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**Think Critically to Communicate for Success —
New Employee Organizational Communication Primer**

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Think Critically to Communicate for Success

New Employee Organizational Communication Primer

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Think Critically to Communicate for Success

New Employee Organizational Communication Primer

(AUTHOR'S NOTE: Words in dark blue refer to terms and *Americanisms* that are defined in the glossary. Americanisms (terms and phrases with meanings peculiar to Americans) are included and defined as an additional help for EASL (English As a Second Language) readers. We hope this promotes understanding of that second level of American English, colloquialisms and slang.)

INTRODUCTION

Welcome

Now that you're a team member at *Dewey, Cheatum, and Howe Media* (DCHM), there are a few things we want to talk about. We're sure most of you have a strong background in the **three R's: reading, 'riting, and 'rithmetic**. But at DCHM, we've expanded that formula to include the **three R's, two C's, and a T: reading, 'riting, 'rithmetic, and *critically thoughtful communication (CTC)***. Because without the ability to communicate effectively by using the skills of critical thinking, you cannot effectively transfer knowledge you have gained — from the three R's or anywhere else. We define **critically thoughtful communication** as "*communication that consistently incorporates the principles of **critical thinking** (especially the components of **IBATR**), which best promotes the ethical, accurate transfer of information.*" More on **IBATR** (pronounced "EYE-batter") later.

Organizational Culture

In all companies, corporations, and organizations, there is a culture or an organizational atmosphere that sets the tone for its communication, interpersonal relationships, decision-making, **ethical guidelines**, profit-making approach, business focus, idea-generation, management style, member treatment, **environmental stewardship**, **organizational identity**, etc. The **organizational culture** essentially characterizes the way people communicate and treat each other, inside and outside of the organization.

DCHM organizational culture rests upon the foundation of **critically thoughtful communication**. This principle is woven into all aspects of our thinking, information transfer, and business functions, including problem-solving, conflict-resolution, and small group work. We pride ourselves on being what Peter Senge has articulated as a **learning organization**. This is an organization in which all members are encouraged to consistently innovate and improve whatever processes they are involved in through the steps of observation, planning, execution (of plan), evaluation (of results), modification (of plan) — and ***rinse and repeat***. **The primary components of a learning organization are,**

- **systems thinking** – This is the ability to view an organization's functioning

through the lens of **systems theory**. The organization is viewed as analogous to a living thing, with its own unique sense of identity and being. It has the learning capabilities of an entity (like a sled dog team or a marching band).

- **personal mastery** – All members of the organization share a personal commitment to observing, learning, acting, and self-reflection.
- **flexible mental models** – Organizational members participate in self-reflection, allowing them to understand and modify their mental models, which tend to guide their thought processes. (Mental models are belief patterns that shape and limit an individual's thinking, understanding, and actions.)
- **shared vision** – Strict hierarchical control is replaced by *concertive control*, enabling members to act as a team with a shared organizational vision and an understanding of their own contribution to that vision.
- **team learning** – This puts the emphasis on dialogue (communication) as the key to an organization's learning ability and to guiding the organization to intelligent decisions.

(Eisenberg, Goodall, & Trethewey, 2007, p. 112)

Corporate Strategy

If you're getting the idea that DCHM expects its employees at all levels to be involved in idea-generation and innovation, **you are correct, Sir**. Closely related to an organization's culture is its strategy. Strategy asks, What is our purpose as an organization? DCHM's purpose is to continuously challenge and define our business focus, corporate identity, concern for community (inside and outside our company), and concern for our planet.

Business focus describes how and why we make money and to whom we are accountable during the making of that money. Our environmental consciousness reflects our concern for the planet: the level of effort we commit to minimizing waste, maximizing efficiency in the use of earthly resources, and ensuring that limited or zero new environmental damage occurs in the course of conducting business. We measure community concern by sensitivity to our staff's quality of life, concern for our readership at large, and our commitment to be a good neighbor in the corporate and human neighborhood (Senge et al., 1999, pp. 487-492).

The **organizational culture** generally determines **corporate identity** — the unique way our members and the outside world view our organization. And it is important that these two views are consistent. Aspects of DCHM's corporate identity are that we're always innovating, always on the lookout for a fallacy to expose, we're truth-seekers, we're ethical and honest but not perfect, irreverent but not mean-spirited; we are the class clown and the class rebel who gets grades as good as the student council president.

Yeah, we're a little **big on** ourselves. And we want you to be **big on** yourself and DCHM. We're assuming you already possess the desire and mind-set laid out in the previous paragraphs or you wouldn't be here. We're expecting that you're anxious to start contributing ideas, solving problems, and providing answers to the issues of improving DCHM (and, of course, establishing world peace). DCHM wants to instill and cultivate in you a heightened sense of meaning, aspiration, and purposefulness. This is a cliché, but we want you to be here for more than a paycheck (Senge et al., 1999, pp. 487-492).

Now that we have established these goals, lofty and mundane, the following section lays out the tools for attaining them.

COMMUNICATION BUILDING BLOCKS: IBATR

If You Remember Nothing Else: IBATR

IBATR (pronounced "EYE-batter") is the acronym representing the five legs of our communication table. When even one or two legs are weak or broken — or missing — the table wobbles. *Milk spills*. This acronym, IBATR, represents the foundation of *critically thoughtful communication*, the key to ethical, accurate information exchange. Make this acronym your best friend. Put aside time for it. *When it is speaking to you, give it your full attention, as if it were the most important acronym on earth. Compliment it now and then on a new outfit. Surprise your acronym occasionally; send the kids to Grandma's and plan an intimate rendezvous at home, just the two of you. But never, EVER, dispute your acronym's word when the two of you are with friends.*

1. **Information:** Carefully consider the communicated information or *question at hand (QAH)*. Assign no immediate favoritism toward information sources and no immediate judgment about accuracy or inaccuracy of the information.
2. **Biases:** Examine all biases you or the sources might have surrounding the communicated information or *QAH*.
3. **Assumptions:** Examine all assumptions you or the sources might have surrounding the communicated information or *QAH*.
4. **Truth:** Maintain a commitment to truth and honesty, and consider the level of this commitment for each communication, information source.
5. **Response:** Carefully draw a conclusion, and formulate a response. And always remember that these might require modification based on new analysis, new communication, or new information-source evaluation.

IBATR is the *Holy Grail* of successful communication. Granted, perfection is not possible. But *virtual IBATR perfection (VIP)* is. *Virtual IBATR perfection* means that, for all practical purposes, he, she, or it has done their best to follow the steps to the best of their ability—and that Step Five always allows for the reexamination of information, methods, and motives.

Let's take a closer look. Assume that you work for a corporation, *Amalgamated Rose-Colored Boxer Shorts, Inc.* Also assume that all male employees, from the sweeper to the CEO, are required to make a company pledge to "*walk the walk, spread the good word, and wear what we produce — rose-colored boxer shorts.*"

1) Information

Carefully consider the communicated information or question at hand (QAH). Assign no immediate favoritism toward information sources and no immediate judgment about

accuracy or inaccuracy of the information. Consider an accusation communicated to you that the CEO, John McCain, of our company *Amalgamated Rose-Colored Boxer Shorts, Inc.*, actually wears **tight white** briefs — in violation of the company pledge. Remember that CEO McCain's innocence or guilt is an important matter.

First, we carefully consider this information. We don't immediately believe it or disbelieve it. We mull it over for a while and let it turn in our minds. We confirm that we heard this outrageous, damaging information correctly. And we don't immediately favor or disfavor the information source. For example, if we dislike CEO McCain, our tendency might be to put more credence in the source that supports our view ("*Tight whites proves I was right — McCain doesn't respect this company, and he's got to go!*"). And we might put less credence in the source that refutes the accusation. So, we neither favor nor discount any initial sources.

2) Biases

Examine all biases you or the sources might have surrounding the communicated information or QAH. The first person who passed on this scurrilous accusation to you was Mike Huckabee, Vice President overseeing the Hue Research Division. We know that Huckabee has long had his eye on the CEO's job. Huckabee has reason to make McCain look bad, even though Huckabee is normally a **straight shooter**. This presents one point against and one point in favor of Huckabee's credibility.

Then, the following day, you heard the same information from Sarah Palin, VP of the Fact-Checking Division. Now, CEO McCain is Palin's mentor; she highly respects McCain. Palin is also known as a **straight shooter**. Sarah Palin has a strong disincentive to make CEO McCain look bad (in addition to her **straight shooter** reputation), which gives her significant positive credibility as a source with damaging information about McCain.

We've assumed all our source information is based on personal **first-hand** knowledge of CEO John McCain's underwear preferences. Palin and Huckabee have either seen McCain's underwear or are lying — or both. But this does bring up **hearsay**. When you add this element, source credibility evaluation becomes exponentially more difficult. When **hearsay** is involved, we must make every effort to rule out sources without **first-hand** information.

One more point concerning bias: our own. Assume the **pro and con** information carry identical levels of credibility, but you dislike CEO McCain for firing your good friend last year. In this case, you must withhold judgment. Ethically and logically, McCain's innocence or guilt must remain an open question.

3) Assumptions

Examine all assumptions you or the sources might have surrounding the communicated information or QAH. Assumptions can be correct, but they can also be misunderstandings based on wrong information. Examine assumptions in light of your communication sources and your own beliefs. Let's say that in evaluating Sarah Palin's

credibility as a source of damaging information about CEO McCain, you assumed that, being McCain's protégé, Palin would not harm his reputation unless her information was absolutely accurate. As you [dig a little deeper](#), however, you find out that Palin has been carrying resentment against her mentor for months because she feels he has taken all the credit and glory for much of her hard work. Palin's credibility factor just dropped two degrees. A little more [digging](#) uncovers the fact that, even though Huckabee covets CEO McCain's job, McCain quietly donated one of his kidneys last year to save the life of Huckabee's 12-year-old son. Huckabee's credibility shoots up. How could Huckabee want falsely to damage McCain's reputation in the company after such generosity?

4) Truth

Maintain a commitment to truth and honesty, and consider the level of this commitment for each communication, information source. Communication goes two ways — or multiple ways in an organization. You will be making ethical decisions about which information to consider and which to discount. Others may be counting on your accurate interpretation and communication of data. If you allow your personal biases, assumptions, and motives to shade your data interpretations, those others will not get the truth; they will only get your shaded version of it.

There is a lot of discussion these days about different *versions* of the truth based upon political/philosophical persuasion and differing [frames of reference](#). These are indeed factors. But we also believe that most everyone is born with an internal honesty compass. And most everyone can feel when their compass is pointing *north*, free of bias/assumption interference, or in some other direction due to the presence of this interference. The "T" in [IBATR](#) simply asks you to ethically, honestly do the best truth-seeking of which you are capable.

Also, consider your individual source and its reputation for commitment to truth. Did the information you're considering appear in a [tabloid](#), on a radio show, or on a news channel with a long history of [truth-slant](#)? Or did it appear in an outlet with a stellar reputation for accuracy, verification of its source information, and prompt correction of its own errors? [You make the call](#) — and add this judgment to your source-evaluation mix.

OK. New development: Huckabee just found out that the guy he saw in the locker room with the tight white briefs was actually *not* CEO McCain but an uncanny look-alike paid by Chairman of the Board George Bush. Apparently, Bush and McCain went to the same junior high school, and Bush still [holds a grudge](#) about losing his girl to McCain. Huckabee passes this correction on to you. You combine this new information with your knowledge about Palin's long-held resentment of her mentor CEO McCain — and the recent discovery that this is not the first time Palin has played [fast and loose](#) with the facts when it suited her goals. (She also resigned as Chairwoman of the Charity Food Drive Committee after serving only half her term.) Sarah Palin's [straight shooter](#) persona appears now to be a facade.

Huckabee proved to be committed to the truth; consequently, his next-in-line status for the CEO position was moot. Huckabee proved to be honest to the best of his ability. If the evidence had gone the other way, even the kidney from McCain for his son would have **carried no weight**. He had to honor his own ethical being and give you the correction: Huckabee was mistaken when he thought he saw CEO McCain wearing **tight-whites** in the locker room.

You know that at the next Board meeting, the members are planning a vote to fire CEO McCain at the urging of Bush and Palin, based on their false evidence. You know this because you are beneficiary of the one board seat reserved for sweepers, instituted to get a **grunts**-eye view of company operations on the shop floor.

5) Response

Carefully draw a conclusion, and formulate a response. And always remember that these might require modification based on new analysis, new communication, or new information-source evaluation. You drew a conclusion based upon your best, honest evaluation of the data. You concluded there was no credible evidence to support the charge that CEO McCain wore **tight white** briefs. There was no basis to believe McCain violated the pledge that all male employees make at *Amalgamated Rose-Colored Boxer Shorts, Inc.*, (from the CEO down to the sweeper) to "**walk the walk, spread the good word, and wear what we produce — rose-colored boxer shorts.**"

Finally, you formulated your response. You attended the ARCBS Board meeting, presented your evidence, and slept really well that night.

These are the five elements of **IBATR**. You will find countless other intricacies involving **IBATR's** application to communication — **critically thoughtful communication**. In the beginning, it may seem tedious consciously to think of each step in the course of your daily communications. But with practice, the habit becomes ingrained. In interpersonal relationships, the effects will be immediately beneficial. At an organizational level, the results can be miraculous. World peace, anyone? It could happen.

PERSUASION AND IBATR

**God grant me,
The serenity to ignore the idiots I cannot change;
The courage to hear opposing opinions I can change;
And the wisdom to know the difference.**

(— apologies to Reinhold Niebuhr)

ETHICS AND IBATR

Ethics “are the standards by which behaviors are evaluated for their morality; their rightness or wrongness. When applied to human communication, ethics are the moral principles that guide our judgments about the good and the bad, right and wrong, of communication.” (Shockley-Zalabak, 2006; as cited in Hamilton, 2008, p. 22).

And **IBATR** is ethics. When you examine yours and the **other guy's** biases while evaluating the communication, you're exhibiting ethics. When you double-check yours and the **other guy's** assumptions about the communication, you're employing ethics. When you make the effort to commit to the truth, in everything that you communicate, you are certainly exhibiting ethics. And your reputation for credibility and trustworthiness will shine because of it.

The easy thing is consistently to take in what you hear and assume it's accurate — especially if the communication **falls in line** with what you already believe. Ethics takes effort — and patience. It's time-consuming not to draw conclusions right away. But regularly drawing quick, ill-considered conclusions results in mistakes, injustice, and the perpetuation of dishonesty.

If it weren't for examining biases and assumptions and respecting the truth, we would not have electricity, automobiles, the Internet, or any other technological marvel. We wouldn't have our imperfect-but-still-the-best-in-the-world justice system, and we would not have any media sources of information we could trust. Assumption, bias, and dishonesty: Bad. Truth and honesty: Good. Passing along assumption, bias, and dishonesty in organizational communications: Bad. Critically thoughtful communication: Good. Got it?

Here are a few bullet points for those ethical gray areas we all encounter, occasionally.

Ethics Quick Test

- Is the action legal?
- Does it comply with our values?
- If you do it, will you feel bad?
- How will it look in the newspaper?
- If you know its wrong, don't do it.
- If you're not sure, ask.
- Keep asking until you get an answer.

(Texas Instruments; as cited in Hamilton, 2008, p. 25)

Ethics Traps

- Trap of necessity – "I really have no choice."
- Trap of relative filth – "I'm not as bad as the other guy."
- Trap of rationalization – There's a "good reason" for the unethical behavior.
- Trap of self-deception – No one will ever find out.
- Trap of the ends justifying the means

(Bell, 1991, p. 68; as cited in Hamilton, 2008, p. 26)

Practical Reasons for Ethics

- If people lose faith in you or your company, failure is inevitable.
- People prefer dealing with honest people, and they prefer ethical employers.
- Unethical behavior weighs heavily on your conscience. (*"Doesn't it?"*)

(Hamilton, 2008, p. 27)

INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION AND IBATR

Communication Model

Communication education circles often refer to a *communication model*. There are nine components to the theoretical *communication model*. It all starts with at least two entities, a sender and a receiver, who will likely be switching roles back and forth. ***Then the message is affected by the following components of the model:***

- **stimulus and motivation** – Sender must be stimulated to send a message (by internal or external stimulus), as well as be motivated.
- **encoding and decoding** – **Encoding** is the process of choosing the form in which the message will be sent, e.g., simple, complicated, verbal, written, humorous, formal, etc. **Decoding** is the interpretation of the message by the receiver in order to most accurately understand what the sender meant. Besides reading or hearing the words, the receiver's interpretation includes reading the sender's mood, format, body language, etc.
- **frame of reference** – This consists of the sender's/receiver's background and experience, education, race, culture, gender, life experiences, attitudes, and personality. There are no identical **frames of reference**. Double-check messages by using or asking for paraphrased versions.
- **code** – The symbols that carry the message, e.g., language (verbal code: spoken or written words), paralinguistic (vocal code: tone of voice, pitch, rate, volume, emphasis, etc.), and nonverbal cues (visual code: body language, eye contact, appearance, office size and location, promptness, etc.) make up the code. If any of the codes carry conflicting messages, people will generally believe more of what they see than what they hear. Marvin Gaye had it right: "People say believe half of what you see, and none of what you hear" (Whitfield & Strong, 1966).
- **channel** – This is the medium or format used to carry the message to the receiver, e.g., face-to-face, telephone, memo, e-mail, instant message, blog, newsletter, magazine, radio, television, primer, etc. Channel richness is the extent of information sent through the channel. Factors in selecting a channel include message importance, receiver's needs and abilities, feedback amount and speed required, permanent record necessity, cost of channel, formality level, etc.
- **feedback** – The visual and verbal communication by which a receiver responds to a sender's message, e.g., questions, comments, paraphrasing of message, eye contact, smiling, frowning, snoring, etc., is called feedback. Some advantages of feedback are that it improves accuracy and productivity (for individuals and groups) and increases employee job

satisfaction. Some disadvantages of feedback are that it can cause people to feel under attack psychologically, it can be time-consuming, and it can be difficult to elicit.

- **environment** – This is the social and physical surroundings (place, time, etc.) in which a message is communicated. The prevailing atmosphere and attitudes (the work and social environment) of the organizational members determine the **climate**.
- **noise** – Anything that inhibits or impedes communication by blocking the message or distorting it is noise. This includes the external noise of a poor speaker, insufficient or uncomfortable lighting, papers shuffling, ringing telephones, other conversations, uncomfortable room temperature, etc. It also includes the internal noise of sender/receiver conditions like illness, attention deficit, fatigue, thoughts of other problems, lack of topic knowledge, etc.

(Hamilton, 2008, pp. 6-21)

You can see that there is more to communicating than simply one person talking to another. And there is a myriad of ways that a message can be distorted between the point from which it is sent and the point at which it is received. There are two primary factors we want you to remember about the communication model: 1) each component affects the quality and accuracy of the message; and 2) without the **IBATR** treatment, each component can potentially distort the message even more — which is what a dishonest message sender might want.

Make your best ethical attempt to ensure that your encoding will result in an accurate decoding by your receiver. Consider your receiver's frame of reference, and do not, intentionally or inadvertently, manipulate your message to be misunderstood. Make sure the channel fits the message; don't send a *Dear John* message by e-mail. And consider the effect of the environment and noise on the accuracy of your message. Any of these factors can be manipulated intentionally to distort information. Assumptions, biases, and honesty all play into every aspect of the communication model. That's why it is so ethically important to treat the flow of information with respect.

Listening

There has been much said and written about the art of listening over the years. Let us try to give you something new. For maximum comprehension, it's important to know the steps of the process. ***There are five stages of listening:***

- **sensing stage** – *We hear what is important.* This is the stage at which our mind decides what stimuli to give attention to and what stimuli to ignore. Once it decides, the mind then works to overcome **environmental noise**.
- **interpreting stage** – *We assign meaning to what we see, hear, or feel.* In this

stage, we are attempting to **decode** what the incoming information really means. It's at this stage that **attribution theory** explains a common fundamental error: the tendency to overestimate the role of a person's character and underestimate the role that the situation has on behavior, i.e., we usually assume that the things that happen to people are a result of something they did. According to **attribution theory**, we 1) perceive an action, 2) judge the intent of that action, and 3) attribute a reason for that action. But our judgment of the intent is often erroneous (Hamilton, 2008, p. 117).

- **evaluating stage** – *We determine the speaker's credibility and the importance of the message.* Here we begin to think about the message and make more extensive inferences. We are evaluating the speaker's qualifications and the message's accuracy and relevance. A common problem here is that our attitudes toward that speaker often influence our evaluations of her message; therefore, the importance of examining biases and assumptions comes up again.

It's also important to remember that when you speak, others are evaluating you, too. Your words (**language code**), the quality of your speaking voice (**paralanguage code**), and your body language (**nonverbal code**) all affect the accuracy and effectiveness of your message.

- **responding stage** – *We react to speech, usually through nonverbal cues.* After sensing, interpreting, and evaluating the speaker and her ideas, we are ready to respond with verbal feedback, facial expressions, or other body language — or not.
- **memory stage** – *We retain certain parts of the message in our long-term memory.* It's at this stage that we decide which parts of the message to retain and then attempt to store them. Unfortunately, a listener generally remembers only about 10-25% of a presentation after a day, week, or month. The problem is in the transfer of information from short-term to long-term memory. Our short-term memory can only hold about seven bits of information at a time, give or take two bits. Once the short-term buffer gets full, there's no room for additional information.

The **up-side** is that there are methods a speaker can use to improve comprehension in her listeners: 1) present the information in an organized presentation; 2) deliver the information effectively (speaking skills); 3) gently repeat the most important information; 4) frame information so that it relates to the listeners' backgrounds; and 5) use professional-looking visual aids to accompany the talk.

(Hamilton, 2008, pp. 116-120)

As you can see, there is plenty of room for biases and assumptions to **muddy up** the listening stages and cause distortions and inaccuracies. In the interpreting and evaluating stages, the listener is **sizing up** the speaker to judge the importance and veracity of the message. Our bias might be that Kathleen (or women in general) should not be in the work force. We might assume someone forced Bob Jones to give this talk. Either of these factors will likely contribute to discounting Kathleen's presentation on opening up the company's organizational **system** or Jones' talk that he doesn't even want to give. And either result would be an unethical distortion of the message on our part.

Nonverbal Communication

We have touched on this subject slightly. **Nonverbal communication** consists of our facial expressions (eye contact, smiling, and frowning), body language (posture, movements, and gestures), **paralanguage** characteristics (vocal tone, pitch, rate, and emphasis), and even our dress and the characteristics of our office. All of these things help to carry our message. If there is a discrepancy between our words and our nonverbal signs, the visuals usually carry the most weight. For example, if your boss says she's doing fine and feeling good, but her posture is uncharacteristically slouched, her walk is more of a shuffle, her voice is unusually soft, and her normally permanent smile is absent — Which message is the accurate one? If you guessed that her dog just died or something of that nature, you're probably right.

In any event, be honest with your nonverbal as well as your verbal communication. And watch out for your internal assumption that you know what other people's nonverbal signs mean. Just as we often understand certain words or phrases differently from the guys in the Tech Department — even without cultural differences — so, too, can we interpret the same facial expression differently than Carol in Accounting. Tolerance and open-mindedness are **key** — to these differences and so many others (Hamilton, 2008, pp. 127-135).

Relationship Building

We've all heard about the importance of networking and that it's not *what* you know but *whom* you know. But it goes so much deeper than that. A company builds its entire functioning upon the interpersonal and inter-group relationships that make up the larger organizational **system**. Relationships lie at the core of organizational communication. And consistent with the theme of this primer, if the relationships are not built on ethical, honest interaction and accurate communication, the organization suffers.

Relationships are built on mutual expectations, which develop gradually. Relationships are also built on honesty and trust — or the lack of those. Either scenario reflects that what you put into it is what you get out of it. Each time an expectation is not met (you're late for dinner again, or you withheld important information again), the relationship is strained further. Either the parties are not making expectations clear to each other, or one party is simply not meeting them. After enough unmet expectations, the relationship

either ends or devolves into a near-valueless relationship with no expectations ever made on each other. Why bother?

Relationships have a reciprocal nature. As they grow, they gradually elicit interpersonal cooperation and trust. If the levels of reciprocated expectations — cooperation and trust — grow, the relationship strengthens. This principle applies whether you've known your personal or professional friend for 6 months or 20 years. And the strength of the relationship is directly proportional to the level of reciprocated expectations.

Relationships also exist that are not actual friendships. The quality of these is still commensurate with the levels of mutual interpersonal cooperation and trust. One facet of trust is that we must be able generally to give everyone the *benefit of the doubt*, at least in the beginning. Time will tell whether it was warranted. But those who have trouble with that notion — *benefit of the doubt* — will also have more trouble developing trusting relationships from *scratch*. Everyone needs some leeway to make mistakes. In fact, this could serve as an early, unconscious test of one's ability to trust.

It always comes back to *IBATR*. If we can't reign in our ethnic biases, we might never have gotten to know that *cool* Caucasian guy in the Maintenance Department. If Smith had held onto his assumption that Carol in Accounting would never go for a guy who works with his hands, they might never have spent their lives together in matrimonial bliss. Finally, if we are half-honest, that is the type of relationship we will attract. If we can't trust the other party to be truthful and accurate in their communication with us, we'll probably discount that relationship — whether it be between coworkers, friends, husband and wife, employee and boss, union and management, or the United States and Iran (Hamilton, 2008, pp. 68-72).

SMALL GROUP COMMUNICATION AND IBATR

The nature of corporate work in the 21st century is continuously moving toward small group work. As many companies have learned, despite the traditional disadvantages and many individuals' general aversion to it, a small group's productive value is often greater than the sum of its parts. It is important, therefore, to understand some basic principles of effective group relationships and how these lie on the foundation of IBATR. When the boss says you have to work in a group, you can either fight it and sulk in your own lowered job satisfaction, or you can [go with the flow](#), show the company why they hired you, and do the best small group work that you can.

In the previous section, *Interpersonal Communication and IBATR*, we covered many of the fundamental principles for relationship-building and individual human interaction. Now we will discuss building on those principles and adapting them for small group interaction and task accomplishment.

One important aspect of group membership and relationships is something called [symbolic convergence theory](#) — a fancy name for the development of camaraderie, pride, and motivation that small groups hope to engender to improve their functioning and efficiency. A point to remember here is that there can also be too much of a good thing. Generally, camaraderie, pride, and motivation are positive traits that lead to good work and member satisfaction. The 2010 Canadian Olympic hockey team exemplifies these traits at their finest. But taken to an extreme, these characteristics can lead to group arrogance, [groupthink](#), and a [closed organizational system](#) (Lumsden & Cragan, 2006, pp. 42-44).

[Groupthink](#) is the characteristic single-minded or *mindlessness* thinking that excludes everything except what the group assumes or wants to be true. (Some of you may recognize this as the definition of *truthiness*, a word coined by Stephen Colbert.) Arrogance or fear can cause it, but either way, it leads to a [closed system](#), i.e., a system that no longer interacts with its environment or receives outside feedback. A [groupthink](#), [closed system](#) has lost its healthy sense of perspective, which leads to disastrous decisions. The Nixon White House exemplified these traits at their worst (Lumsden & Cragan, 2006, p. 235; Eisenberg, Goodall, & Trethewey, 2007, p. 107).

You may have heard of the four stages of group functioning summed up as [forming](#), [storming](#), [norming](#), and [performing](#). We're going to expound on those briefly. We'll also use the terms [transactional processes](#) to describe the relationship-development stages and [task processes](#) to describe the actual work performed in the course of task completion. ***The following stages illustrate the theory of small group decision-making/problem-solving theory.***

Stage 1: Orientation to Task and Primary Tension from Role Development ([forming](#))

This obviously comes at the beginning of the process. The group members are getting together for the first few times and are getting to know each other. This is also known as **transactional processes**. It's a little awkward. You're meeting new, potential friends and working partners. The group is figuring out how they're going to begin the project. Relationships and alliances begin and gradually develop. Though this stage's importance is often discounted, relationship-building is extremely important. Later on, it will be the strength of the relationships that guides the path of decision-making and problem-solving. And it will be the strengths or weaknesses of the relationships that determine the group's successful navigation through the inevitable tensions and disagreements to come.

Stage 2: Conflict (task) and Secondary Tension (role) (*storming*)

This is the most complex and difficult stage. The group is deciding, overtly or covertly, who is going to be the leader (unless one was appointed) and who is going to get coffee. (If you're usually the coffee person, it's time you asserted yourself.) During the course of competing for leadership and other roles, tensions will flare, a little or a lot. Someone will assume the role of tension-easer by acting as the funny man or woman. At this stage, ideas are suggested, accepted, and rejected. Members are apprehensive about where they will end up in the hierarchy, the social circle, and the workload.

It's important to point out here that the **IBATR's** of the group are in the best position to lead and set the tone for quality work. Trustworthiness and credibility **carry a lot of weight**. Additionally, there are aspects of leadership to go around for everyone who is qualified. Of course, there will end up just one *official* leader, appointed or anointed. But if she is an **IBATR**, she will welcome the leadership assistance and role-modeling of the other qualified group members. If she does not adhere to the tenants of **critically thoughtful communication**, the auxiliary leadership of the members who do will be that much more valuable and necessary to overcome the biases, assumptions, and rigidity of the official leader.

Stage 3: Emergence (task) and Recurring Primary and Secondary Tension (role) (*norming*)

Initially, there will be some bouncing between Stages 2 and 3. Actually, there might be some bouncing between any of the stages at any time. There will be a certain amount of repeated primary and secondary tension, causing some delays and disruptions. The thing that will get a healthy group through the inevitable recurring tensions, though, is the strength of the relationship-building that should have occurred in Stage 1. If it didn't, groups will find themselves needing to revisit Stage 1. If they try to bypass it again, it will be at the expense of their ultimate productivity.

As we've seen, tensions and disputes are inevitable. But it is how well the members deal with them that determines their ability to succeed in their task. If the group is functional and it properly attended to relationships, the **norming** can take place. **Norming** is that desirable stage of a small workgroup's progression in which members are getting

along and accomplishing work on the project. The quality of the **norming** stage is directly proportional to the quality of the previous relationship-building and the shared leadership.

Stage 4: Reinforcement (task) (*performing*)

Stage Four is the **end of the road** for a small workgroup. They now have to finalize the solution, decision, or project that brought them together. A little more tension may arise in the process of attaining that goal. It often happens that a bare majority wins out in the end, but Stage 4 should also focus on building a consensus. This promotes a greater sense of job satisfaction in all members, a solidifying of relationships for the future, and a generally higher quality final project.

Relationships forged in workgroups are often long-lasting and productive. The one's forged on the principles of bias control, communicational honesty and truthfulness, and trust and credibility will be the most satisfying.

(Lumsden & Cragan, 2006, pp. 30-36)

CONFLICT-RESOLUTION AND IBATR

Conflict. You can't live with it, and you can't live without it. For all its inevitability, some people are still surprised when conflict occurs. And many people still don't know what to do with it. The first thing to remember is, again, it's inevitable. Conflict is not inherently unhealthy or a sign of a weak relationship. The way it is *handled*, however, could indicate an unhealthy or weak relationship.

Two Conflict Types

- **affective (feelings)-type conflict** – sidetracks the individual or team from the issues; creates defensiveness and anger
- **cognitive (reasoning, logic)-type conflict** – improves team productivity and individual relationships; creates feeling of satisfaction

(Hamilton, 2008, p. 89)

Now, Which one of these conflict types is consistent with the principles of **IBATR** and **critically thoughtful communication**? Don't you *dare* say **affective-type**!

Lens Model of Conflict

A conflict perspective that makes sense to us is Wilmot & Hocker's *Lens Model of Conflict*. This model states that there are two fundamental aspects of conflict: communication behaviors and the mutual perceptions of those behaviors. During an argument, each party views the interaction as if through a lens, in terms of himself, the other person, and their relationship. **The features or elements that drive the conflict are,**

- **communicative acts (behaviors) of each person**
- **meanings (attributions) attached to those acts by each person**, consisting of 1) each person's view of self, and 2) each person's view of the other
- **meanings (attributions) the two people ascribe to their relationship**, consisting of 1) past events, 2) current events, and 3) future projections

(Wilmot & Hocker, 2007, p. 49)

Here's the kicker:

- We use different lenses for viewing ourselves than we do for viewing others.
- We tend to attribute negative effects to the other person rather than to ourselves.
- As conflict stress increases, our blaming of the other person(s) increases.
- We begin with an attribution of blame, then choose our next conflict move based on our perception that the other party is at fault.

- We attribute our successes to our own efforts, and blame our failures on external factors.
- Finally, the other party does the same thing.

(Wilmot & Hocker, 2007, pp. 49-51)

Essentially, what is happening is that an event occurs: our argument or disagreement. In reality, that event is what it is. However, you see it through your *lens*, which distorts the event one way, and I see it through my *lens*, which distorts it in a different way. We've both seen the exact same event, but our perspectives are often *miles apart*. So, if we both base our next moves on our unique perspectives, we grow further apart because our unique perspective almost always includes the view that you are wrong, and I am right (Wilmot & Hocker, 2007, pp. 49-51).

TRIP Conflict Goals

There is one more acronymic model of conflict we'd like to show you. *Hang in there. This has to do with the following goals, implicit and explicit, that each party is trying to achieve in a conflict.*

- **topic** – *Conflicting parties either want different things or they want the same thing, of which only one can have.*
- **relationship** – *Who are we in this relationship to each other?* This goal defines how each party wants to be treated by the other and how much interdependence they desire. Much of the communication regarding relationship goals remains unspoken. Most people argue content when they should be arguing relational issues. Relational goals are at the core of all conflicts, yet they are hard to identify from the outside (and from within).

It is helpful to have conflict parties share relational translations of the content issues. "Relational goals are often reactive. What I want from you is the result of what I think you think about me. . . . Every statement carries a relational message. We each translate or interpret relational messages differently. Relational interests carry more urgency than topic interests do. Our relational interests are triggered in reaction to the others' behavior" (Wilmot & Hocker, 2007, pp. 68-69).

- **identity/facework** – *What is my value in this interaction? How may I protect or repair my self-identity in this conflict?* As conflict intensity increases, face-saving goals increase. Often a particularly frustrating argument can make sense if viewed as one party trying to put forth a positive face — by claiming her need for approval, inclusion, and respect.

When face-saving becomes an issue, people are less flexible and more emotionally destructive. They may totally overwhelm the identified issues

and drastically increase the costs of conflict-resolution. As the dispute progresses, the parties generally try to protect their own face while damaging the others'. But solving a conflict by damaging the other party's sense of dignity and worth never works in the end.

signs of face-saving attempts

- one party claims unfair intimidation (topic issues become secondary)
- one party refuses to back off from a position (even if they no longer feel strongly about it)
- one party suppresses conflict issues or refuses to acknowledge conflict existence

ways to increase problem-solving and flexibility

- help your partner or opponent to increase their sense of self-worth
 - avoid giving orders
 - be a good listener and try to empathize with others' concerns
 - ask questions to clarify, so the other party can analyze her goals
- **process** – *What communication process will we use? What process would work best?* Quick, structured processes help initial conflict-resolution but may inhibit creativity and solution innovation. Longer, less clear processes that include reflection and evaluation improve the likelihood of creative solutions.

(Wilmot & Hocker, 2007, pp. 63-75)

Again, there is so much fertile ground for the application of **IBATR** and critically thoughtful communication to conflict. The very nature of the **lens model of conflict** is that both parties have a biased view of the conflict — they both think their conflict behavior is appropriate and mature, and they both view the other party as being at fault. "We use different lenses for viewing ourselves than we do for viewing others." Herein lies the direct connection to **IBATR**: biased favoritism of our own methods, the assumption that we're doing everything right and vice versa, and the clear breakdown of our own honest view of the situation due to the emotional pull of conflict. As difficult as it is, we must catch ourselves in the midst of conflict and reign in our prejudiced view of it.

Regarding the **TRIP** goals of conflict, clearly, the **face-saving (identity/facework)** aspect plays a large role. We're being disingenuous if we become astute enough to identify the other party's **face-saving** needs and attempts, but we ignore those and proceed only with issue (or *topic*) goals.

CULTURAL/ETHNIC DIFFERENCES AND IBATR

We would be remiss in this era of increasing [globalization](#) and cross-cultural industries and businesses if we did not address some key differences in various cultures' [frames of reference](#). Perhaps you already know that giving the "OK" sign (thumb and first finger forming a circle, remaining three fingers extended) in Columbia or Brazil does not mean the same thing it does in the United States. Maybe you already know that in Columbia the "OK" sign means — well, let's just say the signer must not think very highly of himself.

Two broad categories of differing cultural [frames of reference](#) are [individualistic/low-context cultures](#) and [collectivistic/high-context cultures](#).

Two Dimensions

- **individualistic/low-context cultures** (e.g., U.S., Australia, Great Britain, Canada, Netherlands, New Zealand, Italy)
 - individual-oriented
 - problem-oriented
 - values autonomy
 - democratic decision-making
 - prefers competition
 - freely open to conflict for settling disputes
 - communication is clear, direct, and explicit
 - speaker has responsibility for clear meaning

 - **collectivistic/high-context cultures** (e.g., Asia, Japan, Venezuela, Columbia, Pakistan, Peru, Taiwan, Thailand, Chile)
 - group-oriented
 - relationship-oriented
 - values empathy and listening
 - prefers avoiding and accommodating to conflict
 - communication is vague, indirect, and implicit
 - difficulty giving or receiving a "No"
 - values [face-saving](#)
 - listener has responsibility for inferring meaning
- (Hamilton, 2008, pp. 95-97)

These are not all-inclusive guidelines. It pays to do a little research if you know you will be working with members of other cultures. But a little knowledge of the general cultural differences in orientation can go a long way in smoothing working relationships and conflicts.

Bradford “J” Hall Tips for Easing Inter-Cultural Conflict

- Realize that there is more than one reasonable position in a conflict.
- Look for the *trigger* to conflict (*buttons* that exacerbate conflict into the open).
- Use storytelling as a way to discuss conflict when direct approach is undesirable.
- Use neutral 3rd party to mediate serious conflicts.

(Hamilton, 2008, p. 97)

Differing Attitudes About Time

- **monochronic (M-time) cultures** (e.g., U.S., Switzerland, Germany)
 - low context/individualistic cultures
 - time is a scarce resource which must be rationed and controlled through schedules and appointments
 - saving time is good, wasting time is bad
- **polychronic (P-time) cultures** (e.g., Arabic, Asian, Latin American countries)
 - high context/collectivistic cultures
 - time is subordinate to maintenance of harmonious relationships
 - time needs to be flexible to do right by people with whom we have obligations
 - saving time is not as important

(Hamilton, 2008, p. 142)

Nonverbal Communication

There are too many variances in cultural meanings of nonverbal communication to list them here. The point to remember is that you must be aware of the sender's personal *frame of reference*, cultural background, and specific situation. This will probably require a little individual research. And if you haven't had a chance to do the research, when in doubt, don't jump to any conclusions about the sender's meaning. And refrain from any nonverbal gestures with culturally unclear meanings.

Here's an example: Nodding your head means the following in each country:

- U.S. = agreement
- Japan = only that message was received
- Bulgaria = disagreement

(Hamilton, 2008, p. 127)

Slang/Colloquialisms

This one is relatively simple, although many of us will be surprised at how many “*Americanisms*” we use that pass as *normal* English in our minds. We found this out

when we were compiling the glossary of words, terms, and **Americanisms**. The general rule when communicating with members of other cultures is either don't use **Americanisms**, or be conscious of explaining and defining them when you do. Use your best judgment. Some members of other cultures might find your usage and explanations of **Americanisms** interesting, humorous, and even educational. This could even create a relationship-building effect. Others might find them tedious. Above all, stay away from *blue* or *off-color*, potentially offending **Americanisms**. Always err on the side of caution. If you're not sure how a term might be interpreted, don't use it. Or as they say in the music performance business: "**When in doubt, lay out.**"

RESEARCH/INFORMATION-GATHERING AND IBATR

In the course of your work here at DCHM and in your personal life, you'll be asked at some time to gather information — research — either formally or informally. The concepts of **IBATR** and **critically thoughtful communication** apply to this kind of information just as much as any other communication in which you might be involved. Indeed, once you complete the research, you'll probably be passing it on to someone. Therefore, the principles of examining biases, assumptions, and credibility levels remain imperative. This is but one more aspect of the systematic effect that **critically thoughtful communication** has on the organization.

Treat research the same as any other information that goes through IBATR.

- **information** – carefully consider
- **assumptions** – examine your sources' and your own
- **biases** – examine your sources' and your own
- **commitment to truthfulness** – make it and evaluate your sources'
- **response** – formulate one after carefully drawing a conclusion

Research Methods

- **library**
- **interviews**
- **television**
- **Internet - originally printed credible sources**
- **Internet - academic sites**
- **Internet - all other sources**

In today's technologically innovative age, many new sources of research data have opened up to us, primarily on the Internet. But just like television, newspapers, or magazines, there is often a large amount of manure to sift through before you find the **pony**, i.e., high-quality, accurate information. Unfortunately, the **cream** does not **always rise to the top** of the Internet. The point is, research from almost any source can be useful if run through the steps of **IBATR**.

Here are two more bullet-pointed, acronymic lists that are helpful in separating the believable from the incredible, the fact from the fantasy, and the credible from the un-credible.

CAFÉ Checklist – for Processing Information

- **challenge** information and demand accountability

- **adapt** your skepticism and requirements for quality to fit the importance of the information and what is being claimed
- **file** new information in your mind rather than immediately believing or disbelieving it
- **evaluate** and re-evaluate regularly

(Harris, 2007)

CARS Checklist – for Information/Research Source Evaluation

- **credibility** – trustworthy source, author's credibility, evidence of quality control
- **accuracy** – up-to-date, factual, detailed, exact, comprehensive
- **reasonableness** – fair, balanced, objective, reasoned, no conflict of interest
- **support** – listed sources, contact information, available corroboration, claims supported

(Harris, 2007)

Here's one last point about research: For those of you who might want further information on any of the topics addressed in this primer, please seek out the sources in the reference list at the end. Much research was completed during the writing of this document, and it could not all be included. If you have additional interest in any one topic, see the in-text citation or peruse the reference list source titles.

COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY AND IBATR

We won't spend too much time on this subject because we know most of you are already proficient, or, at least, familiar with most new forms of communication. What we do want to **touch on** is the human side of technology. First, sometimes restraint is the key to influence, power, and innovation. It's the old "too much of a good thing can be bad" concept. Corporate employees now spend an inordinate amount of time sending and answering e-mail. And much of that is useless or redundant. Be conscious of this and make it a productive habit to look for ways to minimize time spent at your **in-box**.

Second, **IBATR** applies equally to electronic communication — maybe even more so than face-to-face information exchange. Electronic communication can be more prone to misunderstanding and misinterpretation because the instant ability to correct a faulty **decoding** is not there. By the time a clarification is made, that original e-mail, voicemail, IM (instant message), or video could already be sitting in many — perhaps thousands of — other **in-boxes**. It's more important than ever to carefully consider the information you have received. Clarify if necessary before responding. Examine the sender's and receiver's (your) biases and assumptions, and evaluate the sender's and receiver's commitment to the truth. In the response phase, consider not only how to respond, but also to whom. Does everybody in your department really need to know that you think Jones is a plant from the *Washington Post*? The response phase includes **scenario thinking**. Consider the possible contingencies of your response, and consider minimizing its scope whenever possible.

Third, **critically thoughtful electronic communication** should always, always factor in the **Golden Rule**. How are you responding and to whom? Is this how you would want it if you were the subject of the response? It's so simple, yet **Golden Rule** consideration is so often neglected. Also important is choosing the best **communication channel** to transfer the information. Would you want to be fired from your job or **dumped** by your girlfriend through an e-mail, text, or IM? Would you want your valuable time wasted with a scheduled face-to-face group meeting, only to hear an announcement that the company gym's hours have changed? The **Golden Rule**. If the message is emotional or delicate, see the person in-person. Don't hide behind e-mail or voicemail just because you can. There is an inherent ethic in choosing the proper **communication channel** based on the required sensitivity and efficiency of the message.

Finally, treat every electronic communication as if it will someday be on the front page of *The New York Times*. Not that any of us at DCHM would snoop on our people. But any electronic communication can go public, across the globe, at any time. Just ask **Kwame Kilpatrick**. Just ask **Tiger Woods**. Just ask the second Bush Administration who thought they had "taken care of" all those internal e-mails discussing torture — *I mean*, enhanced interrogation techniques.

COMPLETING THE CIRCLE – THE IBATR CORPORATE CULTURE

There you have it. If you remember nothing else, **IBATR**: Carefully consider the **information** you are about to respond to. Examine the **biases** and **assumptions** surrounding this information, in your sources and within yourself. Maintain a commitment to the **truth**, to the best of your ability. Then decide on a measured **response**, if any, to the communicated information that you originally received. Apply this procedure to everything from your relationship with your spouse to your relationship with your organization. Yeah, it's a little tedious at first. But in a short time, it will become **second nature**. And you, your credibility, your relationships, and your organization will be much better for it.

Now go out there, assimilate into the DCHM organizational culture of **IBATR** and **critically thoughtful communication**, and bring us world peace — or, at least, good job performance.

Think Critically to Communicate for Success

New Employee Organizational Communication Primer

GLOSSARY

(Words in dark blue refer to terms and "Americanisms" defined in glossary)

3 R's, 2 C's, and a T – [SEE "three R's, two C's, and a T"]

Americanism – American colloquialism or slang

above and beyond the call of duty – [an "Americanism"] phrase meaning to do considerably more than is expected in a given situation

affective – having to do with feelings or mood

attribution theory – According to **attribution theory**, we 1) perceive an action, 2) judge the intent of that action, and 3) attribute a reason for that action. But our judgment of the intent is often erroneous. A common fundamental error is the tendency to overestimate the role of a person's character and underestimate the role that the situation has on behavior, i.e., we usually assume that the things that happen to people are a result of something they did (Hamilton, 2008, p. 117).

back up – [an "Americanism"] phrase meaning angry; defensive; prepared to argue; prepared to fight; prompted to be vigilantly defensive

backtracking – [an "Americanism"] verb meaning to reverse course by undoing procedural steps taken or rhetorically reversing one's opinion or position on an issue

benefit of the doubt – [an "Americanism"] noun phrase meaning that when unsure of a person's honesty, veracity, dependability, etc., we err on the side of a positive evaluation

big on – [an "Americanism"] phrase meaning drawn to; liking something

blind communication style – characterized by a high amount of disclosure (personal or work-related) and a low amount of feedback-seeking; These people are often seen as critical, demanding, impatient, and outspoken; one of Hamilton's four personal *communication styles* (Hamilton, 2008, p. 76)

blue – [an "Americanism"] adjective meaning profane; offensive; the use of cursing, swearing, profanity, etc.; comedians who want to appeal to a large audience are often advised to "don't work blue, Kid"

boxer shorts – [an "Americanism"] noun meaning loose-fitting mens underwear

"But never, EVER, dispute your acronym's word when the two of you are with friends." – a humorous reference to common advice given to men regarding how to properly treat their wife or girlfriend

CAFÉ Checklist – acronym for Harris' points to consider when researching or acquiring new information: 1) *challenge* (information and demand accountability); 2) *adapt* (your skepticism and requirements for quality to fit the importance of the information and what is being claimed); 3) *file* (new information in your mind rather than immediately believing or disbelieving it); and 4) *evaluate* (and re-evaluate regularly) (Harris, 2007)

CARS Checklist – acronym for Harris' points to consider about research sources: 1)

- credibility* (trustworthy source, author's credibility, evidence of quality control); 2) *accuracy* (up-to-date, factual, detailed, exact, comprehensive); 3) *reasonableness* (fair, balanced, objective, reasoned, no conflict of interest); and 4) *support* (listed sources, contact information, available corroboration, claims supported) (Harris, 2007)
- can** – [an "Americanism"] verb meaning to fire or dismiss someone from their job
- carries a grudge** – [an "Americanism"] [SEE "holds a grudge"]
- carry weight** – [an "Americanism"] phrase meaning level of credibility or level of influence
- channel** – the medium or format used to carry the message to the receiver, e.g., face-to-face, telephone, memo, e-mail, instant message, blog, newsletter, magazine, radio, television, primer, etc.; Channel richness is the extent of information that can be sent through the channel. Factors for selecting a channel include message importance, receiver's needs and abilities, feedback amount and speed required, permanent record necessity, cost of channel, formality level, etc.; one element in Hamilton's *communication model* (Hamilton, 2008, pp. 13-16)
- chip in** – [an "Americanism"] verb phrase meaning to contribute one's share; to do one's part; to volunteer one's time, money, or resources
- climate** – is determined by the prevailing atmosphere and attitudes (the work and social environment) of the organizational members.; one element in Hamilton's *communication model* (Hamilton, 2008, p. 21)
- closed communication style** – characterized by a low amount of disclosure (personal or work-related) and a low amount of feedback-seeking; These people often have difficulty making decisions, speaking up, and maintaining relationships; one of Hamilton's four personal *communication styles* (Hamilton, 2008, p. 74)
- closed organizational system** – a system that does not interact with its environment and the outside world; it results in *groupthink*, distorted view of *norms*, lack of feedback, lack of perspective, and poor decision-making
- code** – the symbols that carry the message, e.g., language (verbal code: spoken or written words), paralinguistic (vocal code: tone of voice, pitch, rate, volume, emphasis, etc.), and nonverbal cues (visual code: body language, eye contact, appearance, office size and location, promptness, etc.); If any of the codes carry conflicting messages, people will generally believe more of what they see than what they hear.; one element in Hamilton's *communication model* (Hamilton, 2008, p. 12)
- cognitive** – having to do with thinking, logic, and reason
- cool** – [an "Americanism"] adjective meaning interesting, desirable, acceptable, good, exceptional, etc.
- collectivistic culture** – culture that is oriented more toward the group and toward relationship-maintenance; high value on empathy and listening; prefers avoidance and accommodation; usually associated with *high-context cultures* (Hamilton, 2008, pp. 95-96)
- communication** – "The process of people sharing thoughts, ideas, and feelings with each other in commonly understandable ways" (Hamilton, 2008, p. 5).
- communication model** – a view of communication broken down into its component

parts: sender/receiver, stimulation and motivation, encoding and decoding, frames of reference, code, channel, feedback, environment, and noise (Hamilton, 2008, p. 6)

communication styles – four general styles of communication that incorporate varying levels of self-disclosure (personal or work-related) and feedback-seeking; These are not intended for stereotyping people but as a practical method of understanding our own, and others', **frames of reference** (Hamilton, 2008, pp. 70-89)

“Compliment it now and then on a new outfit.” – a humorous reference to common advice given to men regarding how to properly treat women

con – [SEE “pro and con”]

concertive control – organizational members act as a team with a shared organizational vision and an understanding of their own contribution to that vision

cons – [SEE “pros and cons”]

consciousness raising – [SEE “symbolic convergence theory (SCT)”]

corporate culture – [SEE “organizational culture”]

corporate identity – the manner in which the outside community and the organization's members view the company; Generally based on its **corporate culture**, it's important that the outside view of a company's identity and the view from within are consistent.

cream always rises to the top – [an “Americanism”] phrase meaning the best part of something will always eventually show itself; the saying comes from the milk production days before homogenization, when the cream would literally rise to the top of a container of milk that had sat for a period of time

critical thinking – "The careful, deliberate, skilled, active interpretation and evaluation of [the veracity, bias, and fairness of] observations, communications, information, and argumentation" (Fisher & Scriven, 1997, p. 20; Moore & Parker, 2007, p. unknown).

critically thoughtful communication – communication that consistently incorporates the principles of **critical thinking** — especially the components of **IBATR** — which best promotes the ethical, accurate transfer of information

Dear John letter – [an “Americanism”] noun phrase meaning message or letter sent to break off a romantic relationship

decoding – **Decoding** is the interpretation of the message by the receiver in order to most accurately understand what the sender meant; Besides reading or hearing the words, this interpretation includes reading the sender's mood, format, body language, etc.; one element in Hamilton's **communication model** (Hamilton, 2008, p. 7)

dig – [an “Americanism”] verb meaning to investigate; to find out information

dig a little deeper – [an “Americanism”] verb phrase meaning to investigate a little more

dumped – [an “Americanism”] past tense of verb, *dump*, which means to end a romantic relationship, often in an abrupt manner

EASL – an acronym meaning “English as a second language”

encoding – **Encoding** is the process of choosing the form in which the message will be sent, e.g., simple, complicated, verbal, written, humorous, formal, etc.; one element in Hamilton's **communication model** (Hamilton, 2008, p. 7)

end of the road – [an “Americanism”] noun phrase meaning the end; all through; finished

environment – the social and physical surroundings, place, time, etc., in which a message is communicated; *Climate* is determined by the prevailing atmosphere and attitudes (the work and social environment) of the organizational members.; one element in Hamilton's *communication model* (Hamilton, 2008, p. 21)

environmental noise – [SEE "noise"]

environmental stewardship – the level of concern a company exhibits toward its impact on the earth's environment; Ideally, the concern is backed up by effort toward minimizing waste, maximizing efficiency in the use of earthly resources, and ensuring that limited or zero new environmental damage is done in the course of doing business.

ethics – "The standards by which behaviors are evaluated for their morality; their rightness or wrongness. When applied to human communication, ethics are the moral principles that guide our judgments about the good and the bad, right and wrong, of communication . . ." (Shockley-Zalabak, 2006; as cited in Hamilton, 2008, p. 22)

face-saving – the attempts to preserve one's dignity and respect, usually in the course of a disagreement, argument, or other conflict; Often conflicts devolve from disputes about a concrete topic to tacit, unspoken attempts to save our own *face* at the expense of the other party.

fall in line – [an "Americanism"] verb phrase meaning to do the expected or required thing;

feedback – the visual and verbal communication by which a receiver responds to a sender's message, e.g., questions, comments, paraphrasing of message, eye contact, smiling, frowning, snoring, etc.; some advantages of feedback: improves accuracy and productivity (for individuals and groups), increases employee job satisfaction; some disadvantages of feedback: it can cause people to feel under attack, psychologically, it can be time-consuming, it can be difficult to elicit; one element in Hamilton's *communication model* (Hamilton, 2008, pp. 17-19)

first-hand – [an "Americanism"] adjective meaning originating directly from the source

flexible mental models – organizational members engage in self-reflection, allowing them to understand and change their *mental models* (belief patterns that shape and limit an individual's interpretations and actions), which tend to guide their thinking; one component of Peter Senge's *learning organization* (Eisenberg, Goodall, & Trethewey, 2007, p. 112)

forming – stage one of Lumsden & Cragan's small group theory: orientation to task and primary tension from role development

frame of reference – the sender's/receiver's background and experience, education, race, culture, gender, life experiences, attitudes, and personality; There are no identical *frames of reference*. Messages should be double-checked by using or asking for paraphrased versions.; one element in Hamilton's *communication model* (Hamilton, 2008, pp. 7-8)

get [his, her, their] back up – [an "Americanism"] [SEE "back up"]

get-go – [an "Americanism"] noun meaning beginning; start

get away with it – [an "Americanism"] phrase meaning to complete a task, event, deed, assignment, etc. and either not be caught or not suffer any punishing or damaging consequences

giving [him, her, it] the benefit of the doubt – [an "Americanism"] [SEE "benefit of the doubt"]

- globalization** – the idea that the world is getting *smaller* due to communication technology advances; the continuing trend of corporations to do business in multiple countries and cultures, which results in increasing cross-cultural interaction
- go with the flow** – [an “Americanism”] verb phrase meaning to go along with the crowd; fall into agreement; refrain from fighting the status quo
- Golden Rule** – [an “Americanism”] “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you”; or literally from the New Testament Christian Bible: “Do to others as you would have them do to you. Then your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High.”
- gossip** – [an “Americanism”] noun meaning hearsay, often of a titillating nature; verb meaning to engage in listening and passing on hearsay, often of a titillating nature
- got [his, her, their] back up** – [an “Americanism”] [SEE “back up”]
- got the girl** – [an “Americanism”] verb phrase meaning bested a romantic rival to win the attentions of the girl or woman — or, sometimes, boy or man
- got your “6”** – [an “Americanism”] [SEE “got your back”]
- got your back** – [an “Americanism”] verb phrase meaning someone is helping to protect you from perceived or real threats to your safety, power, status, etc.
- groupthink** – a kind of mindlessness or single-mindedness thinking and decision-making by a group, often caused by either fear or arrogance; It excludes most information except what the group assumes or wishes to be true. **Groupthink** greatly minimizes the outside feedback and perspective required for making good decisions (Lumsden & Cragan, 2006, p. 235).
- grudge** – [an “Americanism”] [SEE “holds a grudge”]
- grunt** – [an “Americanism”] noun meaning a low-level worker or citizen or organizational member
- guy** – [an “Americanism”] noun meaning person, usually male, but sometimes female
- hang in there** – [an “Americanism”] verb phrase meaning keep trying; be persistent; don’t give up
- hearsay** – information that has come through at least one intermediary, not directly from the source of information
- hidden communication style** – characterized by a low amount of disclosure (personal or work-related) and a high amount of feedback-seeking; These people are often seen as friendly, fun, people pleasers, fearful of conflict and giving opinions; one of Hamilton’s four personal *communication styles* (Hamilton, 2008, pp. 78-79)
- high-context culture** – culture in which communication is vague, indirect, and implicit; the listener generally has the responsibility for inferring meaning; high value on face-saving; members have difficulty giving or receiving a “no”; generally associated with *collectivistic culture* (Hamilton, 2008, pp. 95-96)
- high road** – [an “Americanism”] noun phrase meaning the adherence to fair and ethical tactics and behaviors
- holds a grudge** – [an “Americanism”] phrase meaning carrying resentment
- Holy Grail** – [an “Americanism”] noun phrase meaning the big prize; the highly valued accomplishment
- IBATR** – acronym for the five elements of *critically thoughtful communication*, a formula

for approaching all information and communication; When applied, **IBATR** promotes the highest level of ethical, accurate information exchange.

1) Information: Carefully consider all pertinent information regarding the communication or *question at hand (QAH)*. Assign no favoritism toward information sources and no immediate judgment about accuracy or inaccuracy of information.

2) Biases: Examine all biases you or the information sources might have surrounding the communication or **QAH**.

3) Assumptions: Examine all assumptions you or the information sources might have surrounding the communication or **QAH**.

4) Truth: Maintain a commitment to truth and honesty, and consider the level of this commitment for each communicational, informational source.

5) Response: Carefully draw a conclusion, and formulate a response.

And always remember that these might require modification based on new analysis, new communication, or new information-source evaluation.

identity/facework – [SEE "face-saving"]

in-box – [an "Americanism"] noun meaning the folder in which one's e-mail arrives in one's e-mail program

individualistic culture – culture that is oriented more toward the individual and toward problem-solving; high value on autonomy and democracy; prefers competition to accommodation; usually associated with **low-context cultures** (Hamilton, 2008, pp. 95-96)

inference-observation confusion – jumping to conclusions

interdependency – relationship(s) of two or more people in which members have varying levels of emotional or communicational dependence on each other

key – [an "Americanism"] adjective meaning important or imperative; noun meaning the most important element or point of a theory, idea, project, goal, story, etc.

kicker – [an "Americanism"] noun meaning the important point; the unexpected element

kid – [an "Americanism"] noun meaning a term of endearment in addressing a friend or acquaintance; noun meaning a son, daughter, or peer in primary or secondary school

Kwame Kilpatrick – disgraced Detroit, Michigan, mayor whose marital infidelity and other wrongdoings were publicized through the release of multiple text messages between Kilpatrick and his mistress

language – spoken or written words [SEE "code"]

language code – [SEE "code"; "language"]

learning organization – an organization in which all members are encouraged to consistently innovate and improve whatever processes they are involved in; Generally, a learning organization encourages its members to observe, plan, execute, evaluate, modify, and repeat the cycle; an organizational concept developed by Peter Senge (Eisenberg, Goodall, & Trethewey, 2007, p. 112)

legalistic view of ethics – a view that looks to a code or set of rules to dictate decision-making; This view falsely assumes that all ethical issues are included in a code or set of laws that is always inevitably correct; a view that operates under the assumption that if something isn't illegal, it isn't unethical (Hamilton, 2008, p. 76)

lens model of conflict – Wilmot & Hocker conflict perspective; This model states that

there are two fundamental aspects of conflict: communication behaviors and the mutual perceptions of those behaviors. During an argument, each party views the interaction, as if through a lens, in terms of himself, the other person, and their relationship (Wilmot & Hocker, 2007, pp. 49-50)

low-context culture – culture in which communication is clear, direct, and explicit; the speaker generally has the responsibility for clarifying meaning; generally associated with **individualist culture** (Hamilton, 2008, pp. 95-96)

low road – [an “Americanism”] noun phrase meaning the adherence to unfair and unethical tactics and behaviors

mental models – belief patterns that shape and limit an individual’s thinking, understanding, and actions (Eisenberg, Goodall, & Trethewey, 2007, p. 112)

miles apart – [an “Americanism”] phrase meaning extremely different; extreme disagreement of opinion

milk spills – [an “Americanism”] phrase meaning things can happen, purely by chance, usually bad or inconvenient things

monochromic (M-time) culture – culture in which time is scarce, valuable; time is scheduled and rationed in order to preserve it and use it most efficiently; mostly **low context/individualistic cultures** (Hamilton, 2008, p. 142)

muddy up – [an “Americanism”] verb phrase meaning to confuse; to obfuscate

noise – anything that inhibits or impedes communication by blocking the message or distorting it, e.g., the external noise of a poor speaker, insufficient or uncomfortable lighting, papers shuffling, ringing telephones, other conversations, uncomfortable room temperature, etc.; or the internal noise of communicator conditions like illness, attention deficit, fatigue, thoughts of other problems, lack of topic knowledge, etc.; one element in Hamilton’s *communication model* (Hamilton, 2008, p. 21)

nonverbal code – [SEE “code”; “nonverbal communication”]

nonverbal communication – all parts of the message that are unspoken, e.g., body movements, facial expressions, gestures, clothing, aspects of one’s office, posture, vocal characteristics (**paralanguage**) such as volume, pitch, emphasis, and rate, etc. [SEE “code”]

norming – stage three of Lumsden & Cragan’s small group theory: emergence (task) and recurring primary & secondary tension (role)

norms – the accepted standards in an organization for conducting business, communicating, and general behavior

off-color – [an “Americanism”] [SEE “blue”]

open communication style – characterized by a high amount of disclosure (personal or work-related) and a high amount of feedback-seeking; These people are often seen as sensitive, empathetic, flexible, genuine, trusting, sometimes too open too soon; one of Hamilton’s four personal *communication styles* (Hamilton, 2008, pp. 78-79)

open organizational system – a system that does interact with its environment and the outside world; it results in healthy, ethical interaction, clear understanding of healthy organizational **norms**, quality feedback, clear perspective, and quality, effective decision-making

organizational communication – simply put, it is the sum of all interpersonal,

interdepartmental, intradepartmental, top to bottom, lateral, formal, and informal exchanges of information; The positive or negative quality of communication is generally set by the [organizational culture](#).

organizational culture – the organizational atmosphere that sets the tone for its communication, interpersonal relationships, decision-making, [ethics](#), profit-seeking, business focus, idea-generation, management style, member treatment, [environmental stewardship](#), [organizational identity](#), etc.; The [organizational culture](#) essentially characterizes the way people are treated inside and outside of the organization.

overboard – [an ["Americanism"](#)] adjective or adverb meaning to do too much; to express too much; to give too much; to respond with too much of whatever is being referred to

paralanguage – the quality of your speaking voice including volume, pitch, rate, emphasis, etc. [SEE ["code"](#)]

paralanguage code – [SEE ["code"](#); [paralanguage](#)]

performing – stage four of Lumsden & Cragan's small group theory: reinforcement (task)

personal mastery – all members of an organization share a personal commitment to learning and self-reflection; one component of Peter Senge's [learning organization](#) (Eisenberg, Goodall, & Trethewey, 2007, p. 112)

played fast and loose – [an ["Americanism"](#)] phrase meaning didn't always adhere to the rules; conducted a game or task with abandon

polychromic (P-time) culture – culture in which time is subordinate to relationship maintenance; attitude toward time is flexible; mostly [high context/collectivistic cultures](#) (Hamilton, 2008, p. 142)

pony – [an ["Americanism"](#)] refers to an American joke about optimism and a young boy vigorously digging through a pile of manure, knowing "there's got to be a [pony](#) in there, somewhere"

pony up – [an ["Americanism"](#)] verb phrase meaning to contribute one's share; to do one's part; to meet one's obligation

pro and con – [an ["Americanism"](#)] phrase meaning an argument for and an argument against a particular issue

proactive – [an ["Americanism"](#)] adjective or adverb meaning to take action before either a crisis occurs or a reaction to something becomes necessary; the opposite of reactive

pros and cons – [an ["Americanism"](#)] noun phrase meaning multiple arguments for and multiple arguments against a particular issue

QAH – acronym meaning "question at hand"

rinse and repeat – [an ["Americanism"](#)] verb phrase meaning repeat the process; a humorous reference to the seemingly unnecessary directions on a shampoo bottle

saving face – [SEE ["face-saving"](#)]

scenario thinking – the ability to imagine multiple (future) contingencies that could occur in response to a particular decision or course of action, in order to make better immediate decisions based on that consideration

scratch – [an ["Americanism"](#)] meaning the beginning; nothing; zero

- second nature** – [an “Americanism”] noun phrase meaning automatic or unconscious behavior; an ingrained habit
- shared vision** – tight hierarchical control is replaced by concertive control, where members act in concert due to a shared organizational vision and understand their own contribution to that vision; one component of Peter Senge’s *learning organization* (Eisenberg, Goodall, & Trethewey, 2007, p. 112)
- sizing up** – [an “Americanism”] verb phrase meaning evaluating; determining quality, meaning, or other characteristics of a person, item, or situation
- sold** – [an “Americanism”] verb meaning convinced; persuaded
- speak their mind** – [an “Americanism”] verb phrase meaning to give their opinion
- spread the good word** – [an “Americanism”] phrase meaning to spread the good news; to share one’s enthusiasm for what one is proud of or happy about
- stack up** – [an “Americanism”] verb phrase meaning compare
- stand** – [an “Americanism”] noun meaning rhetorical position; opinion; verb meaning to take a rhetorical position; to acquire an opinion
- stand your ground** – [an “Americanism”] verb phrase meaning to maintain your personal (and sometimes physical) stance on an issue in the face of criticism, contempt, aggression, protest, etc.
- standing on their convictions** – [an “Americanism”] verb phrase meaning maintaining one’s ethical beliefs, even in the face of loss, damage, criticism, etc.
- stand-up person** – [an “Americanism”] noun phrase meaning a person who is trustworthy, dependable, honest, responsible
- step down** – [an “Americanism”] verb phrase meaning to take a demotion; to relinquish a position of authority, stature, or admiration
- step it up** – [an “Americanism”] verb phrase meaning to increase speed, energy, or production related to some activity
- sticking point** – [an “Americanism”] noun phrase meaning point of contention; issue of disagreement; rhetorical obstacle
- stimulus and motivation** – the sender must be stimulated to send a message (by internal or external stimulus), as well as be motivated; one element in Hamilton’s *communication model* (Hamilton, 2008, pp. 6-7)
- stood his ground** – [an “Americanism”] [SEE “stand your ground”]
- storming** – stage two of Lumsden & Cragan’s small group theory: conflict (task) and secondary tension (role)
- straight shooter** – [an “Americanism”] noun phrase meaning person who generally tells the truth; person who is trustworthy; person who is honest
- streak** – [an “Americanism”] noun meaning an aspect to one’s character or personality
- “Surprise your acronym occasionally; send the kids to Grandma’s and plan an intimate rendezvous at home, just the two of you.”** – a humorous reference to common advice given to men regarding how to properly treat their wife or girlfriend
- symbolic convergence theory (SCT)** – explains how small decision-making groups create a unique symbolic identification that is a source of group pride and motivation; SCT dictates the group motivational behavior that is needed, it allows methods to emerge for creating a common group identity, and it fosters group communication that generates feelings of oneness and stimulates feelings of a

new reality and a unique group culture. **SCT** includes consciousness raising (CR), which is techniques used to make participants feel they are a part of a larger "we" (Lumsden & Cragan, 2006, pp. 42-43).

systems thinking – the ability to view an organization's functioning in terms of **systems theory**; The organization is viewed as a living being, with its own sense of identity and personhood. It is capable of learning as an entity (like a theater troupe or a sports team); one component of Peter Senge's *learning organization* (Eisenberg, Goodall, & Trethewey, 2007, p. 112) [SEE "systems theory"]

systems theory – the idea that an organization is a collection of interconnected, interdependent parts (e.g., a company's individual employees, departments, and management members); Any change or effect to one part of the system affects the entire system, like the overall movement of a mobile when one of its component parts is pushed.

TRIP Goals – acronym for Wilmot & Hocker's model of their four conflict goals: 1) *topic* (surface issue); 2) *relationship* (of the participants); 3) *identity/facework* (participants' efforts to save face); and 4) *process* (the means of conflict-resolution) (Wilmot & Hocker, 2007, pp. 63-75)

tabloid – [an "Americanism"] noun meaning a newspaper or magazine (or television show) that specializes in celebrity gossip and **hearsay**; these information sources often have lax standards of ethical and accurate journalism

take a hit – [an "Americanism"] verb phrase meaning to absorb a loss; acquire some damage; lose some points; lose value

taking a stand – [an "Americanism"] verb phrase meaning assuming a rhetorical position; acquiring an opinion

task processes – the actual business, in a small group, of working on solving the problem or finding a solution for the task at hand (Lumsden & Cragan, 2006, p. 15)

team learning – puts the emphasis on dialogue as the key to a team's learning ability and to leading the team to intelligent decisions; one component of Peter Senge's *learning organization* (Eisenberg, Goodall, & Trethewey, 2007, p. 112)

three R's, two C's, and a T – 'reading, 'riting, 'rithmetic, and **critically thoughtful communication**; The "three R's" is an "Americanism" (American colloquialism) for the three basic tenants of primary and secondary education: reading, writing, and arithmetic.

Tiger Woods – international golf star whose multiple marital infidelities were initially publicized through the release of a text message from Woods to one of his mistresses

tight-whites – [an "Americanism"] noun meaning tight-fitting white mens underwear briefs

took a hit – [an "Americanism"] verb phrase meaning absorbed a loss; acquired some damage; lost some points; lost value

touch on – [an "Americanism"] verb phrase meaning to briefly address or focus on

transactional processes – the initial (and sometimes continuing) process in a small group of getting to know each other and establishing relationships; Role emergence begins during this initial process. The **transactional process** in small group functioning is often considered unimportant, but the opposite is true. Quality relationship-building is necessary for the inevitable stress and tension

that accompanies the problem-solving and decision-making stages (Lumsden & Cragan, 2006, p. 14).

trigger – [an “Americanism”] noun meaning something that sets off or prompts an action or response in someone or something; verb meaning to set in motion; to prompt

triple bottom line – Peter Senge’s term for an enlightened corporation; shareholder value, community value, and environmental concerns

truth-slant – [an “Americanism”] noun meaning the shading or distorting of the truth, usually in a way that is advantageous to the one slanting the truth

under the radar – [an “Americanism”] adjective or adverb phrase meaning outside of the normal field of attention

up-side – [an “Americanism”] noun meaning a positive or optimistic perspective

VIP – [SEE “virtual IBATR perfection”] also acronym meaning “very important person”

virtual IBATR perfection (VIP) - for all practical purposes, its human or organizational principal (the entity employing IBATR) feels secure in knowing that he, she, or it has done their best to follow the steps to the best of their ability — and that Step Five always allows for the reexamination of information, methods, and motives

walk the walk – [an “Americanism”] phrase meaning to reflect the meaning of one’s words with one’s actions; to maintain consistency between one’s words and actions

watch your back – [an “Americanism”] verb phrase meaning to protect yourself from perceived or real threats to your safety, power, status, etc.

“What’s going down?” – [an “Americanism”] phrase meaning What is happening right now?; What are you doing? “What interesting things are taking place?; “What is new?; “How are you?; can also be a friendly greeting meaning Hello

“What’s the damage?” – [an “Americanism”] phrase meaning What was the cost?;

“When in doubt, lay out.” – [an “Americanism”] phrase meaning if you’re not sure of what you’re about to say or do, don’t say or do it; this *Americanism* originated in the music performing business (meaning if you’re not sure of what to play at a certain point in the song, don’t play anything.)

“When it is speaking to you, give it your full attention, as if it were the most important acronym on earth.” – a humorous reference to common advice given to men regarding how to properly treat their wife or girlfriend

where does it stand? – [an “Americanism”] phrase meaning How does it measure up?; What is its position?; What is its current state of progress?

“you are correct, Sir” – [an “Americanism”] phrase meaning you are correct; correct; a humorous reference to a *Saturday Night, Live* parody of Ed McMahon, Johnny Carson’s co-host

“you make the call” – [an “Americanism”] phrase meaning you decide the result of a contest, answer to a question, solution to a problem, or decision about a quandary; a humorous reference to an old American radio and television commercial that described various famous plays in Major League Baseball up until their conclusions, then asked the listener or viewer to guess or determine what the conclusion to the play was

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