UP. MAYBE IF YOU WOULD TAKE THE TIME TO GET TO KNOW YOUR OTHER TEAM MEMBERS, YOU WOULD NOT HAVE TO COME TO ME. WE SURE NEED TO CHANGE OUR ORIENTATION FOR NEW HIRES.

MR. BILLIG

NEW PROJECTS MANAGER

Questions to Consider

1. How can the email exchange between Shawana and Mr. Billig be evaluated from an ethical perspective?
2. What would your impression of Mr. Billig be, based on this email message?
3. Was Shawana’s email appropriate and professional?
4. How do you think this email exchange will affect Shawana and Mr. Billig’s future communications?
5. Have you ever sent emails or text messages like Mr. Billig’s? Did you consider this type of communication unethical and/or unprofessional? Why or why not?
The goal of workplace surveillance is to alleviate productivity concerns and discourage employees from looking up personal banking information or viewing pornography at work (Sheriff & Ravishankar, 2012; Watkins-Allen, Coopman, Hart, & Walker, 2007). In addition to blocking employee access to particular sites or tracking web-surfing behaviors, companies are now asking employees to waive their privacy rights when it comes to using work-related email (see Table 8.2). That is, personal or private affairs are not to be included in any company email. Remember, the intensity of workplace surveillance depends on the industry, but holding a conversation on your cell phone as you walk down the hallway or sit in a meeting is unprofessional, regardless of the topic of the conversation. Let's explore in more detail the concerns or problems that emerge with communication and technology in business and professional situations.

**Time Management**

**Chronemics** is the study of time as communication and/or as a communication function. Drawing from research on the nonverbal dimensions of time in CMC, Ivy and Wahl (2014) explain that some messages are posted at one time (referred to as asynchronous), while others are more interactive, often fostered by social media (referred to as synchronous). As a result, email systems and other forms of communication technology make employees more efficient while simultaneously increasing their workloads (Ballard, 2008; Biggiero, Sammarra, & Dandi, 2012; Bruneau, 2012; Ivy & Wahl, 2014). Do you think technology helps or harms your own time management? How, if at all, do you use technology to help manage your time? What expectations do you have related to response time for text messages, email, instant messages, and the like?

In virtual meetings and with the use of messaging features such as Instant Messenger or text-message composition on personal digital assistants (PDAs)
and smartphones, professionals can communicate with little delay between mes-
sages (Ivy & Wahl, 2014; Z. Wang et al., 2012). Indeed, technology helps profes-
sionals be more productive and stay connected with clients; respond quickly; and
accomplish tasks despite geographic distance, travel time, and the like. But what
are the drawbacks when we consider how much of the time we are wired? A good
friend of ours gets so stressed out with email responses and phone calls at work
during the week that he advocates for times of being unplugged—a term referring
to the avoidance of checking email, sending text messages, watching television, or
answering the phone (see Tools for Professional Excellence 8.3). No doubt, some
of you might think of watching television, talking to your friends on the phone,
sending text messages, or listening to your Spotify playlist as ways to recharge—
the use of technology may very well make your downtime possible. We must also
consider the demands of many jobs, which would never allow several days without
communication.

**Information Overload**

Spending a lot of time on tasks that seem to take away from your productivity instead
of helping you accomplish your work can make you feel off balance and stressed,
leading to burnout (covered at length in Chapter 14). You might be experiencing
information overload. This happens when information, requests for feedback, new
projects, responses to questions, phone calls, and required online classes for work—
on top of taking care of loved ones, children, pets, and other family matters—leave
you feeling as though things are spinning out of control (Chen, Pedersen, & Murphy,
2012; Savolainen, 2007).

Contributing to information overload are several unprofessional distractions or
threats to privacy. Here are a few examples:

- **Email forwards** consist of virus alerts, chain letters, stories disguised
  as warnings, petitions or calls for help, jokes, pictures, and the like (Kibby,

- **Spam** is the use of a user’s email address for a purpose to which the
  user didn’t agree. It is junk email sent by “spammers” who obtain
  email addresses by buying company customer lists or using programs to
  produce email addresses randomly.

- **Phishing** involves sending authentic-looking but fraudulent emails
  designed to steal sensitive personal information.

Addressing information overload means more than just deleting emails; it can
also include dealing with threats to your privacy and to the overall security of your
computer (Flynn, 2009).
Information overload is certainly a drawback to technology, and overcoming it serves as more of a maintenance function for professionals globally (Flynn, 2006b; Marulanda-Carter & Jackson, 2012), but let’s return to the drawbacks of communication and technology for professional excellence. We consider Barb and Alex—two

Managing Your Email Inbox

To manage your inbox effectively, follow these practical tips:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Points</th>
<th>Practical Tips</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Set aside time to read and respond to email.</td>
<td>• Don’t leave your email program open all day long. Alerts and beeps from incoming messages can interrupt your work flow and leave you unfocused.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Schedule specific blocks of time throughout the day for checking your email.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Turn off your cell phone and shut your office door to prevent interruptions by family members (if you work from home) or employees.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• The amount of time required for reviewing email and replying will depend on how frequently you check messages and how many you typically receive, so find the right balance for your situation.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Take action immediately.                       | • Making quick decisions and pursuing immediate action will help keep your email inbox under control.                                        |
|                                                | • When you check your messages, browse the inbox for emails that can be deleted immediately such as spam or promotional emails. Then select messages that don’t require a response and delete or archive them. Once you’ve pared down the number of messages in your inbox, you’ll be able to better evaluate which ones are the most critical. |
|                                                | • Don’t let important emails sit in your inbox for days. Reply to the sender as soon as you’ve read his or her message.                      |
|                                                | • If you’re unable to respond immediately, communicate to the sender that you received the message and will be in touch as soon as you can.  |

| Organize an inbox with labels, folders, and categories. | • Although a majority of emails can be deleted, you’ll most likely want to retain messages related to key aspects of your business, such as correspondence between clients, colleagues, and employees. |
|                                                        | • Prioritize, group, sort, and file messages to keep your inbox organized.                                                               |
|                                                        | • Before you file a message, ensure the subject line is search-friendly. If it doesn’t accurately describe the content of the email, edit the subject line before it’s categorized and archived. |

| Unsubscribe from unwanted promotional emails.       | • Clean out the clutter. Newsletters and advertisements can overwhelm your inbox and bury important messages.                           |
|                                                    | • Unsubscribe from specific email lists if you no longer want to receive the senders’ messages or don’t have the time to read them.    |

professionals who happen to work at the same company and maintain an intimate relationship. As you’ll see in this “Step Back and Reflect” feature, technology can be used to attack other people when romance in the workplace goes south.

**STEP BACK AND REFLECT**

**Barb’s Email Response**

As you read this passage and answer the questions, step back and reflect on what went wrong in this professional situation.

Barb was having a bad day. One of her coworkers, Alex, whom she had been dating for several years, broke up with her using a text message! Needless to say, Barb was angry—she couldn’t believe that Alex was impersonal and cold enough to break up with her in that way. They both worked in an accounting office at a large oil refinery. Alex and Barb socialized with a group of coworkers on Friday nights—a social network clearly existed outside of work. To get back at Alex, Barb wanted to make a statement. She decided not to use a text message to respond to Alex and didn’t

---

**TABLE 8.2**

Ways of Addressing Email Security Issues

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ISSUE</th>
<th>POSSIBLE SOLUTION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Technology</td>
<td>Install firewall, antivirus, and antispam software as a minimum requirement. Consider encryption software by weighing the chances of email interception against costs of interception.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Policies       | As a minimum requirement, provide a written policy covering  
• Viruses—e.g., how employees should handle suspicious mail received from unknown sources  
• Misuse of the system—e.g., the organization’s view on what constitutes personal/work email and appropriate/inappropriate material  
• Email etiquette—e.g., the extent to which email correspondence should replicate the format of written correspondence and how to handle organizational opinion in emails  
• Employee privacy rights—e.g., statements on whether or not employees should expect that their email correspondence will be scrutinized if necessary  
• Policies on monitoring and scanning—including, e.g., the extent to which email will be monitored and scanned  
• Storage and archiving of email—e.g., statements on the permanency of email and organizational archiving procedures |
| User Education | Issue employees copies of the written policy.  
Train employees so that they know why email may be insecure—e.g., email correspondence as legally binding.  
Train employees in secure email handling practices—including, e.g., password protection and being discriminating in selecting recipients. |

Source: Table adapted from Kelleher and Hall (2005).
want to confront him face-to-face at work. Instead, she used the workplace email list (the same list used to organize the Friday night gatherings for everyone in the accounting office). Barb sent a “Reply All” email in response to one of Alex’s old email messages and told the entire story about the text-message breakup. The next day, Barb received a formal reprimand from her boss and almost lost her job. As you can see, this is an example of someone using email to attack another person.

**Step Back and Reflect**

1. What went wrong?
2. Was Barb out of bounds in sending this message to coworkers, since this group socialized outside of work?
3. Have you ever used text messages or emails to break up with someone or to display your anger about a breakup?
4. How would you respond, if at all, if you were in Alex’s situation?
5. How could Barb use the KEYS approach to improve her communication interaction?

The circumstances surrounding Alex and Barb’s breakup may sound rare, but it should encourage you to think about how communicating with technology requires the same level of consideration as face-to-face communication. Sometimes you may get mad at another coworker inside or outside of work, but that doesn’t mean the confrontation needs to be distributed to everyone in the company. Do you know someone who has the bad habit of using the “Reply All” function in email?

**Electronic Aggression**

Electronic communication allows people like Barb in any workplace situation to sit behind their computer screens or other digital devices and fire off responses in many forms (see Tools for Professional Excellence 8.4). Professionals in a variety

---

**Skills for Navigating Technology**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skill</th>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Application</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Digital etiquette</td>
<td>Learn what online behaviors are appropriate and which are not.</td>
<td>Visit any accredited etiquette website and familiarize yourself with its online section.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Digital safety</td>
<td>Learn what skills are needed to keep both you and your hardware safe from hackers and malware.</td>
<td>Review general online interaction tips from any major computer security company’s website (e.g., Norton, McAfee).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safety in e-commerce</td>
<td>Familiarize yourself with safe online purchasing practices.</td>
<td>Call your bank or credit union representative for tips and warnings about what to watch out for when shopping online.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

Copyright ©2020 by SAGE Publications, Inc.
This work may not be reproduced or distributed in any form or by any means without express written permission of the publisher.
of industries take topics in need of discussion, or controversial topics, and place them in electronic formats, often termed email dialogues—exchanges of messages about a particular topic using email, professional blog space, and other electronic tools to encourage participation that will ideally lead to new ideas, strategic planning, and sound decision making.

Email dialogues can be fruitful, and we don’t want to advocate avoidance of this type of exchange; however, email dialogues have a drawback that many of you have already experienced. The dark side of these electronic exchanges is electronic aggression—a form of aggressive communication filled with emotionality that is used by people who are interacting on professional topics. Topics that begin with a professional spirit can get unprofessional when people don’t agree with the direction of the discussion or if particular language is used to disagree about a program or idea others support. One way to fuel the aggression is to send an email flame—"a hostile message that is blunt, rude, insensitive, or obscene" (Flynn & Flynn, 2003, p. 54; Nitin et al., 2012).

Electronic aggression and email flames, similar to the one discussed in the “Step Back and Reflect” feature, can occur when someone posts a highly charged message to a corporate blog, a web log used to improve internal communication at work or for external marketing and public relations (Flynn, 2006a; Jang & Stefanone, 2011); a listserv, a computer service that facilitates discussions by connecting people who

Tips for Avoiding Electronic Aggression

To avoid electronic aggression, consider these practical points:

- Would you say the same thing to someone in person?
- Would this message be seen as unprofessional by anyone?
- Is your read of the electronic aggression correct? Give people the benefit of the doubt and request a face-to-face conversation.
- Avoid the temptation to use the ‘Reply All’ option.
- Avoid using obscene or threatening language.
- Control your emotions. Revisit the issue when you’ve had time to calm down.

Source: Flynn (2009).
share common interests; or an electronic bulletin board, an online service that anyone, not just a subscriber, can access to read postings (Doyle, 1998; Hult & Huckin, 1999; Ivy & Wahl, 2014).

SOCIAL MEDIA AND TECHNOLOGY: KEY CHALLENGES IN THE COMMUNICATION AGE

Although new technologies such as smartphones, social networking, and Skype can make communication a more convenient task, these new channels of communication create their own sets of problems if not used effectively (Edwards et al., 2016). Simply because you have the ability to communicate with different people and cultures across the globe does not mean you are ready to work with these people if you lack training and cultural sensitivity. Also, when relying almost exclusively on computer-mediated communication for business and professional interactions, you run the risk of letting your face-to-face communication skills suffer. Another issue is that constant availability and connection with your work life can lead to stress, burnout, and information overload if you do not “unplug” from work from time to time. Here are some common challenges to business communication in the information age.

- **Knowing when to use computer-mediated communication or face-to-face communication can be challenging.** A common problem now is that we have almost too many choices available to us for communicating with others. Email, texting, and instant messaging have become the de facto choice of communication for many people, but what about those who are not as connected to their smartphones or computers? There are still many “traditional” communicators who prefer the intimacy of face-to-face interactions and find email or text interactions to be dismissive or insulting.

- **By this same reasoning, new media are inhibited in their ability to transmit nonverbal cues of intimacy and familiarity.** How many times have you read a text message and not been able to decipher if the text is a joke, sarcastic, or completely serious? These types of miscommunications happen continually, and they have the potential to unintentionally ruin business relationships.

- **So when is it appropriate to use face-to-face or computer-mediated communication?** Current literature suggests that new media are appropriate for sending routine and simple information, but face-to-face communication is better for complex, urgent, or controversial messages. Keep in mind there is no “one size fits all” approach to choosing the appropriate communication channel. Your continued study and application of business and communication are what will ultimately allow you to make the right decisions about what communication channels to use.

- **Practicing cultural sensitivity can be difficult.** As business and commerce increasingly take place on a global scale, the ability to communicate with cultural sensitivity cannot be overstated. Many businesses rely on global exposure for success, and part of that success involves communicating with individuals who can be quite different from you. For intercultural communication competence, you must be an active learner of values, language systems, and cultural communication norms.

- **Intercultural communication involves the communication between and among individuals and groups across national and ethnic boundaries (Wahl & Scholl, 2014).** Understanding and effectively engaging in this type of communication can put you head-over-heels above other professionals in your organization. For the most part, your personal cultural background determines the way
you communicate—how personal beliefs influence what you say, what language you use, and even your nonverbal gestures. These in turn will alter how others respond to your communication. For example, a common job interview or negotiation strategy in the United States is to make consistent eye contact with your communication partner. However, in many Asian cultures, prolonged eye contact can be construed as a sign of disrespect, or even belligerence. This lack of cultural awareness could easily disrupt business negotiations across cultures.

- **Information overload can negatively affect your work and health.** The price we pay for convenience and immediacy with computer-mediated communication is the difficulty of disconnecting from it. Constant connectivity can sometimes be abused by making yourselves or others constantly available. Have you ever had a day off from work ruined because your boss emailed new work after business hours? All the digital media you use for convenience, work, and enjoyment (smartphone, social media, email) can result in *information overload*, which exposes you to more messages than you can process. Research has shown that a growing number of employees are feeling overwhelmed by the seemingly endless flow of email and text messages, and feeling pressured to respond to messages as soon as they receive them (Edwards, Edwards, Wahl, & Myers, 2016; Ivy & Wahl, 2014; Wahl & Scholl, 2014). Remember that although being connected is important and sometimes essential to business communication, it is also equally important to give yourself an avenue to step away from constant digital interaction.

**PROFESSIONAL ETIQUETTE WITH TECHNOLOGY**

The previous sections of this chapter explored the advantages and disadvantages of communication and technology in professional contexts. Remember to think about professional etiquette when communicating with technology (see Tools for Professional Excellence 8.5). Again, a great place to begin practicing your
professional etiquette with technology is in the classroom. Students and teachers alike are using technology in the classroom. Laptop computers, smartphones and tablets, PDAs, cell phones, blogs, and pagers are the beginning of a long list of electronic devices that help us manage our everyday lives (Arlat, Kalbarczyk, & Nanya, 2012; Flynn, 2009). What concerns, if any, do you have regarding technology use during class? Have you ever been distracted by other students’ use of technology? Similarly, think about how the use of technology (e.g., talking, texting, tweeting, gaming, online social networking) can disrupt the workplace experience. Where’s the professional etiquette when employees are texting their friends instead of taking care of work-related tasks? Has professional etiquette changed with the growth of technology? What do you think?

KEYS TO EXCELLENCE WITH COMMUNICATION AND TECHNOLOGY

In the story at the beginning of the chapter, Google was rated as one of the best tech companies to work for in 2018, according to employees. As you continue as a communication professional in your life, you must make a conscious effort to stay informed about ever-changing and growing technologies. If you want to excel and get promoted to a higher position in leadership, you need to improve your communication—especially when using technology to communicate. When studying the KEYS approach to professional excellence as you try to excel in the workplace, make some adjustments and improve your email style. When examining the first key, know yourself, know that achieving professional excellence entails improving your communication. Thus, both your electronic and face-to-face communication have to improve if you want to advance professionally. Examine your strengths and weaknesses related to all aspects of your communication (verbal, nonverbal, and electronic). Set a goal to be more respectful of the employees who work on your team when communicating one-on-one, during meetings, or through email. In all,

Text messaging, tweeting, checking email on smartphones, and ringing cell phones reflect the noise and distractions brought on by new communication technology.
professionally, you need to get to know yourself better in all aspects of your communication, with the use of technology being just one of them.

The next key, evaluate the professional context, is essential for you to become more aware of your professional context as well as how you come across to other people when sending information via email. Become more mindful of how your communication could be hurtful, even if you are just trying to make a point.

The third key, your communication interaction, can make you a more professional communicator. Start to think before making certain statements to members of your team, and be much more mindful of your tone and word choice in emails. If you send out information electronically, think about how your email can be received. Follow up with people in person after sending information electronically. Follow up or ask questions, such as “Did you get my email?” and “I hope my description of

Professional Etiquette with Technology

To use technology with professional etiquette, follow these best practices:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Technology</th>
<th>Professional Best Practices</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Voicemail—your personal greeting</td>
<td>Record your own greeting. Indicate if you will be out of the office. Refer the caller to another person for help. Check messages daily.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voicemail—leaving messages</td>
<td>Speak clearly and slowly. Leave your name and number. Keep messages short and to the point. Leave the date and time you called.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ringtones</td>
<td>Use the silent or vibrate setting when a ringtone might be disruptive. Many ringtones are unprofessional—use the standard tones offered by your provider.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Text messaging</td>
<td>Don’t replace all communication with texts. Use texts that leave little room for misunderstanding. Don’t deliver bad or good news in a text. Don’t use text messages to have a conversation. Don’t send texts during meetings. Don’t type in all caps.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cell phone usage</td>
<td>Don’t answer your phone during a meeting. Don’t take personal calls at work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twitter</td>
<td>Keep posts clear and concise. Watch what you post—before you post anything, consider what your family, friends, coworkers, or boss might think. Don’t post all of the time—go for quality over quantity. Don’t be selfish—use your posts to support others around you. Don’t post while under the influence of alcohol. Don’t go overboard with symbols or emoticons.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: Cowan (2011) and Flynn (2009).
the new product was clear. Let me know if you need my assistance with anything that might come up.” As your communication interaction occurs, work more on planning your message and don’t simply rely on sending messages electronically. Realize the value of follow-up, respect, and courtesy in all aspects of your communication.

When you meet a new hire or send out information to your team, engage in the fourth key, *step back and reflect.* Become a more reflective communicator. Ask yourself some of the following questions as you step back and think about the communication that has occurred, especially electronically: Was my email response appropriate? Did my questions in the email sound sarcastic? Did my team think it was rude when I answered my cell phone during the meeting? Should I use all caps in my text message? Was sending a response to everyone inappropriate? Did my coworker view my email as negative and critical? What will my staff think if I don’t respond at all? This fourth key can make you more thoughtful about all aspects of communication, not just when you use technology.

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Now that you have finished reading this chapter, you should be able to

**Discuss the impact technology has on business and professional communication:**

- Communication and technology are important for the following reasons: (1) The way you communicate when using technology influences the impressions other people have of you, which is central to achieving professional excellence; (2) communication and technology help you establish contact and maintain professional networks and relationships with coworkers, leaders, and clients; and (3) communication and technology can lead to a number of obstacles that can hinder professional excellence (p. 183).

**Explain how emotion is expressed with technology:**

- As you analyze yourself online, remember that you want to portray the same image and the same level of communication professionalism electronically that you would portray in person or in written, hard-copy correspondence, because the need for professionalism is the same (p. 190).
- Since emotions can be difficult to portray online, it is useful to first evaluate the audience or receiver of the message (p. 190).

**Discuss how the drawbacks of technology can prevent you from excelling as a professional:**

- Companies and organizations are using workplace surveillance systems in an effort to monitor and track employee behavior in terms of the information they access or communicate while at work (p. 191).
- Electronic messages can occur in asynchronous time—messages are posted at one time, then read at another time—but CMC also offers more interactive features, such as communication in synchronous time. As a result, email systems and other forms of communication technology make employees more efficient while simultaneously increasing their workload (p. 192).
CHAPTER 8  TECHNOLOGY IN THE WORKPLACE

- Information overload occurs when information, requests for feedback, new projects, responses to questions, phone calls, and required online classes for work—on top of taking care of loved ones, children, pets, and other family matters—leave you feeling as though things are spinning out of control (p. 193).

- The dark side of electronic exchanges is electronic aggression—a form of aggressive communication filled with emotionality that is used by people interacting about professional topics (p. 196).

**Explain how to use professional etiquette with technology:**

- Thinking about professional etiquette in the use of technology means examining your use of voicemail (personal greetings and messages), ringtones, text messaging, cell phones, and social media in the workplace (p. 200).

- Inappropriate use of technology can disrupt the workplace experience (p. 200).

**Apply the KEYS approach to achieve professional excellence regarding communication and technology:**

- **Know yourself.** Determine if you want to achieve professional excellence, and know that part of that entails improving your communication (p. 200).

- **Evaluate the professional context.** This is essential because you become more aware of your professional context, as well as how you come across to other people when sending information via email (p. 201).

- **Your communication interaction.** This will help you become a more professional communicator. Start to think before making certain statements to members of your team, and be much more mindful of your tone and word choice in emails (p. 201).

- **Step back and reflect.** Become a more reflective communicator. This fourth key will make you more thoughtful about all aspects of your communication, not just when you use technology (p. 202).

---

1. Go to a major technology company’s website and look over some of its latest consumer products. How much more developed are they than what you currently use? Write a short response that compares and contrasts how old your personal technologies are (e.g., computer, smartphone, tablet) compared with what’s on the market right now. What does this tell you about the changing communication landscape?

2. Have a “mock” face-to-face discussion with a friend, coworker, or family member about a descriptive subject of your choice. Afterward, try to replicate the same conversation via text or email. What nonverbal cues are lost during the computer-mediated communication? What tools (acronyms, emojis, or emoticons) did you use to substitute for nonverbal cues, and how effective were they?

3. On any social networking site, conduct a self-inventory of your knowledge about the jargon and acronyms used. How often do you use these shortcuts in your online interactions: lol, imo, ftfy, and the like? Write a brief response in favor of or in opposition to using abbreviated communication in online environments.

---

1. Define a virtual work team.

2. Explain the goal of workplace surveillance systems.
3. ________ is the study of time as communication and/or as a communication function.

4. ________ refers to the avoidance of checking email, sending text messages, watching television, or answering the phone.

5. ________ occurs when information, requests for feedback, new projects, responses to questions, phone calls, and required online classes for work—on top of taking care of loved ones, children, pets, and other family matters—leave you feeling as though things are spinning out of control.

6. ________ refers to sending authentic-looking but fraudulent emails designed to steal sensitive personal information.

7. A(n) ________, is a hostile electronic message that is blunt, rude, insensitive, or obscene.

8. ________ are exchanges of messages about a topic using email and other professional electronic tools to encourage participation that will ideally lead to new ideas, strategic planning, and sound decision making.

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. Discuss an example of a time when you misunderstood another person in a text message, an email, or an instant message. How did you respond to the misunderstanding? Did you and the other person clear things up in person, or was it done electronically?

2. Do you have a Facebook, Twitter, or related account? Is there anything posted in your profile that you think could potentially harm your credibility as a professional?

3. How do you express emotion when communicating with various forms of technology covered in this chapter?

4. Can the drawbacks and risks associated with communication and technology be alleviated with employee education and training? What experiences have you had, if any, concerning training or education related to security, privacy, and professional etiquette?

5. Have you ever experienced information overload? If so, what are some strategies you implement to help you with time management, filtering spam and email forwards, excessive text messages, and other distractions?

**TERMS TO REMEMBER**

Review key terms with eFlashcards: [http://edge.sagepub.com/quintanilla4e](http://edge.sagepub.com/quintanilla4e).

- chronemics 192
- computer-mediated communication (CMC) 184
- corporate blog 197
- electronic aggression 197
- electronic bulletin board 198
- email dialogues 197
- email flame 197
- email forwards 193
- information overload 193
- listserv 197
- phishing 193
- spam 193
- unplugged 193
- virtual work team 184
- workplace surveillance systems 191

Visit [edge.sagepub.com/quintanilla4e](http://edge.sagepub.com/quintanilla4e) to help you accomplish your coursework goals in an easy-to-use learning environment.