



Case in Point: 400 Million People

The demographic trends presented in this chapter have highlighted patterns within the U.S. population. However, given the trends in globalization also considered within this chapter, it is critical to consider these trends in comparison with demographic developments around the world. For many years, large populations in areas of the world, such as China, Japan, and Singapore, fueled a huge economic expansion in East Asia. However, this pattern is clearly changing. As Joel Kotkin, author of *The Next Hundred Million: America in 2050* (2010b), points out, "With a fertility rate 50 percent higher than Russia, Germany, or Japan, and well above that of China, Italy, Singapore, South Korea, and virtually all of Eastern Europe, the United States has become an outlier among its traditional competitors, all of whose populations are stagnant and seem destined to eventually decline" (Kotkin, 2010a). Indeed, it is estimated that the U.S. population will reach 400 million by the year 2050, and the key employment demographic group aged 15 to 64 will increase by 42% in the United States, while this age segment in China and Japan will decline by 10% and 44%, respectively.

These shifts pose important organizational and political challenges across the globe. For nations

with an increasing proportion of older citizens, it will be crucial to find ways to take care of older citizens, and this need is likely to influence many sectors of the economies in these countries. For example, Kotkin notes that "lacking a developed social-security system, China's rapid aging will start cutting deep into the country's savings and per capital income rates" (2010a). For the United States, the challenge will be to generate jobs for a growing number of working-age citizens—a particularly daunting task when considering the high unemployment rates seen during the recent United States and global recession. However, Kotkin believes that another demographic trend—immigration to the United States—will be instrumental in addressing this problem. Increasingly, new residents in the United States are starting small businesses in basic industries, such as construction, manufacturing, agriculture, and energy, and it is these small businesses—more than megacorporations—that will be engines of employment. "Expanding our basic industries, and focusing on the necessary skills training for those laboring in them, will provide new opportunities" (Kotkin, 2010a) needed in the workplaces of tomorrow.

But changing demographics do not just influence the organizational experience of individuals. They also create new challenges for organizational communication. Changing demographics result in multicultural workplaces, in workers with increasing responsibilities to aging family members, in workers with longer commutes, and in workers who telecommute. Changing demographics also pose the challenge of treating individuals from different ethnic backgrounds, races, ages, genders, disabilities, and sexual orientations in ways that respect these differences and create opportunities for meeting both individual and organizational goals. Thus, questions confronting organizational communication scholars as they consider these demographic shifts include:

- How can we communicate with members of a culturally diverse workforce in ways that respect difference and help achieve organizational and individual goals?
- How do members of the "sandwich generation" cope with the stresses of work and family concerns?