

1

Establishing a Framework for Business Communication



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
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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;

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

- coordinating the work of various employees, departments, and other work groups;
- evaluating and counseling employees;
- 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

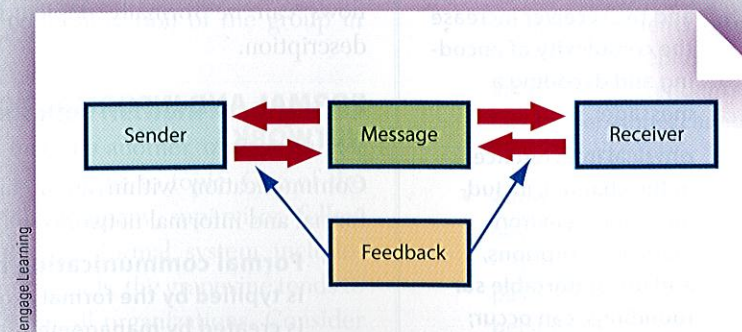
are major determinants of career success in many fields.¹ Although essential to personal and professional success, effective business communication does not occur automatically. Your own experiences likely have taught you that a message is not interpreted correctly just because you transmitted it. An effective communicator anticipates possible breakdowns in the communication

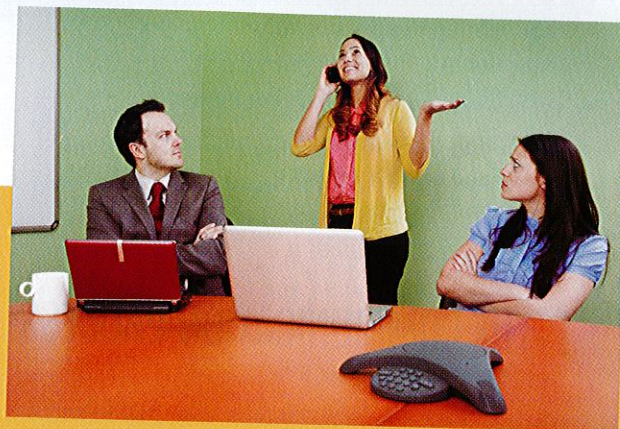
process—the unlimited ways the message can be misunderstood. This mind-set provides the concentration to plan and design the initial message effectively and to be prepared to intervene at the appropriate time to ensure that the message received is on target.

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

FIGURE 1.1 THE TRANSACTIONAL PROCESS MODEL OF COMMUNICATION





Interruptions or distractions can create barriers to understanding.

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.

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,

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 organization chart; dictated by the technical, political, and economic environment of the organization

- 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;
- 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 to a communication encounter may be sending information both orally and nonverbally simultaneously, 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.

1-3 COMMUNICATING WITHIN ORGANIZATIONS

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 organization 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*. Procedures manuals, job descriptions, organization 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—job, company, supervisor, 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:



The office grapevine carries informal messages.

- 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 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

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

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 and Twitter.

- 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 and Twitter, for sharing information with their internal constituents. Company openness with employees about management decisions 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.²

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.

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 organization chart

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

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 organization 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:

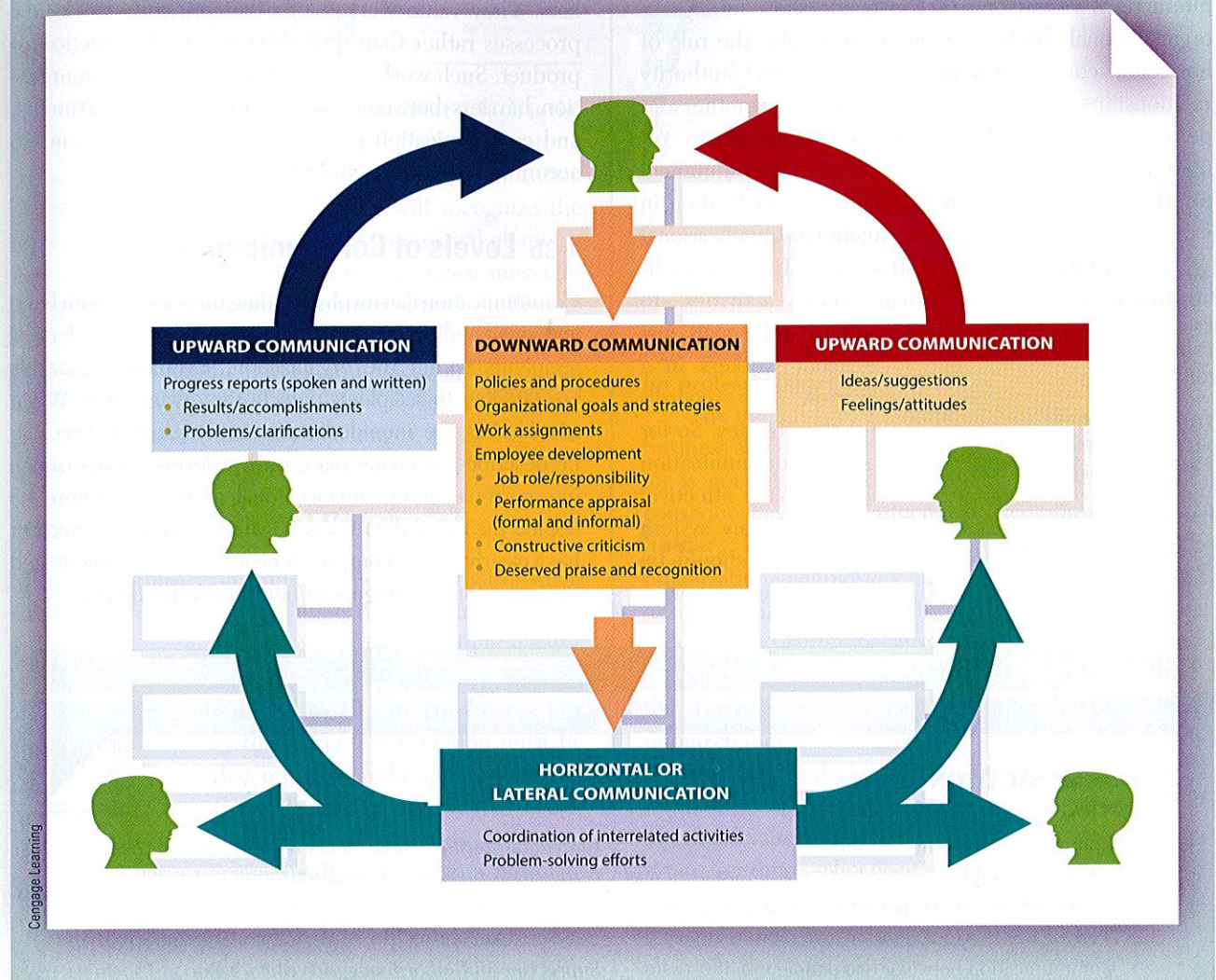
DOWNWARD COMMUNICATION

- ▶ 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.

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 to the downward flow transmitted in

FIGURE 1.2 FLOW OF INFORMATION WITHIN AN ORGANIZATION



UPWARD COMMUNICATION

- ▶ Upward communication is primarily feedback to 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 trust in the supervisor.
- ▶ Employees will reject superficial attempts by management to obtain feedback.

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 following factors are important to consider when upward communication is involved:

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 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.³

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

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

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 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 selected strategies for targeting his or her intended audience.

FIGURE 1.3 LEVELS OF COMMUNICATION

COMMUNICATION LEVELS	EXAMPLES
INTRAPERSONAL	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communication within oneself Not considered by some to be true communication as it does not involve a separate sender and receiver 	Individual considers how others respond to his or her verbal and/or nonverbal communication.
INTERPERSONAL	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communication between two people Task goal to accomplish work confronting them Maintenance goal to feel better about themselves and each other because of their interaction 	Supervisor and subordinate, two coworkers
GROUP	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communication among more than two people Goal of achieving greater output than individual efforts could produce 	Work group, project team, department meeting
ORGANIZATIONAL	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Groups combined in such a way that large tasks may be accomplished Goal of providing adequate structure for groups to achieve their purposes 	Company, organization
PUBLIC	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The organization reaching out to its public to achieve its goals Goal of reaching many with the same message 	Media advertisement, website communication, annual report

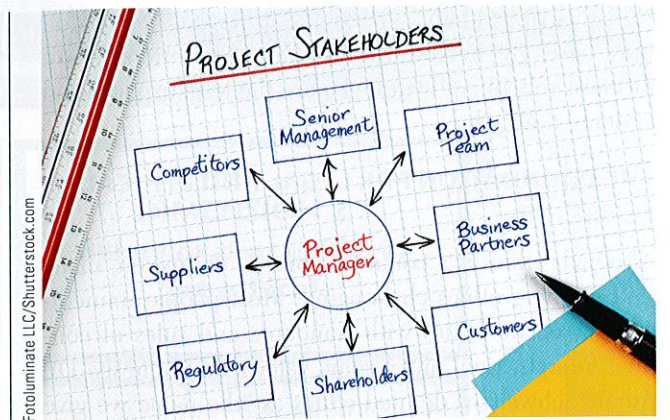
1-4

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 messages in response. Four important contextual forces influence the communication process today and help determine 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. Competitors in the same industry also suffer because their strategies are based on what they perceive about their competition. Beyond that, financial markets as a whole suffer due to erosion of public confidence.

Business leaders, government officials, and citizens frequently express concern about the apparent erosion of ethical values in society. Even for those who want to do the right thing, matters of ethics are seldom clear-cut decisions of right versus wrong, and they often contain ambiguous

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	CHANGING TECHNOLOGY	DIVERSITY CHALLENGES	TEAM ENVIRONMENT
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> International Laws Domestic Laws Codes of Ethics Stakeholder Interests Ethical Frameworks Personal Values 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Accuracy and Security Issues Telecommunications Software Applications "High-Touch" Issues Telecommuting Databases 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cultural Differences Language Barriers Gender Issues Education Levels Age Factors Nonverbal Differences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Trust Team Roles Shared Goals and Expectations Synergy Group Reward Distributed Leadership

elements. In addition, the pressure appears to be felt most strongly by lower-level managers, often recent business school graduates who are the least experienced at doing their jobs.

THE FOUNDATION FOR LEGAL AND ETHICAL BEHAVIOR

Although ethics is a common point of discussion, many find defining ethics challenging. Most people immediately associate ethics with standards and rules of conduct, morals, right and wrong, values, and honesty. Dr. Albert Schweitzer defined *ethics* as “the name we give to our concern for good behavior. We feel an obligation to consider not only our own personal well-being, but also that of others and of human society as a whole.”⁴ In other words, **ethics** refers to the principles of right and wrong that guide you in making decisions that consider the impact of your actions on others as well as yourself.

Although the recorded accounts of legal and ethical misconduct would seem to indicate that businesses are dishonest and unscrupulous, keep in mind that millions of business transactions are made daily on the basis of honesty and concern for others. Why should a business make ethical decisions? What difference will it make? Johan Karlstrom, global chief executive officer of construction giant Skanska, gave a powerful reply to these questions:

When you understand that profits and a strong values base go together then you have a company that employees are so proud of. We want our team to feel that they're doing something that has a higher meaning, that they feel like "I'm part of something bigger, part of a bigger puzzle driving society in a positive direction."⁵

CAUSES OF ILLEGAL AND UNETHICAL BEHAVIOR

Understanding the major causes of illegal and unethical behavior in the workplace will help you become sensitive to signals of escalating pressure to compromise your values. Unethical corporate behavior can have a number of causes:

- **Excessive emphasis on profits.** Business managers are often judged and paid on their ability to increase business profits. This emphasis on profits might send a message that the end justifies the means.
- **Misplaced corporate loyalty.** A misplaced sense of corporate loyalty might cause

ethics the principles of right and wrong that guide one in making decisions that consider the impact of one's actions on others as well as on the decision maker

an employee to do what seems to be in the best interest of the company, even if the act is illegal or unethical.

- **Obsession with personal advancement.** Employees who wish to outperform their peers or are working for the next promotion might feel that they cannot afford to fail. They might do whatever it takes to achieve the objectives assigned to them.
- **Expectation of not getting caught.** Thinking that the end justifies the means, employees often believe illegal or unethical activity will never be discovered. Unfortunately, a great deal of improper behavior escapes detection in the business world. Believing no one will ever find out, employees are tempted to lie, steal, and perform other illegal acts.
- **Unethical tone set by top management.** If top managers are not perceived as highly ethical, lower-level managers might be less ethical as a result. Employees have little incentive to act legally and ethically if their superiors do not set an example and encourage and reward such behavior. The saying “The speed of the leader is the speed of the pack” illustrates the importance of leading by example.
- **Uncertainty about whether an action is wrong.** Many times, company personnel are placed in situations in which the line between right and wrong is not clearly defined. When caught in this gray area, the perplexed employee asks, “How far is too far?”
- **Unwillingness to take a stand for what is right.** Often employees know what is right or wrong but are not willing to take the risk of challenging a wrong action. They might lack the confidence or skill needed to confront others with sensitive legal or ethical issues. They might remain silent and then justify their unwillingness to act.

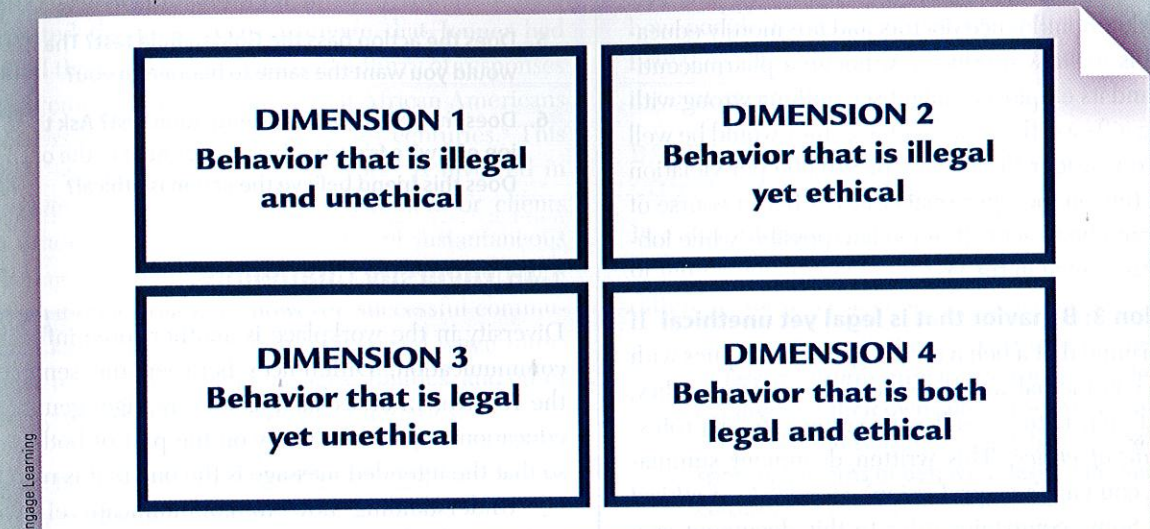
FRAMEWORK FOR ANALYZING ETHICAL DILEMMAS

Determining whether an action is ethical can be difficult. Learning to analyze a dilemma from both legal and ethical perspectives will help you find a solution that conforms to your own personal values. Figure 1.5 shows the four conclusions you might reach when considering the advisability of a particular behavior.

Dimension 1: Behavior that is illegal and unethical

When considering some actions, you will reach the conclusion that they are both illegal and unethical. The law specifically outlines the “black” area—those alternatives that are clearly wrong—and your employer will expect you to become an expert in the laws that affect your particular area. When you encounter an unfamiliar area, you must investigate any possible legal implications. Obviously,

FIGURE 1.5 FOUR DIMENSIONS OF BUSINESS BEHAVIOR



obeying the law is in the best interest of all concerned: you as an individual, your company, and society. Contractual agreements between two parties also offer guidance for legal decision making. Frequently, your own individual sense of right and wrong will also confirm that the illegal action is wrong for you personally. In such situations, decisions about appropriate behavior are obvious.

Dimension 2: Behavior that is illegal yet ethical

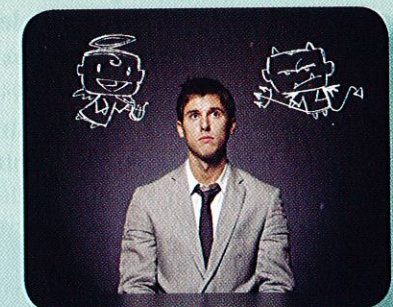
Occasionally, a businessperson will decide that even though a specific action is illegal, there is a justifiable reason to break the law. A case in point is a law passed in Vermont that makes it illegal for a pharmaceutical company to give any gift valued at more than \$25 to doctors or their personnel.⁶ Those supporting the law charge

ETHICAL DILEMMAS ...

Identifying ethical issues in typical workplace situations can be difficult, and coworkers and superiors might apply pressure for seemingly logical reasons. To illustrate, examine each of the following workplace situations for a possible ethical dilemma:

- ▶ In order to achieve profit expectations, a stockbroker hides the financial risk of an investment product from potential clients.
- ▶ To prevent an adverse effect on stock prices, corporate officers deliberately withhold information concerning a possible corporate takeover.
- ▶ To protect the organization, management decides not to publicize a design flaw in an automobile that could lead to possible injury and even death to consumers, because the announcement might result in legal action.
- ▶ A supervisor takes advantage of his position and threatens an employee with dismissal if she does not acquiesce to his inappropriate requests and language use.
- ▶ Angry because of an unfavorable performance appraisal of a colleague, an employee leaks confidential information to the colleague that creates distrust among others in the department and results in a lawsuit.

Your fundamental morals and values provide the foundation for making ethical decisions. However, as the previous examples imply, even seemingly minor concessions in day-to-day decisions can gradually weaken an individual's ethical foundation.



that the giving of freebies drives up medical costs by encouraging doctors to prescribe new, more expensive brand-name drugs. The law's opponents contend that the gifts do not influence doctors and are merely educational tools for new products. Although a pharmaceutical firm and its employees might see nothing wrong with providing gifts worth in excess of \$25, they would be well advised to consider the penalty of \$10,000 per violation before acting on their personal ethics. A better course of action would be to act within the law, possibly while lobbying for a change in the law.

Dimension 3: Behavior that is legal yet unethical If you determine that a behavior is legal and complies with relevant contractual agreements and company policy, your next step is to consult your company's or profession's *code of ethics*. This written document summarizes the company's or profession's *standards of ethical conduct*. Some companies refer to this document as a *credo*. If the behavior does not violate the code of ethics, then put it to the test of your own personal integrity. You may at times reject a legal action because it does not "feel right." Most Americans were appalled to learn that the marketing of sub-prime loans packaged as reputable securities has been blamed for causing the "Great Recession." Although they might have acted legally, their profiting at the expense of company employees, stockholders, and the public hardly seemed ethical. You might be faced with situations in which you reject a behavior that is legal because you would not be proud to have your family and community know that you engaged in it.

Dimension 4: Behavior that is both legal and ethical Decisions in this dimension are easy to make. Such actions comply with the law, company policies, and your professional and personal codes of ethics.

The Pagano Model offers a straightforward method for determining whether a proposed action is advisable.⁷ For this system to work, you must answer the following six questions honestly:

1. Is the proposed action legal? (This is the core starting point.)
2. What are the benefits and costs to the people involved?
3. Would you want this action to be a universal standard, appropriate for everyone?



4. Does the action pass the light-of-day test? That is, if your action appeared on television or others learned about it, would you be proud?
5. Does the action pass the Golden Rule test? That is, would you want the same to happen to you?
6. Does the action pass the ventilation test? Ask the opinion of a wise friend with no investment in the outcome. Does this friend believe the action is ethical?

1-4b Diversity Challenges

Diversity in the workplace is another force influencing communication. Differences between the sender and the receiver in areas such as culture, age, gender, and education require sensitivity on the part of both parties so that the intended message is the one that is received.

Understanding how to communicate effectively with people from other cultures has become more integral to the work environment as many US companies are increasingly conducting business with international companies or becoming multinational. Even when a person can communicate, it may differ in other countries. For example, France's administrative court recently ruled that tech workers' right to health and rest was not sufficiently protected by existing laws. What this means is that a tech worker in France can choose to not check his work email during his legally mandated rest period and not face retribution.⁸ For Americans, who may dare not even think of "unplugging," cultural differences might require adjustments to communication expectations.

When addressing cultural differences, successful communication must often span barriers of language and differing worldviews resulting from societal and religious beliefs and practices. When a person fails to consider these factors, communication suffers, and the result is often embarrassing and potentially costly. To be successful on an international scale, managers need to be aware of cultural differences and be willing to work to ensure that effective communication occurs despite these barriers.

Cultural blunders aren't limited to international communication situations, however. In April 2014, the magazine *Marie Claire* tweeted a

photo of American television personality Kendall Jenner wearing cornrows with the message "Kendall Jenner takes bold braids to a new epic level." Twitter followers interpreted the message to insinuate that Jenner had invented the braided hairstyle, and a flurry of responses ensued reminding the magazine that African Americans and others have worn the hairstyle for centuries.⁹ This example shows how much "homework" is involved in maintaining good relations with customers or clients from other cultures, and the danger of instantaneous messaging. The potential barrier of language is obvious in international situations; however, successful communicators know that much more is involved when interacting across cultures, genders, ages, abilities, and other differences, regardless of national boundaries.

COMMUNICATION OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES IN DIVERSITY

As world markets continue to expand, US employees at home and abroad will be doing business with more people from other countries. You might find yourself working abroad for a large American company, an international company with a plant in the United States, or a company with an ethnically diverse workforce. Regardless of the workplace, your **diversity skills**—that is, your ability to communicate effectively with both men and women of all ages, cultures, and minority groups—will affect your success in today's culturally diverse global economy.

Workplace diversity can lead to misunderstandings and miscommunications, but it also poses opportunities to improve both workers and organizations. Employees must be prepared to communicate effectively with workers of different nationalities, genders, races, ages, abilities, and other characteristics.

Being a part of a diverse workforce will require you to communicate with *everyone* and to support colleagues in reaching their fullest potential and contributing to the company's goals. To lessen miscommunication, which inevitably occurs, increasing numbers of companies have undertaken *diversity initiatives* and are providing diversity training seminars to help workers understand and appreciate gender and age differences and the cultures of coworkers.

CULTURE AND COMMUNICATION

The way messages are decoded and encoded is not just a function of the experiences, beliefs, and assumptions of the person sending or receiving those messages but also is shaped by the society in which he or she lives.

People learn patterns of behavior from their culture. The *culture* of a people is the product of their living

experiences within their own society. Culture could be described as "the way of life" of a people and includes a vast array of behaviors and beliefs. These patterns affect how people perceive the world, what they value, and how they act. Differing patterns can also create barriers to communication.

BARRIERS TO INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

Because cultures give different definitions of such basics of interaction as values and norms, people raised in two different cultures can clash in various ways.

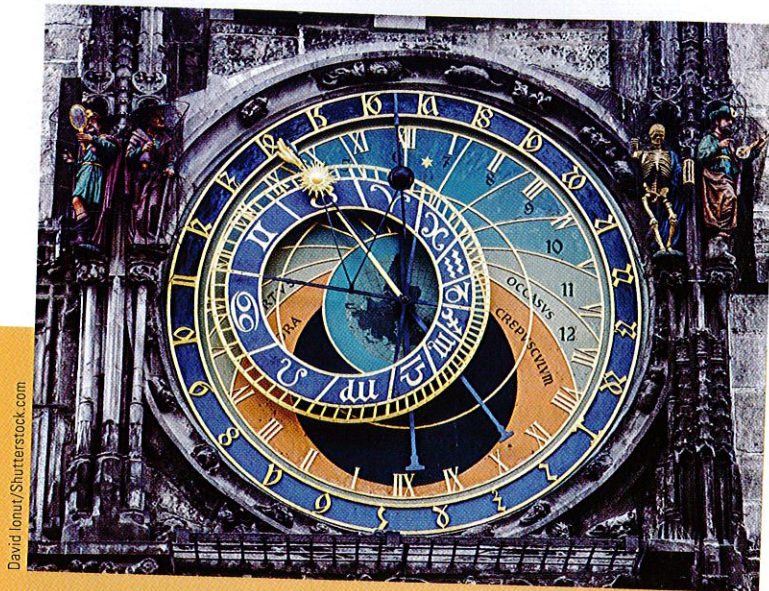
- **Ethnocentrism.** Problems occur between people of different cultures primarily because people tend to assume that their own cultural norms are the right way to do things. They wrongly believe that the specific patterns of behavior desired in their own cultures are universally valued. This belief, known as **ethnocentrism**, is certainly natural; but learning about other cultures and developing sensitivity will help minimize ethnocentric reactions when dealing with other cultures.
- **Stereotypes.** We often form a mental picture of the main characteristics of another group, creating preformed ideas of what people in this group are like. These pictures, called **stereotypes**, influence the way we interact with members of the other group. When we observe a behavior that conforms to the stereotype, the validity of the preconceived notion is reinforced. We often view the other person as a representative of a class of people rather than as an individual. People of all cultures have stereotypes about other cultural groups they have encountered. These stereotypes can interfere with communication when people interact on the basis of the imagined representative and not the real individual.
- **Interpretation of time.** The study of how a culture perceives time and its use is called **chronemics**. In the United States, we have a saying that "time is money." Canadians, like some northern Europeans who are also concerned about punctuality, make appointments, keep them, and complete them, and waste no time in the process. In some other cultures, time is the cheapest

diversity skills the ability to communicate effectively with both men and women of all ages, cultures, and minority groups

ethnocentrism the assumption that one's own cultural norms are the right way to do things

stereotypes mental pictures that one group forms of the main characteristics of another group, creating preformed ideas of what people in this group are like

chronemics the study of how a culture perceives time and its use



Although Americans and some Europeans believe "time is money," other cultures are less concerned about economy of time. Above, the Prague Orloj astronomical clock, installed in 1410, is the oldest still-working clock in the world.

commodity and an inexhaustible resource; time represents a person's span on Earth, which is only part of eternity. To these cultures, engaging in long, casual conversations prior to serious discussions or negotiations is time well spent in establishing and nurturing relationships. On the other hand, the time-efficient American businessperson is likely to fret about wasting precious time.

- **Personal space requirements.** Space operates as a language just as time does. The study of cultural space requirements is known as **proxemics**. In all cultures, the distance between people functions in communication as "personal space" or "personal territory." In the United States, for example, for intimate conversations with close friends and relatives, individuals are willing to stay within about a foot and a half of each other; for casual conversations, up to two or three feet; for job interviews and personal business, four to twelve feet; and for public occasions, more than twelve feet. However, in many cultures outside the United States, closer personal contact is accepted, or greater distance might be the norm.

proxemics the study of cultural space requirements

kinesics the study of body language, which is not universal, but instead is learned from one's culture

- **Body language.** The study of body language is known as **kinesics**. Body language is not universal, but instead is learned from one's culture. Even the most basic gestures have varying

cultural meanings—the familiar North American symbol for "okay" means zero in France, money in Japan, and an expression of vulgarity in Brazil. Similarly, eye contact, posture, and facial expressions carry different meanings throughout the world.

- **Translation limitations.** Words in one language do not always have an equivalent meaning in other languages, and the concepts the words describe are often different as well. Translators can be helpful, but keep in mind that a translator is working with a second language and must listen to one language, mentally cast the words into another language, and then speak them. This process is difficult and opens the possibility that the translator will fall victim to one or more cultural barriers. Even if you cannot speak or write another language fluently, people from other cultures will appreciate simple efforts to learn a few common phrases.

DEVELOPING CULTURAL INTELLIGENCE

One way to improve your ability to communicate with those from other cultures is to develop your *cultural intelligence*. Cultural intelligence can be defined as "a person's capability to adapt as he or she interacts with others from different cultural regions."¹⁰ There are three elements of cultural intelligence:

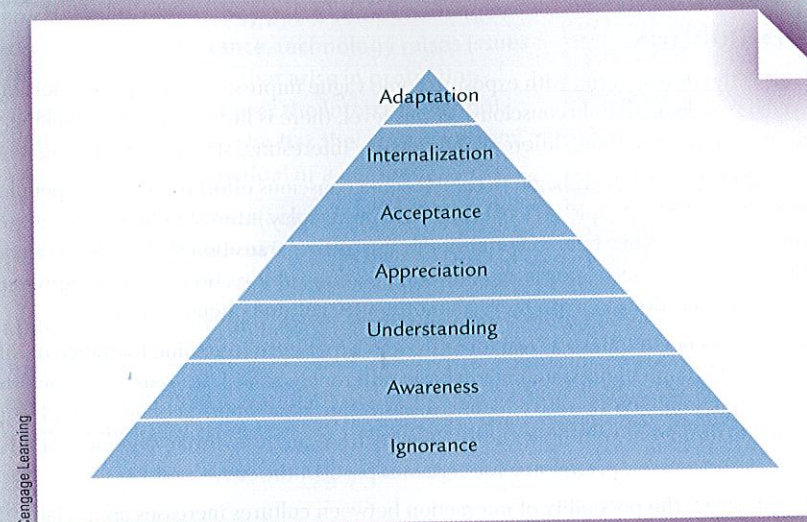
- **Cognitive knowledge:** The possession of a wide-ranging information base about a variety of people and their cultural customs.
- **Motivation:** Healthy self-efficacy, persistence, goals, value questioning, and integration.
- **Behavioral adaptability:** The capacity to interact in a wide range of situations, environments, and diverse groups.

The Global Literacy Competence (GLC) Model offers a road map to begin to conceptualize the stages of cultural intelligence development (see Figures 1.6 and 1.7). The GLC assumes that ascending to a higher level of global functioning is not only possible but is required for excellence in a cross-cultural environment. To do so requires a commitment to personal growth, openness, and continuous learning about other cultures and customs.

1-4c Changing Technology

Electronic tools create opportunities that range from new kinds of communications to improved quality of the messages themselves. Electronic tools, such as

FIGURE 1.6 GLOBAL LEADERSHIP COMPETENCY MODEL



Source: C. O. Chin, J. Gu, and S. Tubbs. (2001). Developing global leadership competencies. *Journal of Leadership Studies*, 7(4): 20–35.



It's critical in business to develop a cultural intelligence.

the Internet, intranets, document production software, multimedia presentations, web publishing tools, and email, can help people in various ways, such as by (1) collecting and analyzing data, (2) shaping messages to be clearer and more effective, and (3) communicating quickly and efficiently with others in geographically dispersed locations.

Using various communication technologies, individuals can often work in their homes or other remote locations and send and receive work from the company office electronically. **Telecommuting** (also referred to as *teleworking*) offers various advantages, including reduced travel time and increased work flexibility. Laptops and smartphones provide computing power and connectivity for professionals wherever they are. Although the public Internet is accessible to everyone and offers a wide array of information, organizations are establishing intranets, which can be understood as a private analog of the Internet or as a private extension of the Internet confined to a particular organization. An intranet is a computer network that uses Internet Protocol technology to share information, operational systems, or computing services within an organization. Increasingly, intranets are being used to deliver tools, for example, collaboration (to facilitate working in groups and teleconferencing) or sophisticated corporate directories, sales and

telecommuting also called *teleworking*; working at home or other remote locations and sending and receiving work from the company office electronically

FIGURE 1.7 LEVELS OF GLOBAL COMMUNICATION COMPETENCE

LEVEL	DESCRIPTION
Awareness	This is the novice stage; with exposure come vague impressions. They are brief sensations of which people are barely conscious. At this level, there is little or no sense-making, but a dawning awareness of something different and possibly interesting, strange, frightening, or annoying.
Understanding	At this stage individuals begin to exhibit some conscious effort to learn why people are the way they are and why people do what they do. They display interest in those who are different from themselves. Sanchez et al. (2000) refer to this as the "transition stage." This is a stage whereby the individual collects information through reading, observation, and real experiences as well as by asking questions to learn more about the new cultural phenomenon.
Appreciation	Individuals begin to take a "leap of faith" and experience a genuine tolerance of different points of view. Through understanding the basic differences as well as areas where one thinks, acts, and reacts similarly, a positive feeling towards the "new" cultural phenomenon begins to form. Individuals not only put up with the "new" culture but also display a genuine appreciation of and, in some cases, preference for certain aspects of the "new" culture.
Acceptance	In this stage, the possibility of interaction between cultures increases appreciably. People are more sophisticated both in terms of recognizing commonalities and in terms of effectively dealing with differences. At this stage, there is the willingness to acquire new patterns of behavior and attitudes. This is a departure from the ethnocentric notion that "my way is the best way and the only way."
Internalization	At this stage, the individual goes beyond making sense of information and actually embarks on a deliberate internalization process, with profound positive feelings for the once unknown cultural phenomenon. At this stage, there is a clear sense of self-understanding leading to readiness to act and interact with the locals/nationals in a natural, appropriate, and culturally effective manner.
Adaptation	Cultural competence becomes a way of life. It is internalized, to the degree that it is out of one's consciousness, thus becomes effortless and second nature. Individuals at this level display and possess (1) The capacity for gathering knowledge about different cultures, (2) drive or motivation, and (3) behavioral adaptability—the capacity to act effectively based upon their knowledge and motivation.

Source: C. O. Chin, J. Gu, and S. Tubbs. (2001). Developing global leadership competencies. *Journal of Leadership Studies*, 7(4): 20–35.

customer relationship management tools, and project management, to advance productivity.

Intranets are also being used as corporate culture-change platforms. For example, large numbers of employees discussing key issues in an intranet forum application could lead to new ideas in management, productivity, quality, and other corporate issues. When part of an intranet is made accessible to customers and others outside the business, that segment becomes part of an extranet, or a network between organizations.

A related development is the growing use of **social media** in organizations.

social media a group of Internet-based applications that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content

Social media is "a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological

foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content." Social media depends on mobile and Web-based technologies to create highly interactive platforms through which individuals and communities share, co-create, discuss, and modify user-generated content. It introduces substantial and pervasive changes to communication between organizations, communities, and individuals. In a business context, social media provides opportunities to engage in marketing research, communication, sales promotions/discounts, and relationship development/loyalty programs.

Although many benefits are provided through the use of technology in organizations, challenges or risks also must be recognized. Knowing how to "tunnel" through the vast amounts of irrelevant information available on the "digital highway" to find what you want can

LEGAL AND ETHICAL IMPLICATIONS OF TECHNOLOGY

In addition to its many benefits, technology poses some challenges for the business communicator. For instance, technology raises issues of ownership, as in the case of difficulties that arise in protecting the copyright of documents transmitted over the Internet. Technology poses dilemmas over access, that is, who has the right to certain stored information pertaining to an individual or a company.

Technology threatens our individual privacy, our right to be left alone, free from surveillance or interference from other individuals or organizations. Common invasions of privacy caused by technology include

- ▶ monitoring your Internet use, infiltrating your information, and sending advertising based on your browsing history;
- ▶ monitoring the exact time employees spend on a specific task and between tasks and the exact number and length of breaks, and supervisors' or coworkers' reading of another employee's email and computer files; and
- ▶ spreading of spyware and various computer "bugs" through the Internet.¹¹



be overwhelming. The experience can also be expensive in terms of human time spent and charges incurred for online time. Locating information from electronic sources requires that you know the search procedures and methods for constructing an effective search strategy. There are also possible legal liabilities that can arise from improper use of technological resources.

Effective use of various communication technologies helps ensure timely, targeted messages and responses and helps build interpersonal relationships. This responsiveness leads to positive interactions with colleagues and strong customer commitment.

1-4d Team Environment

As firms around the world face problems of decreasing productivity, faltering product quality, and worker dissatisfaction, work teams are seen as a way to help firms remain globally competitive. Decentralized decision making enables teams of people to communicate in a peer-to-peer fashion, rather than following traditional lines of authority, and new technologies give employees the ability to communicate easily and openly with one another and with those outside the firm.

Although worker involvement in the management process has long been the hallmark of Japanese business, many businesses in the United States and elsewhere are empowering self-directed work teams to accomplish various assignments.¹² The list of companies using self-directed work teams is diverse, including Hunt-Wesson, Federal Express, Kraft Foods, Inc., Hewlett-Packard, Southwest Airlines, Toyota, Motorola, General Electric, and Corning.

WORK TEAM DEFINED

The terms *team*, *work team*, *group*, *work group*, *cross-functional team*, and *self-directed team* are often used interchangeably.¹³ Whatever the title, a **team** is a small number of people with complementary skills who work together for a common purpose. Team members set their own goals, in cooperation with management, and plan how to achieve those goals and how their work is to be accomplished. The central organizing element of a team is that it has a common purpose and measurable goals for which the team can be held accountable, independent of its individual members. Employees in a self-directed work team handle a wide array of functions and work with a minimum of direct supervision.¹⁴

Some major strengths of teams are as follows:¹⁵

- Teams make workers happier by causing them to feel that they are shaping their own jobs.
- Teams increase efficiency by eliminating layers of managers whose job was once to pass orders downward.
- Teams enable a company to draw on the skills and imagination of a whole workforce.

A key element in team success is the concept of **synergy**, defined as a situation in which the whole is greater than the sum of the parts. Teams provide a depth of expertise that is unavailable at the individual level. Teams open lines of communication that then lead to increased

team a small number of people with complementary skills who work together for a common purpose

synergy a situation in which the whole is greater than the sum of the parts

To improve group communication, time needs to be set aside to assess the quality of interaction. Questions to pose about the group process might include the following:

Is the group dealing with conflict in a positive way?

What in the group process is going well?

What roles are members playing? For instance, is one person dominating while others contribute little or nothing?



What are our common goals?

What about the group process could be improved?

interaction among employees and between employees and management. The result is that teams help companies reach their goals of delivering higher-quality products and services faster and with more cost-effectiveness.

COMMUNICATION DIFFERENCES IN WORK TEAMS

In the past, most businesses were operated in a hierarchical fashion, with most decisions made at the top and communication following a top-down/bottom-up pattern. Communication patterns are different in successful team environments as compared with traditional organizational structures:

- Trust building is the primary factor that changes the organization's communication patterns.
- Open meetings are an important method for enhancing communication, as they educate employees about the business while building bridges of understanding and trust.
- Shared leadership, which involves more direct and effective communication between management and its internal customers, is common.
- Listening, problem solving, conflict resolution, negotiation, and consensus become important factors in group communication.
- Information flows vertically up to management and down to workers, as well as horizontally among team members, other teams, and supervisors.

Communication is perhaps the single most important aspect of successful teamwork. Open lines of communication increase interaction between employees

and management. All affected parties should be kept informed as projects progress.

MAXIMIZING WORK TEAM EFFECTIVENESS

Grouping employees into a team structure does not mean that they will automatically function as a team. A group must go through a developmental process to begin to function as a team. Members need training in such areas as problem solving, goal setting, and conflict resolution. Teams must be encouraged to establish the "three Rs"—roles, rules, and relationships.¹⁶

The self-directed work team can become the basic organizational building block to best ensure success in dynamic global competition. Skills for successful participation in team environments are somewhat different from those necessary for success in old-style organizations. Today successful business communicators and team members must possess the ability to

- give and take constructive criticism, actively listen, clearly impart one's views to others, and provide meaningful feedback;
- break down emotional barriers, such as insecurity or condescension;
- promote team functioning by removing process barriers, such as rigid policies and procedures;
- understand the feelings and needs of coworkers so members feel comfortable stating their opinions and discussing the strengths and weaknesses of the team;
- overcome cultural barriers, such as stereotyped roles and responsibilities, that can separate workers from management;¹⁷

FIGURE 1.8 CHARACTERISTICS OF DEFENSIVE AND SUPPORTIVE COMMUNICATION CLIMATES

DEFENSIVE

1. Evaluation. To pass judgment on another.
2. Control. To try to do something to another; to try to change behavior or attitudes of others.
3. Strategy. To manipulate another, to engage in multiple or ambiguous motivations.
4. Neutrality. To express a lack of concern for the other; the clinical, person-as-object-of-study attitude.
5. Superiority. To communicate that you are superior in position, wealth, intelligence, and so on, to arouse feelings of inadequacy in others.
6. Certainty. To seem to know the answers and be dogmatic wanting to win an argument rather than solve a problem; seeing one's ideas as truths to be defended.

SUPPORTIVE

1. Description. Nonjudgmental. To ask questions, present feelings, refrain from asking the other to change his or her behavior.
2. Problem orientation. To convey a desire to collaborate in solving a mutual problem or defining it; to allow the other to set his or her goals.
3. Spontaneity. To express naturalness, free of deception; straightforwardness; uncomplicated motives.
4. Empathy. To respect the other person and show it; to identify with his or her problems; to share his or her feelings.
5. Equality. To be willing to enter into participative planning with mutual trust and respect; to attach little importance to differences of worth, status, and so on.
6. Provisionalism. To be willing to experiment with your own behavior; to investigate issues rather than taking sides; to solve problems, not debate.

Source: Jack Gibb. (1961). Defensive communication, *Journal of Communication*, 11: 141–48.

- apply leadership skills in a dynamic group setting that results in team success. In dynamic team leadership, referred to as *distributed leadership*, the role of leader can alternate among members, and more than one leadership style can be active at any given time.¹⁸

Gender, cultural, and age differences among members of a team can present barriers to team communication. Knowing what behaviors can limit the group process is imperative to maximizing results. Team members might need awareness training to assist in recognizing behaviors that may hinder team performance and in overcoming barriers that can limit the effectiveness of their communication.

VIRTUAL TEAMS

The convergence of the last three developments—globalization and increased reliance on technology and teams—has resulted in the increased use of a special kind of team—the virtual team. A virtual team is defined as “a group of geographically, organizationally and/or time dispersed workers brought together by information and telecommunication technologies to accomplish one or more organizational tasks.”¹⁹ Members of virtual teams communicate electronically and may never meet face-to-face.

As with most technology-enabled developments, both advantages and disadvantages can result from virtual team use. Advantages include increased productivity, extended market opportunities, and improved knowledge transfer among employees across an organization.

Common disadvantages include reduced communication effectiveness caused by more limited access to various communication media, poor leadership, and incompetent team members. These disadvantages can be overcome through effective virtual team training, proper goal setting, team building, and successful coordination.

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