Chapter 1

Introduction to Group Communication

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# Chapter Summary

Group communication is the collaboration of three or more interdependent members working to achieve a common goal. Effective group communication requires a joint effort in which members respect and adapt to various perspectives and contributions, and work together to create a successful group experience. Working in groups is an inescapable part of everyday life as we participate in many different types of groups including primary, social, self-help, learning, service, civic, organizational, and public groups. Some groups become virtual teams that use mediated technologies to collaborate, often across time, distance, and organizational boundaries.

Many employers view group-related skills as more important than written communication skills, proficiency in the field of study, and computer skills. There are advantages to working in groups which include better decision making, superior resources, member satisfaction, enhanced learning, and greater creativity. The disadvantages of working in groups include the amount of time, energy, and resources expended by groups; the potential for interpersonal conflicts; and people problems. Group dialectics represent the need for balance between competing and contradictory tensions in group work by taking a *both/and* approach to resolving such tensions. An ethical group and its members seek an appropriate *both/and* response to ethical dilemmas.

# Learning Objectives

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| 1.1 | Explain why employers consistently rank teamwork and the ability to collaborate with others as essential skills |
| 1.2 | Explain the importance of the five key elements in the definition of group communication |
| 1.3 | Compare the advantages and disadvantages of working in groups |
| 1.4 | Describe how understanding the components of the group communication process can enhance group effectiveness |
| 1.5 | Explain how successful groups balance various dialectic tensions by using a collaborative *both/and* approach |
| 1.6 | Practice the ethical principles included in the National Communication Association’s Credo for Ethical Communication |

## Group Communication Competencies Survey

Activity Available in Module 1.1

What are the critical group communication skills identified by employers? Fortunately, there are many research-based competencies that characterize effective group member behavior. As a way of introducing you to the theories, strategies, and skills in this text, assess the importance of each of the competencies presented in the *Group Communication Competencies Survey*.

**Directions:** On a 5-point scale, where 5 is “extremely important” and 1 is “not at all important,” rate the following group competencies in terms of their importance for becoming an effective group member. Select only one number for each item. When you are finished, ask yourself this question: How competent am I in the “extremely important” areas?

You can download this activity to distribute to your class [here](https://media.pearsoncmg.com/ph/hss/revel/advanced_studies/Engleberg/group_activities/engleberg_chap01_group_assessment_group_competencies_survey.pdf). It can also be downloaded directly from Revel.

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### Activity Goals

* To identify and compare student knowledge, interests, concerns, and goals.
* To demonstrate how the course will cover topics that students view as important.

### Participants

Individual students and/or groups of 5 to 7 members

### Procedure

1. Distribute or tell the students to download the *Group Communication Competency Survey*.
2. Students should read and follow the directions.
3. After individual students have completed the survey, create groups of five to seven members.
4. Each group should identify the five or six items that, in its collective opinion, are the *most* important group communication competencies.
5. When groups have identified their top items, ask a representative to write them on the board or share them verbally while you or a student writes them on the board. Star the 10 competencies with the highest scores.

### Teaching Tips

The *Group Communication Competency Survey* introduces students to the many topics covered in the course. In addition to identifying items that are important to students, the survey gives you the opportunity to explain why other topics are equally important. For example, students may not rate “Develop clear group goals” as important as “Reduce your nervousness when speaking in a discussion or meeting.” In a case like this, you have the opportunity to explain why clear group goals are essential for effective group communication—and how they can help reduce member anxiety.

At the end of the course, you may want to revisit the survey to see whether students have changed their minds about the most important group communication competencies and assess whether they think they have learned or improved these competencies and skill areas.

### Discussion Questions

* Which items were selected by most groups? Why are these items important?
* What, if any, are the significant differences between individual results and the classroom group results? What may explain these differences?
* Which items did not receive high ratings? Why and why not did these seem very important?

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## It Was the Best of Teams; It Was the Worst of Teams

Activity Available in Module 1.3

You can begin the process of learning how to become a more effective group member by recalling and evaluating the many groups to which you’ve belonged or lead. Begin by completing the following *Group Work: It Was the Best of Teams; It Was the Worst of Teams* worksheet. This activity is designed to help you identify some of the advantages and disadvantages of working in groups based on your own experiences and the experiences of others.

**Directions:** Consider one of the groups in which you have worked. Then think about what you liked and disliked about working in that group. Now, you should be able to identify characteristics unique to the best groups and worst groups.

You can download this activity to distribute to your class [here](https://media.pearsoncmg.com/ph/hss/revel/advanced_studies/Engleberg/group_activities/engleberg_chap01_groupwork_it_was_the_best_of_teams_it_was_the_worst_of_teams.pdf). It can also be downloaded directly from Revel.

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### Activity Goals

* To identify the advantages and disadvantages of working in groups.
* To identify the many different types of groups to which students belong.
* To provide students with the opportunity to share their past group experiences with other students.

### Participants

Individual students and/or groups of 5 to 7 members

### Procedure

1. Ask students to think about some of the groups in which they have worked. Students should consider groups they have liked working in as well as groups they disliked.
2. Students should identify the characteristics that were unique to the best groups and the characteristics unique to the worst groups. Tell them to write down at least two characteristics for each type of group.
3. Divide the class into groups of five to seven members. Distribute or have them download *It Was the Best of Groups; It Was the Worst of Groups* worksheet.
4. Tell students to take turns explaining one unique characteristic for each type of group. Encourage them to share stories about their experiences.
5. Groups should record on the worksheet as many unique characteristics of the best and the worst groups and be prepared to discuss them in class.

### Teaching Tips

This activity can be conducted prior to the discussion of the advantages and disadvantages of working in groups that is presented in Chapter 1.

### Discussion Questions

* What are the major factors contributing to positive group experiences?
* What are the major factors contributing to negative group experiences?
* Do the positive experiences of working in groups outweigh the negative experience, or vice versa?
* How can groups avoid engaging in the behaviors that were perceived as the worst characteristics?

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## The Ethics Credo in Action

Activity Available in Module 1.6

Are there unique ethical standards for working in groups? Are members ethically obligated to share accurate and important information with other members? Should members encourage one another to express controversial and conflicting points of view and opinions? Provide examples in *The Ethics Credo in Action* activity that demonstrate your understanding of ethical communication in groups.

**Directions:** Review the preamble and principles in the NCA Credo for Ethical Communication. The first column in *The Ethics Credo in Action* activity lists all of the nine principles. The second column provides an example of how the credo can be applied to groups. Your job is to provide another example in the third column—Additional Example—for each of the ethical principles to demonstrate your understanding of each principle. The example can be a situation you or group members have experienced personally, or it can be taken from current events or from history.

You can download this activity to distribute to your class [here](https://media.pearsoncmg.com/ph/hss/revel/advanced_studies/Engleberg/group_activities/engleberg_chap01-groupwork_the_ethics_credo_in_action.pdf). It can also be downloaded directly from Revel.

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### Activity Goals

* To demonstrate the applicability of the National Communication Association’s Credo for Ethical Communication to a variety of group communication contexts.
* To assess the extent to which students understand and can apply the principles in the NCA Credo for Ethical Communication in group communication contexts.

### Participants

Individual students and/or groups of 5 to 7 members

### Procedure

1. Review the NCA Credo for Ethical Communication in Chapter 1 with special emphasis on the preamble.
2. Distribute or tell students to download *The Ethics Credo in Action* worksheet.
3. Students should add a second example that demonstrates their understanding of the nine ethical principles and how they apply to group communication.
4. If time permits, form groups of five to seven students. Group members should share their examples with one another and choose one or two examples that, in their opinion, best represent the credo principle.
5. After students have completed the worksheet, discuss their answers with group members as well as any questions they have about ethical communication.

### Teaching Tips

This activity asks students to apply the principles set forth in the NCA Credo for Ethical Communication. You may give students time to think about their responses before they begin working in groups. Group examples can be shared with the entire class and lead to a discussion of communication ethics. Please note that many of the questions posed for discussion do not have a right or wrong answer.

### Discussion Questions

* Can you provide examples of groups or group members who have “violated” this credo?
* What should a group and its members do if two principles are in conflict? For example, what if being truthful and expressing your personal convictions could hurt members’ feelings or invade their privacy?
* What are some of the Dos and Don’ts you would list for group member who want to be a more ethical communicators?
* Based on your personal experiences in groups, what, if any, principle would you add to the list of ethical principles?

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