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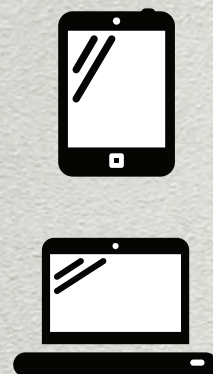
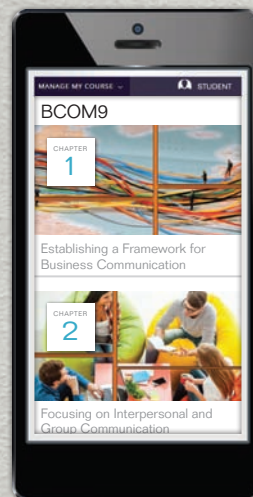


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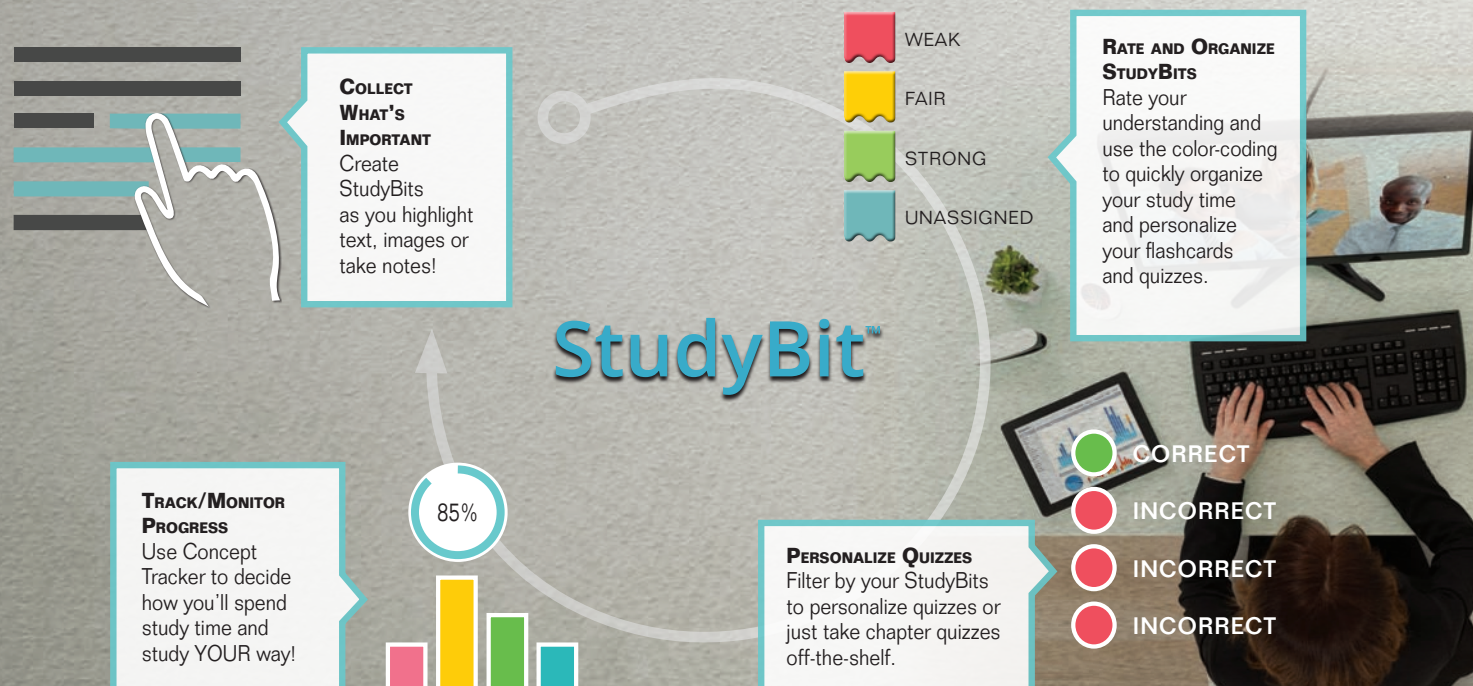
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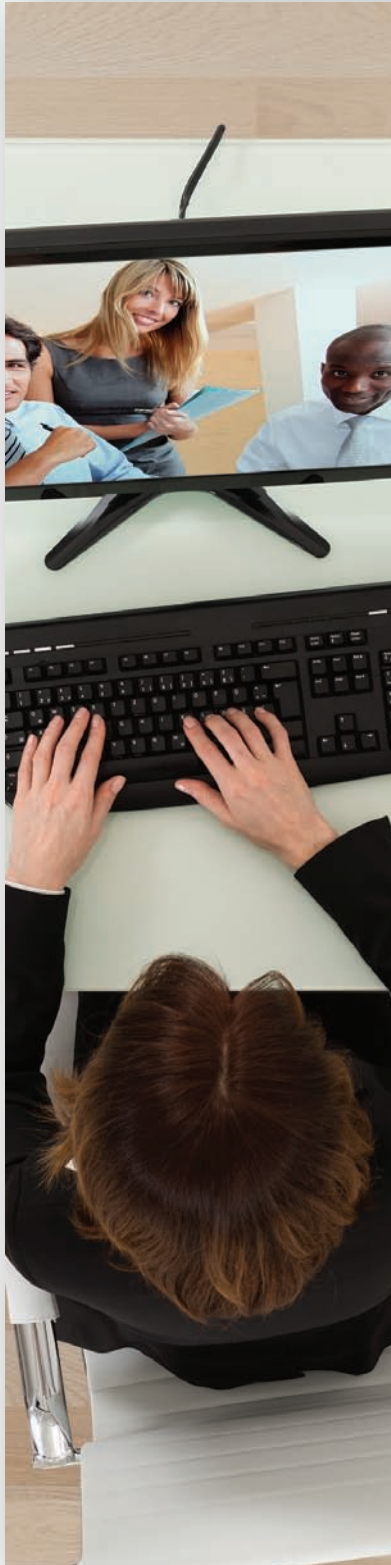
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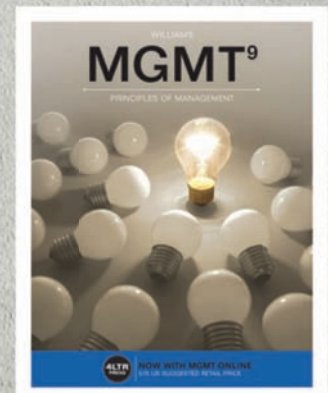
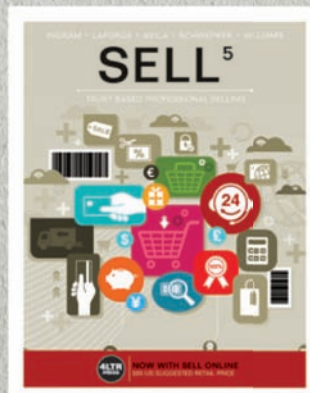
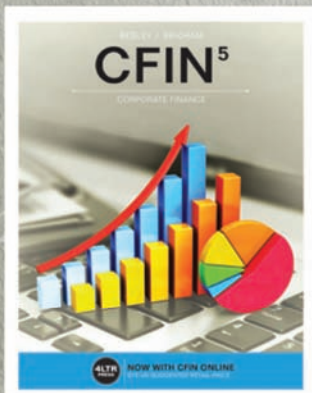
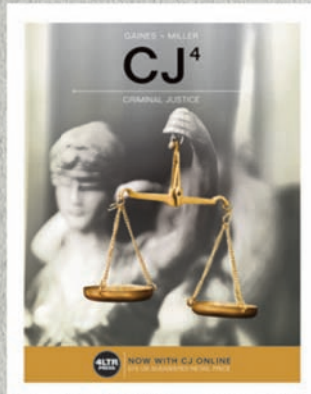
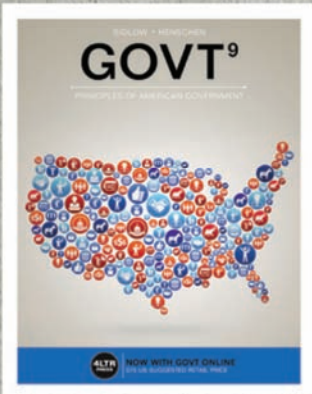
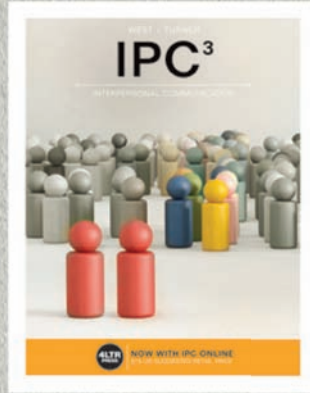
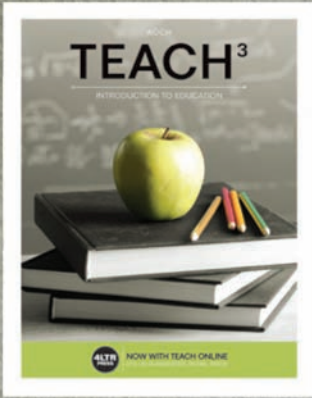
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# 1 | Establishing a Framework for Business Communication



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## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After studying this chapter, you will be able to...

- 1-1 Define communication and describe the value of communication in business.
- 1-2 Explain the communication process model and the ultimate objective of the communication process.
- 1-3 Discuss how information flows in an organization.
- 1-4 Explain how legal and ethical constraints, diversity challenges, changing technology, and team environment act as contextual forces that influence the process of business communication.

After finishing this chapter, go to **PAGE 21** for **STUDY TOOLS**.

## 1-1

## VALUE OF COMMUNICATION

We communicate to satisfy needs in both our work and private lives. Each of us wants to be heard, appreciated, and wanted. We also want to accomplish tasks and achieve goals. Generally people communicate for three basic purposes: to inform, to persuade, and to entertain. However, in the professional workplace some of these purposes have greater importance. Informing and persuading are common purposes of communication in the workplace; entertainment is less so. In addition, establishing and maintaining our credibility and positive relationships with others are also important purposes in an organizational setting.

What is communication? Communication is the process of exchanging and interpreting information and meaning between or among individuals through a system of symbols, signs, and behavior. In ideal situations, the goal is to reach mutual understanding. Studies indicate that managers typically spend 60% to 80% of their time involved in communication. In your career activities, you will communicate in a wide variety of ways, including

- listening and contributing to decision making and problem solving while attending meetings;
- writing various types of messages to inform and persuade others about your ideas and the services and products your organization provides;
- presenting information and persuasive messages to large and small groups in face-to-face and virtual environments;
- explaining and clarifying management procedures and work assignments;
- coordinating the work of various employees, departments, and other work groups;

- evaluating and counseling employees and;
- promoting the company's products, services, and image using a variety of channels in various contexts.

## 1-2

## THE COMMUNICATION PROCESS

Effective business communication is essential to success in today's work environments. Recent surveys of executives demonstrate that abilities in writing and speaking are major determinants of career success in many fields.<sup>1</sup> Although essential to personal and professional success,

effective business communication does not occur automatically. Your own experiences likely have taught you that a message is not interpreted correctly just because you transmitted it. An effective communicator anticipates possible breakdowns in the communication process—the unlimited ways the message can be misunderstood.

This mind set provides the concentration to plan and design the initial message effectively and to be prepared to intervene at the appropriate time to ensure that the message received is on target.

Consider the transactional process model of communication presented in Figure 1.1. These seemingly simple steps actually represent a very complex process.

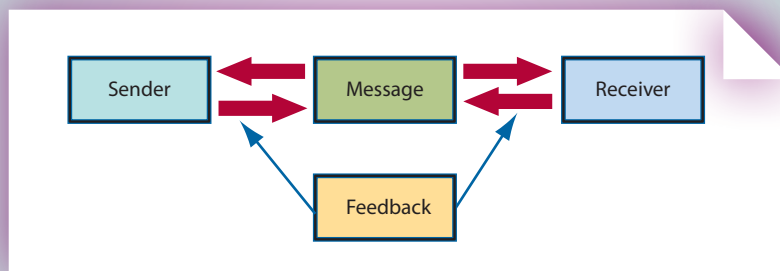
A number of communication process models exist. The transactional model is useful, though, because it illustrates the complexity of the communication process and reveals some of the challenges to effective communication that might emerge in a communication encounter.

According to the transactional process model, two parties involved in a communication encounter are potentially both communicating at the same time, particularly if the encounter is face-to-face. That's because in face-

to-face communication situations, parties to the encounter are continuously interpreting each other's nonverbal signals. Some scholars say more than 90% of the information in a face-to-face encounter may be sent nonverbally. But even in a cellphone conversation, silences and tone of voice may be interpreted in various ways. Even a written message may provide information about the writer that he or she did not intend to convey.

Abilities in writing and speaking are major determinants of career success.

**FIGURE 1.1** THE TRANSACTIONAL PROCESS MODEL OF COMMUNICATION





Paul Vasarhelyi/Shutterstock.com

Interruptions or distractions can create barriers to understanding.

nonverbally, it can be very challenging to ensure that the information is received as intended. For this reason, it is particularly important to check for understanding rather than assume that it has taken place, particularly when communicating important messages to audiences that are less familiar to us.

You can surely compile a list of other barriers that affect your ability to communicate with friends, instructors, coworkers, supervisors, and others. By being aware of them, you can concentrate on removing these interferences.

In an ideal communication situation, one party would be able to encode his or her message in such a way that the receiving party would understand it exactly as intended. However, this goal can be challenging for a variety of reasons, or what are called **interferences** or *barriers* to effective communication. For example,

- differences in educational level, experience, culture, and other characteristics of the sender and the receiver increase the complexity of encoding and decoding a message;
- physical interferences in the channel, including a noisy environment, interruptions, and uncomfortable surroundings, can occur and;

**interferences** also called *barriers*; numerous factors that hinder the communication process

**organizational communication** the movement of information within the company structure

**formal communication network** a network of communication flow typified by the formal organizational chart; dictated by the technical, political, and economic environment of the organization

- mental distractions, such as being preoccupied with other matters and developing a response, rather than listening, create barriers to understanding.

Because of these barriers, and because both parties engaged in a communication encounter may be simultaneously sending information both orally and

1-3

## COMMUNICATING WITHIN ORGANIZATIONS

In order to be successful, organizations must create an environment that energizes and encourages employees to accomplish tasks by promoting genuine openness and effective communication.

**Organizational communication** is communication that occurs with an organizational context. Regardless of your career or level within an organization, your ability to communicate will affect not only the success of the organization but also your personal success and advancement within that organization.

### 1-3a Communication Flow in Organizations

Communication occurs in a variety of ways within an organization. Some communication flows are planned and structured, others are not. Some communication flows can be formally depicted, whereas some defy description.

#### FORMAL AND INFORMAL COMMUNICATION NETWORKS

Communication within an organization involves both formal and informal networks.

- **Formal communication network.** This channel is typified by the formal organizational chart, which

is created by management to define individual and group relationships and to specify lines of responsibility. Essentially, the formal system is dictated by the managerial, technical, cultural, and structural environment of the organization. Within this system, people are required to behave and to communicate in certain ways simply to get work done.

- **Informal communication network.** This network, which is commonly called “the grapevine,” continuously develops as people interact within the formal system to accommodate their social and psychological needs. Because the informal network undergoes continual changes and does not parallel the organizational chart, it cannot be depicted accurately by any graphic means.

**The Formal Communication Network** When employees rely almost entirely on the formal communication system as a guide to behavior, the system might be identified as a *bureaucracy*. Procedure manuals, job descriptions, organizational charts, and other written materials dictate the required behavior. Communication channels are followed strictly, and red tape is abundant. Procedures are generally followed exactly; terms such as *rules* and *policies* serve as sufficient reasons for actions. Even the most formal organizations, however, cannot function long before an informal communication system emerges. As people operate within the organized system, they interact on a person-to-person basis and create an environment conducive to meeting their personal emotions, prejudices, likes, and dislikes.

In a workplace, employees are generally expected to satisfy a formal system of arriving at work on time, fulfilling their job duties, working well with others, and addressing their supervisor’s requests. However, some employees may not openly accept these expectations and may arrive at work late and spend an undue amount of time “around the water cooler.” If these informal practices become more widely spread, the purposes of the group may move from a focus on completing tasks to that of socializing with others or speculating about organizational events or activities. Obviously, the informal system benefits people because it meets their needs, but it also may affect the overall communication of the group in important ways.

**The Informal Communication Network** As people talk casually during breaks, text one another, or chat online, the focus usually shifts from topic to topic. One of the usual topics is work—the company, supervisor,



The office grapevine carries informal messages.

or fellow employees. Even though the formal system includes definite communication channels, the grapevine tends to develop and operate within all organizations. Consider these points related to the accuracy and value of grapevine communication:

- As a communication network, the grapevine has a reputation for being speedy but inaccurate. In the absence of alarms, the grapevine might be the most effective way to let occupants know that the building is on fire. It certainly beats sending an email.
- Although the grapevine often is thought of as a channel for inaccurate communication, in reality it is no more or less accurate than other channels. Even formal communication can become inaccurate and filtered as it passes from level to level in the organizational hierarchy.
- The inaccuracy of the grapevine has more to do with the message input than with the output. For example, the grapevine is noted as a carrier of rumors, primarily because it carries informal messages. If the input is a rumor, and nothing more, the output obviously will be inaccurate. But the output might be an accurate description of the original rumor.
- In a business office, news about promotions, personnel changes, company policy changes, and annual salary adjustments often is communicated through the grapevine long before being

**informal communication network** a network of communication flow that continuously develops as people interact within the formal system to accommodate their social and psychological needs

conveyed through formal channels. The process works similarly in colleges, where information about instructors typically is not officially published but is known by students, often through word-of-mouth. How best to prepare for examinations, instructor attitudes on attendance and homework, and even faculty personnel changes are messages that travel over the grapevine.

- A misconception about the grapevine is that the message passes from person to person until it finally reaches a person who can't pass it on: the end of the line. Actually, the grapevine works as a network channel. Typically, one person tells two or three others, who each tell two or three others, who each tell two or three others, and so on. Thus, the message might spread to a huge number of people in a short time, especially now that the grapevine includes digital forms of communication, such as social networking sites.
- The grapevine has no single, consistent source. Messages might originate anywhere and follow various routes.

Due at least in part to widespread downsizing and corporate scandals during the last few years, employees in many organizations are demanding that they be better informed. Some companies have implemented new formal ways, such as newsletters and intranets, as well as informal ways, including blogs, wikis, Twitter, and other social networking platforms, for sharing information with their internal constituents. Company openness with employees about management decisions, process changes, and financial issues means conveying more information through the formal system rather than risking its miscommunication through informal channels. Online eyewear retailer Warby Parker, for example, grew from a small start-up to a 300-employee company in just three years. In order to keep the lines of communication open, the company has an "Ask Anything" segment of its weekly meetings, in which employees can ask anything. The Warby Parker Wiki enables employees

to add notes from meetings, key lessons from the past or present, or team updates. The transparent company culture extends to each of its employees submitting weekly "happiness ratings" (on a 0 to 10 scale) and participating in quarterly, one-on-one, "360 reviews" in which brutal honesty is encouraged.<sup>2</sup>

**downward communication** a type of communication that flows from supervisor to employee, from policy makers to operating personnel, or from top to bottom on the organizational chart

**upward communication** a type of communication that is generally a response to requests from supervisors

An informal communication network will emerge from even the most carefully designed formal system. Managers who ignore this fact are attempting to manage blindfolded. Instead of denying or condemning the grapevine, the effective manager will learn to use the informal communication network. The grapevine, for instance, can be useful in counteracting rumors and false information.

## DIRECTIONS OF COMMUNICATION FLOW

The direction in which communication flows in an organization can be downward, upward, or horizontal, as shown in Figure 1-2. Because these three terms are used frequently in communication discussions, they deserve clarification. Although the concept of flow seems simple, direction has meaning for those participating in the organizational communication process.

**Downward Communication** The communication that flows from supervisor to employee, from policy makers to operating personnel, or from top to bottom on the organizational chart is called **downward communication**. A simple policy statement from the top of the organization might grow into a formal plan for operation at lower levels. Teaching people how to perform their specific tasks is an element of downward communication. Another element is orientation to a company's rules, practices, procedures, history, and goals. Employees learn about the quality of their job performance through downward communication.

Downward communication normally involves both written and spoken methods and makes use of the following assumptions:

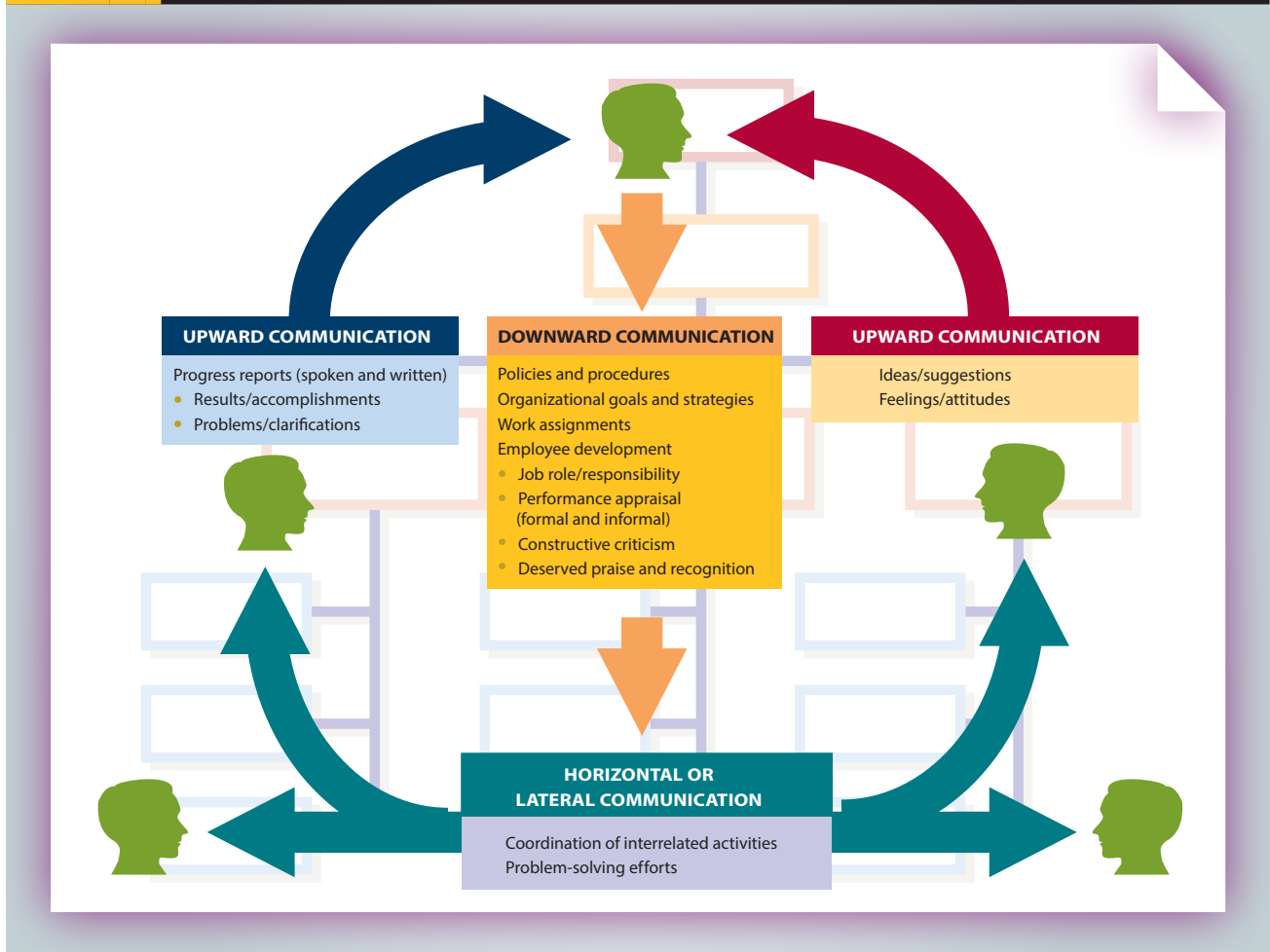
### DOWNWARD COMMUNICATION

- ▶ People at high levels in the organization usually have greater knowledge of the organization's mission and goals than do people at lower levels.
- ▶ Both spoken and written messages tend to become larger as they move downward through organizational levels. This expansion results from attempts to prevent distortion and is more noticeable in written messages.
- ▶ Spoken messages are subject to greater changes in meaning than are written messages.

When a supervisor sends a message to a subordinate employee who then asks a question or nods in agreement, the employee has given signs of feedback. Feedback can flow both downward and upward in organizational communication through traditional as well as informal channels.



**FIGURE 1.2** FLOW OF INFORMATION WITHIN AN ORGANIZATION



**Upward Communication** The information that flows from the front lines of an organization to the top is **upward communication**. When management requests information from lower organizational levels, the resulting information becomes feedback to that request. Employees talk to supervisors about themselves, their fellow employees, their work and methods of doing it, customer needs and perceptions, and their own perceptions of the organization. These comments are commonly feedback in response to the downward flow transmitted

in both spoken and written forms by group meetings, emails, procedures or operations manuals, company news releases, the company intranet, and the grapevine.

Although necessary and valuable, upward communication involves risks. The box that follows lists important upward communication factors to consider.

When effectively used, upward communication keeps management informed about the feelings of lower-level employees, taps the expertise of employees, helps management identify both difficult and

### UPWARD COMMUNICATION

- ▶ Upward communication is primarily feedback to the requests and actions of supervisors.
- ▶ Upward communication can be misleading because lower-level employees often tell their superiors what they think their superiors want to hear. Therefore, their messages might contradict their true observations and perceptions.
- ▶ Upward communication frequently involves risk to an employee and is dependent on his or her trust in the supervisor.
- ▶ Employees will reject superficial attempts by management to obtain feedback.

potentially promotable employees, and paves the way for even more effective downward communication. Upward communication is key to keeping employees engaged and informed and is especially critical in tapping the power of younger employees who expect to collaborate rather than to be supervised.<sup>3</sup>

**Horizontal Communication** **Horizontal, or lateral, communication** describes interactions between organizational units on the same hierarchical level. These interactions reveal one of the major shortcomings of organizational charts: They do not recognize the role of horizontal communication when they depict authority relationships by placing one box higher than another and define role functions by placing titles in those boxes. Yet management should realize that horizontal communication is the primary means of achieving

coordination in a functional organizational structure. Units coordinate their activities to accomplish task goals just as adjacent workers in a production line coordinate their activities. So for horizontal communication to be maximally effective, the people in any system or organization should be available to one another.

Many companies realize that the traditional hierarchy organized around functional units is inadequate for competing in increasingly competitive global markets. They value work teams that integrate work-flow processes rather than specialists in a single function or product. Such work teams can break down communication barriers between isolated functional departments, and communication patterns take on varying forms to accommodate team activities.

### 1-3b Levels of Communication

Communication can involve sending messages to both large and small audiences. **Internal messages** are intended for recipients within the organization. **External messages** are directed to recipients outside the organization. When considering the intended audience, communication can be described as taking place on

**horizontal (or lateral) communication** interactions between organizational units on the same hierarchical level

**internal messages** messages intended for recipients within the organization

**external messages** messages directed to recipients outside the organization

organizational charts: They do not recognize the role of horizontal communication when they depict authority relationships by placing one box higher than another and define role functions by placing titles in those boxes. Yet management should realize that horizontal communication is the primary means of achieving

**FIGURE 1.3** LEVELS OF COMMUNICATION

#### COMMUNICATION LEVELS

##### INTRAPERSONAL

- Communication within oneself
- Not considered by some to be true communication as it does not involve a separate sender and receiver

##### INTERPERSONAL

- Communication between two people
- Task goal is to accomplish work confronting them
- Maintenance goal is to feel better about themselves and each other because of their interaction

##### GROUP

- Communication among more than two people
- Goal of achieving greater output than individual efforts could produce

##### ORGANIZATIONAL

- Groups combined in such a way that large tasks may be accomplished
- Goal of providing adequate structure for groups to achieve their purposes

##### PUBLIC

- The organization reaching out to its public to achieve its goals
- Goal of reaching many with the same message

#### EXAMPLES

*Individual considers how others respond to his or her verbal and/or nonverbal communication*

*Supervisor and subordinate, two coworkers*

*Work group, project team, department meeting*

*Company, organization*

*Media advertisement, website communication, annual report*

five levels: intrapersonal, interpersonal, group, organizational, and public. Figure 1.3 depicts the five audience levels. An effective communicator has a clearly defined purpose for each message, and has selected strategies for targeting his or her intended audience.

## 1-4 CONTEXTUAL FORCES INFLUENCING BUSINESS COMMUNICATION

All communication occurs within a **context**, which is the situation or setting. Context can influence the content, the quality, and the effectiveness of a communication event. The effective communicator will recognize the importance of context, identify the contextual elements that will influence communication, and adjust his or her messages in response. Four important contextual forces influence the communication process today and help determine and define the nature of the communication that should occur, as shown in Figure 1.4. These forces are legal and ethical constraints, diversity challenges, changing technology, and team environment.

### 1-4a Legal and Ethical Constraints

Legal and ethical constraints act as contextual or environmental forces on communication because they set boundaries in which communication rightfully occurs. International, federal, state, and local laws affect the way that various business activities are conducted. For instance, laws specify that certain information must be stated in messages that reply to credit applications and those dealing with the collection of outstanding debts.



Furthermore, one's own ethical standards will often influence what a person is willing to say in a message. For example, a system of ethics built on honesty might require that the message provide full disclosure rather than a shrouding of the truth. Legal responsibilities, then, are the starting point for appropriate business communication. One's ethical belief system, or personal sense of right and wrong behavior, provides further boundaries for professional activity.

The press is full of examples of unethical conduct in business and political communities, but unethical behavior is not relegated to the papers—it has far-reaching consequences. Those affected by decisions, the **stakeholders**, can include people inside and outside the organization. Employees and stockholders are obvious losers when a company fails.

**context** a situation or setting in which communication occurs

**stakeholders** people inside and outside the organization who are affected by decisions

**FIGURE 1.4** FACTORS INFLUENCING BUSINESS COMMUNICATION

#### LEGAL AND ETHICAL CONSTRAINTS

- International Laws
- Domestic Laws
- Codes of Ethics
- Stakeholder Interests
- Ethical Frameworks
- Personal Values

#### CHANGING TECHNOLOGY

- Accuracy and Security Issues
- Telecommunications
- Software Applications
- “High-Touch” Issues
- Telecommuting
- Databases

#### DIVERSITY CHALLENGES

- Cultural Differences
- Language Barriers
- Gender Issues
- Education Levels
- Age Factors
- Nonverbal Differences

#### TEAM ENVIRONMENT

- Trust
- Team Roles
- Shared Goals and Expectations
- Synergy
- Group Reward
- Distributed Leadership