

Organizational Communication for Survival: Making Work, Work. Richmond, McCroskey, & McCroskey (2005).

THE NATURE OF COMMUNICATION IN ORGANIZATIONS

Regardless of the type of organization, communication is the element that maintains and sustains relationships in it. What person A says to person B not only can have an impact on those two people but, since organizations are systems, it also can have a meaningful impact on the total system. Your communication with your co-workers and supervisors in the organization will be a major determinant of how satisfied you are with your work, and how satisfied *others* are with your work.

For example, in one organization where we worked, there was a very gossipy, control-oriented person who would subtly let others know what he/she thought of his/her co-workers. Eventually, this type of communication made it impossible for others to work with this individual. When asked to work with this person, others would find excuses not to or would become "ill" when the time to do the work rolled around. This, of course, had a negative impact on the work of the total unit. The communication behavior of individual employees plays a more significant role in organizational life than some think. Organizational communication is central to organization success.

MYTHS AND MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT COMMUNICATION IN ORGANIZATIONS

Only a small proportion of the people in most organizations have ever engaged in serious study of how the process of communication works. Communication is one of those things we deal with every day, so most of us assume we know quite a bit about it. Although that assumption often is correct, most of us also know some things about communication because they are just "common sense." Unfortunately, some things that are "common sense" are just plain wrong. Before we turn our attention to some of the basic facts about communication in organizations, and some advice on how to deal with those realities, we need to look at some of the most common

misconceptions about communication in organizations so we do not fall prey to these myths as we strive to survive.

Myth 1: Meanings are in words. The idea that meanings are in words is perhaps the most common misconception about communication. This misconception can lead to much misunderstanding between two people and thwart the effectiveness of communication between supervisor and subordinate. What a particular *word* means to us may not be what it means to someone else. The word stimulates a meaning in our minds that is different from the meaning it stimulates in the mind of our colleague. For example, the word *evaluation* carries different meanings for people at different levels in the organization. The lower-level employees might feel this means the end of them. The upper-level management might feel this means support for their work. The point we wish to make about words and their meanings is that no word has meaning apart from the person using it. No two people share precisely the same meanings for all words. *Meanings are in people, not words.* Therefore/ we must realize that what we say to others in the organization might not stimulate in their minds the meaning we want or intend to be stimulated. This requires that we adapt our ideas to the background and experiences of our colleagues so that they can adapt to our ideas.

Myth 2: Communication is a verbal process. When most people, whether they are top management or have just taken an entry-level position, think about communication, they think chiefly about words—written or spoken. They rarely focus on the relevance of the nonverbal aspect of communication. Yet much of communication is nonverbal. In fact, when we talk to someone, our verbal communication is always accompanied by nonverbal messages as well. *How* we say something is as important as *what* we say, and often more important. How we act is as important as what we say, and often more important. Nonverbal actions often contradict verbal messages, and when they do most people believe the nonverbal over the verbal. Thus, *the process of communication is both verbal and nonverbal,*

Myth 3: Telling is communicating. Many employees and managers feel that if they have "said it to her" or "told him about it," they have communicated. They may have tried to communicate, but that is no guarantee they have communicated. It is very naive to think that this is all there is to communication. *Telling is only part of communication—often a small part.* People who believe that telling people something is equal to communicating with them fail to acknowledge the active role of receivers. Sources have to consider what meaning a receiver might attach to the message, what a receiver's background is, what a receiver thinks and feels. If anything, telling is only half of communicating. To be effective communicators, we have to be sensitive to the other person's views and communication skills. If your

boss makes this mistake/ you can be assured you will be blamed for the boss's mistake. Consequently, you must take an active role in communicating with your supervisor to be certain you fully understand anything you are told. Although it is not fair to hold you responsible for inadequate communication on the part of the boss/ that is the reality with which you must be prepared to deal.

Myth 4: Communication will solve all our problems. For years, people have tried to convince us that communication will solve all our problems. If the wife and the husband are not getting along, get them to sit down and talk it out—that will solve the problem. If the parent and the child are not getting along, get them to sit down and talk it out—that will solve the problem. If the supervisor and the subordinate cannot get along, get them to sit down and talk it out—that will solve the problem. Unfortunately, it just is not so. *Communication can either create or help overcome problems.*

Remember, there are a lot of ineffective communicators out there, and often they create more problems than they solve by not knowing how to use communication. There are some situations where communication should be decreased, not increased, such as in true conflict situations. The parties should be separated, not forced to communicate. Yet in many organizations, some individuals always think communication can solve problems, so they put two people or two groups together who hate each other. They force them to communicate and cannot understand why matters only get worse. Effective organizational communication may allow us to solve some problems, but it cannot be expected to solve all problems. Communication is no magic elixir. It will not cure cancer, it will not overcome weight problems, and it will not solve all the problems in an organization. But we can, by communicating more effectively, avoid making some things worse.

Myth 5: Communication is a good thing. Ask 10 people you encounter at work today, "Is communication a good thing?" Probably over half, maybe all 10, will look at you a bit strangely and answer "Certainly," or words to that effect. Since, as we noted above, many people think communication will solve all our problems, it is reasonable they would also think of communication as "good." In reality, communication is neither a good nor a bad thing. *Communication is a tool*, and like any tool, communication can be used for good or bad purposes. The way a person uses communication determines its goodness or badness. For example, take a computer. If we use this tool for its intended purpose—to process information—we can say that it is a good and useful device. Put that computer in the hands of an irate employee and he or she can use it to destroy data and information. Is the computer bad? No, it is simply being used in a bad way. It is the same for communication. We can use our communication for good or evil purposes.

Hopefully, this book will suggest ways in which to use communication as a positive tool to enhance our work environment and our work relationships.

Myth 6: The more communication, the better. If it is a good thing/ and it will solve all our problems, then of course the more of it the better. This myth is tied to the two previous ones. This myth is so prevalent in American society that it has assumed the position of a stereotype. If one meeting is good, two would be better. If one memo is good, two would be better. If one evaluation review conference is good, two would be better. People often do not recognize that *it is the quality of communication that is important, not the pure quantity of it*. In many "white-collar" occupations, meetings are the bane of people's existence. Some people spend more than 75 percent of their working hours in meetings with other employees. Although much of this time no doubt is spent productively, interviews with hundreds of such workers convince us that a very large portion of that time is wasted. It is based on the assumption that the more people talk to one another, the better will be the decision that is made. Not necessarily so. Pooling ignorance does not produce intelligence.

Myth 7: Communication can break down. When people feel a need to place blame for their poor decisions, their interpersonal incompetence, their failure to consult with wiser persons before taking action, we hear the phrase "communication breakdown." Human communication does not break down, although electronic communication systems can do so. We often communicate unsuccessfully and sometimes we stop talking to someone, but in neither instance has communication broken down. As one learns early in the study of nonverbal communication, one cannot *not* communicate. Although this phrase is the English teacher's nightmare, it expresses very well the nature of communication between human beings. Such communication is ongoing, even if words are not being exchanged. Nonverbal messages are likely to continue and, even in the extreme, silence and the absence of new verbal messages in itself communicates. If your supervisor refuses to talk to you, has communication ended? Hardly, but your employment may be about to do so.

Myth 8: Communication is a natural ability. Just as Myth 7 is used as a substitute for our failures and foul-ups, this myth is used as an excuse for not trying to be a better communicator. If people are born with or without the ability to communicate, so the thinking goes, how can I be blamed for being a poor communicator? Sorry, no excuse. *Communication is a learned ability*. While our personality and temperament may be primarily determined by our genes, we acquire our communication skills from our experiences and our education. If what we have acquired is inadequate, it is up to us to see to it that we take the initiative to overcome our inadequacy. Communication competence can be learned, and practice can help us improve.

The fact that you have read this far in this book suggests you are taking that initiative. Read on. We will try to be of help in your quest. Our next task will be to make sure we define what you are going to be studying.

ORGANIZATIONAL COMMUNICATION DEFINED

For the purposes of this book, we define organizational communication as *the process by which individuals stimulate meaning in the minds of other individuals by means of verbal or nonverbal messages in the context of a formal organization*. Some portions of this definition may need clarification.

The word *process* indicates that communication is dynamic and ever changing. Communication is much like the river spoken of by the Greek philosopher **Heraclitus** who said that you can't step in the same river twice—from the moment you take your foot out of the water until you put it back in, the river changes so much that it really isn't the same river. As we change as individuals over time/ and from one organizational event to another/ our communication changes in the organizational environment.

The words *stimulate meaning* are intended to suggest that it is through communication with others that we develop, generate/ cultivate/ shape/ and reshape ideas. It is rare that we develop an idea entirely on our own. Many of our ideas are formed or created by meanings that others have stimulated.

Ideas may be stimulated by either verbal or nonverbal messages. By *verbal messages* we mean the language common to the culture and organization. We transmit these language codes or symbols in either spoken or written form. For example/ when the manager says to you/ "I want this **TRR** memo handled tomorrow/" you have to know the language in order to respond. If you know that TRR stands for Travel Reimbursement Request/ you can respond in the appropriate manner. If you do not/ you have to ask what the "language" means. By *nonverbal messages* we are referring to messages other than verbal/ such as tone of voice/ eye behavior/ touch/ hand gestures/ body movements/ facial expressions/ and so on. When the manager stares at an employee when the employee walks in a few minutes late for the weekly meeting/ meaning may be stimulated in the minds of everyone else in the room.

Communication is a complex process/ and in order to survive in organizations/ you must know what the process is and how it works. To clarify this point/ we need first to turn our attention to the components of the communication process.

COMPONENTS OF COMMUNICATION

A number of early writers in the field of communication developed models of the communication process. Most of them included what were considered to be the four essential components of the process: source, message,

channel/ and receiver. A model representative of those early writings is presented in Figure 2.1. Although the model has some major weaknesses (communication is not presented as a process)/ it does include what are generally considered the primary components of the communication process.

An expanded version of the early models is represented by the interpersonal communication model (see Figure 2.2). As you can see/ this model allows both persons to function as sources or receivers; it also allows for the process nature of communication/ for feedback/ and for transmission of messages by either party. This model clearly presents human interaction as a process. In the organizational environment/ sources are constantly becoming receivers/ and the process is ongoing. Communication in the organizational environment is not static; it does not stop or come to a standstill.

People are constantly exchanging ideas and stimulating meaning in the minds of others. Based on a combination of these models, let's take a look at the critical components in the communication process.

The Source. In the communication process, the source is the person who originates a message. In a broader view, the source could be any individual or collection of individuals—one person, a group, a dyad (twosome), or an entire organization. It could be a group of managers wanting to explain policy changes to employees, it could be a hamburger chain attempting to influence others to buy their hamburgers, or it could be one employee explaining to another employee how to complete a certain task. Whether an organization, group, or individual, the source has three primary functions in communication: (1) determine what specific meaning is to be communicated, (2) encode (translating ideas and information into messages) meaning into one or more messages, and (3) transmit the message(s).

In an organizational environment, one individual may assume all three functions, but it is not uncommon to see each one performed by a different person. For example, a manager wants to communicate certain ideas to his or her employees; he or she may turn to an assistant to ask advice on how best to state the message, and then he or she may select an employee others like and respect and ask that person to carry the message to the rest of the employees. It is therefore very important that as sources we select messages that have mutual meaning for us and the receiver, and that we communicate in a way that will make others want to receive the message.

The Message. A message is any verbal or nonverbal stimulus that elicits meaning in the receiver. When communicating in any environment, most people use a combination of verbal and nonverbal stimuli to stimulate meaning in another. For simplification, we can think of verbal as employing words and nonverbal as employing other stimuli (gestures, smiles, frowns, groans, nods, yawns, touching others, and so on, see Chapter 3) to stimulate meaning. It is not uncommon for an employee or a manager to use these simultaneously when communicating with each other. It is virtually impossible to monitor all nonverbal behaviors. For example, you can more easily monitor your selection of words, but it is very difficult to monitor every facial movement, body movement, eye movement, leg movement, and so on. Sometimes our nonverbal messages will convey much more meaning than our verbal. Good managers have learned to try to interpret the meaning behind the nonverbal messages of their employees as well as the verbal messages; likewise for employees.

The Channel. A channel is a means by which a message is carried from one person to another. In live interaction, our senses (sight, sound, touch, smell, and taste) become channels. Channels can also take the form of mediated

systems—television, radio, the Internet, the world wide web, film, billboards, telephones, etc. In organizations, people often become the most important channels. For example, supervisors function as channels between upper levels of management and lower-level employees. Secretaries often serve as channels between people on different levels and/or in different parts of the organization. People serving as channels make up the informal communication network in organizations.

The Receiver. Just as the source is the person who originates a message, the receiver is the person who acquires the source's message. Like the source, the receiver can be an individual, a group, or an entire organization. Also like the source, the receiver has three functions: (1) receive the source's message, (2) decode (translation of messages into ideas or information) the message into some meaning, and (3) respond to the message. Again, it is typical for one person to handle all three functions, but not uncommon for more than one person to be involved. For example, a new employee might receive the manager's message, but have an older, more-experienced employee interpret it for her or him and have another employee respond to the interpretation.

For communication to be effective, employees and managers need to consider the backgrounds and experiences of each other. This may require that we "put ourselves in the other person's shoes." A manager needs to know the employees to have effective communication with them; likewise for an employee. One of the primary reasons for problems in the organizational environment is that individuals do not understand what one another is saying because they do not communicate with each other enough to get to know one another's attitudes and feelings. Hence, many employees make major errors in communication—and so do managers. We have to be more effective sources and receivers if we want to improve communication. Even if our supervisor is an incompetent bozo, we will be more effective in communicating with "the bozo" if we go to the effort of getting to know her or him better so we are better able to adapt our messages to take her or his feelings into account.

Feedback. Feedback is the receiver's observable response(s) to a source's message. Such responses can be either of a verbal nature (for example, I don't agree with you; Yes, that is right!) or a nonverbal nature (for example, a frown, shaking one's head in disagreement, nodding in agreement).

Feedback is extremely critical in all communication situations, but particularly so in interpersonal communication between manager and employee. A manager can carefully observe an employee's response to judge the success or failure of messages being sent. When feedback is negative, new messages can be constructed. Feedback is the method we use to regulate the messages we send and those that are sent: to us. Many astute managers have "advisory"

groups or boards comprising selected employees whom they use as "sounding boards" for messages and information that is going to be sent to all employees. These "sounding board" groups have ideas bounced off them/ and how they respond often determines how the message is sent or whether it is even sent to other employees in the company at all.

Goals. Generally there are three major goals of communication in the organizational environment: developing interpersonal relationships, gaining compliance, and gaining understanding. Let's take a look at each of these goals and its impact on the organization.

Most of us have the need to develop interpersonal relationships with our colleagues in organizations. It is a basic need, much like our needs for food, water, and shelter. We communicate with our colleagues with the idea that good working relationships can be formed. Whether it is in the work environment or in other environments, most of us communicate to develop interpersonal relationships with others. We want friends, colleagues, and companions we can talk with both on a formal and an informal basis.

We also communicate to gain the compliance of others. Communication directed toward gaining compliance seeks to influence others' beliefs and actions. By "gaining compliance" we mean getting another person (manager) to engage in some behavior that is desired by the source (employee). Usually, our desire to get others to comply is influenced by the fact that we want a change of some kind. For example, the employee who wants to change her or his usual vacation time has to communicate with the supervisor in such a way that she or he will comply with the request. The employee might have to persuade the supervisor. She or he might have to promise to do extra work because it is an inconvenience to rearrange vacation schedules. Communicating to get others to comply is a way of life in contemporary organizations.

Finally, we communicate to gain understanding. We all have a need to know and understand what is going on in our environment. To know and understand, we need information. To acquire information, we must communicate with others. Much of the communication in organizations is for this purpose. People will make inquiries and ask for clarification so they can understand how and why the organization operates as it does. Managers and employees talk to each other for many of the same reasons.

Although the three goals can be separate, it is rare when they are achieved independently. In other words, to achieve one of these goals usually requires that one or both of the other two also be achieved. Relationship development in the organization is a good example. When we first meet a new colleague, we often need or want to know how the other person will respond to us. Hence, our desire to know more about the person and how the person will react to us in a given situation creates the need for information/ which can be acquired only by communicating with that person.

When we have gained that knowledge, we have reduced some of our uncertainty about the other person, and the goals of relationship development and gaining understanding both have been met. Often when we meet people in the work environment/ we establish a relationship and gain some understanding about them. This assists us when we want to gain a person's compliance. For example, employees who know their supervisors well and have a close relationship with them might find it easier to get the supervisor to comply with certain requests. Of course, astute supervisors are aware of this and may avoid allowing many employees to get close to them or know them too well.

Context. We conclude our discussion of the critical components of the organizational communication process by focusing on the "context" of communication. Generally, we refer to the characteristics of a situation in which communication takes place as the "context." This is an important concern for organizations because people do not communicate in exactly the same way within any two different contexts. Thus, even when we are communicating with a particular individual (for example, a manager), how and what we communicate is likely to change as the context in which we communicate changes.

There are issues we will discuss with our co-workers that we might not discuss with our supervisor. Regardless of our role in the organization, the rules for each interaction will change when we change communication partners. We can easily draw from our own experiences how communication with close friends on the job differs from that with new members in the organization. As our role changes (for example, we get a promotion), so do the rules for communicating with organizational members.

In conclusion, communication is a dynamic, ongoing process. We need to understand the context and the rules for a given context so we can adapt to the "real world" in which we find ourselves. Only by adapting to the context can we be more competent communicators in our organizations.

FUNCTIONS OF COMMUNICATION IN ORGANIZATIONS

Communication serves many functions in organizations. There are six functions that seem to dominate communication in the organizational context. The functions are inform, regulate, integrate, manage, persuade, and socialize.

The *informative* function of communication is fairly self-explanatory. It is the function of providing needed information to personnel so they can do their jobs in an effective and efficient manner. People need to be informed about any changes of procedure or policy that are related to their work. Sometimes this function is accomplished by people at higher levels sending

information to people at lower levels/ and the reverse. At other times, people needing information must contact people who have the needed information to acquire it.

Much of the informative communication in organizations is conducted in a written format. This way, a whole group of employees can be informed with one message and at one time. On the other hand, managers may decide to call a meeting once each week (or month) which is primarily of an informative nature. Most employees understand that such meetings are for the purpose of disseminating information and can be prepared to inquire about matters about which they feel they need additional information.

The *regulative* function of communication is involved with the communication that is directed toward regulatory policies within the organization or messages about maintenance of the organization. For example, an employee might be informed by the manager that he or she has broken some rule or regulation and is not to break it again. Communication that involves the regulative function is often not pleasant, but it is essential to the smooth operation of the organization.

The *integrative* function of communication is focused on coordination of tasks, work assignments, group coordination, or the fusing of work units toward a common goal. In other words, it is communication directed at getting people to work together and have tasks coordinated so that the "left hand knows what the right hand is doing." It is an attempt to get people to work together and make things run more smoothly. For example, consultants often will find employees duplicating each other's work, whereas if **there** were more *integrative* communication, one could do one task and another do a related task.

The *management* function of communication is directed toward the three goals mentioned earlier. It is communication focused on getting personnel to do what is needed, learning information about personnel to know them better, and establishing relationships with personnel. If one can meet the interpersonal relationship goal and the understanding goal, he or she might have a better chance at knowing "how to manage" the employees.

The *persuasive* function of communication is an outgrowth of the management function. Here the supervisor is attempting to influence the employee to do something in particular. Whereas simply issuing an order might accomplish the same function, this approach makes for much better relations between supervisors and subordinates.

Finally, we have the *socialization* function. Although the other functions seem obvious and are rarely missed by either managers or employees, the socialization function is often neglected. This is perhaps the most important function. The socialization function of communication in the organization is the one that can determine whether an individual survives well, or not at all, in an organization. Socialization doesn't mean being "buddies" with everyone. It means being integrated into the communication networks

in the organization. It means being told whom one should talk to and what one should talk about. It also means being told whom not to talk to. It means being told what to say in certain situations and what not to say. It means being told how to address others (Ms./ Sir, Dr.). It means being told the informal norms of the organization (what social gatherings to attend/ what to wear at luncheons, what things others find offensive). It means being told the idiosyncratic behaviors (and pet peeves) of others. It means knowing whom you should associate with and whom you should avoid (who are the "in" people and who are the "out" people). In a nutshell, it means survival! Today, many organizations realize the value of this function and will assign each new employee to an employee who has been with the organization for some time so the experienced person can assist the new-comer in "settling into" the organization the first two or three weeks. These guides help new employees "learn the ropes" without upsetting the system or saying things that could hurt them with the older, more established employees.

In summary, all of the functions are important. However, the function most important and probably most neglected by organizations is the socialization function. Hence, if organizations neglect socializing us, then we have to do it ourselves. The best way is to listen and watch the first few weeks. Then start having what we call CCC (casual conversations with colleagues) to learn what you should or should not say or do in your organization.

ORGANIZATIONAL COMMUNICATION NETWORKS

There are two primary communication networks that exist in any organizational environment. These are the formal communication network and the informal communication network. The *formal* network is communication that follows the hierarchical structure of the organization, or the "chain of command." It follows the formal, established, official lines of contact. In other words/ it follows the prescribed path of the hierarchical chart and tends to be explicit in terms of "who should be talking to whom and about what." The formal chart for this network often is provided to new employees the first day they walk in the door. It explains whom they report to and for what. There usually is little confusion about the formal communication network.

The *informal* network involves communication that follows the "grapevine." It carries the "scuttlebutt," the rumors. It is the unofficial network. This is the type of communication that does not follow the hierarchical path or chain of command. It tells you "who is *really* talking to whom and about what." We are not talking about "gossip" here. Gossip can exist in either network. We are referring to informal communication links that have grown out of relationships among employees and management and

that have little or no correlation with the formal organizational chart. The informal network is very strong in most organizations. It usually works much faster than the formal network, and often it works with more accuracy. Until you have access to this informal network, you have not really become a part of the system.

An employee needs to be aware of both networks. Management has more control over the formal network than the informal, but employees have more control over the informal network than management does. It usually is relatively easy to learn the formal network, but specific information regarding the informal network may be more elusive. Being properly socialized assists an employee in gaining understanding about the informal system in the particular organization.

It is critical that employees and management remember that the formal network is not the only network functioning in the organization. One needs to remember that the informal network is a very powerful communication avenue and carries information that the formal network doesn't. The informal network tells you "who is playing golf with whom," "who is sleeping with whom," "who has an occasional lunch with whom," "who is distantly related to whom," "who protects or defends whom," "who promoted whom, and why." These all are things the formal network almost never tells an individual, but the informal network usually will when one is properly socialized.

In conclusion, you must learn the formal network, but don't forget to take the time to learn the informal network also. It, too, can make the difference between surviving and not surviving in the organization.

FORMAL COMMUNICATION FLOW AND IMPACT

In this section we review the types of communication flow in organizations and the impact of each type. Communication flows in two directions in the organization: vertically and horizontally. *Vertical* communication is concerned with communication between employees at different hierarchical levels in the organization. It focuses on *downward* and *upward* communication between managers and employees. *Horizontal* communication is concerned with communication between employees at the same level in the organization. It focuses on communication between peers, people at equal or very nearly equal levels in the organization. It is communication that goes across the organization. Let's look at what types of communication flow downward in the organization.

Downward Communication. The first type of vertical communication is downward communication, that which flows from upper management

down to the employees at lower ranks. Downward communication generally is effective when upper levels of management are highly motivated to make it work. There are five different elements that generally flow downward in all organizations. They are job instruction, rationale/ ideology/ information, and feedback.

Job instruction is the conveying of information to subordinates about what they are expected to do. It can be carried out by a variety of means/ such as direct orders, written memos, workshops on how to do the job, and so on. The key here is that job instructions should be precise and applied directly to one's job.

Rationale is the rationalization or explanation of a duty or assignment and how it is compatible with what the personnel are already doing. Again, this can be carried out by various oral or written methods.

Ideology is an extension of rationale. This type of downward communication seeks to obtain the loyalty of the employees. Ideology is the philosophy of the organization. Managers want employees to "buy into" the organizational philosophy. When everyone has the same or similar ideals and goals, communication becomes easier. Many organizations have a written ideology they give to new employees when they walk through the door.

Information is concerned with acquainting employees with general bits of knowledge that they need to know, such as regulations, changes in benefits, and general policies. It usually is of an informative nature and does not require a response from the employee. It is simply to give employees needed information.

Feedback is the manager's way of giving employees information about how they are doing. Feedback can take many forms, such as salary increase or decrease, a pat on the back, a termination notice, a smile, or a frown. Supervisors need to provide feedback on job performance on a regular basis so that subordinates know how to change what they are doing poorly and keep doing what they are doing well. Feedback also needs to be clear, appropriate, and with instructions on how to make any needed changes.

People at the lower levels of the organization are dependent in many ways on the downward communication of management for their own success. However, management controls most of the means by which downward communication occurs. If that control does not permit needed information to flow to you, you must actively prompt the system to get it. It may be management's fault that the downward system is not working, but the person who receives the blame normally will be at the other end of the line. Does this sound familiar?

Upward Communication. Although upward communication is initiated by those at the lower levels of the organization, it can be successful only if those at the higher levels are willing to allow the communication to be effective. There are five factors that are most likely to influence upper levels of the

organization to allow the upward communication to be effective. Upward communication should be positive, timely/ support current policy/ be sent directly to the person who can act on it/ and have intuitive appeal in order to go up the system without being stopped/ ignored/ or sent back down.

Positive communication is more likely to go up the system than negative. Many times employees think the negative will go through the system faster than the positive; however/ this is not the case. Supervisors try to prevent negative information from reaching their managers/ but forward the positive right up to them. If too much negative reaches a person's immediate supervisor/ it looks as if the person is not doing his or her job. Managers try to "keep the noise level down" in their respective units. They don't want negatives going up/ so they "filter out" the negative information. They send positive information to their bosses so they are seen as doing their jobs. Hence/ if you want something to go up the system/ couch it in positive terms.

A message must be sent at the *appropriate time* to be allowed to go on up the system. It should be timely or it may not be acted on. Think of your own situation. When is it a good time to "ask for a raise/" "ask about vacation/" "ask about different duties/" "ask about being absent for a day"? If you do not learn timeliness/ you are likely to be asking at the "wrong time" or to be "getting yelled at" for inappropriate behavior. When your boss has a sign on the door that says "Do not disturb/" is this the time to go in and ask for help with a problem?

Messages that *support current policy* are much more likely to be given attention than those that are incompatible with current policy. If a message supports current policy/ it is easier for management to adapt it to the system. Hence/ try to generate messages that are consistent with current policies.

Many times messages are ignored or not acted on because they are sent to people who cannot make a decision about them. It is essential that messages be forwarded to *those people who can act on them*, or else communication will be ineffective. In many organizations if a message is sent to a person who cannot act on it/ it is simply discarded. It goes into the ever-popular "File 13." The person who generated the message may never know what happened to it. The best advice is *do not bother to send a message unless you know it is going to the person with authority to act with regard to it*.

Finally/ messages that have *intuitive appeal* are much more likely to go up the system than those that don't. "Intuitive appeal" is an idea that "sounds good." For example/ messages dealing with ideas about how productivity can be increased quickly/ how more profit can be achieved with-' out a great deal of effort, or how major problems can be avoided without a lot of expense are likely to get sent right up the system.

In becoming a more-effective communicator in your organization/ you must be aware of what will come down the system and what will go up. Adapt your communication so you can use the system and get messages

to the correct sources. Don't expect the system to change because you don't like the communication—it won't. And you cannot force inappropriate messages through the system. At every level there is another person trying to block them.

Horizontal Communication. This is communication that flows across the organization (from peer to peer to peer). There is much more horizontal communication in organizations on a daily basis than there is vertical. This is a function of two things: (1) There are more employees than managers, and (2) employees at the same level feel more comfortable talking with each other than with people at different authority levels.

Horizontal communication often focuses on employee satisfaction and employee morale. Here is where you usually can talk openly and freely about your feelings about the system and can discuss your problems with others who can identify with them. In addition, this is also the channel at which most social interaction takes place within the formal organization. It is through the horizontal channels that you are likely to increase your knowledge, communication skills, and socialization skills. This often is where you can establish long-lasting interpersonal relationships that can assist you in becoming a better employee with a better chance of survival in the organization.

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