Chapter One

Communications in Business

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Chapter One

Learning Objectives

LO 1 Understand the importance of communication in the workplace.

LO 2 Examine various communication cycles.

LO 3 Practice engaging in transformational communication.

LO 4 Describe organizational communication styles and structures.

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The Importance of Communication, and the End Goal

We all know that effective communication is important to us. We feel better when communication is positive, when there is warmth and laughter, compassion and understanding, from those we hold in high regard. Given that our workplace is a second home, does it not seem desirable that we would wish for that same comfort level to be present at work? In this text, we will explore why communication is important in the work place, and why communication is important to you, as a vital component of that organizational team. Although most people would agree that communication is important, people are often not as effective as they could be in their communications. Perhaps messages are not received as intended and perhaps those messages may have unwanted results. Effective communication leads to effective organizational fluency, customer satisfaction, and profit. This is a model for success.

For you, as a team member in that organization, it is important to get along with your peers, supervisors, and subordinates. Greg Taffet and other Information Technology (IT) leaders want more than just IT skills in their new college graduates. In an article on the six key skills new IT grads are lacking, they continue to value what most businesses have cited for years—the "soft skills," particularly communication skills, leadership and teamwork (Pratt).

Profit is the "bottom line" in business language. Employees value an incentive such as a salary increase for a job well done. However, it may be surprising to know that though a salary increase is a highly motivating factor, acknowledgement and praise of a job well performed increases job performance even more. Effective communication most certainly is a highly valued business skill.

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Professor and Students: "Thought Bubble" means take a break and discuss these questions. Alternatively, blog about it at a blog site as instructed by your professor. (10 pts.) When completed, upload to your online classroom site. (Assignment Chapter One, #1)

What is the end goal of your company or organization? Instructions: Give students 10 minutes to prepare, then have each student present themselves in relation to this question, for oral presentation practice.

What steps can we take in our professional lives to bring about positive, fluent communications, and how might we mirror those in our personal lives?

Let us take it a step further. We have established that positive communication is pleasant and desirable, and that it leads to productivity and profit. Positive communication is effective communication, and effective communication leads to efficiency and productivity in the organization. Moreover, effective communication leads to "engaged" employees. In an article in *Rural Telecommunications,* Droppers states that "Employees who understand the company's direction and know how to do their jobs to support that direction are more engaged; they have higher job satisfaction and overall morale, and are more productive." (Droppers, "Engage employees with effective communications")

This type of engagement does not happen by itself. It is a result of creating and employing effective role descriptions in the organization, which gives employees clarity as to their roles and creates a sense of ownership. When a specific person takes ownership over a task, there is a clear expectation as to who is going to complete the task. In a company or an organization, the Who, What, Where, When, and How of role descriptions is extremely important to successful communications. Role or job descriptions, scheduling, completion of tasks, tracking, project management, and follow up are common tools that ensure a smooth and successful communication cycle. Let us look at the communication cycle and its elements and discuss how to ensure that the communication techniques you employ at work promote understanding of your "intended" message.

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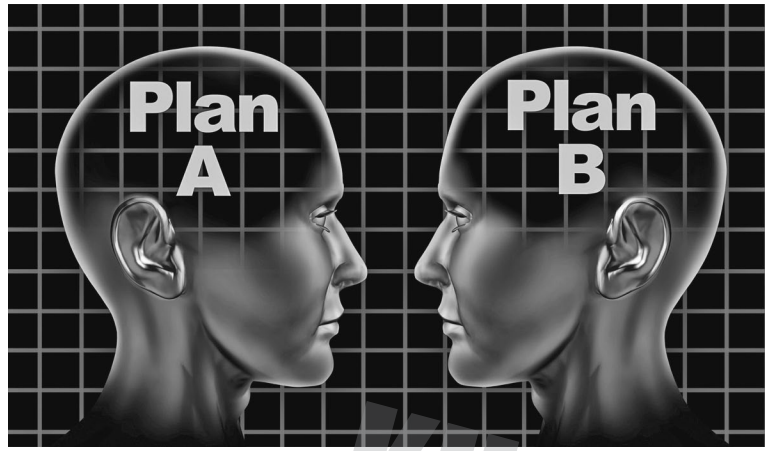
If I understand my message, shouldn't everyone else? What incorrect assumptions might occur in this thinking process? (Discussion only)

As we will discuss next, there is more to ensuring that our communications are well received than thinking that they will be—simply because we understand the message. Communication takes many forms on its journey from Department A to Department Z, and in the end it may be interpreted as a "Plan A," and not your intended "Plan B." The intent of this text, and the activities that you will engage in throughout the course, will help you practice the skills that you need to ensure proper communication. First, let's take a brief look at the history behind the concept of the 'communication cycle' before moving into the skill set you will develop to improve your written and oral communication skills.



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The Communication Cycle

The 'communication cycle' is the complete path of communication that occurs between sender and receiver. There have been several major models of the communication cycle since Claude Shannon and Warren Weaver developed a model for radio and telephone technologies, in which there were three primary parts: sender, channel, and receiver (Shannon). David Berlo expanded on Shannon and Weaver's linear model of communication with his Sender-Message-Channel-Receiver Model (Berlo). Wilbur Schramm noted that the impact that a message has on the target should also be examined (Schramm 3–26). More recently, a model called the transactional model of communication was proposed (Barnlund, A Transactional Model of Communication 47–57), which assumes the basic premise that individuals simultaneously engage in the sending and receiving of messages as displayed in Figure 1.

Finally, James MacGregor Burnes coined a communication model called 'transformational leadership' in his 1978 book titled "*Leadership.*" The model described research on political leadership, but it is now widely used in many leadership activities and takes various forms. It is generally used to improve productivity, performance, or profit (Burnes).

In Burnes' example, a six-step model is used to describe how leadership works (see Fig. 2, 'The Communication Cycle').

We will be examining these steps as they relate to communications in the workplace and to the writing process itself in further detail in Chapter 2. For now, let us begin with a discussion of the six steps.

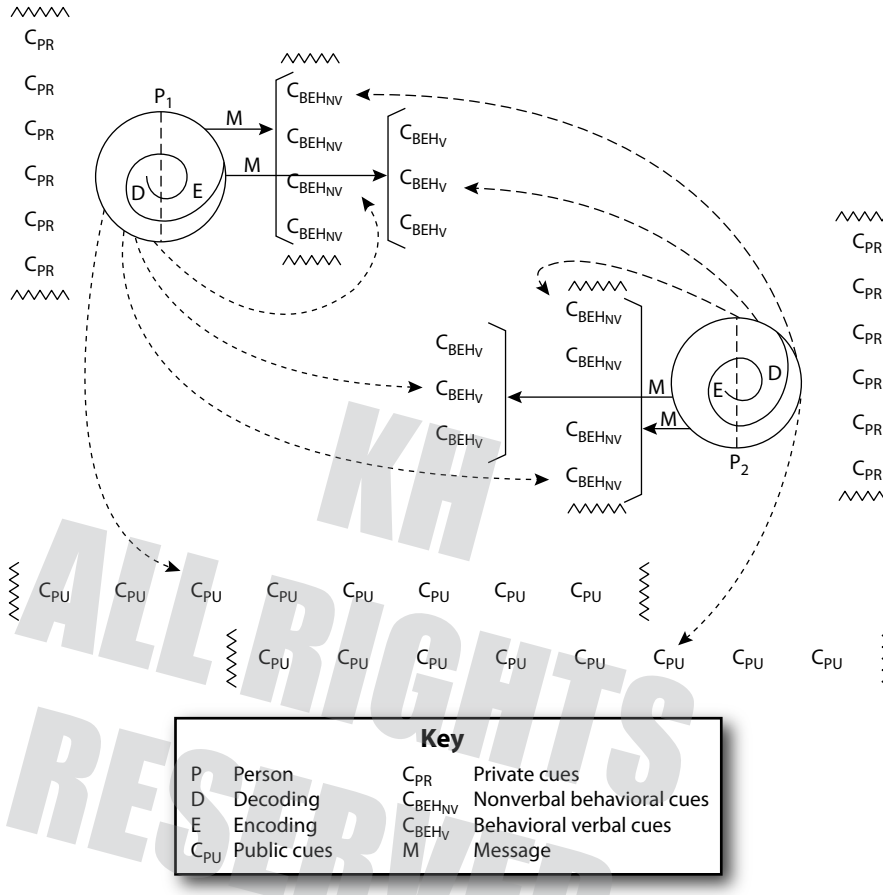

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FIGURE 1 *(Barnlund, A Transactional Model of Communication)*

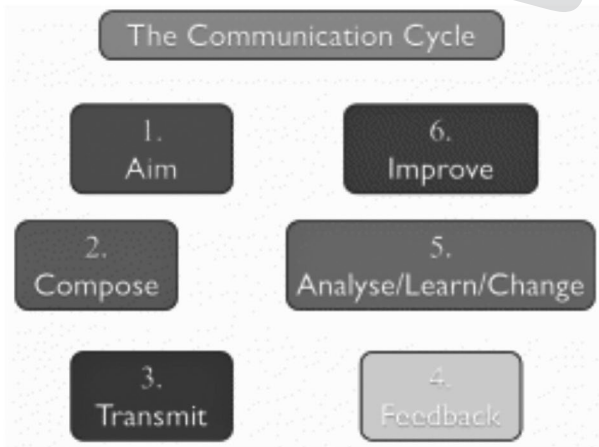

FIGURE 2 *The Communication Cycle.*

STEP 1. **Aim**—Who will you be addressing? In this step, you are considering your audience, their cultural level, corporate or organizational culture, and your motivations. What is the communication that you are trying to achieve? You will need to adapt your intended message to the audience. One way that you can "test" the reading level of your audience is to use the Word tool called "Readability Statistics."

STEP 2. **Compose**—What communication form will you use to communicate with your audience? The message itself may take many forms, such as: face-to-face, video, telephone, speech, voice mail, online, e-mail, letters, flyers, online media, electronic presentations, blogs, and social networking. Further, the importance of well-written documents is often overlooked and is a vital component of successful business communications.

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STEP 3. **Transmit**—Where and when should you communicate in order to optimize your results? Timing is crucial in delivering a communication and having it be well received. For example, if you truly want your colleagues to study your document before the marketing meeting, then you will need to send it to them days in advance, not an hour before the meeting. Have you ever tried to deliver a key piece of information to your staff at 4:00 on a Friday afternoon, when people are "halfway out the door"? That message is better received on a Monday or a Tuesday morning when workers are fresh and ready to plan the week's activities. Yes, it is cliché, but we have all heard the expression "timing is everything." It certainly can be!

STEP 4. **Feedback**—What impact did your communication have? What feedback are you receiving because of your sent communication? If the feedback is negative or deviates from your point of view, sometimes it is hard to accept that point of view. However, you will learn and grow in any organization by asking for constructive feedback. Feedback is hard to accept, as it is this stage that prevents many communications from proceeding further in a positive fashion. It is only when we can move away from defensive reactions to feedback, and open ourselves to listening deeply, that we can actually internalize and synthesize so that we can adapt our writing for future communication. According to Fisher (2006), empathy, acceptance, congruence, and concreteness are the four qualities of active listening. In addition, the listener should deviate from this position and offer an opinion only if the other person asks for it.

STEP 5. **Analyze/Learn/Change**—Based on the feedback and result of your communication, analyze, synthesize, and discuss the information with colleagues and perhaps even with family and friends. Then make any necessary changes. Remember,

in Step 4, we have already accepted the recommendations. In this step, you may actually have to conduct a bit of inquiry as well, based on the constructive feedback. There is a plethora of information on the Internet, so this necessary research has become easier. Based on your research, make the necessary changes to your documents. It is crucial to effective communication that you edit correspondence before sending, often many times, and ask others to review and make recommendations as well. Insufficient editing of written communications is a step that is not appreciated enough in business. We will practice *the crucial repetitive editing step* often throughout this text *to refine our writing.*

STEP 6. **Improve**—The emphasis in this step is on a positive change in your own behavior, and on taking ownership of that improvement. This should take the form of changes in your thinking, feelings, and actions.

Do further research on one of the communication cycles listed above. Upload to your online classroom site under Assignment Chapter One, #2 (10 pts.)

Have you experienced a communication breakdown at your place of employment or in some other organization? Do you think your response improved future communications? If so, describe how your response improved communication. If not, describe how you might improve the communication cycle in the future. Explain. Upload to your online classroom site under Assignment Chapter One, #3 (10 pts.)

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Practicing the Six Steps of the Transformational Leadership Communication Cycle

Once you have an understanding of the communication cycle, consider how you can practice enhanced oral and written communication so that your message is well received and a positive end result is achieved:

STEP 1 *Consider your audience and adapt.*

What is the educational level, the age, and the cultural and perhaps religious background of your audience? Adapt your writing and speaking levels accordingly.

STEP 2 *Choose the form of communication and compose.*

Will you be speaking, giving a PowerPoint presentation, presenting a graph that shows significant company data, writing a memo, sending an e-mail to one or

many, creating and supporting a Website, or collecting online data for analysis and distribution? The intent of the communication, the feedback you anticipate, and the tools and forms of communication available to the recipient are all important considerations.

STEP 3 *Choose when to transmit the message.*

You should transmit the message when people are most open to receiving it. A Friday afternoon may seem like the worst time to deliver it; however, many people now work from home and are online constantly, so you will need to pay attention to the "reading" habits of your audience. What time of the day does the individual seem to read and reply to your message? You'll also need to carefully consider just who should receive a copy of that message. It is just as injurious not to include someone in a message that is relevant or critical to her as it is to send the message to the wrong recipient. Be very careful to edit your communication many times and not to hit the "send" button too quickly. You cannot take that message back once it is sent!

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STEP 4 *Receive and internalize feedback.*

How do we internalize feedback in order to effect changes in our behavior? We engage in reflective listening. According to Fisher (2006), we should listen more than talk, respond to what is personal rather than abstract, restate what the other has said, not ask questions or tell the listener what he or she feels or believes, try to understand the feelings and not just the facts, and empathize with the other's frame of reference.

By studying these important methods, and by practicing them, you will become a more reflective listener and be able to connect with your peers and co-workers.

STEP 5 *Refine your communications based on feedback.*

This text will allow you to spend an entire semester refining your written and verbal communications. By using the included activities, you will develop skills that will enhance your written and spoken communications even after you leave the classroom.

STEP 6 *Improve, change!*

Research leadership training in organizations helps you accelerate your ability to change. Many leadership training institutes, books, and seminars teach you how to lead and communicate effectively.

Changes should be reflected in the tone, emotion, and quality of your written and oral communications. This step is the hardest to achieve, but it has the biggest payoff. Remember that the end goal is to have the listener hear your communication as it was intended, and to achieve the result you desire. If it takes a few revisions to accomplish that, the time will be well spent.

For the next two activities, Assignment 4 and Assignment 5, please use the Tear Out Sheets at the end of this chapter.

Practice Transformational Leadership Principles right now, in your class. Later, apply these techniques to your workplace, home, or interest group, or even blog about it at your classroom blog site. (10 pts.) Online classroom site Assignment Chapter One #4.

Reflective Listening Activity. Break into groups of five to ten students. Have two students volunteer to model the Reflective Listening process. Place two chairs in front of the group. Have the entire group decide on a situation that they have encountered at work or school or some other group to which they belong. Give them ten minutes to recall a scenario. Ask them to briefly describe it on paper. You may have students use the computer to compose this in Word. Do not put your name on the paper. Keep it anonymous. Tear your paper out of the text, after placing a number on the backside of the page, assigned by your instructor. Pass the paper to your left. Make comments on your peer's paper.

Reflective Listening Activity

Practice Reflective Listening Activity on Page 2. (10 pts.) Online Classroom Site Assignment Chapter One #5

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Organizational Communication Styles and Structures

We have already established that any organization, whether public or private, is both an economic system and a social system. A positive social system is crucial to the proper functioning of the economic system. Whether the organization is marketing a product for profit, or is a non-profit organization established to ensure a particular educational or charitable agenda, effective communication creates a positive social system and is vital to the success of the organization.

Several key factors determine how individuals interact within the social system. They are the culture of the organization, the emotional current of the organization, and the structure of the organization.

Organizational culture has received increasing attention from both scholars and business leaders. In particular, the field of empirical studies examining the connection between organizational culture and effectiveness is growing.[1] The culture of the organization determines the type of communication that should be used to achieve the desired result. Some companies and organizations, such as certain government branches, are very formal in their hierarchical structure; therefore, communications between workers are more formal in nature. In a less formal organization, especially those with a creative bent such as an advertising company, communications tend to be more relaxed and even unconventional by design. It is important to pay attention to culture and to adapt written and oral communications to fit the culture. We will learn to adapt written forms of communication to culture in Chapter 2.

Another factor that affects the tone of communications is the "emotional current" of an organization. The emotional current of the organization, or the prevailing feelings regarding current organizational issues, reflects how employees feel, and this feeling is conveyed in various forms of communication. If there is a negative internal message circulating, such as the announcement of a large layoff, this influences workers' morale. Internal communications, especially with the use of e-mail, may rapidly convey this negativity throughout the organization and in some cases may reach external stakeholders, such as shareholders and clients. It is important for leaders to be aware of this type of communication. Capitalizing on and promoting good news, such as the success of an idea or product, is as important as mitigating bad news.

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Grapevine: © Michaela Stejskalova, 2012. Used under license from Shutterstock, Inc.

One way in which the emotional climate of the organization manifests itself is referred to as the "grapevine." The grapevine is the informal network of communications that takes place between employees at the water cooler, around the copy machine, in the workroom, or in the hallways before or after a meeting. It is very important to be aware of this social network as it should in part dictate the next steps in the communication cycle. The form of communication to use, or even to abstain from using, is critical in this stage of the communication process.

[1] Denison and Mishra cite several empirical studies they have conducted on page 206 of their article, "Organizational Culture and Effectiveness."

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Our final consideration is how organizational structure impacts communication choice. To illustrate this, we will refer to a common business graphic called the organizational chart.

Organizational charts represent the organizational structure that establishes the chain of command among various levels of employees. Similar charts can also be used to show the information flow of a new marketing product from concept to market, or to conduct project management, whereby resources are organized, allocated, and secured for a particular project that has a beginning and an end point in mind.

Consider the differences between these two organizational chart structures:

The first chart on the left shows a very traditional top-down management style. Conversely, the chart on the right shows a circular form of communication, where the management and production teams are enveloping the core of workers.

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How do you think the communication would vary between the two types of charts in Figure 3? (5 pts.) Online Classroom Site Assignment Chapter One, #6. Write a two paragraph response to this question using Microsoft Word. Save in a PDF format with your name, date, and assignment number, and upload to your online class site.

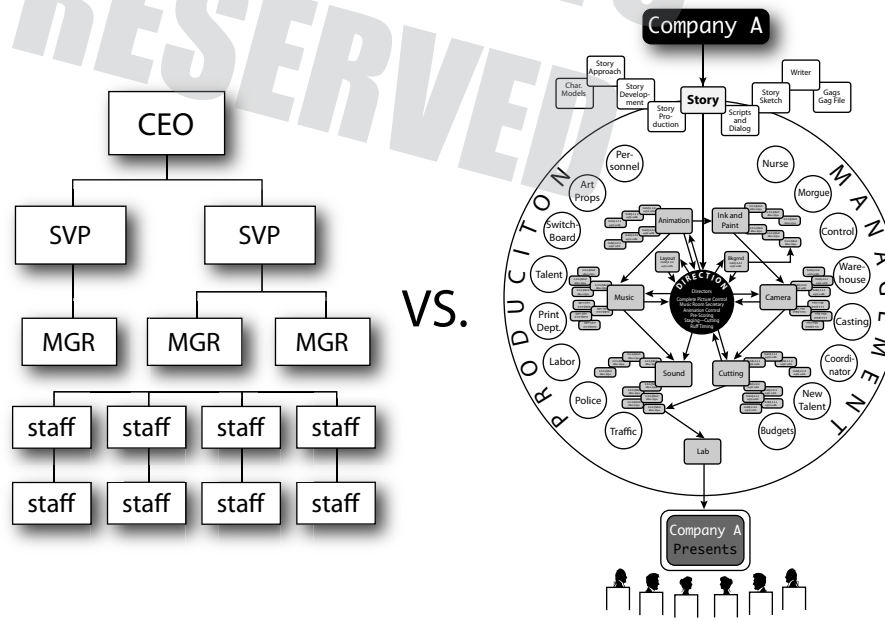

FIGURE 3 *Standard Organizational Chart vs. Circular Organizational Chart.*

Imagine that you are at a wedding with one hundred guests, and that there is just one long table with all guests seated on either side of that table. What do you think communication would be like in this case? Now imagine the same one hundred guests divided into ten tables of ten people and consider the communication that might take place with this table arrangement. Write a four paragraph response to this scenario using Microsoft Word. Spellcheck, save in PDF format with your name, date, and assignment number, and upload to your online class site. Online Classroom Site Assignment Chapter One, #7. (5 pts.)

Using your favorite search engines, find an organizational chart structure that reflects an organization or a business to which you belong. Save with your name, date, and assignment number, and upload to your online class site. Online Classroom Site Assignment Chapter One, #8 (5 pts.)

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The structure of an organization affects the way that people communicate in the organization. Often the product or the mission of the organization dictates the form of communication as well. Just as organizing tables and chairs into circles, as opposed to a straight line, will affect the type of communication that occurs at a meeting or event, the physical layout and hierarchical organization of a company impacts communication to enhance or impede the end goal.

Consider a more traditional hierarchical flow chart, such as a flow chart for the Department of Defense, where the chain of command needs to be clearly understood and followed, since discussing options in moments of international crisis may result in loss of life.

Quite distinct however, is an advertising organization, where the reporting chain would have design team members participating at the same "flat" level to encourage creative feedback and dialogue, with the Design Team Lead encouraging feedback from all members.

Using the Insert SmartArt command, choose a hierarchy or a relationship to show the reporting structure of an organization or a company to which you belong. Online Classroom Site Assignment Link Chapter One, #9. (5 pts.)

Finally, communication, organizational culture, and emotional current are as dynamic as the individuals who make up the organization. Therefore, communication and culture changes, so we have to be aware of the changes, be willing to embrace them, and adapt.

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FIGURE 4 *Traditional Top Down Organizational Chart.*

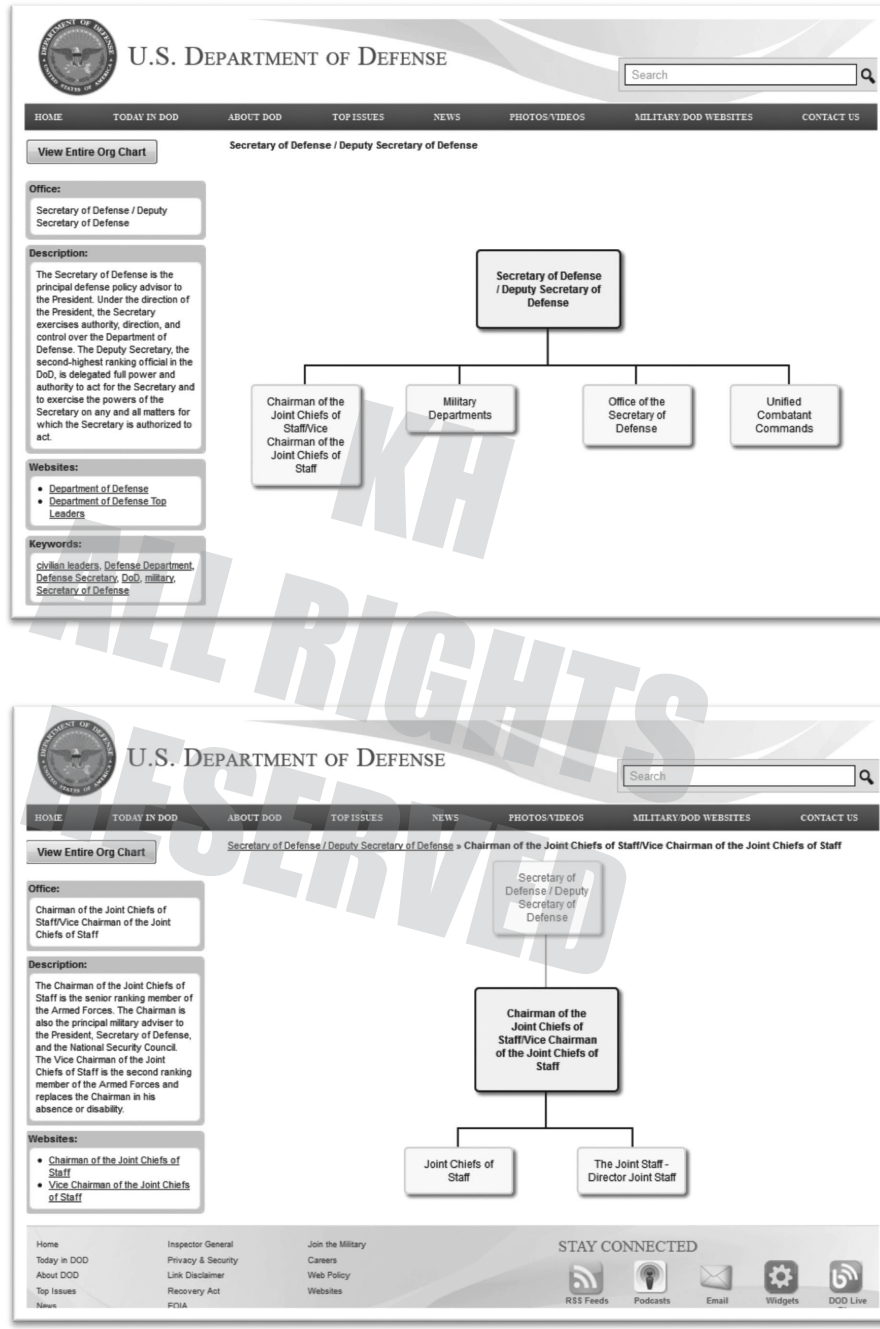

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FIGURE 4 *continued*

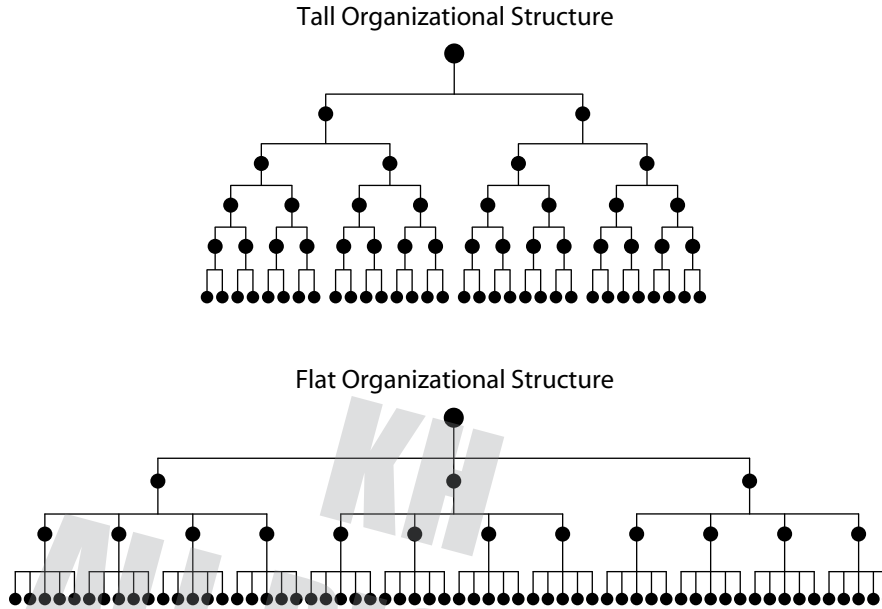

FIGURE 5 *Flat vs. Tall Organizational Hierarcy*

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FIGURE 6 *Communication Changes*

Student Activity Pages

Scenario (Use the same case study throughout the book so that the same documents can be edited repetitively and adapted to different scenarios in chapters.)

Mr. Smith, Sales Director
Ms. Malloy, Marketing Director
Mr. Ruiz, Marketing & Sales Manager
Company: Business Writing With An Edge Consulting Group

Situation

Mr. Smith and Ms. Malloy have been co-workers for several years, working closely together. Over the past year, Mr. Smith and Ms. Malloy have engaged in a more personal relationship. Apparently, the relationship is not working out, so Ms. Malloy would like Mr. Smith to stop communicating with her through company e-mail. Mr. Smith does not want to end the relationship so he continues to send her personal e-mails, even after Ms. Malloy has asked him several times to stop.

As Mr. Smith continues, Ms. Malloy finally tires of this behavior, and she writes an e-mail memo to her supervisor, Mr. Ruiz, who also is Mr. Smith's supervisor. She threatens to sue the company if Mr. Smith does not stop corresponding with her using company e-mail. She states that she can no longer work closely with Mr. Smith and feels that his behavior will negatively affect the marketing campaign that they have been working on for over a year.

Mr. Ruiz decides to call a meeting with Mr. Smith alone first.

Discussion Considerations Should company e-mail be used for personal correspondence? To whom should Ms. Malloy have sent the e-mail? To whom should she not have sent the correspondence? What was her aim, her audience, her goal? What form of communication should she have used?

Notes to instructor

Feedback from Ms. Malloy's supervisor was negative, so should she use that to gauge future communication and to change her behavior? Ms. Malloy should realize she implicated herself by using company e-mail. She can improve by not using company e-mail, by having private conversations, and by involving HR if

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Mr. Smith is harassing. Also, perhaps Ms. Malloy should have had a spoken conversation first with her supervisor, without using a threat of escalation.

Student Activity Tear Outs

"Six Step Transformational Communication Cycle Activity Table"
Answer the following using the Six Step Transformational Communication Cycle table in the Student Activity Tear Out Section:

How should Ms. Malloy aim, compose, and transmit her message?

After transmission of the message, how should she engage in the last three steps of the six step transformational communication cycle?

We will use these handwritten notes again in Chapter 2 to compose e-mail messages, internal memorandums, instant messages, and sample tweets in response to the situation with Mr. Smith, Ms. Malloy, and Mr. Ruiz.

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SIX STEP TRANSFORMATIONAL COMMUNICATION CYCLE ACTIVITY TABLE		
Aim	Compose	Transmit

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SIX STEP TRANSFORMATIONAL COMMUNICATION CYCLE ACTIVITY TABLE		
Receive Feedback	Analyze Learn Change	Improve

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Do not put your name on the paper; keep it anonymous. Tear your paper out of the text, after placing a number on the backside of the page, assigned by your instructor. Pass the paper to your left. Make comments on your peer's paper.

Reflective Listening Activity

Practice Reflective Listening. Engage in each step of the process, but pause to take notes on how you and your partner are interacting as you conduct the communication exchange. Your topic during this process is the responses from the Student Activity "six step transformational communication cycle activity table." (20 pts.)

Listen more than talk.

Respond to what is personal, rather than abstract.

Restate what your partner has said, do not ask questions or tell the listener what he/she feels or believes.

Try to understand your partner's feelings, not just the facts.

Empathize with the other's frame of reference with acceptance.

The completed activities from the Tear Sheets in Chapter One will be used to create appropriate electronic responses to the situation described in Student Activities in Chapter 2.

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In the following chapter, we will explore effective writing tools that we can employ in our communications with others that will ensure the highest probability that communications are received as intended.

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