

9

Communication

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LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After studying this chapter, you should be able to:

1. Describe the functions and process of communication.
2. Contrast downward, upward, and lateral communication through small-group networks and the grapevine.
3. Contrast oral, written, and nonverbal communication.
4. Describe how channel richness underlies the choice of communication channel.
5. Differentiate between automatic and controlled processing of persuasive messages.
6. Identify common barriers to effective communication.
7. Discuss how to overcome potential problems of cross-cultural communication.

★ **Chapter Warm-up**

If your professor has chosen to assign this, go to the Assignments section of **mymanagementlab.com** to complete the chapter warm-up.

COMMUNICATION

Communication is powerful: no group or organization can exist without sharing meaning among its members. In this chapter, we'll analyze communication and ways we can make it more effective.

Communication must include both the *transfer* and the *understanding* of meaning. Communicating is more than merely imparting meaning; that meaning must also be understood. It is only thus that we can convey information and ideas. In perfect communication, if it existed, a thought would be transmitted so the receiver understood the same mental picture the sender intended. Though it sounds elementary, perfect communication is never achieved in practice. Increased understanding of the functions and processes of communication can lead to positive changes in organizational behavior.

Communication
The transfer and the understanding of meaning.

Functions of Communication

Communication serves five major functions within a group or organization: *management*, *feedback*, *emotional sharing*, *persuasion*, and *information exchange*.¹ Almost every communication interaction that takes place in a group or organization performs one or more of these functions, and none of the five is more important than any of the others.

MANAGING BEHAVIOR Communication acts to *manage* member behavior in several ways. Organizations have authority hierarchies and formal guidelines for employees that guide communication flow. When employees follow their job descriptions or comply with company policies, communication performs a management function. Informal communication controls behavior too. When work groups tease or harass a member who produces too much (and makes the rest of the members look bad), they are informally communicating, and managing, the member's behavior.

FEEDBACK Communication creates *feedback* by clarifying to employees what they must do, how well they are doing it, and how they can improve their performance. We saw this operating in goal-setting theory in Chapter 7. Formation of goals, feedback on progress, and reward for desired behavior all require communication and stimulate motivation.

EMOTIONAL SHARING The workgroup is a primary source of social interaction for many employees. Communication within the group is a fundamental mechanism by which members show satisfaction and frustration. Communication, therefore, provides for the *emotional sharing* of feelings and fulfillment of social needs. For example, after a White police officer shot an unarmed Black man in Ferguson, Missouri, in 2015, software engineer Carl Jones wanted to process his feelings through talking with his coworkers at his corporation. It can be difficult for companies to remain neutral today and they may need to be seen taking a stance over political or social issues. For instance, under the caption "All homes are created equal", IKEA used pictures of gay couples in its U.S. and Russian catalogs, in support of LGBT issues. However, IKEA has come under fire over local versions of its furniture catalog, such as the special Israeli or Saudi versions, which did not feature women.²

PERSUASION Like emotional sharing, *persuasion* can be good or bad depending on if, say, a leader is trying to persuade a workgroup to commit to the organization's corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives or to, conversely, persuade the workgroup to break the law to meet an organizational goal. These may be extreme examples, but it's important to remember that persuasion can benefit or harm an organization.

IKEA
The multinational IKEA Group, the world's largest furniture retailer, is well-known for being a values-driven company and for its social and environmental initiatives throughout the whole value chain from product development to production, distribution and retail. For example, co-workers are encouraged to participate in virtual meetings but if business travel is necessary, employees can use the IKEA Intranet to see the CO2 footprint left by getting to a specific location by various transport alternatives.

INFORMATION EXCHANGE The final function of communication is *information exchange* to facilitate decision making. Communication provides the information individuals and groups need to make decisions by transmitting the data needed to identify and evaluate choices.

The Communication Process

Before communication can take place it needs a purpose, a message to be conveyed between a sender and a receiver. The sender encodes the message (converts it to a symbolic form) and passes it through a medium (channel) to the receiver, who decodes it. The result is a transfer of meaning from one person to another.³

Exhibit 9-1 depicts this **communication process**. The key parts of this model are (1) the sender, (2) encoding, (3) the message, (4) the channel, (5) decoding, (6) the receiver, (7) noise, and (8) feedback.

The *sender* initiates a message by encoding a thought. The *message* is the actual physical product of the sender's *encoding*. When we speak, the speech is the message. When we write, the writing is the message. When we gesture, the movements of our arms and the expressions on our faces are the message. The *channel* is the medium through which the message travels. The sender selects it, determining whether to use a formal or informal channel. **Formal channels** are established by the organization and transmit messages that are related to the professional activities of members. They traditionally follow the authority chain within the organization. Other forms of messages, such as those that are personal or social, follow **informal channels**, which are spontaneous and subject to individual choice.⁴ The *receiver* is the person(s) to whom the message is directed, who must first translate the symbols into understandable form. This step is the *decoding* of the message. *Noise* represents communication barriers that distort the clarity of the message, such as perceptual problems, information overload, semantic difficulties, or cultural differences. The final link in the communication process is a feedback loop. *Feedback* is the check on how successful we have been in transferring our messages as originally intended. It determines whether understanding has been achieved.

DIRECTION OF COMMUNICATION

Communication can flow vertically or laterally, through formal small-group networks or the informal grapevine. We subdivide the vertical dimension into downward and upward directions.⁵

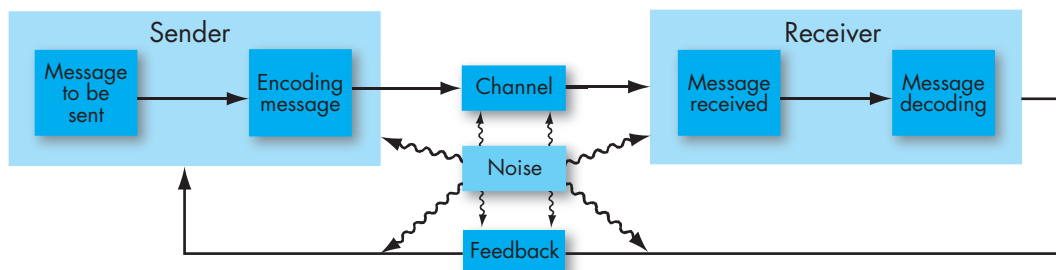


EXHIBIT 9-1

The Communication Process

Communication process

The steps between a source and a receiver that result in the transfer and understanding of meaning.

Formal channels

Communication channels established by an organization to transmit messages related to the professional activities of members.

Informal channels

Communication channels that are created spontaneously and that emerge as responses to individual choices.

Downward Communication

Communication that flows from one level of a group or organization to a lower level is *downward communication*. Group leaders and managers use it to assign goals, provide job instructions, explain policies and procedures, point out problems that need attention, and offer feedback.

In downward communication, the delivery mode and the context of the information are of high importance. We will talk more about communication methods later, but consider the ultimate downward communication: the performance review. Alan Buckelew, CEO of Carnival Cruise Lines says, “A review is probably the one time when you want to be physically present.” The Samsonite CEO agrees: “A conference call cannot substitute for face-to-face interactions.” Automated performance reviews have allowed managers to review their subordinates without discussions, which is efficient but misses critical opportunities for growth, motivation, and relationship-building.⁶ In general, employees subjected to less direct, personalized communication are less likely to understand the intentions of the message correctly. The best communicators explain the reasons behind their downward communications but also solicit communication from the employees they supervise.

Upward Communication

Upward communication flows to a higher level in the group or organization. It’s used to provide feedback to higher-ups, inform them of progress toward goals, and relay current problems. Upward communication keeps managers aware of how employees feel about their jobs, coworkers, and the organization in general. Managers also rely on upward communication for ideas on how conditions can be improved.

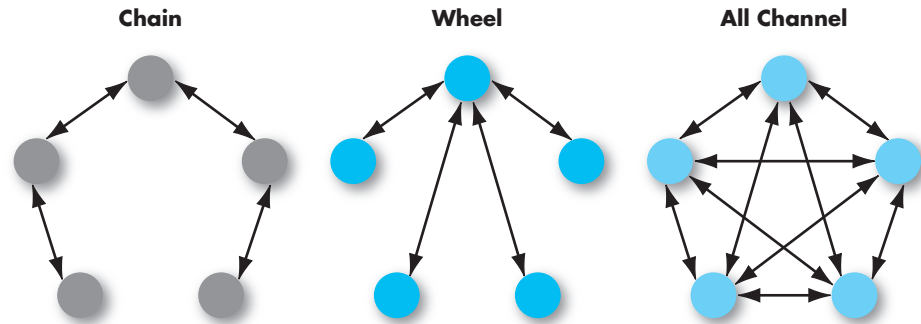
Given that most managers’ job responsibilities have expanded, upward communication is increasingly difficult because managers can be overwhelmed and easily distracted. To engage in effective upward communication, try to communicate in short summaries rather than long explanations, support your summaries with actionable items, and prepare an agenda to make sure you use your boss’s attention well.⁷ And watch what you say, especially if you are communicating something to your manager that will be unwelcome. If you’re turning down an assignment, for example, be sure to project a “can do” attitude while asking advice about your workload dilemma or inexperience with the assignment.⁸ Your delivery can be as important as the content of your communication.

Lateral Communication

When communication occurs between members of the same workgroup, members at the same level in separate workgroups, or any other horizontally equivalent workers, we describe it as *lateral communication*.

Lateral communication saves time and facilitates coordination. Some lateral relationships are formally sanctioned. More often, they are informally created to short-circuit the vertical hierarchy and expedite action. So from management’s viewpoint, lateral communications can be good or bad. Because strictly adhering to the formal vertical structure for all communications can be inefficient, lateral communication occurring with management’s knowledge and support can be beneficial. But dysfunctional conflict can result when formal vertical channels are breached, when members go above or around their superiors, or when bosses find actions have been taken or decisions made without their knowledge.

EXHIBIT 9-2
Three Common
Small Group
Networks



Formal Small-Group Networks

Formal organizational networks can be complicated, including hundreds of people and a half-dozen or more hierarchical levels. We’ve condensed these networks into three common small groups of five people each (see Exhibit 9-2): chain, wheel, and all channel.

The *chain* rigidly follows the formal chain of command; this network approximates the communication channels you might find in a rigid three-level organization. The *wheel* relies on a central figure to act as the conduit for all group communication; it simulates the communication network you might find on a team with a strong leader. The *all-channel* network permits group members to actively communicate with each other; it’s most often characterized by self-managed teams, in which group members are free to contribute and no one person takes on a leadership role. Many organizations today like to consider themselves all channel, meaning that anyone can communicate with anyone (but sometimes they shouldn’t).

As Exhibit 9-3 demonstrates, the effectiveness of each network is determined by the dependent variable that concerns you. The structure of the wheel facilitates the emergence of a leader, the all-channel network is best if you desire high member satisfaction, and the chain is best if accuracy is most important. Exhibit 9-3 leads us to the conclusion that no single network will be best for all occasions.

The Grapevine

Grapevine
An organization’s informal communication network.

The informal communication network in a group or organization is called the **grapevine**.⁹ Although rumors and gossip transmitted through the grapevine may be informal, it’s still an important source of information for employees and candidates. Grapevine or word-of-mouth information from peers about a company has important effects on whether job applicants join an organization,¹⁰ even over and above informal ratings on websites like Glassdoor.

EXHIBIT 9-3
Small Group
Networks and
Effectiveness
Criteria

Criteria	Networks		
	Chain	Wheel	All Channel
Speed	Moderate	Fast	Fast
Accuracy	High	High	Moderate
Emergence of a leader	Moderate	High	None
Member satisfaction	Moderate	Low	High

The grapevine is an important part of any group or organization communication network. It serves employees' needs: small talk creates a sense of closeness and friendship among those who share information, although research suggests it often does so at the expense of those in the outgroup.¹¹ It also gives managers a feel for the morale of their organization, the issues employees consider important, and employee anxieties. Evidence indicates that managers can study the gossip driven largely by employee social networks to learn more about how positive and negative information is flowing through the organization.¹² Furthermore, managers can identify influencers (highly networked people trusted by their coworkers¹³) by noting which individuals are small talkers (those who regularly communicate about insignificant, unrelated issues). Small talkers tend to be influencers. One study found that social talkers are so influential that they were significantly more likely to retain their jobs during layoffs.¹⁴ Thus, while the grapevine may not be sanctioned or controlled by the organization, it can be understood and leveraged a bit.

MODES OF COMMUNICATION

How do group members transfer meaning among each other? They rely on oral, written, and nonverbal communication. This much is obvious, but as we will discuss, the choice between modes can greatly enhance or detract from the way the perceiver reacts to the message. Certain modes are highly preferred for specific types of communication. We will cover the latest thinking and practical application.

Oral Communication

A primary means of conveying messages is oral communication. Speeches, formal one-on-one and group discussions, and the informal rumor mill or grapevine are popular forms of oral communication.

The advantages of oral communication are *speed*, *feedback*, and *exchange*. Regarding *speed*, we can convey a verbal message and receive a response in minimal time. As one professional put it, “Face-to-face communication on a consistent basis is still the best way to get information to and from employees.”¹⁵ If the receiver is unsure of the message, rapid *feedback* allows the sender to quickly detect and correct it. Unfortunately, we should acknowledge that we are usually bad listeners. Researchers indicate that we are prone to “listener burnout” in which we tune the other person out and rush to offer advice. “Good listeners overcome their natural inclination to fix the other’s problems and to keep the conversation brief,” said Professor Graham Bodie.¹⁶ Active listening; in which we remove distractions, lean in, make eye contact, paraphrase, and encourage the talker to continue¹⁷—helps us learn more and build trust if we are genuine and not judgmental.¹⁸ The *exchange* given through oral communication has social, cultural, and emotional components. Cultural social exchange, in which we purposefully share exchanges that transcend cultural boundaries, can build trust, cooperation, and agreement between individuals and teams.¹⁹

One major disadvantage of oral communication surfaces whenever a message has to pass through a number of people: the more people, the greater the potential distortion. If you’ve ever played “Telephone,” you know the problem. Each person who receives a whispered message in this pass-along game interprets the message in his or her own way. The message’s content, when it reaches its destination, is often very different from the original,

Atos

Thierry Breton, CEO of Atos SE, a leading digital services company with 100,000 employees in 72 countries, is known for instigating a companywide zero-email policy. In 2011, he decided he could improve employee productivity by banning internal email. Atos’s own social network is a platform better designed to facilitate group communication, resulting in more efficient collaboration and information sharing among employees who report feeling far more productive.

even when we think the message is simple and straightforward. Therefore, oral-communication “chains” are generally more of a liability than an effective tool in organizations.

Written Communication

Written communication includes letters, e-mail, instant messaging, organizational periodicals, and any other method that conveys written words or symbols. The advantages depend on what written mode is used. Written business communication today is usually conducted via letters, PowerPoint®, e-mail, instant messaging, text messaging, social media, apps, and blogs. Some of these create a digital or physical long-term record, while the advantage of others is quick, fleeting information exchange. The disadvantages are also specific to each written mode. We will therefore discuss the applications more in a bit.

Nonverbal Communication

Every time we deliver a verbal message, we also impart an unspoken message.²⁰ Sometimes the nonverbal component may stand alone as a powerful message of our business communication. No discussion of communication would thus be complete without consideration of *nonverbal communication*; which includes body movements, the intonations or emphasis we give to words, facial expressions, and the physical distance between the sender and receiver.

We could argue that every *body movement* has meaning, and no movement is accidental (though some are unconscious). We act out our state of being with nonverbal body language. For example, we smile to project trustworthiness, uncross our arms to appear approachable, and stand to signal authority.²¹

If you read the minutes of a meeting, you wouldn’t grasp the impact of what was said the same way as if you had been there or could see the meeting on video. Why not? There is no record of nonverbal communication, and the emphasis given to words or phrases (*intonation*) is missing. Both make the meaning clear. Intonations can change the meaning of a message. *Facial expressions* also convey meaning. Facial expressions, along with intonations, can show arrogance, aggressiveness, fear, shyness, and other characteristics.

Physical distance also has meaning. What is considered proper spacing between people largely depends on cultural norms. A businesslike distance in some European countries feels intimate in many parts of North America. If someone stands closer to you than is considered appropriate, it may indicate aggressiveness or sexual interest; if farther away, it may signal disinterest or displeasure with what is being said.

CHOICE OF COMMUNICATION CHANNEL

Why do people choose one channel of communication over another? A model of media richness helps explain channel selection among managers.²²

Channel Richness

Channels differ in their capacity to convey information. Some are *rich* in that they can (1) handle multiple cues simultaneously, (2) facilitate rapid feedback, and (3) be very personal. Others are *lean*, in that they score low on these factors. Face-to-face conversation scores highest in **channel richness** because it transmits the most information per

Channel richness

The amount of information that can be transmitted during a communication episode.

communication episode—multiple information cues (words, postures, facial expressions, gestures, intonations), immediate feedback (both verbal and nonverbal), and the personal touch of being present. Other examples of media with high channel richness (in descending order) include video conferences, telephone conversations, live speeches, and voice mail. Impersonal written media such as formal reports and bulletins score lowest in richness as well as memos, letters, prerecorded speeches, and e-mail.²³

In sum, rich channels give us the chance to observe. The unconscious aspects of communication help us understand the full meaning of a message. When these aspects are missing, we must look for other clues to deduce the sender's emotions and attitudes.

Choosing Communication Methods

The choice of channel depends on whether the message is routine. Routine messages tend to be straightforward and have minimal ambiguity; channels low in richness can carry them efficiently. Nonroutine communications are likely to be complicated and have the potential for misunderstanding. Managers can communicate them effectively only by selecting rich channels.

CHOOSING ORAL COMMUNICATION Whenever you need to gauge the receiver's receptivity, *oral communication* is usually the better choice. The marketing plan for a new product, for instance, may need to be worked out with clients in person, so you can see their reactions to each idea you propose. Also consider the receiver's preferred mode of communication; some individuals focus on content better in written form and others prefer discussion. For example, if your manager requests a meeting with you, you may not want to ask for an e-mail exchange instead. The pace of your work environment matters too. A fast-paced workplace may thrive on pop-by meetings, while a deadline-heavy team project may progress faster with scheduled Skype videoconferences.

Much of what we communicate face-to-face is in the delivery, so also consider your speaking skills when choosing your communication method. Research indicates the sound of your voice is twice as important as what you are saying. A good speaking voice, clear and moderated, can be a help to your career; while loud, questioning, irritating, immature, falsetto, breathy, or monotone voice tones can hinder you. If your voice is problematic, your work teams can help you raise your awareness so you can make changes, or you may benefit from the help of a voice coach.²⁴

CHOOSING WRITTEN COMMUNICATION *Written communication* is generally the most reliable mode for complex and lengthy communications, and it can be the most efficient method for short messages when, for instance, a two-sentence text can take the place of a 10-minute phone call. But keep in mind that written communication can be limited in its emotional expression.

Choose written communication when you want the information to be tangible, verifiable, and "on the record." *Letters* are used in business primarily for networking and record-keeping purposes, and when signatures need to be authentic. Also, a handwritten thank-you note is never a wrong choice for an applicant to send after an employment interview, and handwritten envelopes are often put right on the receiver's desk unopened by administrative staff. In general, you should respond to *instant messages* only when they are

professional and initiate them only when you know they will be welcome; remember that your conversation will not be stored for later reference. *Texts* are cheap to send and receive, and the willingness to be available for quick communications from clients and managers is conducive to good business. However, some users—and managers—view text messaging as intrusive and distracting, so establish some protocols first. Some of the most spectacular gains in *social media* are in the sales arena, both business-to-public and business-to-business. For instance, one sales representative for virtual meetings company PGi landed his fastest sale ever by instantly connecting with a potential client after TweetDeck alerted him that a CEO was tweeting his frustration about Web conferencing.²⁵ Finally, curtail usage of blogs, posting, and commenting; both options are more public than you may think, and your words are easily found by your name via search engines like Google.

CHOOSING NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION It's important to be alert to *nonverbal* aspects of communication; look for these cues as well as the literal meaning of a sender's words. You should particularly be aware of contradictions between the messages. For example, someone who frequently glances at her wristwatch is giving the message that she would prefer to terminate the conversation no matter what she actually says. We misinform others when we express one message verbally, such as trust, but nonverbally communicate a contradictory message that reads, "I don't have confidence in you."

Information Security

Security is a huge concern for nearly all organizations with private or proprietary information about clients, customers, and employees. Organizations worry about the security of the electronic information they need to protect such as hospital patient data, physical information they still keep in file cabinets, and information they entrust their employees with knowing. Most companies actively monitor employee Internet use and e-mail records, and some even use video surveillance and record phone conversations. Necessary though they may be, such practices can seem invasive to employees. An organization can relieve employee concerns by engaging them in the creation of information-security policies and giving them some control over how their personal information is used.²⁶

PERSUASIVE COMMUNICATION

We've discussed a number of methods for communication up to this point. Now we turn our attention to one of the functions of communication—persuasion—and the features that might make messages more or less persuasive to an audience.

Automatic and Controlled Processing

To understand the process of persuasion, it is useful to consider two different ways we process information.²⁷ Think about the last time you bought a can of soda. Did you carefully research brands, or did you reach for the can that had the most appealing advertising? If we're honest, we'll admit glitzy ads and catchy slogans have an influence on our choices as consumers. We often rely on **automatic processing**, a relatively superficial consideration of evidence and information, making use of heuristics like those we discussed in Chapter 5. Automatic processing takes little time and low effort, so it makes sense to use it for processing persuasive messages related to topics you don't care much

Automatic processing
A relatively superficial consideration of evidence and information making use of heuristics.

about. The disadvantage is that it lets us be easily fooled by a variety of tricks, like a cute jingle or glamorous photo.

Now consider the last time you chose a place to live. You probably sourced experts who knew something about the area, gathered information about prices, and considered the costs and benefits of renting versus buying. You were engaging in more effortful **controlled processing**, a detailed consideration of evidence and information, relying on facts, figures, and logic. Controlled processing requires effort and energy, and it's harder to fool someone who has taken the time and effort to engage in it. So what makes someone engage in either shallow or deep processing? Let's explore how we might determine what types of processing an audience will use.

Controlled processing

A detailed consideration of evidence and information relying on facts, figures, and logic.

INTEREST LEVEL One of the best predictors of whether people will use an automatic or controlled process for reacting to a persuasive message is their level of interest in it.²⁸ Interest levels reflect the impact a decision is going to have on your life. When people are very interested in the outcome of a decision, they're more likely to process information carefully. That's probably why people look for so much more information when deciding about something important (like where to live) than something relatively unimportant (like which soda to drink).

PRIOR KNOWLEDGE People who are well informed about a subject area are more likely to use controlled processing strategies. They have already thought through various arguments for or against a specific course of action, and therefore won't readily change their position unless very good, thoughtful reasons are provided. On the other hand, people who are poorly informed about a topic can change their minds more readily, even in the face of fairly superficial arguments presented without a great deal of evidence. A better-informed audience is likely to be much harder to persuade.

PERSONALITY Do you always read at least five reviews of a movie before deciding whether to see it? Perhaps you even research films by the same stars and director. If so, you are probably high in **need for cognition**, a personality trait of individuals who are most likely to be persuaded by evidence and facts.²⁹ Those who are lower in their need for cognition are more likely to use automatic processing strategies, relying on intuition and emotion to guide their evaluation of persuasive messages.

Need for cognition

A personality trait of individuals depicting the ongoing desire to think and learn.

MESSAGE CHARACTERISTICS Another factor that influences whether people use an automatic or controlled processing strategy is the characteristics of the message itself. Messages provided through relatively lean communication channels, with little opportunity for users to interact with the content of the message, encourage automatic processing. Conversely, messages provided through richer communication channels encourage more deliberative processing.

Tailoring the Message

The most important implication is to match your persuasive message to the type of processing your audience is likely to use. When the audience is not interested in a persuasive message topic, when they are poorly informed, when they are low in need for cognition, and when information is transmitted through relatively lean channels, they'll be more likely to use automatic processing. In these cases, use messages that are more emotionally

laden and associate positive images with your preferred outcome. On the other hand, when the audience is interested in a topic, when they are high in need for cognition, or when the information is transmitted through rich channels, then it is a better idea to focus on rational arguments and evidence to make your case.

BARRIERS TO EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

A number of barriers can slow or distort effective communication, barriers that we need to recognize and reduce. In this section, we highlight the most important.

Filtering

Filtering

A sender's manipulation of information so that it will be seen more favorably by the receiver.

Filtering refers to a sender's purposely manipulating information so the receiver will see it more favorably. A manager who tells his boss what he feels the boss wants to hear is filtering information.

The more vertical levels in the organization's hierarchy, the more opportunities there are for filtering. But some filtering will occur wherever there are status differences. Factors such as fear of conveying bad news and the desire to please the boss often lead employees to tell their superiors what they think they want to hear, thus distorting upward communications.

Selective Perception

Selective perception is important because the receivers in the communication process selectively see and hear based on their needs, motivations, experience, background, and other personal characteristics. Receivers also project their interests and expectations into communications as they decode them. For example, an employment interviewer who expects a female job applicant to put her family ahead of her career is likely to see that characteristic in all female applicants, regardless of whether any of the women actually feel that way. As we said in Chapter 5, we don't see reality; we interpret what we see and call it reality.

Information Overload

Information overload

A condition in which information inflow exceeds an individual's processing capacity.

Individuals have a finite capacity for processing data. When the information we have to work with exceeds our processing capacity, the result is **information overload**. We've seen in this text that dealing with it has become a huge challenge for individuals and for organizations. It's a challenge you can manage, to some degree, by following the steps outlined earlier in this chapter.

What happens when individuals have more information than they can sort and use? They tend to select, ignore, pass over, or forget it. Or they may put off further processing until the overload situation ends. In any case, lost information and less effective communication results, making it all the more important to deal well with overload.

More generally, as an Intel study shows, it may make sense to connect less frequently to technology, to, in the words of one article, "avoid letting the drumbeat of digital missives constantly shake up and reorder to-do lists."³⁰ One radical way is to limit the number of devices you access. For example, Coors Brewing executive Frits van Paas-schen jettisoned his desktop computer in favor of mobile devices only, and Eli Lilly & Co. moved its sales teams from laptops plus other devices to just iPads. Both these moves have resulted in increased productivity.³¹

Emotions

You may interpret the same message differently when you're angry or distraught than when you're happy. For example, individuals in positive moods are more confident about their opinions after reading a persuasive message, so well-designed arguments have a stronger impact on their opinions.³² People in negative moods are more likely to scrutinize messages in greater detail, whereas those in positive moods tend to accept communications at face value.³³ Extreme emotions such as jubilation or depression are most likely to hinder effective communication. In such instances, we are most prone to disregard our rational and objective thinking processes and substitute emotional judgments.

Language

Even when we're communicating in the same language, words mean different things to different people. Age and context are two of the biggest factors that influence such differences. For example, when business consultant Michael Schiller asked his 15-year-old daughter where she was going with friends, he said, "You need to recognize your ARAs and measure against them." Schiller said that in response, his daughter "looked at him like he was from outer space."³⁴ (ARA stands for accountability, responsibility, and authority.) Those new to corporate lingo may find acronyms such as ARA, words such as *deliverables* (verifiable outcomes of a project), and phrases such as *get the low-hanging fruit* (deal with the easiest parts first) bewildering, in the same way parents may be mystified by teen slang.³⁵

Silence

It's easy to ignore silence or lack of communication because it is defined by the absence of information. This is often a mistake—silence itself can be the message to communicate non-interest or inability to deal with a topic. Silence can also be a simple outcome of information overload, or a delaying period for considering a response. For whatever reasons, research suggests using silence and withholding communication are common and problematic.³⁶ One survey found that more than 85 percent of managers reported remaining silent about at least one issue of significant concern.³⁷ The impact of silence can be organizationally detrimental. Employee silence can mean managers lack information about ongoing operational problems; management silence can leave employees bewildered. Silence regarding discrimination, harassment, corruption, and misconduct means top management cannot take action to eliminate problematic behavior.

Communication Apprehension

An estimated 5 to 20 percent of the population suffers debilitating **communication apprehension**, or social anxiety.³⁸ These people experience undue tension and anxiety in oral communication, written communication, or both.³⁹ They may find it extremely difficult to talk with others face to face or become extremely anxious when they have to use the phone, relying on memos or e-mails when a phone call would be faster and more appropriate.

Oral-communication apprehensives avoid situations, such as teaching, for which oral communication is a dominant requirement.⁴⁰ But almost all jobs require *some* oral

Communication apprehension

Undue tension and anxiety about oral communication, written communication, or both.

communication. Of greater concern is evidence that high oral-communication apprehensives distort the communication demands of their jobs in order to minimize the need for communication. Be aware that some people severely limit their oral communication and rationalize their actions by telling themselves communicating isn't necessary for them to do their job effectively.

Lying

The final barrier to effective communication is outright misrepresentation of information, or lying. People differ in their definition of a lie. For example, is deliberately withholding information about a mistake a lie, or do you have to actively deny your role in the mistake to pass the threshold? While the definition of a lie befuddles ethicists and social scientists, there is no denying the prevalence of lying. People may tell one to two lies per day, with some individuals telling considerably more.⁴¹ Compounded across a large organization, this is an enormous amount of deception happening every day. Evidence shows people are more comfortable lying over the phone than face-to-face, and more comfortable lying in e-mails than when they have to write with pen and paper.⁴²

CULTURAL FACTORS

Effective communication is difficult under the best of conditions. Cross-cultural factors clearly create the potential for increased communication problems. A gesture that is well understood and acceptable in one culture can be meaningless or lewd in another. Unfortunately, only 18 percent of companies have documented strategies for communicating with employees across cultures, and only 31 percent require that corporate messages be customized for consumption in other cultures.

Cultural Barriers



There are a number of problems related to language difficulties in cross-cultural communications. First are *barriers caused by semantics*. Words mean different things to different people, particularly people from different national cultures. Some words don't translate between cultures. For instance, the Finnish word *sisu* means something akin to "guts" or "dogged persistence" but is essentially untranslatable into English. Similarly, capitalists in Russia may have difficulty communicating with their British or Canadian counterparts because English terms such as *efficiency*, *free market*, and *regulation* have no direct Russian equivalents.

Second are *barriers caused by word connotations*. Words imply different things in different languages. Negotiations between U.S. and Japanese executives can be difficult because the Japanese word *hai* translates as "yes," but its connotation is "Yes, I'm listening" rather than "Yes, I agree."

Third are *barriers caused by tone differences*. In some cultures, language is formal; in others, it's informal. In some cultures, the tone changes depending on the context: People speak differently at home, in social situations, and at work. Using a personal, informal style when a more formal style is expected can be inappropriate.



Fourth are *differences in tolerance for conflict and methods for resolving conflicts*. People from individualist cultures tend to be more comfortable with direct conflict and will make the source of their disagreements overt. Collectivists are more likely to

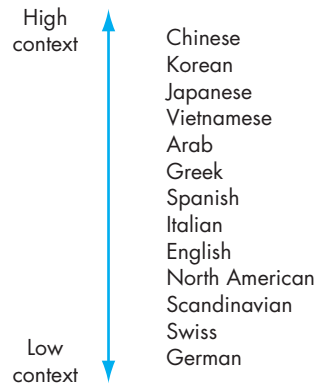


EXHIBIT 9-4
Continuum of
Countries with
High and Low
Context Cultures

acknowledge conflict only implicitly and avoid emotionally charged disputes. They may attribute conflicts to the situation more than to the individuals and therefore may not require explicit apologies to repair relationships, whereas individualists prefer explicit statements, accepting responsibility for conflicts and public apologies to restore relationships.

Cultural Context

Cultures tend to differ in the degree to which context influences the meaning individuals take from communication.⁴³ In **high-context cultures** such as China, Korea, Japan, and Vietnam, people rely heavily on nonverbal and subtle situational cues in communicating with others, and a person's official status, place in society, and reputation carry considerable weight. What is *not* said may be more significant than what *is* said. In contrast, people from Europe and North America reflect their **low-context cultures**. They rely essentially on spoken and written words to convey meaning; body language and formal titles are secondary (see Exhibit 9-4).

Contextual differences mean quite a lot in terms of communication. Communication in high-context cultures implies considerably more trust by both parties. What may appear to be casual and insignificant conversation, in fact reflects the desire to build a relationship and create trust. Oral agreements imply strong commitments in high-context cultures. And who you are—your age, seniority, rank in the organization—is highly valued and heavily influences your credibility. Managers can therefore “make suggestions” rather than give orders. But in low-context cultures, enforceable contracts tend to be in writing, precisely worded, and highly legalistic. Similarly, low-context cultures value directness. Managers are expected to be explicit and precise in conveying intended meaning.

A Cultural Guide

There is much to be gained from business intercultural communications. It is safe to assume every one of us has a different viewpoint that is culturally shaped. Because we do have differences, we have an opportunity to reach the most creative solutions possible with the help of others if we communicate effectively.

According to Fred Casmir, a leading expert in intercultural communication research, we often do not communicate well with people outside of our culture because we tend to generalize from only their cultural origin. This can be insensitive and potentially



High-context cultures

Cultures that rely heavily on nonverbal and subtle situational cues in communication.

Low-context cultures

Cultures that rely heavily on words to convey meaning in communication.

disastrous, especially when we make assumptions based on observable characteristics. Many of us have a richly varied ethnic background and would be offended if someone addressed us according to what culture our physical features might favor, for instance. Also, attempts to be culturally sensitive to another person are often based on stereotypes propagated by media. These stereotypes usually do not have a correct or current relevance.

Casmir noted that because there are far too many cultures for anyone to understand completely, and individuals interpret their own cultures differently, intercultural communication should be based on sensitivity and pursuit of common goals. He found the ideal condition is an ad hoc “third culture” where a group can form when they seek to incorporate aspects of each member’s cultural communication preferences. The norms this subculture establishes through appreciating individual differences create a common ground for effective communication. Intercultural groups that communicate effectively can be highly productive and innovative.

When communicating with people from a different culture, what can you do to reduce misinterpretations? Casmir and other experts offer the following suggestions:

1. ***Know yourself.*** Recognizing your own cultural identity and biases is critical to understanding the unique viewpoints of other people.
2. ***Foster a climate of mutual respect, fairness, and democracy.*** Clearly establish an environment of equality and mutual concern. This will be your “third culture” context for effective intercultural communication that transcends each person’s cultural norms.
3. ***State facts, not your interpretation.*** Interpreting or evaluating what someone has said or done draws more on your own culture and background than on the observed situation. If you state only facts, you will have the opportunity to benefit from the other person’s interpretation. Delay judgment until you’ve had sufficient time to observe and interpret the situation from the differing perspectives of all concerned.
4. ***Consider the other person’s viewpoint.*** Before sending a message, put yourself in the recipient’s shoes. What are his or her values, experiences, and frames of reference? What do you know about his or her education, upbringing, and background that can give you added insight? Try to see the people in the group as they really are first, and take a collaborative problem-solving approach whenever potential conflicts arise.
5. ***Proactively maintain the identity of the group.*** Like any culture, the establishment of a common-ground “third culture” for effective intercultural communication takes time and nurturing. Remind members of the group of your common goals, mutual respect, and need to adapt to individual communication preferences.⁴⁴

WATCH IT

If your professor has assigned this, go to the Assignments section of **mymanagementlab.com** to complete the video exercise titled **Communication (TWZ Role Play)**.

SUMMARY

You’ve probably discovered the link between communication and employee satisfaction in this chapter: the less uncertainty, the greater the satisfaction. Distortions, ambiguities, and incongruities between verbal and nonverbal messages all increase uncertainty and

reduce satisfaction. Careful attention to the methods and modes for each communication better ensures that the message is properly interpreted by the receiver.

IMPLICATIONS FOR MANAGERS

- Remember that your communication mode will partly determine your communication effectiveness.
- Obtain feedback to make certain your messages—however, they are communicated—are understood.
- Remember that written communication creates more misunderstandings than oral communication does; communicate with employees through in-person meetings when possible.
- Make sure you use communication strategies appropriate to your audience and the type of message you're sending.
- Keep in mind communication barriers such as gender and culture.

★ TRY IT!

If your professor has assigned this, go to the Assignments section of **mymanagementlab.com** to complete the **Simulation: Communication**.

★ PERSONAL INVENTORY ASSESSMENTS

Communication Styles

What is your preferred communication style? Take this PIA to learn more about various communication styles.

Go to **mymanagementlab.com** for the following Assisted-graded writing questions:

- 9-1.** What is your favorite method of communication, and how might you incorporate your preference into your business communications now that you've read the chapter?
- 9-2. Pearson MyLab Management Only**—comprehensive writing assignment for this chapter.



PERSONAL INVENTORY ASSESSMENTS

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