21st Century COMMUNICATION A Reference Handbook

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Ethical and Unethical Communication

This chapter explores the relationship of communication to ethics. Introductions to general guidelines for ethical communication, related dialogic virtues and skills, and additional tools for recognizing and addressing ethical issues are included. The principles, guidelines, and tools outlined below reflect insights from numerous disciplines and are applicable within and across diverse 21st-century contexts.

Communication—the use of available resources to convey information, to move, to inspire, to persuade, to enlighten, to connect—is an inherently ethical undertaking. Regardless of context, communication involves choice, reflects values, and has consequences. These three key elements of communication form the basis of its ethical makeup.

Ethics is the study of values, of what is more or less important, of the "good," of behavioral guidelines and norms. Ethics provides frameworks and tools for recognizing and assessing available options and for differentiating between more or less morally justified pathways in any given situation.

Scholars have identified numerous approaches to the study of communication ethics (Arneson, 2007; Boss, 2004; Bracci & Christians, 2002; Jaksa & Pritchard, 1994; Johannesen, 2002; Makau & Arnett, 1997). Some approaches focus on intentions, others on means, and still others on consequences. Some approaches to communication ethics focus primarily on duties, obligations, rights, and responsibilities, while others emphasize the importance of dispositional traits and related abilities, referred to by many as virtues. Some communication ethics scholars derive guidelines from community, others stress the importance of authority, while still others turn primarily to the individual for ethical insight. Some perspectives on communication ethics focus on narrative, while others feature reason and argument, and still others integrate both approaches to understanding and decision making. Some communication ethicists stress situational factors more than others, but all approaches to the study recognize the importance of context. This chapter explores shared elements of diverse ethical frameworks and introduces resources for recognizing and responsibly addressing ethical issues across contexts.

Historical Links Between Communication and Ethics

Throughout history, unethical communication has been one of humanity's most potentially harmful weapons. In interpersonal contexts, communication has the power to wound deeply, to undermine connection, and to thwart healthy human development. Within institutional contexts, unethical communication has been used to support greed and corruption, to bolster tyranny, and otherwise to foster oppression. Historically, communication has been instrumental in sparking and justifying economic injustice, violence, war, genocide, and tribal conflicts.

At the same time, the art of communication has been instrumental to the pursuits of truth, wisdom, justice, and peace. Historically, responsible and effective communication has fostered loving connection, compassion, and understanding.

Communication's powers to hurt and to heal, to repress and to inspire, to betray and to uplift, to oppress and to comfort, to deceive and to enlighten, to wound and to mend are among the direct links between communication and ethics. The pages to follow will reveal the importance of ethics to fulfilling communication's constructive

potential while addressing the myriad challenges associated with such efforts.

Key Elements of Ethical Communication

All communication—interpersonal, organizational, small group, mass mediated, political, informational, technical, or commercial, whether delivered orally, electronically, verbally or nonverbally, visually, or through a print medium— occurs within a context, including goals, means, and occasion. Ethical communication requires understanding of and responsiveness to each of these three key elements. *What* one hopes to achieve through the communication (the *ends*), *how* one chooses to communicate (the *means*), and the "real-world" *outcomes* (the *consequences*) of communication are particularly important features of ethical communication.

Choice, Moral Agency, and Responsibility

Communication ethics is, first and foremost, about choice. To the extent an individual or group has options available in any given situation, moral agency is at play. With moral agency—the relative freedom to choose one's pathway in any given situation—comes responsibility.

Although circumstances often limit individuals' options, adults interacting with others usually have at least some moral agency. When interacting with a friend or a close acquaintance, for example, people in diverse circumstances are often relatively free to choose how attentively they will listen to the Other. How will they respond to the Other's questions, concerns, insights, charges, and so on? Will they seek to manipulate the Other to their personal advantage? Seek to gain the "upper hand"? Will they listen defensively? Or will they seek to understand the Other? To connect with the Other? To foster the mutual pursuit of truth, insight, wisdom, informed and just decision making with the Other?

In encounters with strangers, the decision of whether to recoil or to express hostility, on the one hand, or to smile or otherwise express a sense of human connection, on the other, reflects elements of choice and hence of responsibility to the Other as well. Numerous factors—from cultural norms, customs, and traditions to individual preferences, abilities, genetic makeup, neurophysiology, and many other variables within and outside the individual's control—influence how each person responds to the circumstances he or she confronts. Central to the deliberative process across contexts, however, is the overall state of one's heart and mind.

In interpersonal communication settings, for example, each individual's approach is shaped by goals, values, emotions, and perceptions. What does each party hope to achieve? How does each perceive the Other? What are their perceptions of stakeholders' interests? What about their own values, beliefs, and vested interests? How thoroughly has each considered the likely consequences of the interaction to the self, to others, and to the relationship? Responses to these questions all involve elements of choice and reflect values, influenced significantly by each participant's overall state of heart and mind.

Structural factors are relevant as well. People often find themselves in circumstances defined, at least in part, by power structures beyond their control. Institutional structures are especially relevant. Consider, for example, those situated at the "bottom" of a clearly defined corporate hierarchy. Even in such seemingly constrained circumstances, the state of one's heart and mind is instrumental to the quality, efficacy, and ethics of one's interactions. Individuals in such positions often have a much broader range of communicative options than appears evident on the surface. Often, for example, even those with limited institutionally sanctioned power have opportunities to facilitate transparency, to engender acts of loving-kindness, and to foster elements of just and caring communion. How these individuals choose to respond to their circumstances often profoundly affects the quality of the organizational environment.

This sense of quality relates directly to a second key feature of moral agency across communication contexts. While the communicator's goals (the intentions or ends of communication) are important, so too are the means communicators elect to use. Consider, for example, a situation in which one must decide how to respond when

a friend asks questions regarding her performance at a concert the previous evening. Suppose that a fully truthful response could prove painful to the friend. There are many means available to avoid hurting the Other in such circumstances. Among these means are lies or other more subtle forms of deception. For reasons to be outlined later, however, these means are inherently ethically suspect. In contrast, pursuing compassionate and caring means to sharing the information truthfully in such circumstances promises to foster connection, mutual trust, respect, and understanding, thereby facilitating fulfillment of communication's constructive potential.

The centrality of means to ethical communication is especially evident in studies of social movements. Historically, pursuits of social justice in the face of tyranny and oppression have taken many forms. Some means— such as "random" violence, demonizing the Other, and hate speech—have been shown to be inherently ethically suspect. Addressing this issue, prominent global leaders in the pursuit of social justice such as Mahatma Gandhi, Nelson Mandela, César Chavez, and Martin Luther King have noted that the means are the ends in the making (Boss, 2003; Makau & Marty, 2001).

This discussion of means and ends leads to exploration of a third, related element of ethical communication: The consequences of one's choices matter deeply. Thus far, the focus has been on "good" intentions and ethical means. However, even the most noble intentions and ethical means have the potential to cause harm. Consider, for example, the case of a journalist seeking to uncover abuses of power and using truthful means to convey the information. In such a case, the journalist can be said to be using ethical means (conveying information truthfully) in an effort to pursue noble ends (transparency, accountability, and justice). At the same time, however, innocent people could be gravely imperiled as a result of the journalist's revelations, particularly if the abuses uncovered by the story take place in an environment of "unchecked" power. Before publishing the story, the journalist has the responsibility to consider the likely consequences of the publication, especially to the most vulnerable members of the community.

Given the complexity of life's circumstances, predicting such consequences with certainty is impossible. The responsibilities associated with moral agency do not require the ability to prophesize in this way. However, responsible exercise of moral agency does require thoughtful consideration of the circumstances, particularly from the standpoints of all relevant stakeholders; moral agents have a responsibility to anticipate likely consequences as a part of their deliberations.

In sum, then, ethical communication across contexts requires attentiveness to at least the following: one's intention, the means used to fulfill these ends, and the likely consequences of one's choices. Even within these parameters, however, differentiating more or less ethical communication pathways is often difficult. Each set of circumstances is unique, and often the most ethical choice is not readily apparent. A number of resources are available to address these complexities.

General Guidelines for Ethical Communication

No set of rules or norms can provide certainty regarding the most ethical pathway in specific cases. Usually, some measure of uncertainty is inevitable. However, people unable to make absolute decisions nevertheless have the potential to make well-informed, ethical choices. General guidelines for ethical communication provide tools for discerning more or less ethical pathways, assisting decision makers in their efforts to make responsible choices.

The Principle of Veracity is illustrative. This principle provides resources for discerning whether, and how, to lie or use other forms of deception in any given set of circumstances. Although the Principle cannot provide certainty regarding this often difficult ethical choice, applying this general guideline to specific cases facilitates responsible and wise discernment regarding available options.

Truth and Truthfulness

To understand the Principle of Veracity and its role in guiding communicative acts, it is important to distinguish the pursuit of truth on the one hand and truthfulness on the other. The former is an important, but complex, undertaking. The quest for truth takes many forms, from the pursuit of verifiable empirical knowledge regarding the material world, on the one hand, to the search for deep transcendent insights and wisdom, on the other. Beliefs of either kind that are held to be "true" by most people in a community during one era and in one domain are often found to be "false" during another. The once widely held "flat earth" belief illustrates this phenomenon. For many years, people throughout many regions of the world believed that the earth was flat. Over time, however, evidence revealing the unreliability of that earlier view was widely disseminated. Most of the world's population today rejects the idea that the earth is flat.

Truthfulness is closely related to such pursuits of truth. Among other things, the quest for truth depends on peoples' truthfulness. Imagine, for example, if scientists and ruling authorities (including governmental agents) around the world had chosen to deceive the public about scientific research revealing compelling evidence against the "flat earth" thesis. Under these circumstances, humanity would not have benefited from the scientific community's evolving insights regarding the earth's dimensions and shape.

Within today's globally interdependent world, the relationship of truthfulness to truth is especially critical. For example, understanding of complex environmental issues—such as those associated with evidence of global warming, land use and ownership policy issues, resource allocation issues, sustainability, energy policies, and so on—requires access to scientifically verifiable information. Truthful representation of this information will be instrumental to responsible and reasoned decision making.

At the same time, however, truthfulness in this and other contexts does not depend on humans' abilities to arrive at definitive truths. It is possible, indeed critical, for people to be truthful even when they are confronted with the possibility that their beliefs will one day be shown to be false. Truthfulness is not so much about the capacity to know or to disseminate definitive truths but is rather a reflection of one's integrity. Communicators who make every effort possible—relying on all available resources— to confirm the truth of their statements before sharing their insights, who remain open to the possibility that they are wrong, and who convey only information and insights they sincerely believe to be true at the time of their representations can be said to be speaking truthfully, even if future inquiries reveal that their beliefs were mistaken.

The case of perjury illustrates the point further. Witnesses can be convicted of perjury only if it can be shown that their false testimony was intentionally deceptive. The oath to "tell the truth" during a trial relates exclusively to expressing what one believes to be true and not on what turns out to be verifiably the case. District attorneys are especially aware of this distinction. The adage "eye witness accounts are both the most compelling and the least reliable" sources of evidence at a trial underscores differences between truth on the one hand and truthfulness on the other. Truthfulness is a necessary condition for judicial pursuits of truth and justice. However, given the frailty of human perceptions, truthfulness by itself is not sufficient.

The Principle of Veracity

With this distinction in mind, the Principle of Veracity relates not so much to truth per se but rather to truthfulness. According to this general guideline, although the use of deception is morally justified in some special circumstances, truthfulness has moral presumption in its favor (Bok, 1999). The Principle provides four discrete but related steps for discerning whether deception is morally justified in any given case.

Among the reasons why truthfulness has presumption in its favor across communication contexts are the inherent risks associated with lying and other forms of deception. For example, the decision to deceive another inevitably risks compromising the trust so critical to enduring relationships. Once undermined, trust is difficult to restore. Similarly, deceiving another—either by lying or through more subtle forms of deception—threatens the shared experience of respect at the heart of meaningful interpersonal connection. The use of deception, even for the most noble of purposes, also risks undermining informed and reasoned decision making. From the

perspectives of the person being perceived and members of the broader community, these are potentially significant harms. Additionally, when communicators choose to deceive, they risk compromising their own personal integrity. Such compromises are potentially devastating, particularly over time. These inherent risks—threats to trust, respect, sound decision making, the broader community's well-being, and personal integrity—are but a few of the inevitable dangers associated with deception within and across communication contexts.

Yet those who choose to deceive others often overestimate the benefits and underestimate the harms of their decision. Focusing primarily on their "good intentions," deceivers often persuade themselves that their actions are morally justified. Taking thoughtful account of the inherent risks associated with deception—with particular attention to the long-term consequences to the deceived, to the relationship, to one's integrity, and to the broader community—helps mitigate this tendency. The Principle of Veracity provides resources to assist with this process.

Four Steps for Moral Discernment

The first step of the Principle calls for consultation with one's conscience. Does the conscience—a particularly valuable resource for ethical communication—provide a clear sense of moral direction in the case at hand? Does the use of deception feel warranted by the circumstances? What are the "true" intentions underlying the decision to deceive in this case? For example, is the primary goal pursuit of justice, fairness, care, or loving-kindness? Or is the "true" intention to seek revenge, power over vulnerable others, or self-aggrandizement? Above all, what is the overall state of heart and mind governing the deliberative process?

Following consultation with one's conscience, the Principle of Veracity calls for careful consideration of one's available options. Are there viable truthful means available to fulfill the communicator's goals? Is it possible to pursue the ends without using deception?

These first two steps are important and necessary to fulfillment of the Principle of Veracity. However, they are not sufficient to justify the use of deception. The third required step is consultation with peers. When available, people who share one's interests, values, and beliefs offer potentially valuable insights for ethical deliberation. Consultations with people who are honest, thoughtful, forthright, and caring are especially helpful. If such peers are not available, imagining their likely counsel will meet the third step of the Principle. More specifically, if one's peers were made aware of all the relevant facts in the case, would they be likely to view the use of deception in this case as ethically justified?

At this point, having checked in with one's conscience, assessed one's motives, sought truthful alternatives, and consulted with one's peers, significant "checks" have been placed on the decision to deceive. Though fruitful, however, these preliminary steps are not sufficient to overcome the burden of proof against deception. One's conscience and peers, for example, often privilege one's own values and interests, leaving out critical insights regarding the needs and interests of all stakeholders, as well as the likely long-term consequences to the deceived and broader community. To attend thoughtfully to these important final features of ethical communication, the Principle of Veracity provides a Test of Publicity.

This fourth, and final, step calls for exploration of the circumstances through a "shifting of perspective." In particular, the Test of Publicity requires exploration of how the deceived, those who share his or her values and interests, and members of the broader community would be likely to view the case. If these parties had access to all the available information, would they be likely to view the deception as morally justified? Would they view deception in this case as potentially helpful to the individual, the relationship, and the community, both short- and long-term? Would they find compelling evidence that no viable alternatives are available? If fully informed of the circumstances, would they be likely to support the decision to deceive? Would they deem the act of deception as morally justified?

The classic "placebo" case in medical practice serves to illustrate. Medical practitioners have long recognized the

powerful "healing" effect of "placebos." Informing patients that they are receiving medicinal drugs has been shown to benefit many patients, even when the "drug" is merely an inactive placebo without chemical healing properties. In the past, many physicians have viewed the goal of providing patients a "placebo effect" as justification for this form of deception. As a result, paternalistic deception—deceiving someone for their own benefit—was once an accepted medical practice by many practitioners in the United States.

Applying the first three steps of the Principle of Veracity, physicians might well have concluded that this form of paternalistic deception is morally justified. Good intentions, the lack of viable alternatives to achieve the "placebo" healing effects, and counsel with peers (especially fellow physicians) would likely lead to such a conclusion. Application of the fourth step, however, offers moral insights previously unavailable to these decision makers.

During the past several decades, challenges by patients' rights groups have served this purpose. Patients' advocates have raised issues such as the right to make informed choices regarding one's treatment. They have noted further that when asked, most (though certainly not all) patients indicate that they would prefer not to be lied to, even if they might experience "healing" benefits through the deception. Patients' rights groups have spoken eloquently as well of the dangers "paternalistic lies" pose to the trust and respect so central to doctor-patient relationships. Through their testimonies, these advocates have helped physicians consider the communication context from the standpoint of the deceived.

The resulting revelations have led to changes in the professional association's code of conduct. Today, physicians are admonished to avoid deception in most cases, even when the use of a paternalistic lie may serve beneficent ends.

This approach to moral discernment—checking in with one's conscience, exploring available alternatives, consulting one's peers, and applying the Test of Publicity— provides the foundation for the application of general guidelines for ethical communication across contexts.

Moral Development and Ethical Communication

There is direct alignment between this foundation on the one hand and findings in moral development theory on the other. For more than four decades, researchers exploring human moral development across cultural boundaries have uncovered three different phases, each with their own discrete stages (Boss, 2004; Gilligan 1987; Jaksa & Pritchard, 1994; Kohlberg, 1987). In particular, they have found that during early development, young children tend to view the world through an "egocentric" lens. As a rule, most toddlers demonstrate the capacity for empathy. Most respond earnestly to others' apparent suffering and appear responsive to others' demonstrated pleasures. However, they also tend to assume that everyone shares their perceptions and experience and that it is their (and others') "responsibility" to privilege their interests.

Following this egocentric phase (often referred to as "preconventional"), children evolve to develop more pressing concern for the well-being of others, particularly those within their own inner circle. Young people at this phase also tend to share a desire to be a part of a group. They tend to seek connections, to pursue meaningful relationships with others. They also tend to seek approval, especially from peers. At the same time, they find value in communal rules, conventions, and guidelines. They embrace the concept of loyalty and understand the importance of duty, especially to members of one's group. Their moral community—those whose needs and interests they include in their moral deliberations—expands beyond just themselves to include family members, friends, others within their village, tribe, or immediate group, as well as peers. During this phase—often called "conventional"—young people also develop pronounced capacities for compassion and empathy.

The third phase of moral development generally begins in early adulthood and continues throughout the remaining span of a person's life. Features of "postconventional development," as this phase is called, include the expansion of the moral community to include all members of the human family (and, for some, all sentient

beings) and a willingness and capacity to think critically about the short- and long-term consequences of one's actions to all humanity. In this phase, pursuits of justice, fairness, and sound and reasoned decisions become routine. Other qualities marking "postconventional" moral development include responsiveness to others and to diverse circumstances with compassion, care, love, humility, moral courage, generosity, kindness, integrity, and truthfulness. The concepts of loyalty and duty remain important but tend to be associated with transcendent commitments (beyond narrow understandings of moral community). Although "authority" has a place during this phase, postconventional moral reasoning takes on a more heteronymous character. Decision making is based on thoughtful, careful, independent assessment of available information rather than on the appraisals of "authoritative" others.

This last feature of postconventional reasoning is often associated with development of what are called "intellectual virtues." Among these are the willingness and ability to think critically; to avoid fallacies; to pursue reasoned and just decision making; to embrace diversity of perspective, intellectual humility, love of learning, and, in general, an openness of heart and mind.

Reversibility, Ethical Communication, and the "Golden Rule"

The resources explored thus far rest on several assumptions shared widely by students of communication ethics. The underlying assumption that "reversibility" is a prerequisite for moral justification is one such assumption. This concept derives from the related belief, reflected throughout this chapter, that communicating ethically requires attentiveness and regard for the needs and interests of others as well as one's own.

This precept provides a foundation for most approaches to communication ethics. There are a number of sources for this shared assumption. Perhaps the most widely known across diverse religious, spiritual, and secular philosophical traditions is a principle often referred to as the "Golden Rule."

Among the iterations of this ancient guideline, perhaps the most well-known among secularists in the West is "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." Within the Christian faith tradition, the guideline is articulated in the *New Testament* Gospel of Matthew as follows: "In everything, do to others as you would have them do to you: for this is the law of the prophets." The Prophet Mohammed of the Islamic faith tradition is cited as saying, "Not one of you truly believes until you wish for others what you wish for yourself." The Buddha is recorded as having admonished followers to "treat not others in ways that you yourself would find hurtful." Within the Hindu faith tradition, the guideline appears as follows: "This is the sum of duty: Do not do to others what would cause pain if done to you." Confucius is said to have told his followers, "One word which sums up the basis for all good conduct ... loving-kindness. Do not do to others what you do not want done to yourself." Within the Zoroastrianism faith tradition, the guideline is shared as follows: "Do not do unto others whatever is injurious to yourself." Judaism's Talmud teaches the following: "What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbor. This is the whole Torah; all the rest is commentary. Go learn it." In the Baha'i faith, followers are admonished to "lay not on any soul a load that you would not wish laid upon you, and desire not for anyone the things you would not desire for yourself."

These iterations of the Golden Rule reflect strong, shared, cross-cultural commitment to reversibility as a key element of moral justification. At the same time, however, application of the guideline is not without difficulty. The discussion below will highlight both common ground and the special challenges associated with its application in specific contexts.

Common Ground

Most people, regardless of their backgrounds, experiences, or beliefs, share a need to be loved. Most wish to avoid suffering and want to be happy. Most prefer the experience of loving kindness to meanness, and most want to experience peace in their daily lives. Most wish peace for their loved ones and for the broader community. And most relish the prospect of mutual respect and understanding.

Apart from these generally shared traits, much of the human family shares a set of values across cultural boundaries as well. Several of these beliefs about right and wrong, good and bad, what is more or less important can be found in the International Declaration for Human Rights. This document was first adopted by the international community in December 1948. In a celebration 50 years later, the United Nations General Assembly reaffirmed the Declaration. Among the core values expressed in this document are the "inherent dignity" and the "equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family." The document's Preamble identifies these values as the foundations of "freedom, justice, and peace in the world." Article 1 adds that all "are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood."

Scholars (Bok, 1995; Boss, 2004; Christians & Traber, 1997; Johannesen, 2002; West, 1994) have identified related shared values and traits. Among these are commitments to empathy, compassion, truthfulness, human dignity, loving kindness, solidarity with others—particularly those who are vulnerable, love, justice, fairness, respect, moral courage, humility, and care.

For deliberative purposes, ethical communication takes these values as starting points. Authentic appeals to love, justice, fairness, respect, dignity and care, for example, hold the status of presumption, comparable with the role of truthfulness in ethical communication explored earlier in this chapter. In contrast, appeals to prejudice, intolerance, hatred, injustice, and fear of the Other require compelling justification through the use of the four steps outlined in the earlier discussion of the Principle of Veracity. Similarly, the use of communication to manipulate (especially to pursue ethically suspect ends) requires compelling justification. Application of all four steps, including the Test of Publicity, is required to justify strategic manipulation.

In these ways, general guidelines such as the Principle of Veracity and the Golden Rule provide valuable resources for those seeking to communicate ethically. At the same time, however, beyond such broad, generally shared common grounds, people cannot assume that others share their particular interests, values, beliefs, or dreams. This realization of difference is one of the most compelling challenges to the concept of reversibility at the heart of such general guidelines. As Seyla Benhabib (1992), Anthony Appiah (2006), Amin Maalouf (2000), and other scholars have noted, difference is one of humanity's defining qualities.

Reversibility and Difference

Despite much common ground, diverse cultures have differences from one another. Some of these differences are deep, for example, potentially competing conceptions of the "good." While one group may privilege the individual's interests, needs, and rights, another privileges the needs and interests of the community. While one group embraces a particular spiritual text as authoritative, another rejects the same text. While one group privileges rights to property ownership, another finds the concept of land ownership mystifying.

World religions are especially illustrative. On the one hand, monotheistic faith traditions such as Judaism, Christianity, and Islam share many beliefs and values. On the other, however, differences between these groups have been associated with violence and warfare.

Even groups sharing common religious affiliation often disagree sharply. Within the Christian faith tradition, for example, conflicts between Catholics and Protestants have led to violence and warfare and continue to pose significant challenges for the faithful. Similarly, conflicts between different Muslim sects have led to violence and warfare throughout regions in which large numbers of people embrace the faith tradition.

Apart from divisions both within and across cultural groups, individuals within each group have unique sets of characteristics and experiences. Even people who appear to share close bonds—such as genetic or familial links, socioeconomic ties, shared religious affiliation, similar age, shared ethnicity, race, gender, affectional orientation, physical abilities and limitations, intellectual skills, or other important features of personal identity—are nevertheless "different" from one another. Each individual is distinctive, with a particular constellation of material and philosophical characteristics shaping his or her personal identity. These distinctions help inform

each person's life's experiences, which in turn help shape the individual's unique perceptual lens and associated values, beliefs, interests, and needs.

Given such differences among "concrete" others, the admonition to "do unto others what you would have them do unto you" encumbers special responsibilities. Most important, ethical communication requires insight into the particular needs, interests, values, and beliefs of the Other; the ethical call to reversibility requires understanding of and responsiveness to the Other on his or her own terms. This is an essential underlying mandate of the reversibility requirement, when understood contextually.

A related theme is recognition of and responsiveness to the role of standpoint in communication. This concept combines features of identity with relevant power dynamics. Consider, for example, a university classroom context. The professor is vested with the hierarchical authority to "manage" the classroom, facilitate learning, assess and grade student performance, assign tasks, and so on. Within the classroom "hierarchy," the professor's institutionally vested power is manifest. Yet outside the context of the classroom, there are a number of officials whose hierarchical authority takes precedence over the professor's. Among these are the college dean, the vice president of Academic Affairs, the university president, the system chancellor, the board of trustees, and so on. In this sense, the professor's hierarchical status shifts from context to context.

At the same time, however, the professor's identity also plays an evolving role in the power dynamic. Race, ethnicity, gender, age, physical traits, and other defining features of personal identity help shape the relations of power between professor and student in the classroom, as well as between "ruling" authorities throughout the university hierarchy.

A further key factor shaping the context is how power is negotiated in diverse settings. For example, some professors adopt pedagogical strategies designed to enhance students' authority over their own educations. Learning- centered instructional paradigms feature such shifting power dynamics. Similarly, some college administrators reject the "sovereign power" paradigm in which authorities routinely (and sometimes arbitrarily) exercise "power over" others and embrace instead a "mutual power" paradigm, in which people are provided opportunities and resources to share "power with" one another. Given these diverse understandings and exercises of power dynamics, simply identifying a person's "official" status within an organizational structure does not fully account for the individual's "standpoint" in a particular context. Ethical communication requires mindfulness of these evolving elements of standpoint and their role within particular communication contexts. Dialogic virtues and skills provide resources for attending thoughtfully to these and other dynamic features of communication across contexts.

Dialogic Virtues and Skills

Dialogue differs from other forms of communication in its responsiveness to the Other. Rather than communicating at, to, or for another, dialogue is characterized by communicating with others.

Ethical and effective dialogue requires several skills. Among the most important are attentive listening abilities. Communication is often thwarted by human tendencies to judge, to blame, or to defend in response to others. Whether in communication within intimate relationships or in interactions with strangers, this narrow pattern of response fosters defensiveness and inhibits the possibility of mutual understanding.

In contrast, the art of listening nondefensively opens possibilities for dialogic connection. Developing the habit of listening to understand fosters conditions for learning from and with others, for deliberating well together, and for building community.

There are at least three other dialogic virtues and related skills required to meet the Other on his or her own terms: keeping an open mind and heart, balanced partiality, and critical self-awareness.

Often, the willingness and ability to approach communication with an open mind and heart is confused with a kind of passivity, pursuit of "pure objectivity," or lack of passion for one's point of view. Importantly, however, these characteristics are neither required nor even helpful to ethical and effective dialogue. Without passion and personal commitment, for example, exchanges have little meaning. Without mutual recognition of the values and interests inevitably underlying each participant's point of view, interactions are unlikely to foster mutual understanding and informed decision making. Balanced partiality—the dedicated and caring commitment to fairness—helps participants acknowledge their own and others' partiality without compromising their receptiveness to others' perspectives.

Similarly, critical self-awareness—the process of acknowledging and recognizing how our standpoints influence our perspectives, as well as how others see us—is vital to ethical and effective dialogue.

Finally, the capacity to imagine the experiences and sensibilities of others is critical to ethical decision making. Seyla Benhabib (1991) and Martha Nussbaum (1997) are among the many scholars whose work has revealed the importance of developing the habit of representing to oneself the many perspectives, layers of meaning, and viewpoints constituting any particular set of circumstances. Development of one's moral imagination, as this capacity is often called, requires both willingness and an ability to challenge one's "self-centered perspective." Receptiveness of and responsiveness to the diversity and multiplicity of perspectives characteristic of the human family are especially helpful. As noted earlier, the Test of Publicity provides a particularly fruitful resource for attending thoughtfully to this facet of ethical decision making.

In summary, ethical communication requires a diversity of dispositional traits, intellectual virtues, and related dialogic virtues and skills. These resources have always been important. However, special challenges and opportunities unique to 21st-century contexts make them all the more compelling.

21st-Century Challenges and Opportunities

Never before have people from such richly diverse backgrounds, representing different interests, potentially competing values and beliefs, and distinctive ways of knowing, encountered one another so routinely. People around the world today cross cultural boundaries as a matter of course. More than 200 million people live and work away from their ancestral homes, in close proximity to people from culturally diverse backgrounds. Through the Internet and other communication technologies, vast reserves of information and widely divergent perspectives are delivered to people from richly diverse backgrounds across the globe each day as well.

These circumstances hold unparalleled promise for mutual growth and enlightenment. Sharing ideas and experiences with one another enables people to question their assumptions and achieve heightened awareness of issues from multiple standpoints, facilitates the "shifting of perspective" at the heart of ethical communication, and otherwise enriches possibilities for reasoned and just decision making. In these ways, communication in today's world holds great promise for fulfilling its creative and constructive potential.

At the same time, however, numerous challenges confront humanity at the dawn of this new era. As Ellul (1964), Jonas (1984), Christians (2007), and others have shown, technologies tend to create their own imperatives. People using communication technologies, for example, often succumb to a kind of instrumentalism, in which "efficiency" is privileged at the expense of relationships, connection, dignity, freedom, and other core values. Surveillance and control, manipulation, and power over others often take precedence when people using technologies acquiesce to this tendency. As machines become more and more sophisticated, it is likely that these risks will become increasingly manifest.

Similarly, although the power and ubiquity of mass communication creates valuable opportunities to foster shared understanding, to facilitate peace, to achieve justice, and to otherwise serve humanity, their ubiquity creates vulnerability to abuse as well. As control of news sources becomes increasingly driven by commercial interests in service to the few at the expense of the many, for example, access to reliable information may

prove increasingly difficult. Similarly, speed of information transmission prevents the kind of scrutiny and reflection once considered hallmarks of sound reporting. Enhanced tools for manipulating messages pose additional challenges, undermining the ability to discern differences between "truthful" dissemination of information on the one hand and propaganda on the other. At the same time, sharp (and growing) disparities between the "haves" and "have-nots," characteristic of today's global economy, will likely exacerbate these and related risks.

Given these circumstances, explorations of how communications technologies and other forms of media are used— the interests they serve, the messages they convey, the consequences of these messages, and their underlying values—will prove critical to humanity's long-term well-being.

In sum, communication in today's globally interdependent world has both extraordinarily creative and devastatingly harmful potential. In such an environment, the relationship of communication to ethics takes on special importance. Discerning more or less ethical pathways for communication in any given context will prove key to meaningful relationships, to responsible participation in the global economy, to the understanding and resolution of complex social and political issues, and to responsive civic engagement. The core values, virtues, skills, and related resources explored in this chapter are designed to equip individuals and groups for this dynamic and vital undertaking.

—Josina M. Makau

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