Downward Communication

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

When engaging in downward communication, managers must explain the reasons *why* a decision was made. One study found employees were twice as likely to be committed to changes when the reasons behind them were fully explained. Although this may seem like common sense, many managers feel they are too busy to explain things or that explanations will "open up a big can of worms." Evidence clearly indicates, though, that explanations increase employee commitment and support of decisions.[7] Moreover, although managers might think that sending a message one time is enough to get through to lower-level employees, most research suggests managerial communications must be repeated several times and through a variety of different media to be truly effective.[8]

Another problem in downward communication is its one-way nature; generally, managers inform employees but rarely solicit their advice or opinions. A study revealed that nearly two-thirds of employees say their boss rarely or never asks their advice. The study noted, "Organizations are always striving for higher employee engagement, but evidence indicates they unnecessarily create fundamental mistakes. People need to be respected and listened to." Companies like cell phone maker Nokia actively listen to employee's suggestions, a practice the company thinks is especially important to innovation.[9]

The best communicators explain the reasons behind their downward communications but also solicit communication from the employees they supervise. That leads us to the next direction: upward communication.

Upward Communication

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

Given that most managers' job responsibilities have expanded, upward communication is increasingly difficult because managers are overwhelmed and easily distracted. To engage in effective upward communication, try to reduce distractions (meet in a conference room if you can, rather than your boss's office or cubicle), communicate in headlines not paragraphs (your goal is to get your boss's attention, not to engage in a meandering discussion), support your headlines with actionable items (what you believe should happen), and prepare an agenda to make sure you use your boss's attention well.[10]

Lateral Communication

When communication takes place among members of the same work group, members of work groups at the same level, managers at the same level, or any other horizontally equivalent workers, we describe it as *lateral communication*.

|		
communication process *The steps between a source and a receiver that result in the transfer and understanding of meaning.*	**formal channels** *Communication channels established by an organization to transmit messages related to the professional activities of members.*	**informal channels** *Communication channels that are created spontaneously and that emerge as responses to individual choices.*

As president of Home Depot's southern division, Ann-Marie Campbell demonstrates the text concept of downward communication when speaking with the manager and employees of a store in St. Petersburg, Florida. Serving as a member of Home Depot's senior leadership team, Campbell oversees 100,000 workers at 640 stores in 15 states, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands. During her store visits, Campbell communicates the retailer's goals of focusing on clean warehouses, stocked shelves, and excellent customer service. Her personal, face-to-face meetings with employees give her the opportunity to solicit upward communication from them.

Source: s70/ZUMA Press/Newscom.

Why is lateral communication needed if a group or an organization's vertical communications are effective? Lateral communication saves time and facilitates coordination. Some lateral relationships are formally sanctioned. More often, they are informally created to short-circuit the vertical hierarchy and expedite action. So from management's viewpoint, lateral communications can be good or bad. Because strictly adhering to the formal vertical structure for all communications can be inefficient, lateral communication occurring with management's knowledge and support can be beneficial. But it can create dysfunctional conflicts when the formal vertical channels are breached, when members go above or around their superiors to get things done, or when bosses find actions have been taken or decisions made without their knowledge.

Interpersonal Communication

| Exhibit 11-1 | The Communication Process |
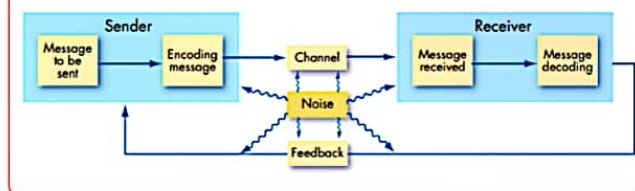
The Communication Process

2 Describe the communication process and distinguish between formal and informal communication.

Before communication can take place it needs a purpose, a message to be conveyed between a sender and a receiver. The sender encodes the message (converts it to a symbolic form) and passes it through a medium (channel) to the receiver, who decodes it. The result is transfer of meaning from one person to another.[4]

Exhibit 11-1 depicts this **communication process**. The key parts of this model are (1) the sender, (2) encoding, (3) the message, (4) the channel, (5) decoding, (6) the receiver, (7) noise, and (8) feedback.

The *sender* initiates a message by encoding a thought. The *message* is the actual physical product of the sender's *encoding*. When we speak, the speech is the message. When we write, the writing is the message. When we gesture, the movements of our arms and the expressions on our faces are the message. The *channel* is the medium through which the message travels. The sender selects it, determining whether to use a formal or informal channel. **Formal channels** are established by the organization and transmit messages related to the professional activities of members. They traditionally follow the authority chain within the organization. Other forms of messages, such as personal or social, follow **informal channels**, which are spontaneous and emerge as a response to individual choices.[5] The *receiver* is the person(s) to whom the message is directed, who must first translate the symbols into understandable form. This step is the *decoding* of the message. *Noise* represents communication barriers that distort the clarity of the message, such as perceptual problems, information overload, semantic difficulties, or cultural differences. The final link in the communication process is a feedback loop. *Feedback* is the check on how successful we have been in transferring our messages as originally intended. It determines whether understanding has been achieved.

Direction of Communication

3 Contrast downward, upward, and lateral communication, and provide examples of each.

Communication can flow vertically or laterally. We further subdivide the vertical dimension into downward and upward directions.[6]

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When engaging in downward communication, managers must explain the reasons *why* a decision was made. One study found employees were twice as likely to be committed to changes when the reasons behind them were fully explained. Although this may seem like common sense, many managers feel they are too busy to explain things or that explanations will "open up a big can of worms." Evidence clearly indicates, though, that explanations increase employee commitment and support of decisions.[7] Moreover, although managers might think that sending a message one time is enough to get through to lower-level employees, most research suggests managerial communications must be repeated several times and through a variety of different media to be truly effective.[8]

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Many communication interactions that take place in an organization perform the function of providing for the emotional expression of feelings and fulfillment of social needs. In this photo, Rene Brookbank, marketing consultant and director of client relations at Cummins & White law firm, jokes with her co-workers during a corporate fashion event. The law firm staged a show for female lawyers and staffers as a fun way for them to view fashion trends in business attire and then treated them all to new outfits. Throughout the social event, cheerful communication among employees allowed them to express their emotions of happiness and gratitude.

Source: o44/ZUMA Press/Newscom.

are required to follow. When employees must communicate any job-related grievance to their immediate boss, follow their job description, or comply with company policies, communication is performing a control function. Informal communication controls behavior too. When work groups tease or harass a member who produces too much (and makes the rest of the group look bad), they are informally communicating, and controlling, the member's behavior.

Communication fosters *motivation* by clarifying to employees what they must do, how well they are doing it, and how they can improve if performance is subpar. We saw this operating in our review of goal-setting theory in Chapter 7. The formation of specific goals, feedback on progress toward the goals, and reward for desired behavior all stimulate motivation and require communication.

Their work group is a primary source of social interaction for many employees. Communication within the group is a fundamental mechanism by which members show their satisfaction and frustrations. Communication, therefore, provides for the *emotional expression* of feelings and fulfillment of social needs.

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

Almost every communication interaction that takes place in a group or organization performs one or more of these functions, and none of the four is more important than the others. To perform effectively, groups need to maintain some form of control over members, stimulate members to perform, allow emotional expression, and make decision choices.

communication *The transfer and understanding of meaning.*

Exhibit 11-1   The Communication Process

The Communication Process
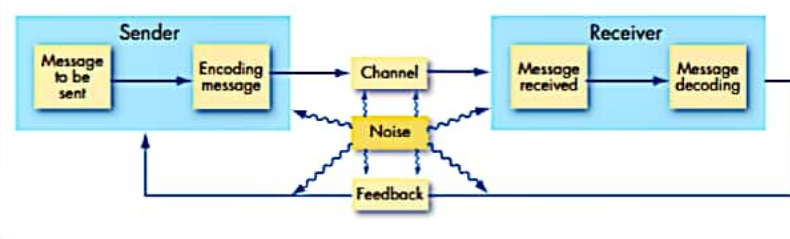
4 Contrast oral, written, and nonverbal communication.

How do group members transfer meaning between and among each other? They essentially rely on oral, written, and nonverbal communication.

Oral Communication

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

The advantages of oral communication are speed and feedback. We can convey a verbal message and receive a response in minimal time. If the receiver is unsure of the message, rapid feedback allows the sender to quickly detect and correct it. As one professional put it, "Face-to-face communication on a consistent basis is still the best way to get information to and from employees."[11]

The major disadvantage of oral communication surfaces whenever a message has to pass through a number of people: the more people, the greater the potential distortion. If you've ever played the game "Telephone," you know the

problem. Each person interprets the message in his or her own way. The message's content, when it reaches its destination, is often very different from the original. In an organization, where decisions and other communiqués are verbally passed up and down the authority hierarchy, considerable opportunities arise for messages to become distorted.

Written Communication

Written communications include memos, letters, fax transmissions, e-mail, instant messaging, organizational periodicals, notices placed on bulletin boards (including electronic ones), and any other device that transmits via written words or symbols.

Why would a sender choose written communication? It's often tangible and verifiable. Both the sender and receiver have a record of the communication; and the message can be stored for an indefinite period. If there are questions about its content, the message is physically available for later reference. This feature is particularly important for complex and lengthy communications. The marketing plan for a new product, for instance, is likely to contain a number of tasks spread out over several months. By putting it in writing, those who have to initiate the plan can readily refer to it over its lifespan. A final benefit of all written communication comes from the process itself. People are usually forced to think more thoroughly about what they want to convey in a written message than in a spoken one. Thus, written communications are more likely to be well thought out, logical, and clear.

Of course, written messages have drawbacks. They're time consuming. You could convey far more information to a college instructor in a 1-hour oral exam than in a 1-hour written exam. In fact, what you can say in 10 to 15 minutes might take you an hour to write. The other major disadvantage is lack of a built-in feedback mechanism. Oral communication allows the receiver to respond rapidly to what he thinks he hears. But emailing a memo or sending an instant message provides no assurance it has been received or that the recipient will interpret it as the sender intended.

Nonverbal Communication

Every time we deliver a verbal message, we also impart a nonverbal message.[12] Sometimes the nonverbal component may stand alone. In a singles bar, a glance, a stare, a smile, a frown, and a provocative body movement all convey meaning. No discussion of communication would thus be complete without consideration of *nonverbal communication*—which includes body movements, the intonations or emphasis we give to words, facial expressions, and the physical distance between the sender and receiver.

We could argue that every *body movement* has meaning, and no movement is accidental (though some are unconscious). Through body language, we say, "Help me, I'm lonely"; "Take me, I'm available"; and "Leave me alone, I'm depressed." We act out our state of being with nonverbal body language. We lift one eyebrow for disbelief. We rub our noses for puzzlement. We clasp our arms to isolate ourselves or to protect ourselves. We shrug our shoulders for indifference, wink for intimacy, tap our fingers for impatience, slap our forehead for forgetfulness.[13]

The two most important messages body language conveys are (1) the extent to which we like another and are interested in his or her views and (2) the

Change your tone and you change your meaning:

Placement of the Emphasis	What It Means
Why don't I take you to dinner tonight?	I was going to take someone else.
Why don't **I** take you to dinner tonight?	Instead of the guy you were going with.
Why don't I **take** you to dinner tonight?	I'm trying to find a reason why I shouldn't take you.
Why don't I take **you** to dinner tonight?	Do you have a problem with me?
Why don't I take you to **dinner** tonight?	Instead of going on your own.
Why don't I take you to **dinner** tonight?	Instead of lunch tomorrow.
Why don't I take you to dinner **tonight**?	Not tomorrow night.

Source: Based on M. Kiely, "when 'No' Means 'Yes,'" Marketing (October 1993), pp. 7–9. Reproduced in A. Huczynski and D. Buchanan, *Organizational Behaviour,* 4th ed. (Essex, UK: Pearson Education, 2001), p. 194.

Body language adds to, and often complicates, verbal communication. A body position or movement can communicate something of the emotion behind a message, but when it is linked with spoken language, it gives fuller meaning to a sender's message.

If you read the verbatim minutes of a meeting, you wouldn't grasp the impact of what was said the same way as if you had been there or could see the meeting on video. Why? There is no record of nonverbal communication. The emphasis given to words or phrases is missing. Exhibit 11-2 illustrates how *intonations* can change the meaning of a message. *Facial expressions* also convey meaning. A snarling face says something different from a smile. Facial expressions, along with intonations, can show arrogance, aggressiveness, fear, shyness, and other characteristics.

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

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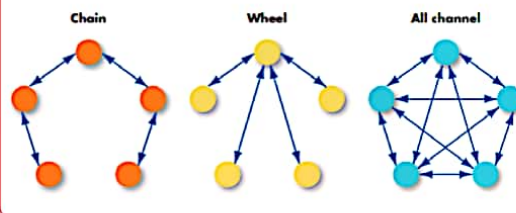
Organizational Communication

5 Analyze the advantages and challenges of electronic communication.

In this section, we move from interpersonal communication to organizational communication. Our first focus will be to describe and distinguish formal networks and the grapevine. Then we discuss technological innovations in communication.

| Exhibit 11-3 | Three Common Small-Group Networks |

Chain   Wheel   All channel

Formal Small-Group Networks

Formal organizational networks can be very complicated, including hundreds of people and a half-dozen or more hierarchical levels. To simplify our discussion, we've condensed these networks into three common small groups of five people each (see Exhibit 11-3): chain, wheel, and all channel.

The *chain* rigidly follows the formal chain of command; this network approximates the communication channels you might find in a rigid three-level organization. The *wheel* relies on a central figure to act as the conduit for all the group's communication; it simulates the communication network you would find on a team with a strong leader. The *all-channel* network permits all group members to actively communicate with each other; it's most often characterized in practice by self-managed teams, in which all group members are free to contribute and no one person takes on a leadership role.

As Exhibit 11-4 demonstrates, the effectiveness of each network depends on the dependent variable that concerns you. The structure of the wheel facilitates the emergence of a leader, the all-channel network is best if you desire high member satisfaction, and the chain is best if accuracy is most important. Exhibit 11-4 leads us to the conclusion that no single network will be best for all occasions.

The Grapevine

The informal communication network in a group or organization is called the **grapevine**.[16] Although the rumors and gossip transmitted through the grapevine may be informal, it's still an important source of information.

| Exhibit 11-4 | Small-Group Networks and Effective Criteria |

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

One survey found it's where 75 percent of employees hear news first.[17] A recent report shows that grapevine or word-of-mouth information from peers about a company has important effects on whether job applicants join an organization.[18]

One of the most famous studies of the grapevine investigated communication patterns among 67 managers in a small manufacturing firm.[19] The study asked each communication recipient how he or she first received a given piece of information and then traced it back to its source. While the grapevine was important, only 10 percent of the executives acted as liaison individuals (that is, passed the information to more than one other person). When one executive decided to resign to enter the insurance business, 81 percent of the others knew about it, but only 11 percent told someone else. This lack of spreading information through the grapevine is interesting in light of how often individuals claim to receive information that way.

It's frequently assumed rumors start because they make good gossip. This is rarely the case. Rumors emerge as a response to situations that are *important* to us, when there is *ambiguity*, and under conditions that arouse *anxiety*.[20] The fact that work situations frequently contain these three elements explains why rumors flourish in organizations. The secrecy and competition that typically prevail in large organizations—around the appointment of new bosses, the relocation of offices, downsizing decisions, or the realignment of work assignments—encourage and sustain rumors on the grapevine. A rumor will persist until either the wants and expectations creating the uncertainty are fulfilled or the anxiety has been reduced.

What can we conclude about the grapevine? Certainly it's an important part of any group or organization communication network and is well worth understanding. It gives managers a feel for the morale of their organization, identifies issues employees consider important, and helps tap into employee anxieties. The grapevine also serves employees' needs: small talk creates a sense of closeness and friendship among those who share information, although research suggests it often does so at the expense of those in the "out" group.[21] There is also evidence that gossip is driven largely by employee social networks that managers can study to learn more about how positive and negative information is flowing through their organization.[22] Thus, while the grapevine may not be sanctioned or controlled by the organization, it can be understood.

Can managers entirely eliminate rumors? no. What they should do, however, is minimize the negative consequences of rumors by limiting their range and impact. Exhibit 11-5 offers a few practical suggestions.

Exhibit **11-5**	**Suggestions for Reducing the Negative Consequences of Rumors**

1. **Provide information**—in the long run, the best defense against rumors is a good offense (in other words, rumors tend to thrive in the absence of formal communication).
2. **Explain actions and decisions** that may appear inconsistent, unfair, or secretive.
3. **Refrain from shooting the messenger**—rumors are a natural fact of organizational life, so respond to them calmly, rationally, and respectfully.
4. **Maintain open communication channels**—constantly encourage employees to come to you with concerns, suggestions, and ideas.

Source: Based on L. Hirschhorn, "Managing Rumors," in L. Hirschhorn (ed.), *Cutting Back* (San Francisco, Jossey-Bass, 1983), pp. 54–56.

An Ethical Choice

The Ethics of Gossip at Work

Experts define gossip as "the exchange of information between two people about a third, absent person." It's tempting to gossip about others at work. We all want to know about what's going on with our co-workers, even if it isn't necessarily our concern. But there is a real possibility that gossip can change from harmless chat about other people's lives to truly destructive words that can spread animosity and anger.

So is gossip necessarily bad? Not according to Joe Labianca at the University of Kentucky. He notes, "If a few people know what's really going on, gossip becomes the means of spreading that information to everyone else. What's more, research shows that gossip often reduces individuals'

anxiety and helps them cope with uncertainty." How? Labianca and colleagues have found that gossip allows people to make personal connections with co-workers and facilitates social support. Managers tend not to like gossip because it subverts their authority, but at the same time, it can level the playing field for those who do not otherwise have access to power. Gossip can also be a means to identify individuals who are free riders, bullies, or difficult to work with. In this way, gossip can even facilitate productive performance.

Does this mean that anything goes when it comes to gossip? Hardly. There are several guidelines for keeping gossip a positive source of information. First, don't pass on any information without checking that it's

accurate. Second, don't share personally sensitive information about someone else that violates that person's privacy. Finally, whenever possible, let the person you are talking about to have a chance to enter the discussion at some later point so his or her view can be explicitly taken into account.

Sources: Based on G. Michelson, A. van Iterson, and K. Waddington, "Gossip in Organizations: Contexts, Consequences, and Controversies," *Group and Organization Management* 35, no. 4 (2010), pp. 371–390; K. M. Kniffin and D. S. Wilson, "Evolutionary Perspectives on Workplace Gossip: Why and How Gossip Can Serve Groups," *Group and Organization Management* 35, no. 2 (2010), pp. 150–176; and J. Labianca, "It's Not 'Unprofessional' to Gossip at Work," *Harvard Business Review* (September 2010), pp. 28–29.

Electronic Communications

An indispensable—and in about 71 percent of cases, the primary—medium of communication in today's organizations is electronic. Electronic communications include e-mail, text messaging, networking software, blogs, and video conferencing. Let's discuss each.

E-mail E-mail uses the Internet to transmit and receive computer-generated text and documents. Its growth has been spectacular, and its use is now so pervasive it's hard to imagine life without it. E-mail messages can be quickly written, edited, and stored. They can be distributed to one person or thousands with a click of a mouse. And the cost of sending formal e-mail messages to employees is a fraction of the cost of printing, duplicating, and distributing a comparable letter or brochure.[23]

E-mail is not without drawbacks. The following are some of its most significant limitations and what organizations should do to reduce or eliminate them:

- **Risk of misinterpreting the message.** It's true we often misinterpret verbal messages, but the potential to misinterpret e-mail is even greater. One research team at New York University found we can accurately decode an e-mail's intent and tone only 50 percent of the time, yet most of us vastly

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- **Risk of misinterpreting the message.** It's true we often misinterpret verbal messages, but the potential to misinterpret e-mail is even greater. One research team at New York University found we can accurately decode an e-mail's intent and tone only 50 percent of the time, yet most of us vastly overestimate our ability to send and interpret clear messages. If you're sending an important message, make sure you reread it for clarity.[24]
- **Drawbacks for communicating negative messages.** E-mail may not be the best way to communicate negative information. When Radio Shack

decided to lay off 400 employees, it drew an avalanche of scorn inside and outside the company by doing it via e-mail. Employees need to be careful when communicating negative messages via e-mail, too. Justen Deal, 22, wrote an e-mail critical of some strategic decisions made by his employer, pharmaceutical giant Kaiser Permanente, and questioned the financing of several information technology projects. Within hours, Deal's computer was seized; he was later fired.[25]

- **Time-consuming nature.** An estimated 62 trillion e-mails are sent every year, of which approximately 60 percent, or 36 trillion, are non-spam messages that someone has to answer![26] Some people, such as venture capitalist and Dallas Mavericks owner Mark Cuban, receive more than a thousand messages a day (Cuban says 10 percent are of the "I want" variety). Although you probably don't receive *that* many, most of us have trouble keeping up with all e-mail, especially as we advance in our career. Experts suggest the following strategies:
  - **Don't check e-mail in the morning.** Take care of important tasks before getting ensnared in e-mails. Otherwise, you may never get to those tasks.
  - **Check e-mail in batches.** Don't check e-mail continually throughout the day. Some experts suggest twice a day. "You wouldn't want to do a new load of laundry every time you have a dirty pair of socks," says one expert.
  - **Unsubscribe.** Stop newsletters and other subscriptions you don't really need.
  - **Stop sending e-mail.** The best way to receive lots of e-mail is to send lots of e-mail, so send less. Shorter e-mails garner shorter responses. "A well-written message can and should be as concise as possible," says one expert.
  - **Declare e-mail bankruptcy.** Some people, like recording artist Moby and venture capitalist Fred Wilson, become so overwhelmed by e-mail they declare "e-mail bankruptcy." They wipe out their entire inbox and start over.
  Although some of these steps may not work for you, keep in mind that e-mail can be less productive than it seems: we often seem busy but get less accomplished through e-mail than we might think.[27]
- **Limited expression of emotions.** We tend to think of e-mail as a sort of sterile, faceless form of communication. Some researchers say the lack of visual and vocal cues means emotionally positive messages, like those including praise, will be seen as more emotionally neutral than the sender intended.[28] But as you no doubt know, e-mails are often highly emotional. E-mail tends to have a disinhibiting effect on people; without the recipient's facial expression to temper their emotional expression, senders write things they'd never be comfortable saying in person. When others send flaming messages, remain calm and try not to respond in kind. And, as hard as it might sometimes be, try to see the flaming message from the other party's point of view. That in itself may calm your nerves.[29]
- **Privacy concerns.** There are two privacy issues with e-mail.[30] First, your e-mails may be, and often are, monitored. You can't always trust the recipient of your e-mail to keep it confidential, either. For these reasons, you shouldn't write anything you wouldn't want made public. Second, you need to exercise caution in forwarding e-mail from your company's e-mail account to a personal or "public" e-mail account (for example, Gmail, Yahoo!, MSN). These accounts often aren't as secure as corporate accounts, so when you forward a company e-mail to them, you may be

violating your organization's policy or unintentionally disclosing confidential data. Many employers hire vendors to sift through e-mails, using software to catch not only obvious key words ("insider trading") but also the vague ("that thing we talked about") or the guilt-ridden ("regret"). Another survey revealed nearly 40 percent of companies have employees whose only job is to read other employees' e-mail.[31]

Instant Messaging and Text Messaging   Like e-mail, instant messaging (IM) and text messaging (TM) use electronic media. Unlike e-mail, though, IM and TM either occur in real time (IM) or use portable communication devices (TM). In just a few years, IM and TM have become pervasive. As you no doubt know from experience, IM is usually sent via computer, whereas TM is transmitted via cellphones or handheld devices such as BlackBerrys and iPhones.

Despite their advantages, IM and TM aren't going to replace e-mail. E-mail is still probably a better device for conveying long messages that must be saved. IM is preferable for one- or two-line messages that would just clutter up an e-mail inbox. On the downside, some IM and TM users find the technology intrusive and distracting. Its continual presence can make it hard for employees to concentrate and stay focused. A survey of managers revealed that in 86 percent of meetings, at least some participants checked TM, and another survey revealed 20 percent of managers report having been scolded for using wireless devices during meetings.[32] Finally, because instant messages can be intercepted easily, many organizations are concerned about the security of IM and TM.[33]

One other point: it's important to not let the informality of text messaging ("omg! r u serious? brb") spill over into business e-mails. Many prefer to keep business communication relatively formal. A survey of employers revealed that 58 percent rate grammar, spelling, and punctuation as "very important" in e-mail messages.[34] By making sure your professional communications are, well, professional, you'll show yourself to be mature and serious. Avoid jargon and slang, use formal titles, use formal e-mail addresses for yourself (lose thatpartygirl@yahoo.com), and take care to make your message concise and well written. None of this means, of course, that you have to give up TM or IM; you just need to maintain the differences between the way you communicate with your friends and the way you communicate professionally.

Social Networking   Nowhere has communication been more transformed than in the rise of social networking. You are doubtless familiar with and perhaps a user of social networking platforms such as Facebook and LinkedIn. Rather than being one huge site, Facebook, which has more than 600 million active users, is actually composed of separate networks based on schools, companies, or regions. Individuals older than age 25 are now its fastest-growing group of users. In a desire to maintain control over employee use of social networking for professional purposes, many organizations have developed their own in-house social networking applications. The research and advisory firm Gartner Inc. estimates that social networking will soon replace e-mail as the primary form of business communication for 20 percent or more of business users.[35]
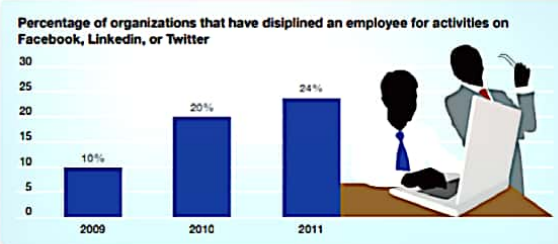
To get the most from social networks and avoid irritating your contacts, reserve them for high-value items only—not as an everyday or even every-week tool. Remember that a prospective employer might check your Facebook entries. Some entrepreneurs have developed software that mines such Web sites on behalf of companies (or individuals) that want to check up on a job applicant

The World's 1st Airline SMS Bookin

Malaysia's airline AirAsia is taking advantage of the flexibility of text messaging to make it more convenient for travelers to book flights. AirAsia flight attendants are shown here with a mobile phone billboard during the launch of the world's first airline booking through a short messaging service (SMS) on cell phones. The SMS makes it easier for travelers to book their seats as the service allows them to choose their flights, confirm their booking, and pay for their seats by text messaging from the convenience of their mobile phone wherever they are.

OB Poll   **Rising Risks of Social Networking at Work**

Percentage of organizations that have disiplined an employee for activities on Facebook, LinkedIn, or Twitter

2009: 10%	2010: 20%	2011: 24%

Source: Based on Studylogic poll for Starwood Hotels and Resorts/Sheraton.

(or potential date). So keep in mind that what you post may be read by people other than your intended contacts.[36]

Blogs   A blog (Web log) is a Web site about a single person or company. Experts estimate that more than 156 million blogs now exist. Millions of U.S. workers have blogs. And, of course, many organizations and organizational leaders have blogs that speak for the organization.

Twitter is a hybrid social networking service that allows users to post "micro-blog" entries to their subscribers about any topic, including work. Many organizational leaders send Twitter messages ("tweets"), but they can also come from any employee about any work topic, leaving organizations with less control over the communication of important or sensitive information.

Although some companies have policies governing the content of blogs and Twitter feeds, many don't, and many posters say they have blogged or tweeted comments that could be construed as harmful to their company's reputation. Many think their personal blogs are outside their employer's purview, but if someone else in the company happens to read a critical or negative blog entry or post, there is nothing to keep him or her from sharing that information with others, and the employee could be dismissed as a result.

One legal expert notes, "Employee bloggers mistakenly believe the First Amendment gives them the right to say whatever they want on their personal blogs. Wrong!" Also, beware of posting personal blog entries from work. More than three-quarters of employers actively monitor employees' Web site connections. In short, if you are going to have a personal blog, maintain a strict work–personal "firewall."[37]
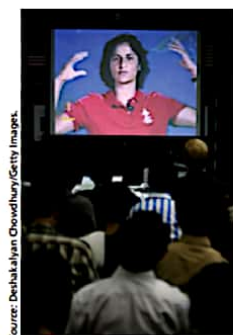
Sunita Williams, a NASA astronaut commander and the woman who has spent the longest time in space, used videoconferencing to speak to students and journalists at The American Center in Kolkata, India. The videoconferencing technology allowed the students and journalists

other meetings as well. Doing so saves travel expenses and time. However, Quirk notes it's especially important to stimulate questions and involve all participants in order to avoid someone who is linked in but disengaged. Sun Microsystem's Karen Rhode agrees special efforts must be made to engage remote participants, suggesting, "You can poll people, people can ask questions, you can do an engaging presentation."[38]

Managing Information

We all have more information at our disposal than ever. It brings us many benefits, but also two important challenges: information overload and threats to information security. We consider each in turn.

Dealing with Information Overload   Do you find yourself bombarded with information—from e-mail, blogs, Internet surfing, IMs, cell phones, and televisions? You're not alone. Basex, a company that looks at worker efficiency, found the largest part of an average worker's day—43 percent—is spent on matters that are neither important nor urgent, such as responding to noncrucial e-mails and surfing the Web. (In fairness to e-mail, Basex also found 25 percent of an employee's time was spent composing and responding to *important* e-mail.)

Intel designed an 8-month experiment to see how limiting this **information overload** might aid productivity. One group of employees was told to limit both digital and in-person contact for 4 hours on Tuesdays, while another group followed its usual routine. The first group was more productive, and 75 percent of its members suggested the program be expanded. "It's huge. We were expecting less," remarked Nathan Zeldes, an Intel engineer who led the experiments. "When people are uninterrupted they can sit back and design chips and really think."[39]

We have already reviewed some ways of reducing the time sunk into e-mails. More generally, as the Intel study shows, it may make sense to connect to technology less frequently, to, in the words of one article, "avoid letting the drumbeat of digital missives constantly shake up and reorder to-do lists." Lynaia Lutes, an account supervisor for a small Texas company, was able to think much more strategically by taking a break from digital information each day. In the past, she said, "I basically completed an assignment" but didn't approach it strategically. By creating such breaks for yourself, you may be better able to prioritize, think about the big picture, and thereby be more effective.[40]

As information technology and immediate communication have become a more prevalent component of modern organizational life, more employees find they are never able to get offline. Some business travelers were disappointed when airlines began offering wireless Internet connections in flight because they could no longer use their travel time as a rare opportunity to relax without a constant barrage of organizational communications. The negative impacts of these communication devices can spill over into employees' personal lives as well. Both workers and their spouses relate the use of electronic communication technologies outside work to higher levels of work–life conflict.[41] Employees must balance the need for constant communication with their own

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blog (Web log) *A Web site where entries are written, and generally displayed in reverse chronological order, about news, events, and personal diary entries.*

Twitter *A free blogging and networking service where users send and read messages known as tweets, many of which concern OB issues.*

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

---

personal need for breaks from work, or they risk burnout from being on call 24 hours a day.

Threats to Information Security Security is a huge concern for nearly all organizations with private or proprietary information about clients, customers, and employees. A Merrill Lynch survey of 50 executives found 52 percent rated leaks of company information as their number-one information security concern, topping viruses and hackers. Most companies actively monitor employee Internet use and e-mail records, and some even use video surveillance and record phone conversations. Necessary though they may be, such practices can seem invasive to employees. An organization can relieve employee concerns by engaging them in the creation of information-security policies and giving them some control over how their personal information is used.[42]

Choice of Communication Channel

6 Show how channel richness underlies the choice of communication channel.

Why do people choose one channel of communication over another—say, a phone call instead of a face-to-face talk? A model of media richness helps explain channel selection among managers.[43]

Channels differ in their capacity to convey information. Some are *rich* in that they can (1) handle multiple cues simultaneously, (2) facilitate rapid feedback, and (3) be very personal. Others are *lean* in that they score low on these factors. As Exhibit 11-6 illustrates, face-to-face conversation scores highest in **channel richness** because it transmits the most information per communication episode—multiple information cues (words, postures, facial expressions, gestures, intonations), immediate feedback (both verbal and nonverbal), and

Exhibit 11-6 Information Richness and Communication Channels
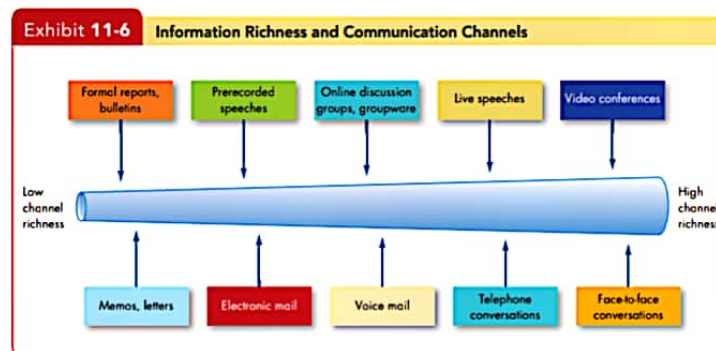
Source: Based on R. H. Lengel and R. L. Daft, "The Selection of Communication Media as an Executive Skill," Academy of Management Executive [August 1988], pp. 225–232; and R. L. Daft and R. H. Lengel, "Organizational Information Requirements, Media Richness, and Structural Design," Managerial Science [May 1996], pp. 554–572. Reproduced from R. L. Daft and R. A. Noe, Organizational Behavior (Fort Worth, TX: Harcourt, 2001), p. 311.

the personal touch of being present. Impersonal written media such as formal reports and bulletins rate lowest in richness.

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

When tough times hit Manpower Business Solutions during the recent economic contraction, the company elected to communicate with employees daily in a variety of media to ensure that everyone remained informed.[44] Employees were given updates about the company's plans for dealing with economic problems, including advance warning before layoffs. The company believes its strategy of using rich communication channels for nonroutine information has paid off by reducing employee anxiety and increasing engagement with the organization.

Persuasive Communications

7 Differentiate between automatic and controlled processing of persuasive messages.

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

Automatic and Controlled Processing

To understand the process of communication, it is useful to consider two relatively different ways that we process information.[45] Think about the last time you bought a can of soda. Did you carefully research brands and engage in your own double-blind taste test to see which types you actually prefer? Or did you reach for the can that had the most appealing advertising images? If we're honest, we'll admit glitzy ads and catchy slogans do indeed have an influence on our choices as consumers. We often rely on **automatic processing**, a relatively superficial consideration of evidence and information making use of heuristics like those we discussed in Chapter 6. Automatic processing takes little time and low effort, so it makes sense to use it for processing persuasive messages related to topics you don't care much about. The disadvantage is that it lets us be easily fooled by a variety of tricks, like a cute jingle or glamorous photo.

Now consider the last time you chose a place to live. For this more important decision, you probably did do some independent research among experts who know something about the area, gathered information about prices from a variety of sources, and considered the costs and benefits of renting versus buying. Here, you're relying on more effortful **controlled processing**, a detailed consideration of evidence and information relying on facts, figures, and logic. Controlled processing requires effort and energy, but it's harder to fool

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

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

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

---

someone who has taken the time and effort to engage in it. So what makes someone engage in either shallow or deep processing? There are a few rules of thumb for determining what types of processing an audience will use.

Interest Level

One of the best predictors of whether people will use an automatic or controlled process for reacting to a persuasive message is their level of interest in it.[46] Interest levels reflect the impact a decision is going to have on your life. When people are very interested in the outcome of a decision, they're more likely to process information carefully. That's probably why people look for so much more information when deciding about something important (like where to live) than something relatively unimportant (like which soda to drink).

Prior Knowledge

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

Personality

Are you the type of person who always likes to read at least five reviews of a movie before deciding whether to see it? Do you carefully consider several movies before making a choice? Perhaps you even research recent films by the same stars and director. If so, you are probably high in *need for cognition*, a personality trait of individuals who are most likely to be persuaded by evidence and facts.[47] Those who are lower in need for cognition are more likely to use automatic processing strategies, relying on intuition and emotion to guide their evaluation of persuasive messages.

Message Characteristics

Another factor that influences whether people use an automatic or controlled processing strategy is the characteristics of the message itself. Messages provided through relatively lean communication channels, with little opportunity for users to interact with the content of the message, tend to encourage automatic processing. For example, most television advertisements go by too fast for really deliberative thought; we automatically process these. Conversely, messages provided through richer communication channels, like a long magazine article, tend to encourage more deliberative processing.

The most important implication of all this research is to match your persuasive message to the type of processing your audience is likely to

Barriers to Effective Communication

8 Identify common barriers to effective communication.

A number of barriers can retard or distort effective communication. In this section, we highlight the most important.

Filtering

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

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

Selective Perception

We have mentioned selective perception before in this book. It appears again here because the receivers in the communication process selectively see and hear based on their needs, motivations, experience, background, and other personal characteristics. Receivers also project their interests and expectations into communications as they decode them. An employment interviewer who expects a female job applicant to put her family ahead of her career is likely to see that in all female applicants, regardless of whether they actually feel that way. As we said in Chapter 6, we don't see reality; we interpret what we see and call it reality.

Information Overload

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

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

Emotions

You may interpret the same message differently when you're angry or distraught than when you're happy. For example, individuals in positive moods are more confident about their opinions after reading a persuasive message, so well-crafted arguments have stronger impacts on their opinions.[48] People in negative moods are more likely to scrutinize messages in greater detail, whereas those in positive moods tend to accept communications at face value.[49] Extreme

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

Managers of Hochtief, Germany's largest construction firm, relied on controlled processing when addressing employees during a supervisory board meeting at company headquarters in Essen, Germany, shown here. In response to a takeover bid by the Spanish construction firm Actividades de Construccion & Servicios (ACS), Hochtief management focused on rational evidence and arguments in presenting its defense against the takeover bid and its plans to fend off the bid. Employees' level of interest in the takeover attempt is high, because they fear that an ACS takeover would result in a major downsizing of Hochtief's workforce and would put their jobs at risk.

Source: Bernd Thissen/dpa/picture-alliance/Newscom.

emotions such as jubilation or depression are most likely to hinder effective communication. In such instances, we are most prone to disregard our rational and objective thinking processes and substitute emotional judgments.

Language

Even when we're communicating in the same language, words mean different things to different people. Age and context are two of the biggest factors that influence such differences.

When Michael Schiller, a business consultant, was talking with his 15-year-old daughter about where she was going with her friends, he told her, "You need to recognize your KPIs and measure against them." Schiller said that in response, his daughter "looked at him like he was from outer space." (For the record, KPI stands for key performance indicators.) Those new to corporate lingo may find acronyms such as *KPI*, words such as *deliverables* (verifiable outcomes of a project), and phrases such as *get the low-hanging fruit* (deal with the easiest parts first) bewildering, in the same way parents may be mystified by teen slang.[50]

In short, our use of language is far from uniform. If we knew how each of us modified the language, we could minimize communication difficulties, but we usually don't know. Senders tend to assume the words and terms they use mean the same to the receiver as to them. This assumption is often incorrect.

Silence

It's easy to ignore silence or lack of communication, precisely because it is defined by the absence of information. However, research suggests silence and withholding communication are both common and problematic.[51] One survey found that more than 85 percent of managers reported remaining silent

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Silence

It's easy to ignore silence or lack of communication, precisely because it is defined by the absence of information. However, research suggests silence and withholding communication are both common and problematic.[51] One survey found that more than 85 percent of managers reported remaining silent about at least one issue of significant concern.[52] Employee silence means managers lack information about ongoing operational problems. And silence regarding discrimination, harassment, corruption, and misconduct means top management cannot take action to eliminate this behavior. Finally, employees who are silent about important issues may also experience psychological stress.

Silence is less likely where minority opinions are treated with respect, workgroup identification is high, and high procedural justice prevails.[53] Practically, this means managers must make sure they behave in a supportive manner when employees voice divergent opinions or concerns, and they must take these under advisement. One act of ignoring or belittling an employee for expressing concerns may well lead the employee to withhold important future communication.

Communication Apprehension

An estimated 5 to 20 percent of the population suffers debilitating **communication apprehension**, or social anxiety.[54] These people experience undue tension and anxiety in oral communication, written communication, or both.[55] They may find it extremely difficult to talk with others face-to-face or may become extremely anxious when they have to use the phone, relying on memos or e-mails when a phone call would be faster and more appropriate.

Studies show oral-communication apprehensives avoid situations, such as teaching, for which oral communication is a dominant requirement.[56] But almost all jobs require *some* oral communication. Of greater concern is evidence that high oral-communication apprehensives distort the communication demands of their jobs in order to minimize the need for communication. So be aware that some people severely limit their oral communication and rationalize their actions by telling themselves communicating isn't necessary for them to do their job effectively.

Lying

The final barrier to effective communication is outright misrepresentation of information, or lying. People differ in their definition of what constitutes a lie. For example, is deliberately withholding information about a mistake you made a lie, or do you have to actively deny your role in the mistake to pass the threshold of deceit? While the definition of a lie will continue to befuddle both ethicists and social scientists, there is no denying the prevalence of lying. In one diary study, the average person reported telling one to two lies per day, with some individuals telling considerably more.[57] Compounded across a large organization, this is an enormous amount of deception happening every single day! Evidence also shows that people are more comfortable lying over the phone than face-to-face and more comfortable lying in e-mails than when they have to write with pen and paper.[58]

Can you detect liars? Despite a great deal of investigation, research generally suggests most people are not very good at detecting deception in others.[59] The problem is, there are no nonverbal or verbal cues unique to lying—averting your gaze, pausing, and shifting your posture can also be signals of nervousness, shyness, or doubt. Moreover, most people who lie take a number of steps to guard against being detected, so they might deliberately look a person in the eye when lying because they know that direct eye contact is (incorrectly) assumed to be a sign of truthfulness. Finally, many lies are embedded in truths; liars usually give a somewhat true account with just enough details changed to avoid detection.

In sum, the frequency of lying and the difficulty in detecting liars makes this an especially strong barrier to effective communication in organizations.

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

Global Implications

9 Show how to overcome the potential problems in cross-cultural communication.

Effective communication is difficult under the best of conditions. Cross-cultural factors clearly create the potential for increased communication problems. A gesture that is well understood and acceptable in one culture can be meaningless or lewd in another. Only 18 percent of companies have documented strategies for communicating with employees across cultures, and only 31 percent require that corporate messages be customized for consumption in other cultures. Procter & Gamble seems to be an exception; more than half the company's employees don't speak English as their first language, so the company focuses on simple messages to make sure everyone knows what's important.[60]

Cultural Barriers

Researchers have identified a number of problems related to language difficulties in cross-cultural communications.[61]

First are *barriers caused by semantics*. Words mean different things to different people, particularly people from different national cultures. Some words don't translate between cultures. The Finnish word *sisu* means something akin to "guts" or "dogged persistence" but is essentially untranslatable into English. The new capitalists in Russia may have difficulty communicating with British or Canadian counterparts because English terms such as *efficiency*, *free market*, and *regulation* have no direct Russian equivalents.

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

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

Fourth are *differences in tolerance for conflict and methods for resolving conflicts*. Individuals from individualist cultures tend to be more comfortable with direct conflicts and will make the source of their disagreements overt. Collectivists are more likely to acknowledge conflict only implicitly and avoid emotionally charged disputes. They may attribute conflicts to the situation more than to the individuals and therefore may not require explicit apologies to repair relationships, whereas individualists prefer explicit statements accepting responsibility for conflicts and public apologies to restore relationships.
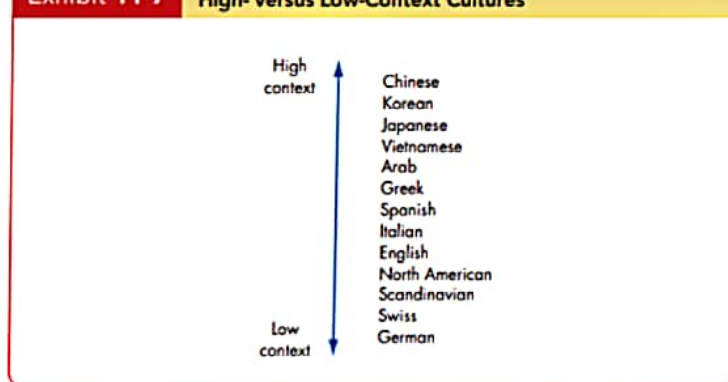
Cultural Context

Cultures tend to differ in the degree to which context influences the meaning individuals take from communication.[62] In **high-context cultures** such as China, Korea, Japan, and Vietnam, people rely heavily on nonverbal and subtle situational cues in communicating with others, and a person's official status, place in society, and reputation carry considerable weight. What is *not* said may be more significant than what *is* said. In contrast, people from Europe and North America reflect their **low-context cultures**. They rely essentially on spoken and written words to convey meaning; body language and formal titles are secondary (see Exhibit 11-7).

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

Exhibit 11-7	**High- versus Low-Context Cultures**

High context

Chinese
Korean
Japanese
Vietnamese
Arab
Greek
Spanish
Italian
English
North American
Scandinavian
Swiss
German

Low context

Exhibit 11-9   High- versus Low-Context Cultures

```
High
context        Chinese
               Korean
               Japanese
               Vietnamese
               Arab
               Greek
               Spanish
               Italian
               English
               North American
               Scandinavian
               Swiss
Low            German
context
```

high-context cultures *Cultures that rely heavily on nonverbal and subtle situational cues in communication.*

low-context cultures *Cultures that rely heavily on words to convey meaning in communication.*

glOBalization!

How Direct Should You Be?

Those who have traveled or done business internationally are often advised to be careful about how directly they communicate with people from different cultures. The popular advice suggests that U.S. citizens prefer upbeat, positive communication; the English prefer formal communication; central Europeans are more interested in direct communication even if information is negative; and East Asians prefer to minimize disagreements and emphasize shared perspectives. Although there is more advice than research on this particular issue, some preliminary work does suggest some reliable differences in how cultures value direct and indirect communication.

One study examined cultural differences in values, beliefs, and personality data to see whether any consistent patterns in communication could be found. A group of East Asian countries, including China, Taiwan, Singapore, and Japan, were marked by a bias for low levels of both agreement *and* disagreement in communication, preferring moderate discussions with respondents not taking strong sides on an issue. Conversely, countries like Morocco, Iraq, Israel, and Saudi Arabia prefer high levels of both agreement and disagreement in their communications; in these countries, the preferred communication style meant directly taking a stand on issues whether positive or negative. "Dissent" cultures like Germany, the United Kingdom, Sweden, and Greece favored high levels of disagreement in communication with relatively low levels of agreement. Nigeria, India, and Vietnam were found to be high in agreement and low in disagreement in communication.

The results of studies of this nature should always be considered carefully in light of the large differences we also find within cultures. Some individuals from India may well value negative opinions and active disagreement from others, whereas some Germans might prefer to focus on areas of shared values. However, some patterning of responses across cultures does indicate a real difference in preferences for communication styles.

Sources: P. B. Smith, "Communication Styles as Dimensions of National Culture," *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology* 42, no. 2 (2011), pp. 216–233; and M. G. Kittler, D. Rygl, and A. Mackinnon, "Beyond Culture or Beyond Control? Reviewing the Use of Hall's High-/Low-Context Concept," *International Journal of Cross Cultural Management* 11, no. 1 (2011), pp. 63–82.

A Cultural Guide

When communicating with people from a different culture, what can you do to reduce misinterpretations? Begin by trying to assess the cultural context. You're likely to have fewer difficulties if it's similar to yours. The following rules can be helpful:[64]

1. **Assume differences until similarity is proven.** Most of us assume others are more similar to us than they actually are. You are less likely to err if you assume they are different from you until proven otherwise.
2. **Emphasize description rather than interpretation or evaluation.** Interpreting or evaluating what someone has said or done draws more on your own culture and background than on the observed situation. So delay judgment until you've had sufficient time to observe and interpret the situation from the differing perspectives of all concerned.
3. **Practice empathy.** Before sending a message, put yourself in the recipient's shoes. What are his or her values, experiences, and frames of reference? What do you know about his or her education, upbringing, and background that can give you added insight? Try to see the other person as he or she really is.
4. **Treat your interpretations as a working hypothesis.** Once you've developed an explanation for a new situation or think you empathize with someone from a foreign culture, treat your interpretation as a hypothesis that needs further testing rather than as a certainty. Carefully assess the feedback recipients provide you, to see whether it confirms your hypothesis. For important decisions or communiqués, check with other foreign and home-country colleagues to make sure your interpretations are on target.