An Introduction to Business and Professional Communication Processes

After reading this chapter you will be able to:

• Understand the definition and centrality of communication competence in the workplace
• Describe the communication model and its components
• Understand the basic principles of communication
• Identify specific communication patterns in organizations
• Describe major changes in today’s business communication settings

CHAPTER OUTLINE

• Introduction
• Importance of Communication in the Workplace
• Communication Competence
• A Model of the Communication Process in Organizations
• Principles of Communication
• Communication in the Workplace
• The Changing Nature of Today’s Organizations
• Conclusion
• Activities
• References
INTRODUCTION

Recent college graduate George Stevens is finishing his third month on the job at Health Matrix, Inc., which manages digitized health-care information for hospitals and insurance companies. His new position as an accounts coordinator involves marketing products to new and existing customers and managing existing accounts. A large part of his job involves customer service, where he works to ensure that health-care information can be seamlessly entered online and transferred between health providers. Although he feels that everything has been going well so far, he is still learning the ropes of this organization and the preferences of his clients. He spent the first month in training, where he met several other recent graduates working in various departments. They had been going out after work to debrief the day and provide support. He was still getting to know the people in his direct work area and had mainly had the chance to meet with them at weekly staff meetings. He was learning that his new role was more autonomous than he thought his first job would be, but decided that this motivated him to do his best work. He was quickly getting the feeling that his ideas would be listened to, as long as he put together well-thought-out plans and ideas. This also carried over with his customers. As long as his proposals were developed to meet their specific needs, they paid attention and worked to negotiate features as well as fees. He remembered learning about the importance of communication to workplace success, but this was the first time he was really seeing the concepts in action. He was quickly finding out how to communicate in this environment and to whom to communicate. So far, the only major bump in the road had been e-mailing a proposal to a client before sharing...
it with his director. Even though he hadn’t covered this in training and the other new account coordinators weren’t following this protocol, George’s director wanted to see his proposals first. Instead of e-mailing them to clients, he was supposed to present them face-to-face. After meeting with his director, George learned that this was standard protocol with new account coordinators in his department and was aimed at teaching new employees the ins and outs of putting together proposals and giving more “face time” with clients to allow new hires to form stronger relationships.

George Stevens’s experience is similar to that of many new employees. Starting a new position is a time filled with uncertainty, which is why many organizations spend time and resources training workers and socializing them to their institution. Through training and on-the-job experience, employees negotiate their new roles and form relationships with coworkers, managers, and clients. Many new employees will learn by making mistakes here and there, which frequently involve communication. Employees find that a new job involves more than knowing how to do the actual job, but also knowing how to navigate their way through the new organization, including the people, communication rules or norms, and organizational values. Understanding the basic elements of the communication process can go a long way toward helping you be successful in any organization.
This chapter emphasizes the importance of communication to your personal success at work. Specifically, you will learn about the components of the communication process along with the basic principles of communication and how communication functions in organizations. Becoming a competent communicator at work will assist you in maximizing understanding, avoiding communication breakdowns, adapting your messages to enhance your credibility, and meeting your goals. Effective and appropriate communication is the key to improving your work life and the work lives of those around you.

IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNICATION IN THE WORKPLACE

The importance of communication in all human relationships cannot be overstated. Communication is the process of exchanging ideas with others to form relationships at a variety of levels within a variety of contexts, including the workplace. Some communication scholars consider communication to be not just a quality of relationships, but to be the relationship itself. This connects to the view of communication as constitutive, which means it is the very ingredient necessary for relationships to exist. In the workplace, relationships come in a variety of forms, including supervisor-employee, coworker, and customer. Within each exists the dynamics of power, position, credibility, and competence. In addition to the successful development and maintenance of workplace relationships, many other communication skills are in high demand in today’s workplace. Surveys of new graduates, employers, and university professors show that communication skills are one of the most important and underdeveloped employee skills.1,2 Human resource managers with Fortune 500 corporations frequently identify listening, speaking, communication of information, and small-group or team communication skills as most important for graduates in the 21st century.3 In 2005, a survey of employers recruiting in the Silicon Valley area reported a need for college graduates to improve their oral and written communication skills, including vocabulary and self-expression.4 Good communication skills directly connect with increased pay, promotion opportunities,5 performance evaluation,6 and job mobility.7 Throughout this book, we’ll explore the process of communication in various forms in an effort to help you become a competent business communicator.
On the surface, the term communication competence sounds pretty straightforward, but competence is more complex than communication that is simply considered good, excellent, or successful. According to O’Hair, Friedrich, Wiemann, and Wiemann, “Communication competence is the ability of two or more persons to jointly create and maintain a mutually satisfying relationship by constructing appropriate and effective messages.” As you can see, this definition focuses on relationships and the satisfaction of both people involved. It also places emphasis on communication that is appropriate and effective within a specific relationship. For example, competent communication between you and a friend might not be competent for you and your boss, so adapting your messages to fit different people and situations is critical.

Another definition to consider is that of organizational communication competence, which is the impression of successful communication where the goals of the people in the interaction are met based on messages that are appropriate and effective within the organizational context. This definition emphasizes that communication competence is an impression or a judgment made by others and involves both parties in a relationship achieving goals. Like the general definition of communication competence, this definition demonstrates the complexity of not only getting the things that you want...
out of communication but also making sure that others’ needs are met. This involves what communication scholars Brian Spitzberg and Bill Cupach identify as motivation, knowledge, and skill. First, we have to be motivated not only to have successful and constructive communication with others, but also to learn how to communicate and approach a variety of communication situations. Next, we need to have knowledge of how to construct and deliver messages in a way that is appropriate to different situations. Finally, we must have the skill or the ability to adapt our messages and to perform the communication act. All the components of communication competence are important, but translating our motivation and knowledge of communication into skillful action can be a challenge and takes practice. As a competent communicator in the workplace, you have to know what is considered appropriate in your organization or with your customers/clients and use the most effective strategies for delivering your messages in terms of the words you use or the way you choose to send your messages. Becoming a competent communicator involves having a thorough working knowledge of the communication model and its essential components.
How skillful of a communicator are you? Complete the assessment in Table 1.1 to find areas of strength and weakness.

**TABLE 1.1: Communication Skill Assessment**

Read each of the following items carefully and select the response that most describes your communication patterns using the following scale:

5 = Strongly Agree  4 = Agree  3 = Sometimes Agree  2 = Disagree  1 = Strongly Disagree

1. I involve others in conversations in an effort to make them feel valued.
2. I always seem to say the right thing, at the right time.
3. I often initiate new topics in conversation.
4. I effectively make others feel important by listening to and confirming their feelings.
5. I disclose information at the same level that others disclose.
6. I offer follow-up comments or feedback in conversations.
7. I consider others’ feeling when talking.
8. I communicate in a way that helps others fit into the organization.
9. I offer my opinions freely.
10. I am appropriately empathetic toward issues affecting different employees.
11. I know how to effectively communicate with people in various levels of authority.
12. My conversations with others have a natural flow.
13. I smile when conversing, encouraging others to participate.
14. I appropriately adapt my communication to my conversational partners.
15. I balance the amount of time I speak in conversations.

This self-assessment measures your communication skill in three areas: empathy, adaptability, and interaction management. In short, empathy is your ability to identify with others on an emotional level, adaptability is your ability to change your communication based on the person you’re conversing with, and interaction management is your ability to manage the interaction or conversation with others. To determine your score, add the items as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Empathy</th>
<th>Adaptability</th>
<th>Interaction Management</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. _____</td>
<td>2. _____</td>
<td>3. _____</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. _____</td>
<td>5. _____</td>
<td>6. _____</td>
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<td>7. _____</td>
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<td>13. _____</td>
<td>14. _____</td>
<td>15. _____</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total: _____</td>
<td>Total: _____</td>
<td>Total: _____</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If you scored between 25 and 19, you exhibit a **High** level of skill in this skill area.
If you scored between 18 and 12, you have a **Medium** or moderate level of skill in this area depending on the context.
If you scored between 11 and 5, you have a **Low** level of skill in this area.

*Adapted from the Workplace Communication Skill Survey (Payne, 2003).^[12]*
A MODEL OF THE COMMUNICATION PROCESS IN ORGANIZATIONS

At the beginning of this chapter we stated that communication is a process that includes an exchange of messages; however, communication itself is actually much more complex than this definition suggests. Consider the last time you posted a message on a friend’s Facebook wall or your last job interview. Even though these are extremely different situations, you still engaged in an exchange that involved your thinking of the best way to construct a message for that specific person to achieve a specific outcome. Perhaps you were posting a joke on your friend’s Facebook page in an effort to make people laugh and to stay connected to that person. This involves creating a funny message that is non-offensive to your friend or any others who might read their wall. In the case of a job interview, you were probably working to send a message to a potential employer that you are responsible and would make a good worker. You adapted your message to try to persuade them to hire you. Goal achievement is a major reason people communicate the way that they do. In other words, communication is largely strategic, but that’s not to say that it is not sincere. We constantly work to create desired images and desired outcomes in our lives, and communication is the primary way we do this. To be successful, we have to adapt our messages to the person and situation to which or within which we are speaking. This exchange involving constructing, sending, and receiving messages is captured in the basic communication model (Figure 1.2).

First, all interactions take place within a specific communication context or situation. Contexts vary from micro to macro levels such as friendships, classrooms, organizations, or cultures. Every context has specific norms of behavior and specific spoken and often unspoken rules that people must follow to be considered competent communicators. Although this textbook focuses on the business context, which has generally agreed-on rules for communication, it is important to recognize that each organization has its own way of doing things, often referred to as organizational culture. Rules for appropriate and effective communication differ from place to place based on organizational culture or context.

Within a context, people exchange many different messages, typically in accordance with the rules of that context. This includes relationship rules. Using an organizational context as an example, you can see how the types of relationships affect the messages you send and the way you send them, whether it’s communicating with a coworker, a supervisor, or a customer. Following the norms of these relationships, we begin the

Communication context: The situation or setting in which communication takes place.
Figure 1.2

The Communication Model
process by constructing or encoding a message. **Encoding** is the process of putting your thoughts and feelings into language. When constructing messages, it is not only important to consider the rules of the context, but also to consider the other person's paradigm. Think of your **paradigm** as your window through which you see the world. In other words, it is your frame of reference. Your window frame is made up of your thoughts, ideas, beliefs, upbringing, culture, values, and so on. All your life experiences go into constructing this lens through which you view others and events. Your paradigm affects everything about how you construct, send, and interpret messages. One great complexity of communicating with others is that we all have a different paradigm, a different life experience. This is why it’s so important to construct messages in a way that is open and sympathetic to the interpretations of others. It also explains why communication is a process because it takes more than one message sent to achieve understanding. Hence, communication is a transactional process, a give-and-take of messages that if effectively crafted are aimed at ensuring that the message sent equals the message received. Having this success involves adapting your communication and messages to your audience.

Once you construct a message, you communicate it verbally and/or nonverbally using spoken or written words, facial expressions, and vocal variations that substitute, contradict, or emphasize your spoken words. Messages are communicated in various ways, whether it is face-to-face, text messaging, e-mail, or by phone. These are considered communication channels. Communication **channels** are the means or mechanisms we use to send messages. Selecting the right way and the right channel to communicate our ideas and feelings is much trickier than it sounds. Sometimes the decision is easy; for example, if you need to terminate an employee, you wouldn’t send them an e-mail. Channel selection can take thought and planning, especially in the workplace. If you were implementing a new company policy, how should you best communicate that message? Often, communicating important policies requires utilization of more than one channel such as face-to-face and written channels. In today’s high-tech workplaces, it’s easy to rely too heavily on e-mail, so make sure to distinguish what is appropriate for e-mail versus a paper memo or face-to-face interaction. Typically, more sensitive messages require face-to-face channels or written forms such as formal letters or policies.

Once a message is communicated to others, it follows a similar process of message interpretation and construction. When people hear or read your message, they **decode**, or translate it and assign meaning. Again, this

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**Encoding**: The process of putting your thoughts and feelings into language.

**Paradigm**: Your frame of reference or worldview, which includes your thoughts, feelings, beliefs, experiences, values, and assumptions.

**Channels**: The means or mechanisms we use to send messages.

**Decode**: Translating messages and assigning meaning to messages.
is where a person's paradigm comes into play as well as their knowledge of you and the specific context you're communicating in.

In addition to the listeners' paradigms, you also have to be aware of things that might interrupt the reception and understanding of your message; this is called noise. **Noise** is anything that interferes with or interrupts the communication process. Noise can be either external or internal. **External noise** is anything in the environment that disrupts or distorts a message. If you're sending an e-mail, and the server goes down, this can delay the transmission of your message, or if you're making a sales presentation at a product expo and there are so many people around other booths talking that it's difficult to hear, then someone or something external to you and your audience is interfering with the communication process. **Internal noise** is the interference experienced within or internally to the communication event. For example, if you are listening to your supervisor instruct you on a new work process and you don’t understand one of the steps, then this could become a form of internal noise because you may not hear or keep up with the information that came after the point you misunderstood. Internal noise is often psychological in that we become distracted from the communication process due to boredom, confusion, or a general lack of focus caused by emotional states. Nevertheless, internal noise can be overcome, as the listener or receiver of the message focuses his/her attention and communicates his/her feedback to the speaker. This is the transactional element of the model. The receiver communicates a follow-up message either verbally or nonverbally that lets the sender know their message was received and understood. Although this sounds like a time-consuming model, these things happen instantaneously as we send and receive messages simultaneously. Sometimes it’s so fast that the speaker may not process the fact that the receiver didn’t fully comprehend the message, but because the back-and-forth continues, common understanding is often found, especially if both parties are sincerely interested in common understanding.
Table 1.2: Sample Elements of Communication Model

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contexts</th>
<th>Messages</th>
<th>Channels</th>
<th>Noise</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Relationships</td>
<td>New company policy</td>
<td>Phone or voicemail</td>
<td>Technology problems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>with coworkers,</td>
<td>Major company announcement</td>
<td>e-mail, instant messaging</td>
<td>Message overload</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>managers, clients</td>
<td>Sales proposal or cost estimate</td>
<td>Letters or memos</td>
<td>Time differences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An organization</td>
<td>Mission or vision statements</td>
<td>Videoconferencing</td>
<td>Cultural differences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An industry</td>
<td>Meeting announcement</td>
<td>Face-to-face meetings or presentations</td>
<td>Low employee morale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A situation</td>
<td>Training or business presentation</td>
<td>Brochures, newsletters</td>
<td>Stress and fatigue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>such as an</td>
<td></td>
<td>Web sites and intranets</td>
<td>Disagreement over policies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>employment</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>interview,</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>performance</td>
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<tr>
<td>appraisal, or</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>sales call</td>
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</table>

Dealing with Communication Overload

With the influx of technology into our everyday work lives comes a massive amount of information, e-mails, Web links, cell phone calls, chat features, and so on. Some researchers speculate that managers and knowledge workers receive anywhere from 100 to 200 new messages each day and that millions of dollars are wasted as employees try to sort through the messages to prioritize.¹ Needless to say, today’s employees often struggle with how to manage their communication load. The Harvard Management Update¹ provided a 12-step program for managing information overload. Here is a summary of their tips:

1. **Set aside a specific time** for checking e-mail throughout the day and consider checking only three times a day.

2. **Don’t open every e-mail**; instead scan subject lines and delete as necessary. When working on projects with colleagues, agree on a subject line that indicates the code name for the project.
3. If working on a team, **set up an e-mail system of communication** and consider using intranet bulletin boards.

4. **Polish your technology skills** by taking the time to learn new methods of using programs. Many times there are useful tools we never learned or overlook that can help us manage information.

5. **Set up an organized filing system** that makes it easy for you to sort and save the files and e-mails that are most important.

6. **Archive messages.** If your inbox is full with too many messages to organize, then create an archive folder on your local workstation and save everything. If you really need any of the information, you at least know where to start looking, plus it will give you a fresh start for implementing your new filing system.

7. **Never wait to organize your files and messages.** Always put files in the appropriate folders so that you’ll always know where to find them and you won’t end up with duplicate copies.

8. Just as you set aside time to respond to e-mail, also **set aside time to return phone calls.** Instead of moving between communication activities, let phone calls go to voicemail and then return calls in batches.

9. If you’re good at **multitasking,** then work to organize your files while doing other things like printing documents or talking on the cell phone.

10. **Print documents** and e-mails that you can read at later times. Many times we receive attachments of information items that don’t need immediate attention, so to keep the clutter out of your inbox, print it to read and respond to later.

11. **Set time limits** for your Internet activity. Whether it’s conducting online research or reading the newspaper online, you should set a specific cutoff time for your usage. It’s easy to get sucked into the Internet only to waste more of your precious time. Focus on the best search engines and sources of information so you don’t waste time fruitlessly looking for information.

12. **Unsubscribe** to as many e-mail lists as possible. Many organizations send out advertisements, newsletters, and announcements that plug up your inbox. Delete and unsubscribe as new organizations add you to their list.

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**PRINCIPLES OF COMMUNICATION**

In addition to the communication model, specific communication principles further clarify and highlight the complexity and nature of the communication process. The following sections provide important considerations for communication in the business and professional environment.
Communication Is a Basic Human Need, but Effective Communication Is Not a Basic Human Ability

We are born communicating. Even though an infant’s level of communication may not be very sophisticated, the tone and pitch of a baby’s cry communicates to caregivers. Perhaps it’s a cry of hunger or sleepiness or even the desire to be held and nurtured; it is nevertheless a powerful form of communication that sets people into action. An extensive amount of research has confirmed the basic physical and mental need for communication; in fact, our brains are formed through interaction and experience with different stimuli. In addition to brain formation, the positive and negative health effects of communication are undeniable. For example, a recent study shows that affectionate communication has a direct impact on lowering stress levels, whereas another study found interpersonal conflict can increase the risk for heart disease. In organizations, positive communication climates translate into more productive and more satisfied employees. Many needs are met through communication, including social, identity, and practical needs. Being a member of an organization includes more than just sitting at a cubicle with no human interaction; it involves working with groups of people and developing relationships with customers, clients, and numerous others. Being a member of different social groups becomes a part of our identities. In other words, we learn more about who we are as people from our interaction with others. We also communicate to meet very practical needs, such as earning a paycheck or learning how to complete a new work process. We learn how to perform our jobs via communication. Even...
though communication is a basic human ability and basic human need, effective communication is a different story. Enrolling in communication courses and practicing your communication skills can give you a leg up in the business world and set you on a course for developing satisfying workplace relationships.

Communication Is Intentional and Unintentional

This basic principle of communication is typically discussed in the form of a question, Can one not not communicate? The beauty of communication is that we have the power to control our messages, and so we have great opportunities to formulate, practice, and deliver the most effective messages possible. In the business world, this means that we can intentionally construct e-mails, phone calls, newsletters, and brochures to create a desired impression. A job interview is a perfect example of how we work to put our best foot forward to communicate intentionally our enthusiasm for a particular position or company and portray a certain level of professionalism. On the other hand, what if we are sending messages that are less strategic? For example, what if during your job interview you nervously bounce your leg under the table, or what if you shake hands with an administrative assistant when you leave the interview, but not the manager? Messages are communicated unintentionally when you either do not realize that you’re communicating something such as nervousness or boredom or when the actions you take, such as shaking hands with someone of a lesser status and skipping the manager, results in others making an interpretation of your behavior that is unintentional. There is nothing wrong with unintentional messages; they are simply an element of existence and human cognitive processing; however, being able to manage and construct your messages and adapt to a variety of contexts can help you to become a more competent communicator.

Communication Is Irreversible

Another common principle of communication is that it is irreversible. This essentially means that once a message is communicated, you cannot adapt, correct, change, or retract it. You can only continue to communicate follow-up messages that assist you in achieving common understanding. This principle of communication is a bit disconcerting because it truly speaks to the power of our words. Communication is a powerful tool that we use in all relationships with others. With that power comes the opportunity to communicate messages for better or worse,
to build or to destroy, which is why it is important to take our time in constructing the best messages possible. An example of the irreversible nature of communication is social networking sites such as Facebook. Many employers are not only using these sites as a way to connect with potential customers, but also as a research tool for potential employees. Specifically, they are looking to see if pictures or postings on personal pages are a match with the image the organization is trying to project. This not only exemplifies the intentional and unintentional nature of our communication, but also the fact that once a message is posted, it cannot be taken back. The beauty of communication is that we rarely have just one interaction with another person, so if we communicate something we’d like to retract, we have other opportunities to adapt our messages.

**Communication Is Contextual and Rule Based**

As indicated in the communication model, communication takes place in specific contexts or situations that have spoken and unspoken or written and unwritten rules for communication. A context can be a specific type of relationship such as between coworkers or between employees and supervisors or it can even be specific organizations or industries. Competent communicators learn the rules of a specific context or situation and then communicate accordingly. For example, some organizations have different procedures for communicating important work policies. Some may communicate all important messages via e-mail, whereas others may use more formal written memos on official company letterhead. As members of many types of organizations, it's important for us to learn the ins and outs of how certain messages are communicated in order to avoid violating norms. This can be a confusing process, but asking questions and observing others at work can go a long way toward helping us tailor what we say and how we say it.

**Communication Has Ethical Dimensions**

Another important part of communicating competently involves ethics. As mentioned earlier, Spitzberg and Cupach described competent communication as being appropriate and effective. This definition is in essence value-neutral. In other words, if communication is strategic, then you could very skillfully communicate in a way that is appropriate and effective within a specific context and at the same time use unethical means for achieving your goals. We are especially susceptible to unethical means of persuasion in the workplace, where our livelihood relies on our
ability to gain compliance from others, including coworkers, clients, and managers. Ethics in communication seems like a no-brainer. Doing the right thing, being honest, and communicating openly seem like fairly easy things to do; however, organizations are complex communication networks where competing goals exist. Consequently, we may find ourselves thrust into frequent ethical dilemmas related to coworkers, clients, or shareholders and we might feel at odds with the ways our organizations want us to communicate. Mumby (2013) states “Communication is ethical when (a) it promotes genuine dialogue and understanding amongst different organizational stakeholders, (b) contributes to individual and relational growth amongst organization members, (c) recognizes the possibility of different organizational realities operating simultaneously, (d) acknowledges the multiple and often conflicting interests of different organizational stakeholders, and (e) facilitates democratic and participatory decision-making processes across all levels of the organization.”16 Many professional communication organizations such as the National Communication Association (NCA) and the International Association of Business Communicators (IABC) provide guidelines for ethical communication. Both organizations stress the importance of communicating honestly and accurately, encouraging free speech, providing access to information, seeking understanding by valuing diverse perspectives including being sensitive to cultural values, giving credit for information borrowed from others, and protecting private and confidential information.17
Table 1.3 highlights IABC’s Code of Ethics for Professional Communicators. As you can see, communicating ethically is central to developing organizational relationships in its many forms.

COMMUNICATION IN THE WORKPLACE

Communication in organizations can take many different forms. As outlined in the communication model, many different messages are sent using various channels and to a number of stakeholders, including customers, clients, employees, government agencies, and investors. Communication within organizations takes place in both formal and informal communication networks. Formal networks are patterns of communication designed by management and inherent to a person’s specific role within an organization. In other words, you use formal networks when you communicate with people based on your specific position in the organization. Formal communication in the workplace can travel in many directions, including upward, downward, and horizontally. All organizations have a certain structure or formal network that influences not only the content of messages, but also the methods for transmitting messages. A review of a company’s organizational chart can tell you a lot about how messages travel. Organizational charts are typically characterized by their breadth and depth or their flatness or tallness. Companies with many different levels of authority are considered “tall” structures, and organizations with power that is spread among employees and divisions are considered “flat.” Figure 1.3 demonstrates what a tall or flat organizational chart looks like.

Downward communication describes messages that travel “down” the organizational chart from members with power to those with lower levels of power. These messages typically include policies, procedures, manuals, vision statements, or annual reports. Upward communication includes messages that travel “up” the organizational chart from employees upward to managers. Messages that travel upward include status reports, suggestions for improvement, and satisfaction surveys. Horizontal communication involves messages that flow between employees of similar status within or across the same departments, including status reports or updates, reminders of policies, and suggestions. Organizations with flatter structures have more upward and horizontal forms of communication. These organizations may or may not use a team-based structure that encourages creative ideas and plans that flow from the bottom up or from employees to managers. An organization’s structure varies; however,
### TABLE 1.3: International Communication Association Code of Ethics for Professional Communicators

1. Professional communicators uphold the credibility and dignity of their profession by practicing honest, candid and timely communication and by fostering the free flow of essential information in accord with the public interest.

2. Professional communicators disseminate accurate information and promptly correct any erroneous communication for which they may be responsible.

3. Professional communicators understand and support the principles of free speech, freedom of assembly, and access to an open marketplace of ideas and act accordingly.

4. Professional communicators are sensitive to cultural values and beliefs and engage in fair and balanced communication activities that foster and encourage mutual understanding.

5. Professional communicators refrain from taking part in any undertaking which the communicator considers to be unethical.

6. Professional communicators obey laws and public policies governing their professional activities and are sensitive to the spirit of all laws and regulations and, should any law or public policy be violated, for whatever reason, act promptly to correct the situation.

7. Professional communicators give credit for unique expressions borrowed from others and identify the sources and purposes of all information disseminated to the public.

8. Professional communicators protect confidential information and, at the same time, comply with all legal requirements for the disclosure of information affecting the welfare of others.

9. Professional communicators do not use confidential information gained as a result of professional activities for personal benefit and do not represent conflicting or competing interests without written consent of those involved.

10. Professional communicators do not accept undisclosed gifts or payments for professional services from anyone other than a client or employer.

11. Professional communicators do not guarantee results that are beyond the power of the practitioner to deliver.

12. Professional communicators are honest not only with others but also, and most importantly, with themselves as individuals; for a professional communicator seeks the truth and speaks that truth first to the self.

http://www.iabc.com/about/code.htm
many organizations in today’s business environment recognize that the hierarchical structures of the past did not value or maximize employee input. Today’s employees must have greater communication skills to be successful in an interactive workplace.

In addition to formal communication networks, informal networks are based on friendships or relationships formed based on similarity in professional goals or personal interests. Informal networks may be influenced by social characteristics such as age, shared activities, or cultural group membership. Messages within informal networks travel in many different ways, but the company grapevine is commonly referenced as a channel for informal communication. The company grapevine is often considered a powerful form of communication and surprisingly accurate. Even though it may be a vehicle for rumors and distortion, the company grapevine is known to be a good indicator of employee opinions and morale.\textsuperscript{18}

\section*{figure\,1.3}
Organizational Chart

\begin{enumerate}
\item Flat vs. Tall Organizational Hierarchy
\item Tall Organizational Structure
\item Flat Organizational Structure
\end{enumerate}
In addition to knowing about the communication model and the basic principles of communication, employees must learn the basic flow of communication within their specific organization. Learning the processes and procedures for exchanging information is critical to reaching your communication goals and maximizing your success and productivity.

THE CHANGING NATURE OF TODAY’S ORGANIZATIONS

As discussed throughout this chapter, communication in organizations is a complex process involving people, messages, channels, meaning, and structure. In addition to these concepts, there are also important contextual elements to consider. Organizations do not exist in a vacuum; they are a part of an intricate conglomeration of environmental factors. Organizations are embedded in environments made up of people, governments, cultures, technologies, beliefs, traditions, etc. To understand an organization and how to communicate within it you must be aware of and understand the environment in which it thrives. Three important
environmental factors that have greatly changed organizations include globalization, technology, and participative organizational structures.

First, if you've heard the phrase, “The world is flat,” it is in reference to the changing nature of our economy from one that focuses on national and regional competition to one that is global in size. Consider for example what might happen if the Chinese real estate bubble bursts. The Chinese government may decide not to bail out construction companies which means they may need to sell off their ownership in U.S. debt, which means that the Federal Reserve might decide to raise interest rates so as to increase the attractiveness of U.S. debt for investors. Even if this scenario does not play out, if the Chinese real estate bubble bursts, it can have serious effects on their economy which will negatively affect American investors in China. As you can see, we live in a complicated global network. Governments and natural forces affect our economy even on something as simple as rattan, a reed used to make baskets and furniture. The Indonesian government recently prohibited the export of products in an effort to build their economy at the same time that they were experiencing a shortage of rattan due to forest depletion. The result? U.S. companies have either been unable to obtain rattan or they have had to pay double the price for it. Fueled by technological advances and improved logistics, we are now more globally connected than ever before. These changes have led to increased multicultural diversity in our organizations and widespread dissemination of technology tools.

As a business communicator you will need an understanding of our global connectedness and must be able to adapt your communication to other cultures. As organizations become more globally dispersed, you will more than likely work with counterparts in other parts of the world, so you can anticipate not only coordinating work across time zones, but you will also need a more in-depth understanding of how to interpret communication patterns of your colleagues and an understanding of consumer behaviors in the international marketplace. Consider the introduction of U.S. fast food to Asia. In 2011 YUM! Brands, owner of KFC, Taco Bell, and Pizza Hut, opened a store in Asia every 18 minutes. Part of the popularity of KFC in the region can be attributed to their inclusion of local foods on their menus. They have been able to adapt to different markets to ensure their success. Another element of doing business in different cultures is understanding cultural practices. For example, when the first drive-through fast food restaurants opened in China, customers didn’t quite understand the concept. First, many bikers went through the drive-through as opposed to vehicles, because that’s
how many people traveled. Next, customers would order the food at the window, park, and take the food inside. Why would anyone want to eat food in their car? This development was unanticipated as Western values of efficiency and time-saving surrounding mealtimes were not cultural values in Asian societies where sitting down to savor a meal is respected and expected. Understanding culture is an important aspect of being a competent business communicator. Chapter 2 provides an even more in-depth discussion of what to expect when interacting with diverse cultures.

It’s difficult to discuss globalization without focusing on the important role of technology. Can you imagine life without a reliable e-mail system, or a cell phone, or social media? Indeed, we have become so reliant on technology that many of us have trouble taking a break from it even when it serves as a distraction to our productivity and creativity. The impact of technology on organizations cannot be overstated. Technology is central to how work gets accomplished and how much work can be accomplished by one person. Additionally, technology has provided organizations with a vast array of processing and storage capabilities and improved inventory control and logistics. Marketing, branding, and new product development have also changed with the technological boom. Consider how organizations use a whole range of social media to connect with customers and constituents from Facebook to Twitter to Tumblr. For the purpose of this textbook, we’ll focus on how to use technology in competent ways from job search processes to networking to telemeeting. Appropriate and effective use of new communication technologies is critical to your success in business.

Finally, the last major organizational change we’ll discuss relates to the way organizations are structuring themselves. As discussed earlier in the chapter, an organizational chart is a visual representation of how a company is organized in terms of how decisions are made and who holds power at various levels. Organizational structures can be tall with many layers of decision-making and power concentrated in the hands of those higher up or flat with fewer layers and more communication horizontally among members at the same level of the organization. Even an organizational chart can be a bit misleading when it comes to describing exactly how decisions are made. One thing is certain; many organizations are using team-based decision-making regardless of the structure they have on paper. Some organizations use a pure form of team management or project management where there are very few levels of hierarchy while others use teams even though they have many layers. Today’s students need to know how to work in groups. Working in groups...
not only involves developing and accomplishing tasks as a group, but also the ability to navigate relational issues that arise. What does it mean to be a team player? Do leaders emerge in a team or are leaders assigned? What happens when power and decision-making are dispersed among employees? The answers to this and other questions are addressed in Chapters 6 and 7 on interpersonal communication and team building. Understanding the role of participation in different organizations is essential to business success. As organizations strive to remain innovative and responsive to market demands, they seek flexible structures that eschew formal hierarchies and slow-moving bureaucracies.

CONCLUSION

This chapter provides the basic concepts for understanding the complex process of communication within the workplace, including the components of the communication model, the principles of communication, and the patterns and flow of communication in organizations. As described in the opening paragraph, George Stevens has experienced some of the complexity of being a new member of an organization. For example, he is learning the most appropriate and effective ways to communicate messages, specifically to his supervisor and to his clients. He is also forming a support system by developing relationships with people outside his department with whom he spent time training. These relationships connect him to the informal communication network at Health Matrix, Inc. In addition, he is learning the best ways to communicate formally with his coworkers and clients by investing time in adapting his messages for staff meetings and sales calls. These are just a few examples of the ways George is learning the ropes and developing his communication competence.

Throughout this course and textbook, you will study many facets of workplace communication, including foundational elements such as listening and verbal, nonverbal, and written communication, as well as processes of interpersonal communication, small-group decision-making, and effective business presentations. As you make your way through each chapter, stay focused on the tools you need for communicating competently in any organization. You might be surprised at how much you’ll learn about the complex process of communication and how you can improve the quality of your personal and professional relationships.
1. Working with a partner, develop a list of common communication breakdowns you have experienced in organizations. At what point in the communication process did the problem(s) occur? How did you deal with the situation, and what was the outcome? In retrospect, what elements of the communication model or the principles of communication were most relevant?

2. Considering the communication model, what sources of internal and external noise are most prevalent in organizations? Would you consider information overload as a form of noise? What suggestions might you give for managing large amounts of information?

3. After completing the self-assessment on your communication skills (Table 1.1), write down three areas of communication in which you would like to improve. Think about someone you perceive to be a competent communicator or a communication role model. What characteristics do they exhibit? How might you work to achieve some of these same skills?

4. Draw an organizational chart that represents the structure of a company you have worked for or been a part of as a volunteer or as a student. What types of messages travel upward, downward, and horizontally? Would you consider the company’s hierarchy as tall or flat? What recommendations would you make for the flow of communication based on the structure?

5. What types of information are shared in the company grapevine? Can you think of an example when information you received from the grapevine was accurate or inaccurate? How can employees and managers use and evaluate information gleaned from the grapevine?

6. Using the NCA Credo for Ethical Communication (Table 1.3) brainstorm examples of ways employees might be ethically challenged. You might consider guidelines for how meetings are run to how messages are marketed to customers. How can organizations assist employees in communicating ethically?
REFERENCES


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