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Teacher view

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# The big picture

In an [Associated Press article](https://www.foxnews.com/story/bad-writing-as-written-communication-skills-deteriorate-business-schools-take-aim), the following example from a company manager's email was shared by Dianna Booher, a communication training consultant for Fortune 500 clients:

'It is my job to ensure proper process deployment activities take place to support process institutionalisation and sustainment. Business process management is the core deliverable of my role, which requires that I identify process competency gaps and fill those gaps.'

The following translation of this email extract was also shared:

'I'm the training director.'

Bad communication can hinder the ability of businesses to perform better. The email extract above shows how a simple message can be made complicated. Complex language used in communication puts up barriers between employees and managers and implicitly sends messages about power and authority.

Another poor example of communication is shown in **Video 1**, where the chief executive of Better.com, a US mortgage company, made 900 people redundant, effective immediately, over a Zoom call.

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## CEO of US mortgage company fires 900 employees on a Z...



**Video 1.** The CEO of a US mortgage company fires 900 employees over a Zoom call.

Communication is the transfer of information from one party to another. In businesses, it is the process of sharing information among all the internal stakeholders and external stakeholders.

Good communication is vital to the success of an organisation, saving time, effort and money. It is an important tool in getting work done effectively and increasing productivity levels of the employees. Strong working relationships and clear communication at different levels of the business's hierarchy are important to build trust and increase output and employee motivation. Good communication helps a business to delegate work, to convey marketing-related and sales-related messages and to streamline business operations.



**Figure 1.** Communication comes in many forms and is vital to business functions.

Credit: Busakorn Pongparnit, Getty Images

More information for figure 1

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The image depicts a person in business attire using a smartphone. Various communication icons, such as a house, Wi-Fi signal, group of people, email, document, and phone, are floating above the smartphone, suggesting different forms of communication. Behind the person on a blurred background, there are abstract graphs and charts indicating data and connectivity, emphasizing the theme of communication's role in business.

[Generated by AI]

In this subtopic, you will learn about the different types of communication in the business world, the advantages and disadvantages of formal and informal communication and barriers to communication.

### **Learning objectives from the IBDP Business Management guide with assessment objective level:**

- **Examine** formal and informal methods of communication (AO3)
- **Explain** barriers to communication (AO2)

2. Human resource management / 2.6 Communication

## **Formal and informal methods of communication**

Formal and informal communication      Formal and informal communication

How easy is it for you to communicate? Are you vocal about your ideas and thoughts, or do you fear talking and communicating?

Communication plays an important role in the lives of many people, and it plays a vital role in organisations. Through communication, people express and exchange their views, thoughts and ideas, all of which can support the business's objectives. Internal communication involves transfer of information inside the business between people. External communication is between the business and external groups such as suppliers, customers or potential employees.



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There are two general types of communication: formal communication and informal communication. The main difference between formal and informal communication is that formal communication uses defined channels for the exchange of information, while informal communication does not use defined channels. Moreover, formal and informal communication will differ in terms of audience, purpose and tone.

## ⌚ Making connections

In your IBDP Language and Literature courses you will have encountered the idea of channels of communication, audience, purpose and tone. These concepts are transferable to the business context as well.



**Figure 1.** Formal communication uses defined channels for the exchange of information.

Credit: shapecharge, Getty Images



**Figure 2.** Informal communication does not use defined channels for the exchange of information.

Credit: Portra Images, Getty Images

## Formal communication

Formal communication is a type of communication that follows defined channels of communication. Formal communication flows through an organisation's developed hierarchical chain of command. Employees have to follow these defined communication channels to perform their duties.

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762729/o Methods of formal communication include:

### Section

Spoken Student... (0/0)

Feedback



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Assign

- written
- electronic

## Spoken communication

Spoken communication includes:

- **Telephone communication.** This is for communicating simple messages and receiving immediate feedback; there is no written record of the conversation.
- **Meetings.** These could be board meetings, shareholder meetings or meetings between different departments or within a department. Such meetings are recorded, and minutes of meetings are sent to all attendees. Ideas can be shared, and feedback can be given and received.
- **Presentations.** These allow for communication of new ideas, projects or requirements of starting something new. Detailed information is passed on and a record of the communication is maintained and sent to the attendees.
- **Interviews.** This method involves a small number of people and is used to recruit new staff. It is detailed and allows two-way communication.

## Written communication

Written communication is used when detailed information is exchanged, either internally within the departments or the business, or externally with suppliers or customers. Through emails and messages, written communication has become more effective and relevant as it is documented, and records are always maintained.

- **Business letters.** These might include letters to government offices or letters arranging meetings with officials.
- **Reports.** Weekly or monthly reports within the business may provide information about sales targets achieved or low sales. Financial performances of businesses are also communicated through reports.



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## Electronic communication

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Electronic communication includes:

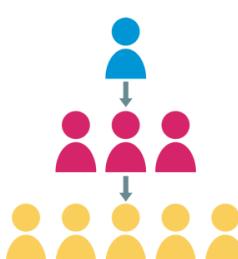
- **Email.** This has become one of the most common methods of communication. Messages are communicated quickly and are stored so that they can be accessed later if required.
- **Websites.** These are used to communicate mainly with external stakeholders. Data can be collected, market research can be carried out, products can be sold and after-sales services can be provided through websites. A good website sends positive messages to external stakeholders about the business.
- **Social media.** Businesses advertise through Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and other platforms. Products are promoted, advertised and sold through social media websites. A business's contact details can also be gathered through these networks. Communication through this method has increased over time.
- **Text messages.** Businesses send text messages to new and existing customers informing them about launches of new products or services. Texting is an efficient method of communication.
- **Intranets.** An intranet is similar to the internet, except that it is a private network used for the sharing of information and internal communication within a business. A business can have offices in many locations and an intranet enables the flow of information. Intranets may also be available as mobile apps.
- **Video conferencing.** This method of communication has gained a lot of attention, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. Face-to-face interviews and meetings with internal and external stakeholders can be held over video. Zoom, Slack and Microsoft Teams meetings have become popular platforms for video conferencing.

There are also a number of pathways that these formal communication methods can take inside an organisation. **Table 1** illustrates some different formal communication pathways that can exist in a business.

**Table 1.** Pathways of formal communication.



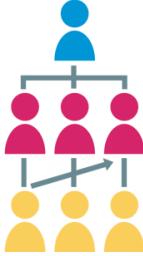
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Type of formal communication pathway	Explanation	Example
<p><b>Vertical communication</b></p>  <p><a href="#">More information</a></p> <div style="border: 1px solid #ccc; padding: 10px;"> <p>The image is a diagram illustrating a hierarchy of communication. At the top is a single blue figure, representing a leader or main communicator. Below this figure are arrows pointing to three pink figures, which could denote a middle management level. Further arrows from these pink figures lead down to a group of six yellow figures, symbolizing a broader base or general audience. The arrangement indicates a structured, vertical communication flow from one individual to many at the bottom, illustrating how information is disseminated through different levels.</p> <p>[Generated by AI]</p> </div>	<p>Communication takes place between different organisational levels.</p> <p><b>Top-down communication</b> is communication from senior managers to employees lower down in the hierarchy.</p> <p><b>Bottom-up communication</b> is communication from employees lower down in the hierarchy to senior managers.</p>	<p>Head of sales sending an email to the sales team about monthly targets.</p>



Type of formal communication pathway	Explanation	Example
<b>Horizontal or lateral communication</b>  <a href="#">More information</a> <div style="border: 1px solid #ccc; padding: 10px;"> <p>The image depicts an illustration of three person icons arranged horizontally. The person on the left is in blue, the one in the middle is in pink, and the person on the right is in yellow. There are two bidirectional arrows. The first arrow connects the blue and pink person icons, indicating a two-way communication or interaction. The second arrow connects the pink and yellow person icons, suggesting another two-way communication. This diagram visually represents the concept of horizontal or lateral communication among people.</p> <p>[Generated by AI]</p> </div>	Communication takes place between two employees working in different departments of an organisation, but on the same hierarchical level.	Marketing manager and sales manager meeting to decide marketing strategies to achieve sales target.



Type of formal communication pathway	Explanation	Example
<p><b>Diagonal communication</b></p>  <p>The diagram illustrates a hierarchical communication structure with a diagonal link. At the top, there is one blue figure connected by lines to three red figures, representing a higher-level position communicating downward to subordinates. Below the red figures are three yellow figures, connected with lines to the red ones, depicting lower-level subordinates. Additionally, there's a diagonal arrow from one of the red figures pointing to a yellow one on the opposite side, illustrating diagonal communication across different levels of the organizational chart. This diagram represents both vertical and diagonal lines of communication.</p> <p>[Generated by AI]</p>	<p>Communication takes place between employees working at different hierarchical levels and in different departments.</p>	<p>Marketing manager meeting with the sales team to discuss distribution of products.</p>



Type of formal communication pathway	Explanation	Example

## Informal communication

Informal communication flows freely in an organisation, without defined channels. It can take place between any employees within the organisation and is usually faster than formal communication. Informal communication can benefit the organisation as work-related issues can be discussed openly without any paperwork involved. Quick solutions can be found over a cup of coffee between employees, saving time and money. **Table 2** describes some types of informal communication.

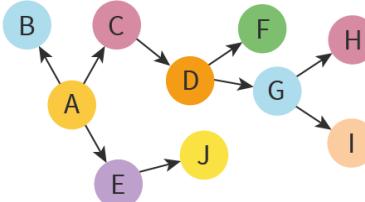
**Table 2.** Types of informal communication.

Type of informal communication	Description
<p><b>Single strand chain</b></p>  <p>More information</p> <p>This is a linear sequence diagram illustrating a flow from left to right. It consists of five circular nodes connected by arrows. Each node has a letter label: A, B, C, D, and E. The diagram starts with node A on the far left, followed by node B to its right, node C next, then node D, and finally node E at the far right. Arrows point from one node to the next, indicating a sequential flow through the nodes in the order of A to B, B to C, C to D, and D to E. This represents a simple, single-strand progression or process flow.</p> <p>[Generated by AI]</p>	<p>One employee says something to another employee, who in turns says it to another forming a chain. And so the process goes on.</p>

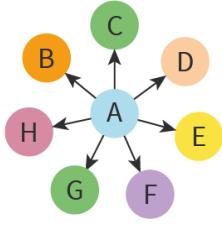


Type of informal communication	Description
<p><b>Cluster chain</b></p> <p>More information</p> <div><p>The image is a flowchart consisting of circular nodes labeled from A to K. The structure starts with node A, which splits into two paths: one leading directly to node D, and another leading to node C. Node D branches into nodes E and F, while node C points to node K. On the top left, node B branches out to three nodes: H, I, and J. Arrows connect the nodes, indicating the direction of the sequence from one to another, with multiple pathways showcasing different branches. This flowchart illustrates various pathways and relationships among these labeled nodes.</p><p>[Generated by AI]</p></div>	<p>A group of people gather to discuss matters of mutual interest. This is a slow communication process.</p>



Type of informal communication	Description
<p><b>Probability chain</b></p>  <p>More information</p> <div style="border: 1px solid #ccc; padding: 10px;"> <p>The image is a flowchart composed of circular nodes labeled A to J, each representing a point in a sequence. The nodes are connected by arrows indicating the flow of the process.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Node A has an arrow pointing to Node B and Node E.</li> <li>Node B is only connected from A with no outgoing arrows.</li> <li>Node C points to Node D.</li> <li>Node D has arrows pointing to Nodes F and J.</li> <li>Node E has an arrow leading to Node J.</li> <li>Node F points to Node D.</li> <li>Node G is connected from Node D and points to Node I.</li> <li>Node H points to Node G.</li> </ul> <p>The arrows depict possible pathways or steps between these nodes, illustrating a graph network or probability chain structure where each lettered node fulfills a step or stage in the sequence. Each node and connection conveys directionality and potential decision paths.</p> <p>[Generated by AI]</p> </div>	<p>One employee transfers information to a random person, who transfers the same information to another random person.</p>



Type of informal communication	Description
<b>Gossip chain</b>  <p>The diagram illustrates a gossip chain. At the center is a node labeled "A." This central node has arrows extending out to nodes labeled "B," "C," "D," "E," "F," "G," and "H." Each of these nodes represents a point in the chain where information from "A" is distributed. The layout is circular, with "A" in the center and the other nodes arranged around it in a radial pattern. The arrows indicate the direction of information flow, all leading from "A" to the other nodes.</p> <p>[Generated by AI]</p>	An employee says something to a group of employees, who then go ahead and spread it to another group of employees.

## Differences between formal and informal methods of communication

The main difference between formal and informal communication is that formal communication can be more time consuming; it has defined channels and a set of commands to be followed. Informal communication does not take up time; it can be passed on at any time as no defined channels are identified.

Formal communication is confidential and documented as it is designed by senior managers. Confidentiality and documentation are usually not part of informal communication. It can happen at any time, has a short chain of command and is simpler in nature.

Formal communication aims to achieve business goals and objectives whereas informal communication aims to achieve personal interests and needs. Sometimes informal communication may relate to business objectives.



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## Activity

**Learner profile:** Thinkers

**Approaches to learning:** Thinking skills (critical thinking)

Copy this table and complete it by writing the differences between formal and informal communication.

Criteria	Formal	Informal
Time		
Defined channels		
Confidentiality		
Who designs it?		
Documentation		
Chain of command		
Objective		
Examples		

Criteria	Formal	Info
Time	Is time consuming.	Does not take
Defined channels	Has a set of defined channels.	Has no defined channels. can be done a
Confidentiality	Involves confidential official communication.	Is not confidential
Who designs it?	The top level of the organisational.	Anyone in the
Documentation	Documentation is required.	No documentation required.



Student view

Criteria	Formal	Info
<b>Chain of command</b>	Can have a long or short chain of command.	Has a short chain of command.
<b>Objective</b>	Furthering business goals and objectives.	Personal interests (sometimes business objectives).
<b>Examples</b>	Official business letters, emails, reports, company website.	Conversations (conversations cooler, gossip).

In most business environments, both formal and informal forms of communication are used throughout the day. The type of communication used will depend on the information being communicated, and positions of the people between whom the information is being communicated. Employees need to make choices about which form of communication is most appropriate at a given time.

In many cases, the balance between formal and informal communication will be influenced by the leadership style and the culture of the organisation. Informal communication can take place in all kinds of business environments. A business with a democratic leadership style may be more likely to use informal communication, particularly where the working environment is friendly and relaxed, and managers are at ease with employees. However, in board meetings or meetings with clients or suppliers, a more formal method of communication is likely to be used. Formal communication will also be used more often where there is a paternalistic or authoritarian leadership style and generally formal culture in the workplace.

## Activity

**Learner profile:** Thinkers

**Approaches to learning:** Thinking skills (critical thinking)

Read the phrases given below and decide whether they are more likely to be used as formal or informal methods of communication between employees. Then drag and drop each phrase into the correct column of the table.





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| As the opportunity arises, we will make necessary adjustments. | Please do not hesitate to contact me if the task is not understood. | Please make the changes in the document and send me an email by 5:00 p.m. |
| Can you help me with this calculation please?                  | Can you give me a minute please?                                    | Can you brief me about the last meeting?                                  |
| This is a real win-win situation for our team.                 | Going forward, we will increase our workload on this project.       | Thanks a million!   |

Check

### Interactive 1. Understanding Formal and Informal Employee Communication.

## 3 section questions ^

### Question 1

- 1 Formal  communication follows defined channels of communication.



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Accepted answers and explanation



## #1 Formal

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**General explanation**

Formal communication is a type of communication that follows defined channels of communication.

Communication flows through an organisation's developed hierarchical chain of command. Employees have to follow these defined communication channels to perform their duties.

**Question 2**

Which of the following is **not** a type of informal communication?

- 1 Written and documented communication ✓
- 2 Cluster chain communication
- 3 Gossip chain communication
- 4 Probability chain communication

**Explanation**

When communication is written and documented it is considered formal communication. This is because the communication can be examined after it has occurred. Cluster, gossip and probability chain communication are considered types of informal communication. Diagonal communication takes place between employees working at different levels and in different departments. Diagonal communication between employees can be either formal or informal.

**Question 3**

Which of the following is **not** a type of electronic communication?

- 1 Presentation ✓
- 2 Email
- 3 Website
- 4 Social media

**Explanation**

A presentation is a type of written (rather than electronic) communication that allows new ideas or projects and/or the requirements of starting something that is new to be communicated. Detailed information is passed on and a record of the communication is maintained and sent to attendees.

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# Advantages and disadvantages of formal and informal communication

Formal and informal communication      Formal and informal communication

Informal communication is a casual form of communication between employees in an organisation. It is not an official form of communication; it takes place between social relationships that form in the workplace. Both employees and the employer need to be careful about what type of communication they use, as a wrong choice can create conflict between co-workers.

## Theory of Knowledge

‘The most important thing in communication is to hear what is not said.’ (Peter Drucker, 1909–2005, Management consultant)

There is more to communication than what is said explicitly either in formal or informal channels. The role of context, body language and tone can convey a lot of information too. People in any organisation need to have a deep understanding of culture and of individual people in order to understand all the information conveyed in their relationships. Watching and listening can help people interpret all kinds of communication in the workplace more effectively.

- Can we ever truly understand all that a person wishes to communicate?

# Advantages and disadvantages of formal communication

Formal communication has some significant advantages and disadvantages, as outlined in **Table 1.**



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**Figure 1.** Formal communication.

Credit: RgStudio, Getty Images

More information for figure 1

The image shows a business meeting setting with several people sitting around a table and one person standing near a flipchart presenting information. The flipchart displays a bar graph and a pie chart. The bar graph has three vertical bars of increasing height from left to right, indicating a trend of growth or increase. Next to it, the pie chart shows a circle divided into red and blue sections of different sizes, suggesting a comparison or breakdown of data. Attendees are dressed in business attire, and some have laptops and notebooks, engaging as the presenter explains the chart data.

[Generated by AI]

**Table 1.** Advantages and disadvantages of formal communication.

Advantages of formal communication	Disadvantages of formal communication
<b>Can increase efficiency, coordination and accuracy.</b> Predefined rules about communication can speed it up and ensure the information reaches its target audience.	<b>Can delay decision-making.</b> Top-down communication through a long chain of command can be slow and can delay decision-making.
<b>Discipline, order and fewer mistakes.</b> Employees follow rules about audience, purpose and tone that can lead to predictable and orderly communication in the organisation, with fewer missteps in communication.	<b>Reduced initiative and creativity.</b> When communication only follows defined channels and rules, more spontaneous and original transfer of information may be prevented.



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Advantages of formal communication	Disadvantages of formal communication
<b>Documented for future reference.</b> Communication through documented, defined channels means that information is recorded if it needs to be referenced in the future.	<b>Cost.</b> Defined channels need to be maintained and documented. This may involve payments for platforms such as business intranets, which cost money.

## Advantages and disadvantages of informal communication

Informal communication has some significant advantages and disadvantages, as outlined in **Table 2**.



**Figure 2.** Informal communication.

Credit: Edwin Tan, Getty Images

**Table 2.** Advantages and disadvantages of informal communication.

Advantages of informal communication	Disadvantages of informal communication
<b>Faster.</b> Not following defined channels, purposes and tones can mean that communication spreads more quickly.	<b>Lack of confidentiality.</b> Unregulated channels of communication outside of the chain of command mean that shared information will not be confidential.

Advantages of informal communication	Disadvantages of informal communication
<b>Employee relationships.</b> Employees share information more freely, which can improve relationships between them and enhance collaboration.	<b>Distortion and conflict.</b> Incorrect or misinterpreted information can be spread easily, resulting in conflict.
<b>Alternative means.</b> Some important information cannot be sent through formal channels, so informal communication acts as an alternative.	<b>Rumours.</b> Alternative types of information may result in rumours that can undermine official communication.

## Exam tip

When evaluating communication for exam questions, it is important to remember that both formal and informal forms of communication can be efficient and can improve business operations.

You should be able to identify which type of communication is referenced in the case study, consider style and purpose and know some advantages and disadvantages of the type of communication in question.

## Case study

Stagecoach Group is a Scottish public limited transport company based in Perth, Scotland. It operates buses, express coaches and a tram service in the United Kingdom.

In 2018, Stagecoach introduced an employee experience app called Blink for its 20 000 plus bus and rail employees. The company appreciates that good internal communication is vital for any business to be successful, and it has since won two awards for being employee-centric and engaging frontline workers through the app.

The Blink app, embedded with an intranet, allows Stagecoach employees to get information about what is new in the company, to communicate with other employees, check schedules, provide feedback and access employee training programmes. The use of this app increases the efficiency and accuracy of communication in the business. Productivity increases and effective communication enhances motivation. Stagecoach believes communication is an integral part of employee satisfaction and retention of employees.





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**Figure 3.** Stagecoach buses are equipped with a mobile communication app called Blink.

Credit: Owen Beveridge / EyeEm, Getty Images

## Questions

1. Define the term communication. [2 marks]
2. Explain **two** advantages for Stagecoach of using Blink, a formal method of communication in the form of an app with an intranet for communicating with its employees. [4 marks]

### Question 1

Communication is the transfer of information from one party to another. In organisations, it is the process of sharing information within a business and outside of the business.

**Define** is an AO1 level command term, requiring the precise meaning of a term.

- One mark is given for a vague definition.
- Two marks are given for a complete definition.
- No application to the stimulus material is required for definitions.

### Question 2

One advantage of using the Blink app is an increase in efficiency in the business. Employees using effective formal methods of communication, like the Blink app with intranet, will spend less time searching for the information they need. A well-organised intranet, in the form of a mobile app, puts vital



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operational and human resources information at employees' fingertips, allowing them to spend more time doing their core work. As a result, 'productivity increases', which may improve Stagecoach's profits.

A second advantage of using the Blink app is that it provides an avenue for employee feedback. Participation in business decision-making and feedback increases employees' sense of purpose and connection with the business and other employees. It increases motivation, which can improve worker wellbeing and productivity. This could impact the performance of the business positively and reduce labour turnover and labour costs, which would improve Stagecoach's profits.

**Explain** is an AO2 level command term, requiring a detailed account including reasons or causes. Explain how, explain why.

- Other responses may be possible and, if appropriately explained and applied in context, may receive full marks.
- To achieve full marks, you must always include theory and application to the case study in your responses.

## 2 section questions ^

### Question 1

Which of the following is **not** a disadvantage of an informal method of communication?

- 1 It can delay decision-making. ✓
- 2 It means facts can be distorted.
- 3 It can create internal conflict.
- 4 It can mean a lack of confidentiality.

### Explanation

A delay in decision-making is a disadvantage of formal communication. Formal communication is top-down and passes through a chain of command, so can take time to reach the relevant employee. This delays decision-making. All other options are disadvantages of informal communication.

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### Question 2



Which of the following is an advantage of a formal communication method?

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- 1 It can increase efficiency and accuracy.
- 2 It is inflexible.
- 3 It can reduce motivation.
- 4 It can reduce initiative and creativity.



### Explanation

Formal communication improves the overall efficiency and accuracy of work in an organisation as it follows a set of predefined rules. The other three answer options are disadvantages of formal communication methods.

2. Human resource management / 2.6 Communication

## Barriers to communication

Barriers to communication Barriers to communication

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You may have experienced the situation of not receiving a message that was intended for you. In organisations, communication is vital. There are times, however, that messages do not reach the relevant person on time. Broken or ineffective communication is a major problem across businesses. It can decrease motivation and productivity and create conflict.

According to [this article](https://www.continuant.com/blog/2016/01/communication-barriers-in-businesses) (https://www.continuant.com/blog/2016/01/communication-barriers-in-businesses), 39% of employee time is usually spent on role-specific tasks, and almost 61% is spent on communication: replying to emails, communicating with external and internal stakeholders, and searching for and gathering information.

According to other research, almost 75% of all business communications do not achieve their desired results. This means that workers are spending a lot of time communicating in an ineffective way.



Student view



# Types of communication barriers

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A barrier to communication in businesses is anything that interferes with the ability of employees to convey information in a timely and accurate manner. There are a number of types of barriers to communication in business.

## Cultural barriers

Most businesses will have employees from different cultural backgrounds; this has increased with globalisation. While this diversity brings new perspectives, it can also lead to cultural clashes. Cultural clashes occur when people have different understandings of ‘how we do things around here’. (HL students learned about cultural clashes in [Section 2.5](#) (/study/app/business-hl/sid-351-cid-762729/book/the-big-picture-id-39398/).) For example, generation barriers can exist between younger and older workers. Young workers can often adapt to changes in technology more quickly than older workers.

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## Linguistic barriers

When internal and external stakeholders speak different languages, this can cause communication difficulties. Businesses that operate in a multinational context will face particular challenges with communication, though translation technologies have alleviated problems to some degree.

The use of jargon – terminology and technical phrases used by people in certain professions and industries – may also be a barrier to communication. Jargon can be confusing to people who are unfamiliar with it. If the receiver is unable to understand the terminology being used by the sender (such as in technical or legal documents), then they may need an expert to help them interpret it.

## Emotional barriers

Managing or avoiding stress can support good communication. Strong emotions like anger or frustration can affect rational decision-making, cause conflict and hinder the transfer of information in the organisation. A ‘bad work day’ might, for example, impact a worker emotionally, leaving them feeling angry or depressed. This may then hinder their ability to understand what other workers around them are trying to communicate.

Section

Student... (0/0)

Feedback



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Student view



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**Figure 1.** Strong emotions can become barriers to communication.

Credit: Westend61, Getty Images

## Psychological and physiological barriers

Fear of public speaking, speech disorders, depression and other psychological or physiological issues may make it more difficult for the sender to convey information.

## Physical barriers

Business communication may be affected by closed doors in the office, the inability to talk to or reach senior managers, or faulty equipment. For example, holding a team meeting in a large, noisy, open-plan office may make it difficult for team members to hear the message intended for them.

## Organisational barriers

A business may have complex organisational structures that can delay or hinder communication. When there are many levels of hierarchy, this can delay information transfer and increase the chances of miscommunication. If an organisation has a long chain of command or tall hierarchy, it may be difficult to pass messages through the many different levels.

## Attitude and personality barriers

People in an organisation will have different personalities. Some may be outspoken and extrovert; some may be shy and introverted; some may be ambiverts. Differences in personality may lead to misinterpretation of communication.



**Figure 2.** Differences in attitude or personality can lead to misinterpretation.

Credit: praetorianphoto, Getty Images

## Perception barriers

People in organisations may view or perceive things differently. This should be taken into consideration when making decisions.

## Technological barriers

Many businesses are dependent on communication technology in order to run their operations and communicate with customers and suppliers. If the technology is faulty – for example if a mobile phone is not working, or a computer has a hardware or software problem – the user may not be able to communicate. Similarly, if an internal or external network goes down, users may not be able to use their communications devices.

## Communications skills of the sender and receiver

A message that lacks clarity may confuse the receiver. For example, notification of a meeting that does not specify the start time or where the meeting is located will not be helpful for the recipient.

## Form (type) of communication

The form of communication chosen may affect how the message is received. If an inappropriate form of communication is used, it can pose a barrier to communication. For example, displaying an important and urgent message to all staff on a company bulletin board may not

reach all employees in a timely manner. In this instance, an instant electronic communication such as an email or text message sent to all employees would be a more appropriate choice.

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## 💡 Concept

### Change

Change is an act or process through which something becomes different. Businesses operate in a dynamic world with constant change. Understanding change involves researching and responding to signals (feedback) in the external environment and evaluating causes, processes and consequences.

Dealing with change requires good communication. Firstly, businesses need good communication both internally and externally to know how they should change. And when change is necessary, they need to communicate effectively with employees to avoid confusion, uncertainty and frustration. Communication is necessary for employees to rethink current operations and move into a new situation. It is important that all employees, from leadership to entry-level employees, develop the competencies required to communicate effectively through change.

## ⚙️ Activity

**Learner profile:** Thinkers

**Approaches to learning:** Thinking skills (critical thinking)

Consider the types of barriers to communication you have just read about, and which are listed in this table.

Type of communication barrier	Rank
Cultural barrier	
Linguistic barrier	
Emotional barrier	
Psychological and physiological barrier	
Organisational barrier	
Attitudinal and personality barrier	
Physical barrier	



Student view

Type of communication barrier	Rank
Perception barrier	
Technological barrier	
Communications skills of the sender and receiver	
Form (type) of communication	

- Copy the table and rank the barriers to communication in order according to how difficult they would be for a business to resolve. (Start with '1' for the most difficult to resolve.)
- Compare your list with that of another student and discuss why you ranked the barriers as you did. Discuss any differences in your ranking with your partner.

## Strategies to overcome communication barriers

The barriers to communication explained above can hinder the operations of a business. There are a number of strategies, both direct and indirect, that businesses can take to improve communication in the organisation.

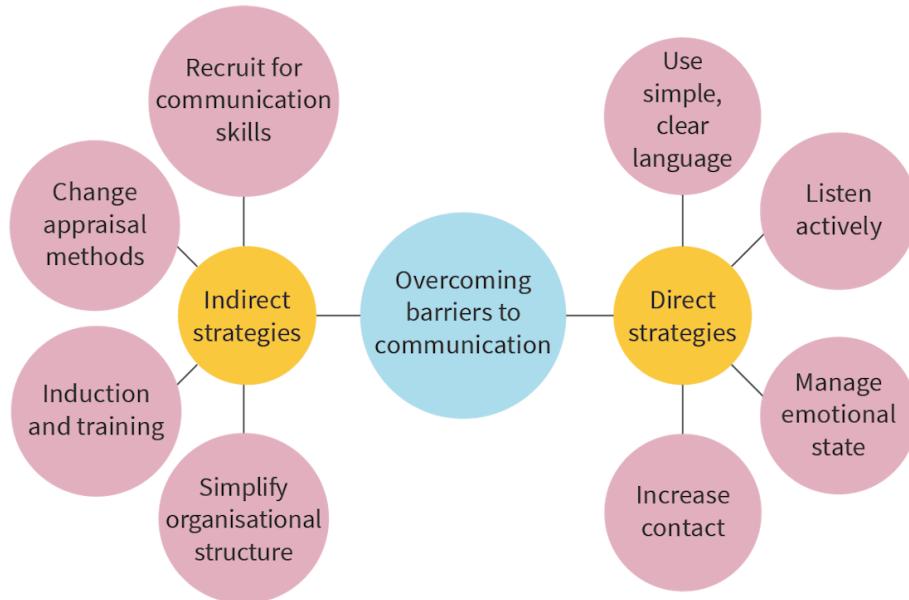


Figure 3. Overcoming barriers to communication.

More information for figure 3



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The diagram illustrates strategies for overcoming barriers to communication. It is structured with a central circle labeled 'Overcoming barriers to communication.' This circle is connected to two smaller circles labeled 'Indirect strategies' and 'Direct strategies.'

From 'Indirect strategies,' several circles branch out: - 'Recruit for communication skills' - 'Change appraisal methods' - 'Induction and training' - 'Simplify organisational structure'

From 'Direct strategies,' several circles branch out: - 'Use simple, clear language' - 'Listen actively' - 'Manage emotional state' - 'Increase contact'

Each branch represents a method or approach related to the strategies. The layout helps visualize how different strategies can be categorized as direct or indirect in addressing communication barriers.

[Generated by AI]

## Direct strategies to improve communication

These are strategies that employees can use themselves in their day-to-day interactions to improve communication.

- **Using simple and clear language.** Written and spoken communication should use clear language so that everyone understands the message. Jargon should be avoided, until and unless it is understood by everyone involved.
- **Active listening.** Employees at every level should be active listeners. Asking questions and repeating what the communicator has said to confirm understanding are two important ways to listen actively. Body language can also improve the quality of information conveyed between colleagues.
- **Managing emotional states.** When people feel overwhelmed, they may communicate frustration or anger along with the information they wish to convey. This can cause misunderstandings and even conflict, so managing emotional states at work is important for communication.
- **Increasing contact.** Managers and employees who spend more time together may be able to better judge when and how to use formal and informal communication appropriately. Establishing constructive relationships opens the channels of communication, increasing feedback that can then be used to improve the organisation.



Student  
view



**Figure 4.** Active listening, for example repeating back what someone has just said to confirm understanding, can improve communication.

Credit: Jose Luis Pelaez Inc, Getty Images

## Indirect strategies to improve communication

There are a number of changes that a business can make to the organisation that should also improve communication:

- **Recruiting for communication skills.** You learned about the recruitment process in [Section 2.4.5 \(/study/app/business-hl/sid-351-cid-762729/book/methods-of-recruitment-hl-id-39418/\)](#). Human resource managers should include good communication skills in the person specification for open positions in the organisation. They could even formally test communication skills, where certain skills are very important for the job.
- **Induction and other training.** In [Section 2.4.7 \(/study/app/business-hl/sid-351-cid-762729/book/training-id-39420/\)](#), you learned about various training methods, including induction, off-the-job training and on-the-job training. When an employee joins a business, induction training could help them understand the expectations around formal and informal communication in the organisation. Where cultural or linguistic differences may be an issue, the business can also provide training to raise cultural awareness or training in the use of translation software. As communication methods change, for example as they did during the COVID-19 pandemic, businesses can offer training to expand the skills of their employees.
- **Simplifying organisational structure.** In [Subtopic 2.4 \(/study/app/business-hl/sid-351-cid-762729/book/the-big-picture-id-39054/\)](#), you learned about organisational structure, including tall and flat structures. When organisations get too ‘tall’ the many levels of hierarchy and long chains of command can impede communication. When this occurs, businesses may consider [delayering](#) to simplify organisational structure.



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- **Changing appraisal methods.** In [Section 2.4.4 \(/study/app/business-hl/sid-351-cid-762729/book/appraisal-hl-id-39417/\)](#), you learned about appraisal methods. A move to more formative appraisal can improve feedback in the organisation, resulting in more consistent and effective communication between employees.



**Figure 5.** Training in new technologies is important to ensure that communication continues to be effective through change.

Credit: Luis Alvarez, Getty Images



## Activity

**Learner profile:** Thinkers

**Approaches to learning:** Thinking skills (critical thinking)

The list in the table below indicates some situations that can arise as a result of barriers to communication. Copy the table and complete it by identifying ways to overcome these barriers.

Situation arising from communication barrier	How to overcome these barriers
Lack of understanding	
Speaking a different language	
Aggression and anxiety	
Inability to complete tasks	



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Situation arising from communication barrier	How to overcome these barriers
Cultural differences	

Situation arising from communication barrier	How to overcome these barriers
Lack of understanding	Use of simple and clear language; employees should listen actively during meetings.
Speaking a different language	Proper induction programmes to be held.
Aggression and anxiety	Use of proper body language.
Inability to complete tasks	Flexibility in completing tasks.
Cultural differences	Training programmes; recruiting people that have a command over the language.

## 2 section questions ^

### Question 1

- 1 Organisation... ✓ arise in businesses that may have complex organisational structures that can delay or hinder communication.

### Accepted answers and explanation

#### #1 Organisational barriers



### Question 2

Student view

Which of the following is **not** a strategy to overcome communication barriers?

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- 1 Using complex language in spoken and written communication
- 2 Delayering
- 3 Recruiting for communication skills
- 4 Active listening



### Explanation

Effective communication demands simple, clear use of language. Using complex language in spoken and written communication is not a strategy to overcome communication barriers.

Delayering, recruiting for communication skills and active listening are all ways to overcome communication barriers.

2. Human resource management / 2.6 Communication

## Terminology exercise

Section

Student... (0/0)

Feedback

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Student view



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### Check that you understand the terminology used in this subtopic by dragging the correct word into each space.

The term **communication** refers to the transfer of information from one party to another. There are two types of communication in an organisation. The first is **formal communication**, which is a type of communication that follows defined channels. The second is **informal communication**, which flows freely within an organisation; it is not predefined and has no boundaries.

A **barrier** to communication within a business is anything that interferes with the communication process. Long chains of command can hinder communication, so businesses may consider **de-layering** to simplify organisational structure.

Communication can be improved with the use of more **formative** appraisal, which will further improve feedback in the organisation and result in more consistent and effective communication between employees.

The term **jargon** describes language used by people of a specific profession, which may be difficult for others not in that profession to understand.

**delayering**    **informal**    **formative**    **formal**    **barrier**    **communication**    **jargon**



### Interactive 1. Organisational Communication.

2. Human resource management / 2.6 Communication

## Checklist

### Section

Student... (0/0)



Feedback



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### What you should know

By the end of this subtopic, you should be able to:

- define the following terms: (AO1)
  - communication
  - formal communication



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- informal communication
- barriers to communication
- jargon
- examine formal and informal methods of communication (AO3)
- explain barriers to communication (AO2)

2. Human resource management / 2.6 Communication

## Reflection

**Section**

Student... (0/0)

Feedback

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**Assign**

### Teacher instructions

The goal of this section is to encourage students to pause at the end of the subtopic and to reflect on their learning. Students can use the questions provided below to guide their reflection. The questions encourage students to look at the bigger picture and to consider how the subtopic's contents might have impacted the way they view the subject.

The following table shows you how each prompt aligns to the DP *Business management guide*:

Prompt #	Syllabus alignment
1	<b>Learner profile:</b> Communicators
2	<b>Learner profile:</b> Reflective
3	<b>Concept:</b> Change

Students can submit their reflections to you by clicking on 'Submit'. You will then see their answers in the 'Insights' part of the Kognity platform.



Student view



### Reflection



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In this subtopic you learned about communication in an organisation.

Take a moment to reflect on your learning so far. You can use the following questions to guide your reflection. If you click 'Submit', your answers will be shared with your teacher.

1. The IB learner profile outlines that IB students are communicators. Reflect on a time in your academic career when a choice of communication affected an outcome.
2. Think of a time when you faced a communication barrier. It could be an emotional, personality or linguistic barrier. How did that specific barrier affect your learning or performance?
3. Think of the communication channels used in your school — have they changed over time? Do you think it may be necessary for organisations to change their communication methods with time?

Once you submit your response, you won't be able to edit it.

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### Rate subtopic 2.6 Communication

Help us improve the content and user experience.



Student  
view