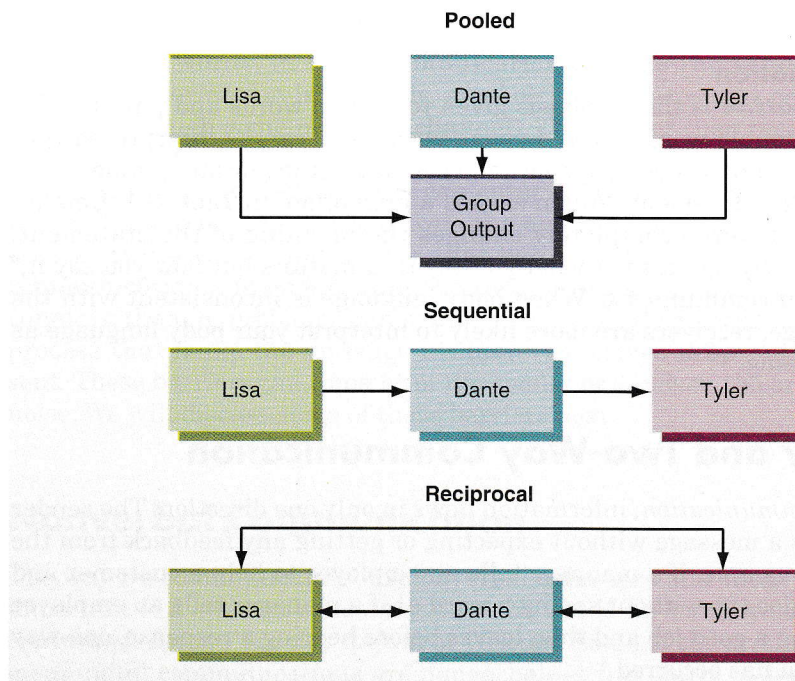


Figure 9.2**Types of Task Interdependence**

Task interdependence leads to an increase in communications requirements. The three major forms of interdependence, as shown here, are pooled, sequential, and reciprocal. The higher the level of interdependence the greater the requirement for effective communication.



types of interdependence, illustrated in Figure 9.2. *Pooled interdependence* is when employees work independently and their output is combined into group output. An example of pooled interdependence is a call center in which customer service agents act relatively independently in handling calls. Because employees work independently, pooled interdependence has low communication requirements.

Sequential interdependence, like in an assembly line, requires tasks to be performed in a certain order. This increases the need for communication as individuals or groups are dependent on other individuals or groups for the resources they need to complete their own tasks. For example, in Figure 9.2, Lisa, Dante, and Tyler need to communicate in order to coordinate their work.

Reciprocal interdependence requires constant communication and mutual adjustment for task completion, such as a cross-functional research and development team, or an event-planning team, and creates the highest potential for conflict. As shown in Figure 9.2, this is the most interdependent way of doing work and has the highest communication needs.

Barriers to Effective Communication

A number of potential barriers to effective communication exist. Table 9.2 summarizes some of the most common barriers that can interfere with the accurate communication of a message.

Table 9.2

A number of different barriers can inhibit effective communication in organizations.

Communication Barriers

Barrier	Description
Selective perception	We selectively see and hear based on our expectations and beliefs.
Misperception	Messages are not always decoded by the receiver in the way the sender intended.
Filtering	Information is intentionally withheld, ignored, or distorted to influence the message that is ultimately received.
Information overload	It is possible to have so much information that it is impossible to process all of it.
Organizational barriers	A firm's hierarchical structure and culture can influence who is allowed to communicate what to whom, and may limit how messages can be sent.
Cultural barriers	Different national cultures have different ways of expressing things.
Noise	Anything that blocks, distorts, or changes the message the sender intended to communicate can create a barrier.

Selective Perception

People tend not to hear things that they do not want to hear, and to hear things that are consistent with what they already believe. Selective perception occurs when we selectively interpret what we see based on our interests, expectations, experience, and attitudes rather than on how things really are. Sometimes people ignore conflicting information and focus only on the information that confirms what they already believe. Selective perception leads us to receive only the part of a message that is consistent with our expectations, needs, motivations, interests, and other personal characteristics.

For example, managers' functional expertise can influence how they perceive and solve complex problems.¹² Two managers given the same information about a problem may see the problem differently—a manager with a finance background may be more likely to see the problem as finance-based, while a manager with a production background may be more likely to see it as production-based. Each manager selectively perceives information that is consistent with his or her expertise and expectations, and does not pay as much attention to other types of information.

Selective perception may occur when people interpret messages differently because of their roles or areas of responsibility. Take these two men, for example. The manager on the left may base his understanding on information he is getting from his digital device. But the warehouse supervisor on the right may base his understanding on his practical background and understanding of how the warehouse operates.

MARGIN BAL CERZAK/
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misperception

When a message is not decoded by the receiver in the way the sender intended

Misperception

Misperception occurs when a message is not decoded by the receiver in the way the sender intended. A misperception can occur because the sender's body language is inconsistent with the sender's words, and the receiver incorrectly interprets the body language to be the true message. A misperception can also be due to the receiver selectively perceiving favorable parts of the sender's message, distorting the message's meaning. Poor listening skills can also result in misperception.

filtering

Less than the full amount of information is received due to withholding, ignoring, or distorting information

Filtering

Filtering occurs when people receive less than the full amount of information due to the withholding, ignoring, or distorting of information. Filtering can happen when a sender manipulates information so that the receiver is more likely to perceive it in a favorable way. For example, to try to look good before a performance evaluation a manager might tell his or her boss about the things that are going well in the manager's unit and fail to mention the challenges she or he is facing.

information overload

The amount of information available exceeds a person's ability to process it

Information Overload

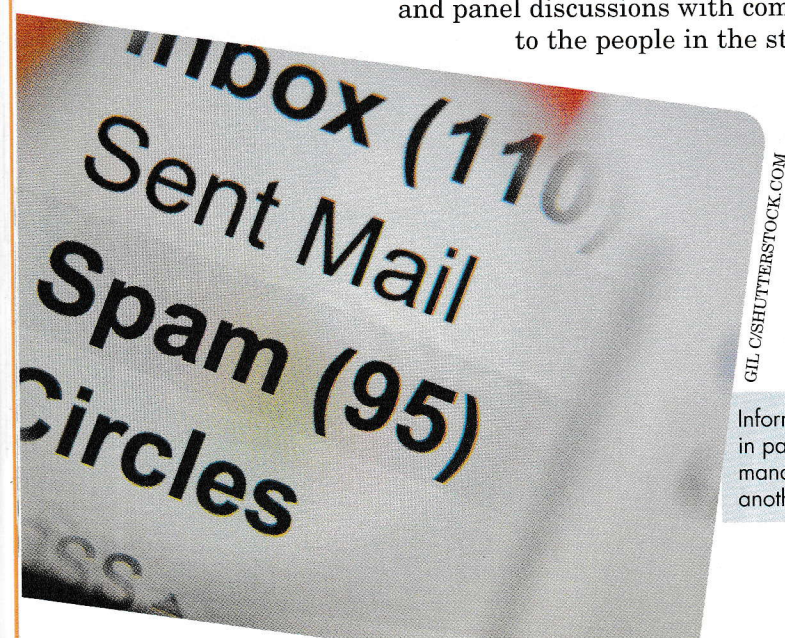
Filtering can also occur when a receiver has too much information. When the amount of information available exceeds our ability to process it, we experience **information overload**. When faced with too much information, we have to use some sort of filtering strategy to reduce it to a manageable amount. For example, an executive who starts the day with 500 emails in her inbox will likely apply some sort of filter, such as the email sender or the urgency conveyed by the sender, to decide which to read and which to delete or save to read later. Filtering is essential to managers because it helps to reduce the amount of noise in the communication process. Effective filtering amplifies relevant and accurate information and minimizes the rest.

Some companies use technology to reduce the filtering of messages as they move around the company. For example, to better manage its internal communications and encourage the free flow of information to better serve its clients, Medco Health Solutions built an internal broadcast facility to broadcast video with sound to all employee desktop computers in the country. The facility posts taped presentations to the company intranet, and hosts real-time interviews and panel discussions with company leaders. Employees can email questions to the people in the studio, who can answer them in real time. This

prevents lower-level employees from having to go through the company's hierarchy to get information about company issues. Medco also uses polling tools on its intranet and in the broadcast studio to quickly survey employees on important issues.

The broadcast facility enables Medco managers to go right to the source to get information that has not been filtered as it

Information overload is becoming increasingly common today, in part because of the growth of digital communication. This manager's inbox, for instance, shows 110 unread emails plus another 95 emails that went directly to spam.



GIL C/SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

gets passed around and up the hierarchy. In addition, lower levels of the organization get faster resolution to their issues because the inefficient filtering and “managing up” that used to take place when the company relied on traditional linear communication channels are eliminated. An additional benefit of adopting the technology has been greater mutual visibility between the lower and higher levels of the organization, which helps to ensure that everyone shares the same goals and priorities.¹³

Organizational Barriers

Organizational barriers to communication come from the hierarchical structure and culture of the organization. Numerous hierarchical levels or department specializations can make communication across levels and departments difficult. Different hierarchical levels typically focus on different types of information, which can interfere with communication. Higher-level executives, for example, typically focus on information related to bigger picture issues and business strategy, while lower-level employees focus on customer issues, production, and deadlines.

Some organizational cultures encourage open communication while other cultures promote a limited sharing of information. Company spaces can reinforce an organization’s communication culture. For example, when the music company Muzak moved from Seattle to Fort Mill, South Carolina, company leaders wanted to create more open communication paths. To do this, they designed the new workspace to be completely open with no cubicle walls. The open environment makes it easy for people to ask questions and offer ideas. This facilitates communication and allows the CEO to get ideas from people he never would previously have asked for input.¹⁴

Everything in the offices of animation company Pixar encourages collaboration. When designing the space, Steve Jobs, who founded the company, even included only one set of bathrooms in the entire building to force interaction among the employees. Games, couches, and a variety of gathering areas help employees move around, communicate, and collaborate.¹⁵

Cultural Barriers

Words and gestures can mean different things in different cultures. For example, in many parts of the world the thumb-up sign means “okay.” But in Nigeria, Afghanistan, Iran, and parts of Italy and Greece, it is an obscene insult and carries the same meaning as the middle finger does in the United States.

In some cultures, people tend to say what they mean and to mean what they say, leaving little to subjective interpretation. These **low-context cultures** rely on the words themselves to convey meaning.¹⁶ People in **high-context cultures** rely on nonverbal or situational cues or things other than words to convey meaning. For example, the Japanese tendency to say “I’ll ask my boss” or “that could be difficult” when they mean “the answer is no” reflects their high-context culture. Sometimes it is what is *not* said that has the most meaning—like silence after you ask someone what she thinks of your idea.

Communicating in high-context cultures like Asian or Arab cultures requires more trust and a greater understanding of the culture. In high-context cultures, managers tend to make suggestions rather than give direct instructions. In low-context cultures like Germany, Switzerland, or North American cultures, communication tends to be more direct and explicit.

One informal survey of managers from fifteen countries identified lack of cultural understanding as the biggest challenge in communicating with people

low-context cultures

Cultures that rely on words to convey meaning

high-context culture

Situational and nonverbal cues are used to convey meaning

around the world. Other challenges (in order) were: “being thorough and very careful with interpretations,” “careful audience research,” “keeping communication simple,” “respecting everyone,” “using technology as an asset,” and “knowing similarities as well as differences.”¹⁷ This chapter’s *Global Issues* feature describes additional cultural issues in communication.

Noise

As discussed earlier, noise is anything that blocks, distorts, or changes in any way the information the sender intended to communicate. It can enter anywhere in the communication process and interfere with the successful transmission and reception of a message. We will next discuss some of the most common sources of noise.

Interruptions, the sound of engines or machinery, dim computer screens, small font, or a receiver’s headache are all physical barriers that create noise.

GLOBAL ISSUES

CULTURAL DIFFERENCES IN COMMUNICATION

Because they are a part of culture, verbal and written communications vary around the world.¹⁸ The international business communication process is filtered through a range of variables including language, environment, technology, social organization, social history, authority beliefs, and different nonverbal communication.¹⁹ Problems in cross-cultural business communication often arise when participants from one culture are unable to understand the other person’s communication practices, traditions, and thinking.

People generally perceive their own behavior as logical, and tend to generalize the values and practices of their culture to apply to everyone. For example, if your culture values promptness, then you probably assume that everyone you meet does too. But in many Hispanic cultures, not being on time is culturally acceptable. Because each culture has its own set of values, some of which are quite different from the values held in other cultures, the concepts of correct and incorrect, and even right and wrong, are often blurred. In international business, questions regularly arise regarding what is proper by each culture’s values, what is wise by each culture’s view of the world, and what is right by each culture’s standards.²⁰

Managing cultural differences is particularly important in cross-cultural teams because of the potential of these differences to reduce information sharing, create interpersonal conflict, or both. For example, Western norms for direct communication often clash with Asian norms of indirect communication. In describing the problems facing her team, one American manager leading a joint U.S.

and Japanese project said, “In Japan, they want to talk and discuss. Then we take a break and they talk within the organization. They want to make sure that there’s harmony in the rest of the organization. One of the hardest lessons for me was when I thought they were saying yes but they just meant ‘I’m listening to you.’”²¹

When the manager discovered flaws in the system that would significantly disrupt company operations, she emailed her American boss and the Japanese team members. Her Japanese colleagues were embarrassed because the manager had violated their norms. They probably would have responded better if she had pointed out the problems more indirectly—maybe by asking them what would happen if a certain part of the system was not functioning properly, even though she knew what was wrong. Because the typical Japanese response to direct confrontation is to isolate the norm violator, the American manager was isolated socially and physically. She explains, “They literally put my office in a storage room, where I had desks stacked from floor to ceiling and I was the only person there. So they totally isolated me, which was a pretty loud signal to me that I was not a part of the inside circle and that they would communicate with me only as needed.”

Effective managers understand how the perception of a given message changes depending on the viewpoint of those communicating. Because business is not conducted the same from culture to culture, business relations are enhanced when employees are trained to be aware of areas likely to create communication difficulties and conflict across cultures.²³