

Introduction: What to Expect from This Book

All organizations have to communicate to advance their mission and achieve their goals—but how can they do so successfully in a rapidly changing communication environment, with the endless options they have for how, when, and where to communicate, and with measures in place to evaluate their success? These are just a few of the challenges you will confront as a strategic communication professional. The purpose of *Strategic Communication for Organizations* is to provide you with an understanding of this emerging area of study, particularly as it operates in a variety of organizational settings. *Strategic Communication for Organizations* emphasizes how to use theory and research from the field of communication studies to support and advance the mission of all types of organizations, including for-profit, nonprofit, and government entities, across a variety of business sectors. Ultimately, you will determine how best to develop, implement, and evaluate messages that are consistent with an organization's identity and mission. You will decide how to effectively reach internal and external audiences. Communicating effectively as an organization is not guesswork or luck; it is a learned skill that can be improved with knowledge and practice.

WHAT IS A STRATEGIC APPROACH TO COMMUNICATION?

There are several reasons why an organization would want to use a strategic approach to communicate their mission. A strategic approach to communication considers an organization's unique type, identity, and mission in designing, implementing, and evaluating strategic communication campaigns aimed at realizing specific goals. Strategic communication relies on evidence-driven practices, theory- and research-based solutions, and systematic procedures to understand and analyze communication campaign opportunities for organizations. A strategic communication approach provides you with a number of distinct advantages for your personal, academic, and professional lives.

- **An emerging interdisciplinary perspective.** The world, and the organizations within it, are becoming more interdisciplinary. In fact, some have argued that a distinct strength of strategic communication is that it is a “transboundary” concept, meaning that it is not limited to one particular field or area of study but rather incorporates knowledge and practice from multiple related fields. As such, strategic communication is capable of accounting for the wide variety of organizational processes much more efficiently than the traditionally segregated fields of marketing, public relations, or human resources (Falkheimer and Heide 2014). To understand the world and the endless organizations within it from a strategic communication perspective is to understand, fundamentally and without limitations of academic discipline or field of study, what makes organizations function effectively.
- **Academic opportunities.** There are a number of emerging undergraduate programs across the country and world that focus on strategic communication. However, there is also a growing number of academic opportunities in graduate education. An increasing number of undergraduate and graduate programs are leaning toward the development of interdisciplinary strategic communication programs that encompass traditional majors such as advertising, marketing, organizational communication, and management. Learning how to think in this interdisciplinary way early can help you to succeed in graduate applications and programs. The expectation is no longer that you will succeed in one narrow aspect of organizational life, but rather that in your studies you will develop a well-rounded, interdisciplinary understanding of organizations—that is the strength of strategic communication.
- **Career opportunities.** At the time this chapter was written, a job search in “Strategic Communication” yielded over two thousand postings in the United States on the job search platform Idealist.org. With the growing number of academic opportunities in these areas already mentioned, employers are seeking graduates with interdisciplinary specializations and talents. Your abilities as a writer, speaker, and critical thinker will serve you well in pursuing these careers.

A strategic communication approach to organizations emphasizes research, analysis, critical thinking, planning, and insight in helping an organization to achieve its goals. In mastering a strategic approach to organizational processes, and communication in particular, you will benefit from a sound interdisciplinary base of knowledge and be well-prepared for cutting-edge academic opportunities and a growing job market.

HOW IS THIS BOOK ORGANIZED?

This book is divided into two main parts. The first part, “Foundations of Strategic Communication” (chapters 1 to 4), provides an understanding of the myriad organizational types and structures that engage in strategic communication as well as how organizations define and brand themselves to create a cohesive identity. Ethical communication is spotlighted in the first part as a key to maintaining organizational value and creating effective campaigns.

The second part, “Creating, Implementing, and Evaluating Strategic Messages” (chapters 5 to 11), lays out a step-by-step plan for creating strategic communication campaigns that align with the organization’s identity and mission as well as for aligning campaigns with the needs of stakeholders and communication partners. In these chapters we discuss how organizations can organize and prepare for effective campaigns by having clear objectives, a thorough understanding of their target audience, an evidence-based approach to messaging, and by carefully selecting both traditional and new media platforms. Throughout this part, we attend to the cultural diversity that exists across campaign stakeholder groups and how that diversity should inform communication strategy. Finally, we address the importance of implementing and evaluating communication campaigns. You will learn a variety of strategies for assessing campaigns to identify successes and for adjusting your strategic communication plan moving forward.

REAL WORLD APPLICATIONS

One way to learn about effective strategic communication involves examining how actual organizations engage in these processes every day. Although this is an emerging area of study in higher education, organizations are already applying and using the theories, research, and practice of strategic communication to obtain impressive results. As you read through *Strategic Communication for Organizations*, you will have access to a number of features that leverage these real-world practices and that will help you contextualize and apply the content of this book.

- **Realistic Opening Vignettes.** Each chapter in this textbook starts with a vignette, or scenario, that depicts a typical situation you might confront as a

strategic communication professional. Reading vignettes will help to put chapter content into context and get you to think critically about the role of strategic communication in organizations.

- **Strategic Communication Mentor.** To help illustrate the concepts discussed in each chapter, the **Strategic Communication Mentor** series featured in each chapter gives you insight from thought leaders in the strategic, corporate, or organizational fields. These features might include links to videos, online articles, or other interactive material that will help you connect the concepts in each chapter to “real” experiences and situations.
- **Interview with a Professional.** Throughout the text, look for these segments in which highly experienced and respected professionals in a variety of organizational types and structures offer their perspective.

RESOURCES FOR CRITICAL THINKING AND RESEARCH

Throughout this book, **Questions for Critical Thinking and Discussion** are included to help you summarize what you learned in a particular chapter, challenge your understanding of a particular concept, or help stimulate discussions with your peers about what you have read.

Keeping with our emphasis on real-world applications, the topics that are discussed throughout this book are based on research studies by professionals in a variety of academic fields. These topics have been chosen to deepen your understanding of the content presented in each chapter and are the focus of the **Further Readings and Resources** feature. Find the additional readings through your university’s library catalog. When appropriate, you might also find links to online articles, web pages, or blogs that can help enhance your understanding of chapter content.

In summary, *Strategic Communication for Organizations* provides a theory- and research-based approach to the complex and sophisticated range of skills necessary for strategic organizational communication. We hope that this book serves as the backdrop for rich course discussions and interesting assignments that will help you grow and apply yourself as a communication professional. Internalizing the interdisciplinary, scholarly approach to practice that we advocate in this book will help you establish your unique professional value as you prepare for a competitive, exciting job market or graduate studies. We wish all the best for you as you embark on this journey, and welcome your feedback or questions about the content of our book or the field of strategic communication. Contact Sara at labelle@chapman.edu and Jennifer at waldeck@chapman.edu.

Reference

Falkheimer, J., and M. Heide. 2014. “From Public Relations to Strategic Communication in Sweden: The Emergence of a Transboundary Field of Knowledge.” *Nordicom Review* 35, no. 2: 123–38.