

part one: strategic case

Sundown Bakery

When Carol Teinchek and Bruce Marshall first started Sundown Bakery, the business was fairly simple. Carol ran the shop up front, while Bruce ran the bakery and ordered supplies. When the business began to grow, Carol hired two part-time clerks to help out in the shop. Marina had moved to the country 2 years ago from El Salvador, and Kim was a newly arrived Korean who was working his way through college. Bruce hired Maurice, a French Canadian, as an assistant.

The ovens were soon running 24 hours a day, supervised by Maurice, who was now master baker, and two assistants on each of three shifts. Marina and Kim supervised the shop, since Carol was usually too busy managing general sales distribution to spend much time with customers. Bruce still spent 3 or 4 hours a day in the bakery whenever he could get out of his office, but he spent most of that time coordinating production and solving problems with Maurice.

Within the next year, Sundown expanded from its original location, adding two new shops as well as two kiosks in local malls. Carol and Bruce hired a new operations manager, Hans Mikelson, who had formerly been regional manager of a national chain of coffee shops. Mikelson had plenty of new ideas about how to operate an expanding business: He had a Web site created, added an extensive range of drinks and meal items to the menu, and instituted two dress codes—one for all counter help and another for kitchen employees. He also put together an employee manual to save time orienting new employees. All of these changes were announced by memos from Mikelson, which were distributed to employees by the store managers.

The expanding size of Sundown led to a change in the company. The family feeling that was strong when Sundown was a small operation was less noticeable. The new employees barely knew Bruce and Carol, and, as a result, there was less give-and-take of ideas between the owners and workers.

Mikelson's memos on the dress code and the employee manual created a crisis. Old-time employees were furious about receiving orders from "the bureaucrats," as management came to be called.

Bruce and Carol recognized the problem and wanted to keep the lines of communication open, but they weren't sure how to do so. "I'm just a baker," Bruce confessed in exasperation. "I don't know how to run a big company."

Another set of challenges grew out of the changing character of the employees. In the original location alone, Sundown now employed workers from seven different countries. José, who was born in Brazil, confessed to Bruce that he felt uncomfortable being managed by Carol. "It's nothing personal," he said, "but where I come from, a man doesn't take orders from a woman." The Sundown employee profile was different in other ways. Two of the assistant bakers were openly gay; one of the sales clerks got around by wheelchair.

Carol, Bruce, and Hans know that good products alone aren't enough to guarantee the continuing success of Sundown Bakeries. They need to improve the quality of communication among the growing team who make and sell their products.

As you read the chapters in this unit, consider the following questions:

Chapter 1

1. Analyze the likely causes of the resentment over the employee manual and uniforms by considering the impact of the sender, message, decoding, feedback, context, and probable sources of noise. Describe how the problems you identified could have been minimized by different communication strategies.
2. Identify the changes in communication channels between employees and management as Sundown has grown. What channels can be used to make communication about changes in the business most productive?
3. Consider the relational messages employees seem to have received from management as Sundown's business grew.
4. How have Sundown's formal and informal communication networks changed as the company expanded? In what ways have both the formal

and informal networks contributed to Sundown's growing pains? In what ways can these networks be used to improve the relationships between management and employees?

Chapter 2

1. How do changes in the demographic makeup of Sundown Bakeries reflect transformation of the larger workforce?
2. Consider the following dimensions of culture as you describe the impact of culture on

communication within the company: high- and low-context styles, individualism and collectivism, and power distance.

3. How would you describe the early organizational culture of Sundown? How has the culture changed as the company grew? Consider the issues listed on pages xx-xx as you answer this question.
4. What advice would you give to Sundown's management team about how to maintain the most effective culture in the face of the company's growth?

1

Communicating at Work

Chapter Outline

The Importance of Communication 00

The Nature of Communication 00

The Process of Communication 00

Communication Principles 00

**Ethical Dimensions of
Communication 00**

Using Communication Networks 00

Formal Communication Networks 00

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**Face-to-Face and Electronic
Communication Channels 00**

Face-to-Face Communication 00

Telephone and Voice Mail 00

Teleconferencing and
Videoconferencing 00

Instant Messaging 00

Twitter and Text Messaging 00

E-mail and Written Communication 00

Which Channel to Use 00

Review Points 00

Key Terms 00

Activities 00

Resources 00

Chapter Objectives

**After reading this chapter you should
be able to**

- 1** Explain the role of communication in career success, providing examples to support your claims.
- 2** Apply the basic elements, the process, and key principles of communication to a specific situation, showing how each one affects the outcome of the interaction.
- 3** Apply the concepts of ethical communication discussed here to one or more ethically challenging situations.
- 4** Describe how formal and informal communication networks operate in a given situation, and how you can use various networks to accomplish your goals within an organization.
- 5** Analyze the advantages and disadvantages of various face-to-face and electronic communication channels and choose the most appropriate and effective one for a given situation.

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The Importance of Communication

Virtually everyone communicates at work. No matter what the field, specialized knowledge alone isn't enough to guarantee success; communication skills are also vital. Table 1-1 summarizes the results of one annual survey in which employers list the skills and qualities for their ideal candidate. Communication skills always top the list.¹ Subscribers to the *Harvard Business Review* rated "the ability to communicate" the most

Table 1-1

Top Ten Qualities/Skills Employers Want

1. Communication skills
2. Strong work ethic
3. Teamwork skills (works well with others)
4. Initiative
5. Analytical skills
6. Computer skills
7. Flexibility/adaptability
8. Interpersonal skills (relates well to others)
9. Problem-solving skills
10. Technical skills

Source: Reprinted from *Job Outlook 2009—Student Version*, from JobWeb (www.jobweb.com), with permission of the National Association of Colleges and Employers, copyright holder.

Careers in Communication

While communication plays an important role in every job, it is the focus of many careers. The National Communication Association (www.natcom.org) publishes a list of communication-related fields and some typical specialties within them. While a degree in communication may not be mandatory for jobs like these, academic study of the field is excellent preparation.

- **Advertising/marketing:** market researcher, copy writer, account executive, sales manager, media planner, media buyer, creative director, media sales representative.
- **Electronic media/radio-television/broadcasting:** archivist/librarian, community relations director, unit manager, video editor, news director, writer, technical director, advertising sales coordinator, traffic/continuity specialist, media buyer, announcer, disc jockey, newscaster, public relations manager, casting director, producer, business
- manager, account executive, floor manager, talk show host, director of broadcasting.
- **Journalism/publishing:** reporter, editor, author, writer, project manager, publisher, news service researcher, technical writer.
- **Public information/development:** public information officer, press agent, development officer, fund raiser, membership recruiter, media analyst/planner, creative director, public opinion researcher.
- **Organizational affairs:** human resources specialist or manager, director of organizational communication, industrial and labor relations representative, negotiator, ombudsman, customer service representative, newsletter editor, trainer, human resources manager.
- **Government/political affairs:** public information officer, speech writer, legislative assistant, campaign staffer/director, research specialist, lobbyist, press secretary.

important factor in making an executive “promotable,” more important than ambition, education, and capacity for hard work.²

The need for communication skills is important in virtually every career,³ not just those that are traditionally regarded as people-oriented. Practitioners in Big Six accounting firms spend 80 percent of their work time communicating with others, individually and in groups.⁴ Likewise, engineers spend most of their professional lives speaking and listening, mostly in one-to-one and small group settings.⁵ Communication skills are essential for doctors, nurses, and other medical professionals.⁶ Technical people with good communication skills earn more, and those who are weak communicators suffer.⁷ William Schaffer, international business development manager for computer giant Sun Microsystems, made the point emphatically: “If there’s one skill that’s required for success in this industry, it’s communication skills.”⁸ Writing in *The Scientist*, author Jim Richman echoes this sentiment: “If I give any advice, it is that you can never do enough training around your overall communication skills.”⁹ Other high-tech experts back up this claim.

On-the-job communication skills can even make the difference between life and death. The Los Angeles Police Department cited “bad communication” among the most common reasons for errors in shooting by its officers.¹⁰ Researchers discovered that “poor communication” was the root of over 60 percent of reported medical errors—including death, serious physical injury, and psychological trauma.¹¹ Research published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* and elsewhere revealed a significant difference between the communication skills of physicians who had no malpractice claims against them and doctors with previous claims.¹²

The importance of communication is not surprising when you consider the staggering amount of time people spend communicating on the job. One study based on responses from over 1,000 employees at Fortune 1000 companies found that workers send and receive an average of 178 messages each day via telephone, e-mail, faxes, text messages, blogs, instant messages, and face-to-face communication.¹³ Some experts have estimated that the average business executive spends 75 to 80 percent of the time communicating—about 45 minutes of every hour.¹⁴ According to one authority, the primary source of clogged in-boxes isn't commercial spam, but messages from co-workers.¹⁵

The Nature of Communication

Understanding the importance of communication isn't the same thing as understanding how the process works. A close look at what happens when people try to communicate can offer clues about why some attempts succeed and others fail.

The Process of Communication

No matter what the setting or the number of people involved, all communication consists of the same elements. Although the process of communication is more than the total of these parts, understanding them can help explain what happens when one person tries to express an idea to others.

A Model of Communication The communication process begins with a **sender**, the person who transmits a **message**. Some messages are deliberate, while others (such as sighs and yawns) may be unintentional. The sender must choose certain words or nonverbal methods to send an intentional message. This activity is called **encoding**. The **channel** (sometimes called the *medium*) is the method used to deliver a message. As a business communicator, you can often choose to write a letter or memo, send a fax or an e-mail, or deliver the message over the phone or in person.

Even if a message does get to its intended receiver intact, there's no guarantee that it will be understood as the sender intended it to be.¹⁶ The **receiver** must still **decode** it, attaching meaning to the words or symbols. Receivers don't just absorb messages like sponges; they interpret and respond to them. The discernible response of a receiver to a sender's message is called **feedback**. Some feedback is nonverbal—smiles, sighs, and so on. Sometimes it is oral, as when you react to a colleague's ideas with questions or comments. Feedback can also be written, as when you respond by writing your co-worker a memo. In many cases, no message can be a type of feedback. Failure to answer a letter or to return a phone call can suggest how the noncommunicative person feels about the sender. When we add the element of feedback to our communication model, we begin to recognize that in face-to-face settings people are simultaneously senders and receivers of information. This explains why these two roles are superimposed in the communication model pictured in Figure 1-1.

One of the greatest sources of communication problems is **noise**—the term communication scholars use for factors that interfere with the exchange of messages. The most obvious type of noise is *external* (also called *physical*) noise. This includes sounds that distract communicators—such as the babble of voices in the next room or the annoying ring of someone's cell phone in a meeting—an overcrowded room, or a smelly cigar. A second kind of noise is *physiological*: hearing disorders, illnesses, disabilities, and other factors make it difficult to send or receive messages. To appreciate the importance of physiological noise, recall how hard it is to pay attention when you are recovering from

case study

Google Goes Low-Tech

Information industry giant Google invited author Stew Friedman to speak to employees at the company's Silicon Valley headquarters about his book *Total Leadership*.

The advance publicity for Friedman's speech was surprisingly low-tech: Google staff had taped sheets of paper announcing the event on glass doors and windows all over the company's campus. This unconventional approach proved quite successful, resulting in a large audience.

CRITICAL ANALYSIS: Answer the following questions as you consider this example of unconventional channel selection.

1. What methods of publicity for the speech would employees have expected at a firm like Google?
2. How might the high-tech context at Google have affected employees' response to the flyers?
3. Can you think of an example when an unconventional communication channel or format would be risky?
4. How could you get the desired kind of attention to a message of your own by delivering it via a nontraditional channel or format? Give a specific example.

Based on a Harvard Business Publishing post by Stew Friedman at <http://discussionleader.hbsp.com/friedman/2008/05/what-you-should-know-about-wha-1.html>.

a late-night study session or have the flu. The third type of noise is *psychological*—forces within the sender or receiver that interfere with understanding, such as egotism, defensiveness, assumptions, stereotypes, biases, prejudices, hostility, preoccupation, and fear.

Communication Contexts Communication always takes place in some setting, and the **context** in which it occurs can have a powerful effect on what happens. For example, the *physical context* can influence the content and quality of interaction. Imagine how discussing a problem with your boss or asking for a raise might be received differently depending on whether the conversation took place in your boss's office or over lunch at a local restaurant.

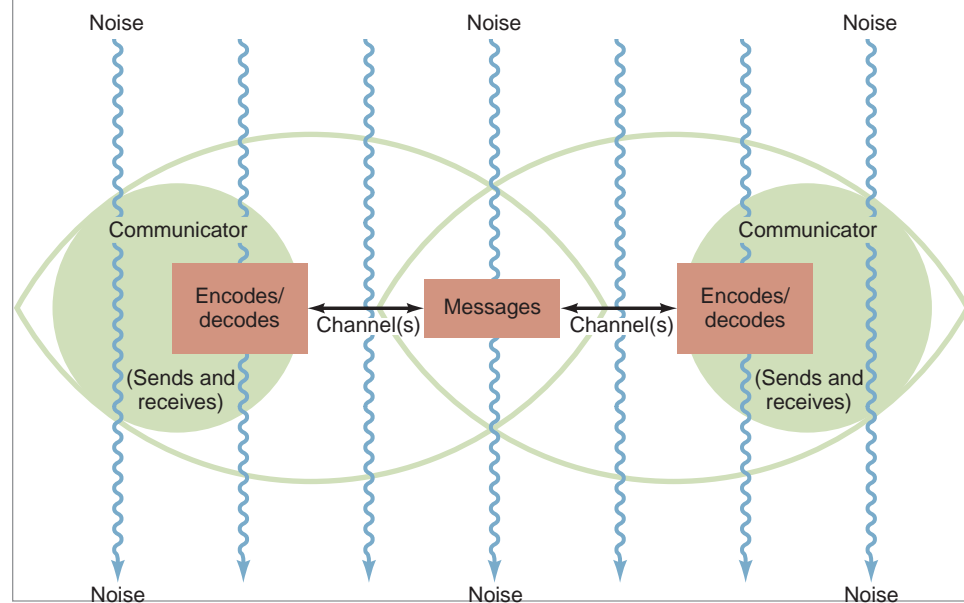


FIGURE 1-1
Communication Model

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The *social context* refers to the nature of the relationship between the communicators, as well as others whose presence may affect the nature of communication. Imagine, for instance, the difference in asking a manager for a raise if you had a long history of friendship versus one of animosity, or if your ages were close or radically different. An interesting application of how changing the social context can shape interaction occurred during a round of secret negotiations in the 1990s between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization. The hosts, the Norwegian foreign minister and his wife, invited the negotiators to their home, where they played on the floor with the hosts' 4-year-old child. After changing the context, impasses were broken and a groundbreaking Mideast peace accord was hammered out.¹⁷



The *chronological context* refers to the ways in which time influences interaction. A sample of time-related considerations shows the importance of adapting to the chronological context: time of day (e.g., first appointment in the morning or last in the afternoon) or the time of year (e.g., holiday season, tax time). You can boost your chances for success by paying attention to chronological factors. When calling someone or requesting a person's help, consider asking, "Is this a good time?" or "Do you have time now, or would another time be more convenient?"

The *cultural context* of communication includes both the organizational and the ethnic and/or national backgrounds of the persons communicating. Chapter 2 discusses the role of culture in detail. For now, you can get a sense of the importance of culture by imagining how just a few differences in backgrounds might influence communication: baby boomers and generation X-ers or Y-ers, Euro-Americans and Hispanics, New Yorkers and Californians, or Americans and Chinese.

Communication Principles

The communication model pictured in Figure 1-1 is not yet complete. It is like a still picture of a live event: All the elements are present except action. Several characteristics describe the dynamic nature of the communication process.

Communication Is Unavoidable A fundamental axiom of communication is "One cannot not communicate." As you will learn in Chapter 4, facial expression, posture, gesture, clothing, and a host of other behaviors offer cues about our attitudes. The impossibility of not communicating means that we send messages even by our absence. Failing to show up at an event or leaving the room suggests meanings to others. Because communication is unavoidable, it is essential to consider the unintentional messages you send.

Communication Operates on Two Levels Every time two or more people communicate, they exchange two kinds of messages. The most obvious ones are **content messages**—information about the topic under discussion. But at a less apparent level, the communicators also exchange **relational messages**—signals indicating how they feel about one another.¹⁸ Relational messages indicate a variety of attitudes. An important one is *affinity*—the degree to which a communicator likes the other person in

ethical challenge



Ethical Communication Choices

See page xx for descriptions of seven guidelines for judging ethical communication:

- Utilitarian Approach
- Rights Approach
- Fairness or Justice Approach
- Common-Good Approach
- Virtue Approach
- Professional Ethic
- Publicity Test

Outline the range of ways you could handle each situation below. Use one or more of the ethical guidelines to decide on a course of action that is both principled and realistic. Justify your decision.

1. A co-worker tells you he's about to buy an expensive car that will strain his budget to the maximum. You recently learned that he is slated to be laid off at the end of the month but were told to keep this information in strictest confidence. What do you do?

2. Your friend is applying for a job and has given you as a reference. A questionnaire sent by the employer asks if there is any reason you cannot recommend the applicant. You know that your friend is struggling with an alcohol problem, which led to dismissal from a previous job. Do you mention this problem on the reference form? If so, how?
3. Your boss calls you into her office and praises you for doing excellent work on a recent project. She suggests that this level of performance is likely to earn you a promotion and raise. In truth, a colleague made a far greater contribution to the project. How do you respond to your boss's praise?
4. As part of your job, you learn that some damaged equipment can be repaired for \$15,000. Your supervisor tells you to claim the damage is much greater so the insurance company will pay closer to \$100,000. What do you do?
5. While you are entertaining a customer, he makes a blatantly offensive joke. How do you respond?

Sources: Some of the scenarios above are adapted from the quiz "How Ethical Are You?" in John E. Richardson, ed., *Business Ethics* 03/04, 15th ed. (Guilford, CT: McGraw-Hill/Dushkin, 2003), p. 200, and "On Witnessing a Fraud" by Don Soeken in John E. Richardson, ed., *Business Ethics* 07/08, 19th ed. (Dubuque, IA: McGraw-Hill/Dushkin, 2008), p. 72.

general or a particular message that is being sent. Another kind of relational message deals with *control*—the amount of influence in that situation. Communication theorists sometimes talk about three self-explanatory distributions of control that can exist between communicators: "one up," "one down," and "straight across." A third type of relational message can reflect a communicator's degree of *respect* for the other person or people. Note that respect and affinity aren't always identical: It is possible to like others without respecting them and to respect them without liking them.

Communication Is Irreversible At one time or another, we have all wished we could take back words we regretted uttering. Unfortunately, this isn't possible. Our words and deeds are recorded in others' memories, and we can't erase them. As the old saying goes, people may forgive, but they don't forget. In fact, often the more vigorously you try to erase an act, the more vividly it stands out.

Communication Is a Process It isn't really accurate to talk about an "act" of communication as if sending or receiving a message were an isolated event. Rather,

every communication event needs to be examined as part of its communication context. Suppose, for example, your boss responds to your request for a raise by saying, “I was going to ask you to take a *cut* in pay!” How would you react? The answer probably depends on several factors: Is your boss a joker or a serious person? How does the comment fit into the history of your relationship—have your boss’s remarks been critical or supportive in the past? How does the message fit with ones you have received from other people? What mood are you in today? All these questions show that the meaning of a message depends in part on what has happened before. Each message is part of a process: It doesn’t occur in isolation.

Communication Is Not a Panacea Although communication can smooth out the bumps and straighten the road to success, it won’t always get you what you want. Misunderstandings and ill feelings can arise even when people communicate carefully,¹⁹ and they can increase when people communicate badly. This helps explain why some problems grow worse the longer they are discussed. Even effective communication won’t solve all problems: There are some situations in which the parties understand one another perfectly and still disagree. These limitations are important to understand as you begin to study communication on the job. Boosting your communication skills can increase your effectiveness, but it isn’t a cure-all.

Ethical Dimensions of Communication

One writer observed that the trouble with business ethics is that many people think the phrase is an oxymoron. Despite this cynical attitude, there is a growing recognition that behaving ethically is an essential part of being an effective, promotable employee. Scandalous business practices led to the downfall of major corporations like Enron and WorldCom and have cost others millions of dollars. As a result of these ethical lapses, sensitivity to communicating in a principled way has grown, and several hundred corporations and organizations now include an ethics officer in their organizational chart who reports directly to the chairman.²⁰ Employees share this concern for ethics. One survey of 800 recent MBA graduates revealed that virtually all were willing to forgo some money to work for an organization with a better reputation for corporate social responsibility (CSR) and ethics.²¹

Doing the ethical thing isn’t always easy. On a personal level, you are likely to face conflicts between what you believe is right and what is practical. For instance, you might have to deal with a customer or colleague whose business or approval you want, but who is behaving badly—perhaps making sexist or racist remarks. After a trip together, co-workers turn in inflated expenses and expect you to do the same. Your team is under pressure to finish a project, but you recognize potential safety issues being shortcut. Besides personal challenges, sooner or later you are likely to experience situations like these where others in your organization behave in ethically questionable ways. Do you speak up when a colleague makes promises to clients that you know the company can’t keep? Should you challenge your boss when he or she treats other employees unfairly or illegally?

It has been said that ethics centers on a sense of responsibility for someone other than yourself.²² A blanket obligation to communicate ethically can be too vague to be helpful in specific situations. Five philosophical principles offer standards that can help you decide how to behave in a principled manner:²³

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Utilitarian Approach (Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill): Does this action provide the greatest good for the greatest number?

Rights Approach (Immanuel Kant): Does this action respect the moral rights (truth, privacy, non-injury, promises) of everyone?

Fairness or Justice Approach (Aristotle, John Rawls): Is this action fair and free of discrimination or favoritism?

Common-Good Approach (Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, John Rawls): Does the action further the common or community good?

Virtue Approach: Does this action promote the development of moral virtue (character) in me and my community?

Two additional guidelines can help you evaluate whether you are behaving ethically:

Professional Ethic: How would this action be judged by an impartial jury of your professional peers?

Publicity Test: Would you be comfortable having the public learn about your behavior in the broadcast or print media?²⁴

Using Communication Networks

The story of Sundown Bakery (pages xx-xx) shows that, as organizations grow, a system for managing the flow of communication has to develop. The regular patterns of communication between people are called **communication networks**.²⁵ Two kinds of networks exist: formal and informal.

Formal Communication Networks

Formal communication networks are systems designed by management to dictate who should talk to whom to get a job done.²⁶ In a small organization, networks are so simple that they may hardly be noticeable; in a larger organization, they become more intricate. The most common way of describing formal communication networks is with **organizational charts** like the one in Figure 1-2 on page xx. Organizational charts are more than a bureaucrat's toy; they provide a clear guideline of who is responsible for a given task and which employees are responsible for others' performance.

Downward Communication Downward communication occurs whenever superiors initiate messages to their subordinates. There are several types of downward communication:

- *Job instructions:* "Bring in receipts for items under \$20 that you pay for with cash. Anything over \$20, charge to the company credit card."
- *Job rationale:* "We rotate the stock like that so the customers won't wind up with outdated merchandise."
- *Procedures and practices:* "Don't try to argue with unhappy customers. If you can't handle them yourself, call the manager."
- *Feedback:* "Backing up the files on your flash drive was a great idea. That saved us a lot of grief when the laptop didn't work."
- *Indoctrination:* "People can buy the stuff we sell at other places, but we can bring them in here by giving them what they want quickly and pleasantly. If we do that, we'll all come out ahead."

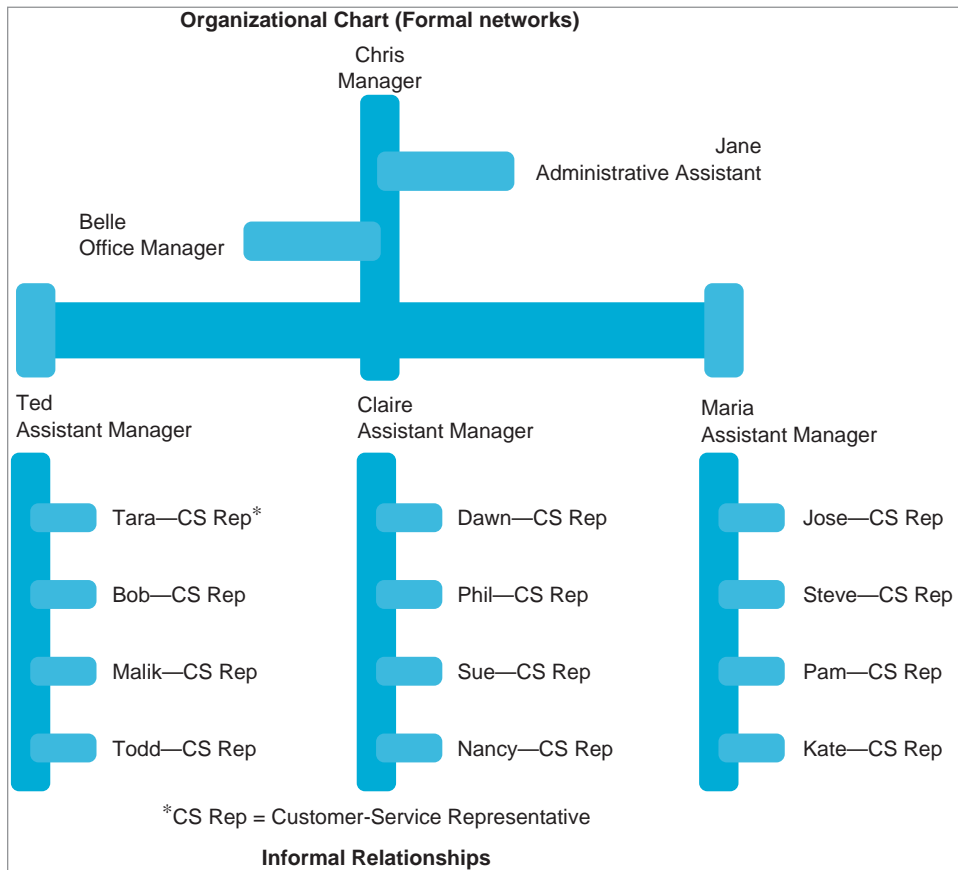


FIGURE 1-2
Formal and Informal Communication Networks

Most managers would agree—at least in principle—that downward communication is important. It’s hard to argue with the need for giving instructions, explaining rationale, describing procedures, and so on. Like their bosses, employees recognize the importance of downward communication. A study at General Electric (GE) revealed that “clear communication between boss and worker” was the most important factor in job satisfaction for most people. GE was so impressed with the findings of this study that it launched a program to encourage managers to communicate more, and more directly, with their employees, including holding informal meetings to encourage interaction.²⁷

The desire for feedback is probably so strong among most employees because supervisors rarely provide enough of it. As two researchers in the field, Daniel Katz and Robert Kahn, put it: “The frequent complaint . . . by the individual is that he does not know where he stands with his superiors.”²⁸ Many companies do take a more enlightened approach to feedback. Ed Carlson, former president of United Airlines, is generally credited with turning the company from a loser into a winner during his tenure. Part of his success was due to keeping United’s employees—all of them—aware of how the company was doing. “Nothing is worse for morale than a lack of information down in the ranks,” he said. “I call it NETMA—Nobody Ever Tells Me Anything—and I have tried hard to minimize that problem.”²⁹ True to his word, Carlson passed along to the field staff information on United’s operations that was previously considered too important to circulate.

Getting Recognized by Your Bosses

According to Muriel Solomon, “The big secret to getting recognized is to give creative thinking a priority.” She and other career advisers recommend that you can showcase your talent, create interest in your work, and display your potential in several ways:

- **Present proposals to your boss.** Learn the history of a challenge, develop a specific plan that shows creativity and understanding of the company's needs. Don't wait for someone to recognize you or choose you for a prime assignment.
- **Volunteer for committees, to chair a committee, or to sponsor a workshop, hearing, or sports event.** Create opportunities to enlarge your working relationships with people at many levels of your organization. Prepare concise summaries and submit reports to your boss.

- **Get your thoughts printed.** Contribute quality writing in the company magazines, department newsletters, or association or professional journals. Distribute copies to your boss, bulletin boards, and company blogs.
- **Use thoughtful gestures to build bridges.** Devote 5 minutes a day to raising your visibility by thanking people who worked on your project, calling or sending notes of thanks to the supervisors of those who helped you (with a blind copy to the one whose help you received), and feeding your gratitude into the grapevine.
- **Be ready to share a story about your accomplishments.** Without bragging, be prepared to weave your accomplishments (be sure to include recent ones) into an interesting story you can tell whenever the opportunity arises: “Something like that happened to us last week . . .”

Sources: Peggy Klaus, *The Hard Truth About Soft Skills* (New York: Collins Business, 2007), and Muriel Solomon, *Getting Praised, Raised and Recognized* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1993).

Upward Communication Messages flowing from subordinates to superiors are labeled **upward communication**. Virtually every organization *claims* to seek out upward messages, but many aren't as open to employee opinions as they claim. In some organizations, questioning the boss can be a recipe for professional suicide. “The disconnect between rhetoric and reality is why Scott Adams [creator of the ‘Dilbert’ comic strip] is a millionaire,” says management expert Warren Bennis.³⁰

Businesses that really are open to upward communication can profit from the opinions of employees.³¹ Sam Walton, founder of Wal-Mart, the largest retailer in the United States, claimed that “our best ideas come from clerks and stockboys.”³² Industry observers credit the dramatic turnaround of Mattel Corporation to the openness to employee suggestions of its CEO, John Aberman.³³ Upward communication can convey four types of messages:³⁴

- *What subordinates are doing:* “We’ll have that job done by closing time today.”
- *Unsolved work problems:* “We’re still having trouble with the air conditioner in the accounting office.”
- *Suggestions for improvement:* “I think I’ve figured a way to give people the vacation schedules they want and still keep our staffing up.” As the Career Tip on page xx suggests, getting recognized by your boss can pave the way to career advancement.
- *How subordinates feel about each other and the job:* “I’m having a hard time working with Louie. He seems to think I’m mad at him.” Or, “I’m getting frustrated. I’ve been in the same job for over a year now, and I’d like more responsibility.”

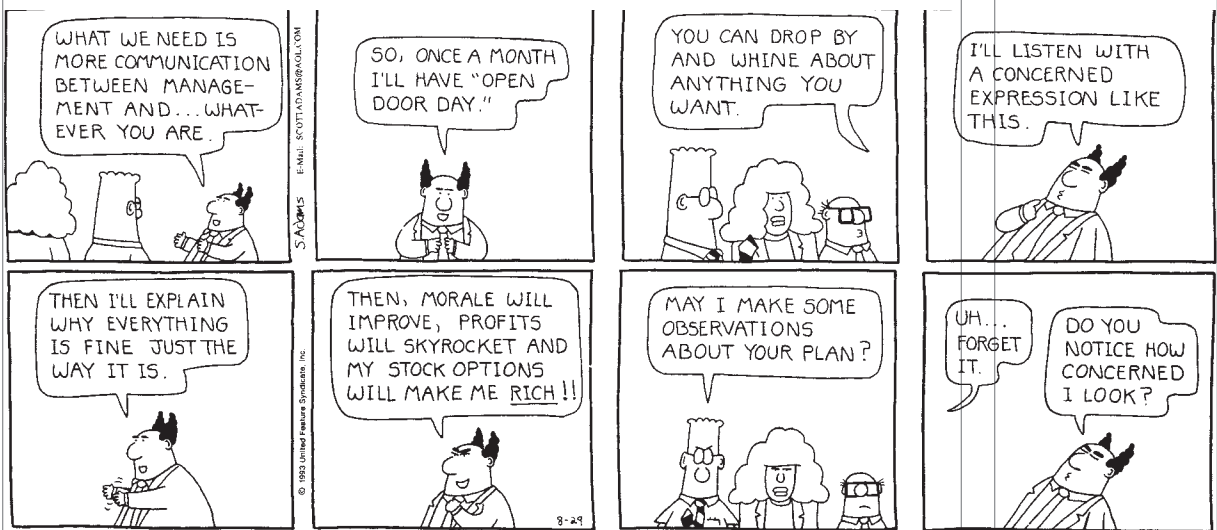
These messages can benefit both subordinates and superiors, and this explains why the most satisfied employees feel free to express dissent to their bosses.³⁵ Bennis emphasizes the critical role upward communication plays in the success of an organization:

[T]he longer I study effective leaders, the more I am convinced of the underappreciated importance of effective followers. What makes a good follower? The single most important characteristic may well be a willingness to tell the truth. In a world of growing complexity, leaders are increasingly dependent on their subordinates for good information, whether the leaders want to or not. Followers who tell the truth, and leaders who listen, are an unbeatable combination.³⁶

Upward communication is especially important for women. Females who engage in more interactions with their supervisors advance in the organizational hierarchy faster than those who do not spend as much time communicating upward.³⁷ A probable explanation for this fact is that women have fewer informal connections with powerful decision-makers in some organizations. Given this absence of connections, it makes sense that women would rely on official contacts to work efficiently and effectively.

Despite the importance of upward communication, employees find participation in upward communication extremely difficult. Being frank with superiors can be risky, especially when the news isn't what the boss wants to hear.³⁸ Busy superiors can also be too isolated, busy, or certain of their expertise to pay attention to employees. Some organizations have developed systems to promote upward communication in the face of challenges like these. Pillsbury Corporation employees can voice their messages on an anonymous voice mail system. An independent company creates transcripts of all calls and forwards them to Pillsbury's CEO.³⁹

Most of the responsibility for improving upward communication rests with managers. They can begin the process by announcing their willingness to hear from subordinates. A number of vehicles facilitate upward messages: an open-door policy, grievance procedures, periodic interviews, group meetings, and the suggestion box, to name a few. Formal channels aren't the only way to promote upward messages. Informal contacts can often be most effective; chats during breaks, in the elevator, or at social gatherings can sometimes tell more than planned sessions. But no method will be effective unless a



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manager is sincerely interested in hearing from subordinates and genuinely values their ideas. Just talking about this isn't enough. Employees have to see evidence of a willingness to hear upward messages—both good and bad—before they will really open up.

Horizontal Communication A third type of organizational interaction is **horizontal communication** (sometimes called **lateral communication**). It consists of messages between members of an organization with equal power.⁴⁰ The most obvious type of horizontal communication goes on between members of the same division of an organization: office workers in the same department, co-workers on a construction project, and so on. In other cases, lateral communication occurs between people from different areas: accounting calls maintenance to get a machine repaired, hospital admissions calls intensive care to reserve a bed, and so on. Horizontal communication serves five purposes:⁴¹

- *Task coordination*: “Let’s get together this afternoon and set up a production schedule.”
- *Problem solving*: “It takes 3 days for my department to get reports from yours. How can we speed things up?”
- *Sharing information*: “I just found out that a big convention is coming to town next week, so we ought to get ready for lots of business.”
- *Conflict resolution*: “I’ve heard that you were complaining about my work to the boss. If you’re not happy, I wish you’d tell me first.”
- *Building rapport*: “I appreciate the way you got that rush job done on time. I’d like to say thanks by buying you lunch when it’s convenient.”

Research suggests that people in most organizations communicate horizontally, but the reasons for doing so in high-performing groups are different from those in less effective ones.⁴² Low-performing groups are likely to reach out to different parts of the organization to get information on how to follow existing procedures. For example, an engineer might contact the purchasing department to check on the status of an equipment order. By contrast, lateral contacts in high-performing organizations are used to get the information needed to solve complex and difficult work problems. For instance, before starting design work on a new product, the same engineer might contact the sales manager to find out what features customers want most. Top-performing organizations encourage people from different areas to get together and share ideas. At Hewlett-Packard,

Worldwide Personnel Manager Barbara Waugh and her colleagues spent 5 years improving horizontal communication. “My role is to create mirrors that show the whole what the parts are doing—through coffee talks and small meetings, through building a network, through bringing people together who have similar or complementary ideas.”⁴³

Despite the importance of good horizontal communication, several forces work to discourage communication between peers.⁴⁴ *Rivalry* is one. People who feel threatened by one another aren’t likely to be cooperative. The threat can come from competition for a promotion, raise, or other scarce resource. Sometimes rivalry occurs over an informal role. For example, two office comedians might feel threatened



each time the other gets a laugh; that could inhibit their cooperation. Another challenge is the *specialization* that makes it hard for people with different technical specialties to understand one another. *Information overload* can also discourage employees from reaching out to others in different areas, and a simple *lack of motivation* is another problem. Finally, *physical barriers* can interfere with horizontal connections.

Informal Communication Networks

So far, we have focused on networks within organizations that are created by management. Alongside the formal networks, every organization also has **informal communication networks**—patterns of interaction based on friendships, shared personal or career interests, and proximity. One business writer described the value of informal networks:

*A firm’s organizational chart will tell you about authority. It doesn’t always show how things get done or created. You know the rules, but you don’t know the ropes. For that, you need a map to the network, the corresponding informal structure that is usually invisible.*⁴⁵

Informal relationships within organizations operate in ways that have little to do with the formal relationships laid out in organizational charts.⁴⁶ Figure 1-2 shows the difference between the formal structure and the actual flow of information in one firm. And beyond any sort of organizational connection, people are connected with one another through informal personal networks—with friends, neighbors, family members, and all sorts of other relationships.

Some informal networks arise because of personal interests. Two colleagues who are avid basketball fans or share a fascination with rare books are more likely to swap information on work than co-workers who have no such bonds. Personal friendships also create connections that can lead to increased communication. Finally, physical proximity increases the chances for interaction. Shared office space or frequent meetings around the copying machine make it likely that people will exchange information. Even sharing restrooms can lead to networking, as public relations executive James E. Lukaszewski observes in describing one anatomical difference that has benefited men.

*This may sound facetious, even silly, but when these meetings break, where are the women and where are the men? The guys go to the porcelain in that little room with M·E·N on the door. . . . The guys are standing there, facing the wall, talking and deciding things. It’s a critical opportunity for important verbal communication to take place during times of decision making.*⁴⁷

Functions of Informal Networks within Organizations As the following examples show, not all informal messages are idle rumors. Informal communication can serve several useful functions.

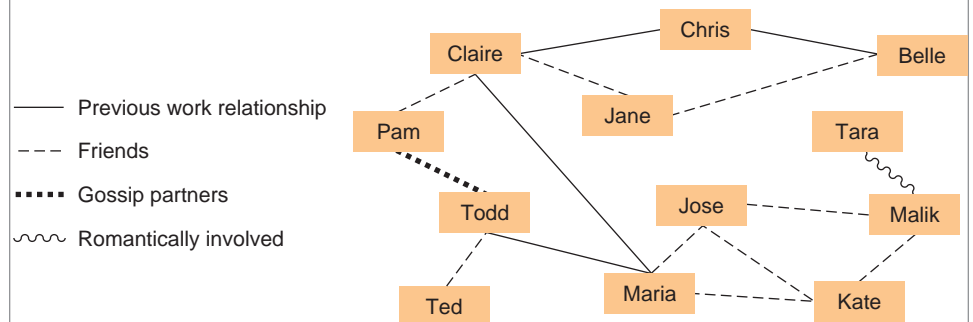


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FIGURE 1-3

Source: Adapted from Mark P. Orbe, and Carol J. Bruess, *Contemporary Issues Interpersonal Communication* (Los Angeles: Roxbury, 2005), p. 309.

- *Confirming formal messages:* “The boss is really serious this time about cutting down on overnight travel. I heard him yelling about it when I walked past his office.”
- *Expanding on formal messages:* “The invitation to the office party says ‘casual dress,’ but don’t make it too informal.”
- *Expediting official messages:* You might learn about openings within an organization from people in your network long before the vacancies are published.
- *Contradicting official messages:* You might learn from a friend in accounting that the deadline for purchases on this year’s budget isn’t as firm as it sounded in the comptroller’s recent memo.
- *Circumventing formal channels:* Your tennis partner who works in duplicating might sneak in an occasional rush job for you instead of putting it at the end of the line.

Many companies elevate informal communication to an official policy by encouraging open, unstructured contacts between people from various parts of the organization. For example, Hewlett-Packard’s approach to problem solving has been termed MBWA, “management by wandering around.”

Some observers consider informal contacts to be the primary means of communication within an organization. In one survey, 57 percent of the respondents said that the grapevine is “the only way to find out what’s really happening” in their organizations.⁴⁸ A decade of research shows that engineers and scientists were five times more likely to turn to a person for information than to impersonal sources like the databases or files.⁴⁹ Two well-known analysts flatly assert that as much as 90 percent of what goes on in a company has nothing to do with formal events.⁵⁰ Writing in the *Harvard Business Review*, David Krackhardt and Jeffrey Hanson capture the difference between formal and informal networks: “If the formal organization is the skeleton of a company, the informal is the central nervous system.”⁵¹

Like the human nervous system, informal networks are faster, and often more dependable, than formal channels.⁵² They also provide a shortcut (and sometimes a way around) for the slower and more cumbersome formal channels, making innovation easier.⁵³ This fact helps explain why organizational decision-makers tend to rely on verbal information from trusted associates.⁵⁴ Smart communicators don’t just rely on informal contacts with peers for information; they take advantage of sources throughout the organization. One study revealed that general managers spent a great deal of time with people who were not direct subordinates, superiors, or peers—people with whom, according to the official chain of command, they had no need to deal. Although many of these people—secretaries, lower-level subordinates, and supervisors with little power—seemed relatively unimportant to outsiders, successful managers all seemed to cultivate such contacts.⁵⁵

Enlightened organizations do everything possible to encourage constructive, informal interaction. Siemens Corp. leaves overhead projectors and empty pads of paper in its factory lunchrooms to facilitate informal meetings.⁵⁶ Corning Glass deliberately installed escalators in its new engineering building to boost the kind of face-to-face contacts that are less likely in elevators. 3M sponsors clubs for any group of employees that requests them, realizing that this sort of employee interaction is likely to encourage new ideas that will help the company. Other firms mingle workers from different departments in the same office, convinced that people who rub elbows will swap ideas and see themselves as part of a companywide team.

Informal networks don’t just operate within organizations. Friends, neighbors, and community members increase their effectiveness by sharing information. In some cities, chambers of commerce host networking events to encourage these ties among

Your Elevator Speech

Often the chance to present yourself and your ideas lasts less than a minute. You meet a prospective customer at a party. You run into your boss on the street. You are introduced to a potential employer in a hallway. Whether networking opportunities like these turn out well or badly may depend on your foresight and preparation.

When the opportunity arises, you can make a good impression by delivering what has been called an “elevator speech.” (This type of communication gets its name because it should be brief enough to deliver in the length of an elevator ride.) Elevator speeches can accomplish a variety of goals. Besides serving as introductions, they can be a tool for seeking help, establishing a relationship, gaining visibility, marketing yourself or your organization, getting feedback, expanding your personal network, and doing an end-run around someone who is blocking your progress.

Practice your skill at presenting yourself briefly and effectively by planning and delivering an elevator speech to your classmates. Your speech should contain four parts and take less than a minute to deliver.

1. State your name and your current job title or position.
“Hi. I’m Claire Yoder. I’m a senior, graduating in December.”
2. Describe some personal strengths or distinguishing information.

“I’m completing my accounting major this semester with a 3.8 GPA and I’ve developed additional skills in tax preparation through volunteer work with Tax-Help USA.”

3. Depending on your audience, state what you can do for others *or* ask for their help:

“If you or someone you know needs help with tax preparation, I can help,” *or* “If you know of any openings in accounting, I’d like to hear about them.”

4. Indicate how the person can get in touch with you or how you plan to contact this person:

“Here’s my card with my e-mail address. I’d like to hear from you.”

While modesty is a virtue, don’t be bashful about presenting yourself as an interesting and competent person. Whether or not you want to, you are always presenting yourself to others. Brevity and sincerity are the keys to an elevator speech. Don’t overwhelm your audience with information; present enough to make sure you create a positive impression and, ideally, to be asked for more information.

For more help planning your elevator speech, see www.saleslinks.com/sideline/99c/11v1.htm and www.work.com/creating-an-elevator-pitch-for-your-startup-319/.

Source: After Marie Wallace, “The Elevator Speech—It’s There for You,” retrieved June 21, 2006, from Law Library Resource Exchange at www.llrx.com/columns/guide18.html.

community businesses. Even without these organized contacts, most people are surprised to realize just how many people they know who can offer useful information. Consider all the networks to which you already belong: family members, friends, neighbors, social acquaintances, fellow workers, members of your religious community, professionals (doctors, dentists, accountants, attorneys, etc.), school contacts (faculty, fellow students, counselors, etc.).

Cultivating Personal Networks Everyone is part of informal networks. As one writer put it, “Shared information is the foundation upon which civilization has been built. . . . We always networked. We just called it being ‘neighborly.’”⁵⁷ While all of us have personal contacts, **networking**, as the term is usually used, has a strategic dimension that goes beyond being sociable. It is the process of deliberately meeting people and maintaining contacts to get career information, advice, and leads—and in

turn to help others. Some professionals use social networks such as Facebook for business contacts, while others are networking at sites like LinkedIn that were designed expressly for business purposes. As you explore and expand your network, keep the following tips in mind.⁵⁸

View everyone as a networking prospect The Self-Assessment tool on page xx will help you identify many people in your personal networks who can help you achieve your goals. Beyond the people you already know, almost everyone you meet has the potential to be a source of useful information. The passenger seated next to you on a plane or train might be acquainted with people who can help you. The neighbor who chats with you at a block party might have the knowledge or skill to help you solve a problem. Within an organization, the best informants are often people you might overlook. Administrative assistants are exposed to most of the information addressed to their bosses, and they usually serve as gatekeepers who can give or deny access to them. Custodial and maintenance people travel around the building and, in their rounds, see and hear many interesting things. Of course, treating everyone you deal with respectfully is ethical as well as smart.

Be sensitive to personal and cultural factors While everyone you meet is a potential networking prospect, it's important to think of each person as an individual. Some welcome the chance to share information, whereas others may object to more than occasional contacts.

It's also important to recognize that culture plays a role in networking practices. As Table 1-2 shows, the relationships you have with others can vary depending on their nationality and background.

Treat your contacts with gratitude and respect Don't make the mistake of equating networking with being dishonest or exploitive. As long as you express a genuine desire for information openly, there's nothing to be ashamed of. Furthermore, seeking information doesn't mean you have to stop enjoying others' company for social reasons.

Table 1-2 Chinese–Western Networking Differences

Chinese	Western
Personal and trust-based	Contract-oriented
Personal relationships have organizational implications and vice versa	Clear distinction between individual and organizational relationships
Symbiotic relationship between networked organizations	High independence of networked organizations
Motivated by economic and social concerns	Motivated primarily by economic concerns
Flexibility and informality	Formality and clearly defined roles

Source: M. J. Chen, *Inside Chinese Business: A Guide for Managers Worldwide*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press, 2001, p. 64.

When others do give you information, be sure to express your appreciation. At the very least, a “thank you” is in order. Even better, let your networking contacts know exactly *how* the information they gave you was helpful.

Help others Don’t just be an information-seeker. Whenever possible, make an effort to put people who will benefit from contact in touch with one another: “You’re looking for a new bookkeeper? I know someone who might be right for you!” Besides being the right thing to do, helping others will earn you a reputation for generosity that can serve you well.⁵⁹ The Self-Assessment on page xx offers a tool for noting ways that you can use your personal networks to help meet others’ needs.

Get referrals to secondary sources The benefits of personal networks don’t stop with your personal acquaintances. Each person you know has his or her own connections, some of whom could be useful to you. Social scientists have demonstrated the “small world” phenomenon: Research on the “six degrees of separation” hypothesis involving over 45,000 messages and over 150 countries has demonstrated that the average number of links separating any two people in the world is indeed a half-dozen.⁶⁰ You can apply this principle to your own information by only seeking people removed from your personal network by one degree: If you ask 10 people for referrals and each of them knows 10 others who might be able to help, you have the potential of support from 100 information-givers.

Secondary sources are so valuable that some online networking groups sites exist to help users find the contacts they need. For tips about how to find these groups, see the Online Learning Center Web site at www.mhhe.com/adler10e. Having a network of people who can refer you to others can be especially helpful in today’s workforce, where people often stay in a job for only a year or two.

Seek a mentor A mentor is a person who acts as a guide, trainer, coach, and counselor; who teaches you the informal rules of an organization or a field; and who imparts the kinds of wisdom that come from firsthand experience. Many organizations have formal programs that match new employees with experienced ones. Other mentor-protégé relationships develop informally and unofficially. However you find one, a mentor can be invaluable. This is especially true for women, minorities, and people trying to break into nontraditional fields where “good old boy” networks can be hard to penetrate.⁶¹

A successful mentoring relationship isn’t a one-time affair. Instead, it passes through several stages.⁶² In the initial phase, the parties get to know one another and gain confidence in each other’s commitment to the relationship. After the initial stage, a period of cultivation occurs in which the mentor guides his or her protégé through a series of conversations and tasks with the goal of buiding knowledge, confidence, and skill. By the third phase of the relationship, the protégé can function mostly on his or her own, with occasional guidance from the mentor. Finally, the fourth stage involves either separation or a redefinition of the relationship as one of peers. Not all mentoring relationships are this involved or long-lasting; but whether they are relatively brief or ongoing, they can provide great value and satisfaction for both mentor and protégé.

Whatever the relationship, some rules guide mentoring relationships.⁶³ Look for someone with a position in a field that interests you. Don’t be bashful about aiming high: You may be surprised by the willingness of successful people to give back by helping aspiring newcomers. Approach your mentor professionally, showing that you are serious about growing in your career. See “The Career Research Interview” in Chapter 7 for guidelines on how to handle this process.

Self Assessment

Communication Network Inventory

Complete the table below to get a sense of some key people who are already members of your personal networks, and who can help you be more successful in your career. After completing the inventory, develop an action plan by choosing which contacts you can pursue. Keep yourself on target by setting deadlines for contacting the people you have identified.

	Name	Type of information this person could provide	Questions I could ask this person	Best channel to contact this person	How I can reciprocate/acknowledge help
Family members					
Friends*					
Neighbors*					
Social acquaintances*					
Fellow workers and bosses*					
Members of religious and charitable community*					
Professionals (doctors, dentists, accountants, etc.)*					
School contacts (faculty, students, etc.)*					
Online acquaintances or friends (e.g., Facebook, MySpace)					

**Past and present.*

Once you have found a mentor, show respect for his or her time by keeping most of your contacts to regularly scheduled times. Be sure to follow up on your mentor's suggestions about reading, checking Web sites, and attending activities.

Realize that a mentoring relationship should be primarily professional. If you have serious personal problems, turn to a counselor. A mentor may be able to help you with some personal problems as they affect your work life, but a mentor should not become an emotional crutch. Remember that any personal insights shared by mentors and protégés should be kept confidential. Finally, don't expect a mentor to grant you special favors, intervene on your behalf with your boss, or boost your chances for promotion. The advice you receive should be reward enough.

Face-to-Face and Electronic Communication Channels

As a business communicator, you often can choose how to deliver a message. Deciding which communication channel to use isn't a trivial matter; communication researchers have studied extensively the factors that lead to good channel choice.⁶⁴ Sometimes a written message succeeds where an oral one fails; at other times, talking to the recipient will produce results that the printed word can't match. An understanding of these two channels will help you make the best choice about how to deliver your important messages.

Face-to-Face Communication

Talking to others in person has several apparent advantages:

- *Richness.*⁶⁵ Richness refers to the number of channels available: facial expression, tone of voice, eye and body movement. In person, a wide array of nonverbal cues help you better understand another person. Is the customer in a hurry? Is your boss angry? Is a colleague joking or serious? Seeing and hearing others can help you answer questions like these.
- *Speed.* Once you make contact with your audience, there's no time lag between the transmission of a message and its reception. If you need a price or have to have the funds in an account released *now*, putting your request in a letter or memo won't be much help.
- *Control.* You might spend hours drafting a memo, letter, or report only to have the recipient scan it superficially or not read it at all. In a personal contact, however, you have much more command over the receiver's attention. Another enormous advantage of face-to-face communication is that it permits *instantaneous feedback*. You can respond to questions as soon as they arise and rephrase or elaborate as necessary.
- *Personal quality.* Face-to-face contact has the potential to create personal bonds that are more difficult in other types of communication. One corporate manager, whose company spends over \$4 million annually on employee travel, makes the case for face-to-face contact: "Nothing takes the place of a handshake, going to lunch, seeing their eyes."⁶⁶

Although face-to-face communication has many advantages, it isn't always the best approach. The biggest drawback of personal contacts is the difficulty in arranging them. Even when communicators are in the same building, scheduling a meeting can be

Cell Phone and Voice Mail Do's and Dont's

Cell Phone

- Know your company's policy regarding personal cell phone calls in the office. Also, be sensitive to the informal norms about cell phone use in your work group.
- Avoid using your cell phone where others will be forced to overhear you. If you must receive calls, use the phone's vibrate function and move to a more private place to talk.
- Don't interrupt an ongoing face-to-face conversation to speak on the phone. It gives the impression that those you are talking with are not as important as the caller. If you know you will be receiving a business-related call that you must take, forewarn the others and take only that call, not other calls. If you must respond to a caller, excuse yourself and make it short—less than 30 seconds.
- Avoid using potentially annoying ringtones. If possible, use the vibrate function or a plain ring.

Voice Mail

- Know the schedule of the person you're trying to reach. Doing so can boost the odds of reaching (or not reaching) the person you're seeking (or avoiding).
- Leave the name of the person for whom the message is directed if the mailbox is shared by more than one person. Don't make the recipient guess who you're trying to reach.
- State your name and phone number and your company at the beginning of the message, and again at the end if the recipient doesn't know you well. Doing so will save the recipient from having to replay the whole message to figure out who you are. If there's any possibility of misunderstanding, spell your last name.
- Organize your message in advance. Don't confuse the recipient by leaving a rambling message that makes you sound muddle-headed and is likely to annoy the recipient.
- Keep the message as short as possible. If you have a great deal to say, consider alerting your receiver to the main points, and then send the details via fax, memo, or e-mail.
- Speak slowly and clearly. The vocal fidelity of some voice mail systems is poor, and you don't want your message to be misunderstood.

difficult and frustrating. A crosstown trip for a half-hour meeting can take most of the morning or afternoon. Personal factors can also be problematic in some relationships. Distance notwithstanding, a personal encounter might also be unproductive if it involves incompatible personalities or a sore subject. In cases like these, less confrontational forms of communication might be better.

Telephone and Voice Mail

While a phone conversation lacks the rich visual feedback that often reveals how your message is getting across, vocal cues—tone of voice, pauses, interruptions, pitch, and rate—can give you a good idea of the other person's reaction to your message.

As with face-to-face conversations, timing is important in phone communication. Your chances of having a successful conversation will drop if the other person is hurried, angry, or distracted. For this reason, it's smart to ask, "Is this a good time?" before launching into your conversation.

Voice mail might seem like a poor alternative to a real phone conversation, and it does have its potential drawbacks. (See the Career Tip box on page xx.) But sometimes

leaving a message can be preferable to a real conversation. If you're rushing to meet a deadline and don't have time to talk, voice mails can allow you to touch base without getting involved in long, unproductive conversations. And a voice mail message can give the recipient a chance to digest bad news before you discuss it in person or over the phone. Services like Slydial (www.slydial.com) allow callers to avoid unwanted conversations by sending messages directly to the receiver's voice mail box without ever ringing his or her phone.

Despite its advantages, oral communication isn't a perfect medium. Possibly the greatest disadvantage of speech is its *transience*. Listeners quickly forget much of what they hear—half of a message almost immediately and half of the remainder 2 days later. Thus, a customer might forget three of the five product features you mentioned, or your boss might forget exactly *why* you need more staff support and recall only the dollar amount you requested.

Even if they remember an oral message, listeners are likely to distort it. Some details drop out with each telling of a story. Facts and figures change. The farther the message travels in space and time from its original sender, the greater the chance of distortion.

Teleconferencing and Videoconferencing

Teleconferencing allows more than two participants to talk with each other via telephones, while **videoconferencing** lets people both speak with and see each other. With a fast Internet connection and a simple microphone and webcam, many conferencing services allow users all over the world to communicate with one another at no cost. Chapter 9 offers tips on how to set up and communicate effectively in teleconferences and videoconferences.

Instant Messaging

Instant messaging (IM) lets you exchange messages in real time via your computer. IM isn't just a tool for recreation: The technology has real utility on the job. For example, people who IM at work report being interrupted less often than non-users, and they engage in *more* frequent computer-mediated communication than non-users—work-related as well as personal.⁶⁷ Instant messaging allows users to send urgent information or queries to others currently logged on to the network or online. For example, customer support agents at many companies can instantly get help from their colleagues when stumped by a customer's problem. When speed is important, instant messaging can beat both e-mail and telephones in efficiency. Connecting is almost instantaneous, and there is less need to socialize when time is of the essence. "One thing about the telephone is the first thing you're supposed to say is 'how's the wife and kids?' With instant messaging you can just say, 'I want this.'"⁶⁸

In one poll of 50 Fortune 1000 companies, 36 percent had employees who used instant messaging to keep in touch.⁶⁹ Another survey revealed that almost a quarter of American workers use instant messaging on the job, often informally.⁷⁰

Along with its advantages, instant messaging does have drawbacks. Typing is certainly more cumbersome than talking on the phone, and text-only messages lack the richness of spoken conversations. For better or worse, instant messaging can make you available to others almost constantly. Failure to respond quickly to others' messages can be perceived by senders as lack of interest, especially if they know you are logged on at your computer.

Instant Messaging at Work

Instant messaging (IM) is less intrusive than a phone call and more immediate than e-mail. It can be a business blessing or curse, depending on its use. Follow these guidelines for respectful and effective IM communication:⁷¹

- Check your organization's policy on IM software. Make sure it allows IM-ing on the job and that it authorizes you to download the software you want to use.
- Ask whether the other person is available to IM rather than assuming he or she is. Respect others' responses that they are busy.
- Save yourself from interruptions by using the "busy" or "away" feature to tell others you aren't available.
- Don't make IM your main form of communication. It can be the right channel for a quick answer or to

open a door. For long conversations, delicate issues, or complex transactions, use the phone, e-mail, or have a face-to-face conversation.

- Keep messages brief and to the point.
- Use IMs for short, nonconfrontational messages, not for arguments or heated discussions.
- Don't write anything you wouldn't put on company letterhead because IMs can be permanent and they are easy to forward.
- Avoid acronyms that may not be widely understood by your correspondent. TTFN ("Ta ta for now") might be fine for casual personal exchanges; at work, this approach may not create the impression you want.
- Avoid poor grammar or general sloppiness that could create a bad impression of you and your company.
- Focus on what you're doing. Too much multitasking can lead to major slip-ups and embarrassments.

Twitter and Text Messaging

Twitter and similar services let users send short messages ("tweets") to interested parties who can read and reply to them via mobile phone, instant message, or the Web. At first, Twitter was criticized as a narcissistic form of microblogging ("Who cares what you are doing?"). Over time, though, business and professional applications have emerged. A small sample suggests the value of this medium:

- Communicate with customers: "See our Web site for new products!"
- Send messages to work teams: "Deadline for equipment requests is Friday at 5:00 p.m."
- Swap ideas with others in your field: "Great article on cost cutting in today's *Wall St. Journal*."
- Extend invitations: "Please come to our grand opening party tonight."
- Express appreciation: "Thanks to all our volunteers. Great job!"
- Coordinate with those in your network: "Anybody going to the conference in Austin?"
- Monitor what people are saying about your organization, its product, and you via Twitter's search feature.

Text messaging (or *texting*) is the common term for sending brief text messages via mobile phones and personal digital assistants. Whereas Twitter is typically used to send messages to many recipients, most texting is aimed at just one receiver.

Texting is a useful tool when you don't want to interrupt the other person with a phone call, and the textual nature of your message provides a record that can be easier to manage than a voice mail message.

E-mail and Written Communication

Written communication comes in a variety of forms. Letters, memos, bulletins, and reports are familiar fixtures in almost everybody's career.

Written messages have a set of advantages and drawbacks different from their spoken counterparts. Unlike speech, written communication is *permanent*. Once your words are down on paper, they are saved for future reference—either to your delight or to your undying embarrassment and chagrin. While people may have trouble accurately recalling what you said a few hours ago, they can refer to your written remarks years later. Even if the receiver has lost or forgotten your message, you can always supply a copy from your files.

Along with its permanence, written communication can be *easier to understand* than speech. Readers can study complex passages as many times as necessary, a luxury they do not have when the same message is delivered orally. They can take a break if their interest wanes and, after a cup of coffee or a quick stretch, come back to what they were reading refreshed and ready to go on.

Perhaps the greatest advantage of written communication is that you can *compose it in advance*. You can take as much time as necessary to shape a message just as you want it, pondering every word if necessary. You can try out several versions on test readers to anticipate the reactions of your real audience, and you can make changes until you get the desired response.

Finally, written messages are *less prone to errors*. Even the best-rehearsed oral presentations can go awry. You can misplace an important set of papers or forget to mention a key idea. Furthermore, the spontaneity that makes spoken communication so effective can backfire. Your attempt to improvise might sound confusing or lame, and the joke you thought would make the perfect ice-breaker might fall flat. Every speaker has thought, hours after a conversation, “If only I’d said . . .” When you communicate in writing, you have time to choose exactly the right words.

E-mail has become the most-used communication tool on the job. According to one survey, 71 percent of managers use e-mail as their primary form of communication. By comparison, only 13 percent of managers polled use the telephone most often and just 14 percent rely on face-to-face meetings.⁷² Just because e-mail is used commonly, it isn't always used well. For example, the length of time it takes a recipient to respond to a message can have serious consequences,⁷³ and a cordial tone can contribute to a positive communication climate, while an impersonal one can lower morale.⁷⁴

Like voice mail, e-mail is asynchronous, so you can leave messages for others to pick up at their convenience. Because your ideas appear in writing, e-mail (like letters and faxes) makes it easier to comprehend lengthy, detailed messages. Along with speed and convenience, e-mail provides an astonishing degree of access to people you otherwise might not be able to reach.

The speed and easy-to-use nature of e-mail also make it a tool for improving personal relationships on the job.⁷⁵ Speeding up routine communication leaves more time for personal contacts, which the medium also makes more likely. Technology consultant Beau Carr explains: “It may sound backwards, but people who refuse to learn about technology are the ones losing the human touch. . . . Users can focus more energy and attention on relating to other people and at the same time deliver products and services faster, better, and probably less expensively.”⁷⁶



Think Before Blogging

Free speech is a cornerstone of democratic society. But when it comes to your career, speaking freely can have serious costs. The information you publish on a personal blog or social networking site may come to the attention of employers—sometimes with shocking results. According to media sources, employees have been fired after opinionated blogging at a number of companies, including Starbucks, Wells Fargo, Kmart, and Silicon Valley firms Google and Friendster. Firms are most likely to discipline employees when posts bring discredit on the company. Delta Airlines terminated a flight attendant who posted suggestive photos of herself in uniform, and Microsoft dismissed a contractor who embarrassed the company by posting photos of Apple computers being delivered at a Microsoft loading dock.

Before posting information on a blog, consider the following guidelines:

1. **Understand company policy.** Ask about your employer's policy regarding blogging. Many firms support, and even host, employee blogs. Be sure

you understand any boundaries about content that involve the organization, and whether any topics are off-limits.

2. **Don't blog on company time.** You are safer if you create and post content with your own equipment on your own time. Using company resources can increase your exposure to discipline.
3. **Think about what you say.** A blog is an extension of your own voice to a potentially enormous audience, so be sure you won't regret anything you post. If you wouldn't make a comment in person to a large audience, don't do so in a blog.
4. **Be prepared for controversy.** Sooner or later it's likely that something you say will displease readers. Your choice, then, is whether to play it safe and keep your thoughts to yourself, or accept the risks that come from having a public voice.

Sources: CNN, "Avoid Getting Fired for Blogging," www.cnn.com/2005/US/Careers/04/05/blogging/, and CBS News, "Fired for Blogging," www.cbsnews.com/stories/2005/03/07/tech/main678554.shtml.

Along with its advantages, e-mail can easily become a drain on your productivity. The technology is so quick and easy that it is prone to overuse: Your in-box can fill up with unimportant messages, and you can go overboard in sending mail to others. At computer chip maker Intel Corp., employees spend an average of 2.5 hours per day sending and receiving e-mails.⁷⁷ See the appendix for more guidelines on composing and managing e-mail messages.

Which Channel to Use

New technologies have given businesspeople a wider range of choices for communication than ever before, and choosing the most efficient and effective way to communicate a message can mean the difference between success and failure.

The question is not which communication channel to use, but when to use each one most effectively.⁷⁸ As Table 1-3 shows, each communication channel has both advantages and drawbacks. Despite these pros and cons, there are guidelines that will help you decide how to deliver your message most effectively. Following these guidelines can produce dramatic results. In one survey, managers who were identified as "media sensitive"—those who matched the channel to the message—were almost twice as likely to receive top ratings in their performance reviews when compared with less media-sensitive peers.⁷⁹

Table 1–3		Considerations in Choosing a Communication Channel				
	Time required for feedback	Richness of information conveyed	Sender's control over how message is composed	Control over receiver's attention	Effectiveness for detailed messages	
Face-to-Face	Immediate	High	Moderate	Highest	Weak	
Telephone Teleconferencing, and Videoconferencing	Immediate	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	Weak	
Voice Mail	Delayed	Moderate	High	Low	Weak	
E-Mail	Varies	Low	High	Low	High	
Instant Messaging	Varies	Low	High	Varies	Weak	
Text Messaging and Twitter	Can be immediate	Low	High (given brevity of message)	Low	Good for brief messages	
Hard Copy (e.g., handwritten or typed message)	Delayed	Low	High	Low	High	

Consider the Desired Tone In general, oral communication is best for messages that require a personal dimension. For example, relationships improve and problems decline when physicians and the administrators of hospitals and health care systems meet in person instead of exchanging messages through less personal channels.⁸⁰ Oral channels are also best for ideas that have a strong need for visual support—demonstration, photos or slides, and so on. Spoken communication is also especially useful when there is a need for immediate feedback, such as question-and-answer sessions or a quick reply to your ideas.

Written communication (with the exception of e-mail) works best when you want to create a relatively formal tone. Writing is almost always the best medium when you must choose your words carefully. Writing is also better than speaking when you want to convey complicated ideas that are likely to require much study and thought by the receiver. It is also smart to put your message in writing when you want it to be the final word, with no feedback or discussion. Finally, writing is best for *any* message if you want a record to exist. In business and the professions, sending confirming letters and memoranda is common practice, as is keeping minutes of meetings. These steps guarantee that what is said will be a matter of record, useful in case of later misunderstandings or disputes and in case anyone wants to review the history of an issue. Handwritten notes of thanks or sympathy express thoughtfulness and add a personal touch that typed messages lose.

Consider the Organization's Culture Besides message-related considerations, the culture of the organization in which you work may favor some communication channels over others.⁸¹ For example, Microsoft Corporation is so e-mail intensive that some voice mail greetings include the directive "If you're from Microsoft, please try to send electronic mail." In other organizations, voice mail is the preferred channel. Kirk Froggatt, a vice president at Silicon Graphics, offers one explanation: "There's something fundamentally more personal about voice mail. You can get the tone of voice, the passion. People like that."⁸² A recent study even indicated that employees who followed corporate norms for e-mail and IM use received higher performance evaluations.⁸³ Along with an organization's overall preference for some channels, it's important to consider the preferences of departments, or even individuals. For example, the computer support staff in some organizations respond to e-mails, while in other companies a phone call to the help desk is the best way to get a quick response. And, if you know a co-worker or your boss responds only to face-to-face reminders, your best bet is to use that approach.

Consider Using Multiple Channels In many cases, it is wise to send a message using both oral and written channels. This kind of redundancy captures the best of both media, and it works in a variety of settings:

- Distribute a written text or outline that parallels your presentation.
- Follow a letter, fax, or e-mail message with a phone call, or call first and then write.
- Send a report or proposal and then make appointments with your readers to discuss it.

You won't always have the luxury of choosing the communication channel. But when you do, the right decision can make your message clearer and more effective. The Career Tips on pages xx and the Technology Tip on page xx can help you use electronic channels with civility and effectiveness.

review points

- Communication occupies more time and is more crucial to success than other work activities.
- The process of communication involves people in different environments, specific contexts (physical, social, psychological, cultural), various channels, and verbal and nonverbal feedback.
- Noise can be physical, physiological, or psychological and can be present in the sender, receiver, message, or channel.
- To improve communication choose the most credible sender, pick the optimal receivers and address their needs, develop messages strategically, structure them clearly, minimize noise, and utilize feedback.
- Understand various ethical frameworks to make principled decisions around ethical challenges.
- Formal communication networks (flowcharts and organizational charts) represent management's view of organizational relationships: upward, downward, horizontal.

- Informal networks, based on proximity, shared interests, or friendships, serve to confirm, expand, expedite, contradict, circumvent, or supplement formal communication so effective communicators cultivate and use informal networks.
- Messages are exchanged face-to-face or electronically via oral and/or written channels. Each channel's advantages and drawbacks can have a strong influence on the effectiveness of a message.
- Communicators can choose the best channel by considering the situation, the nature of the message, the organizational culture, and the desired tone.

key terms



Test your understanding of these key terms by visiting the Online Learning Center Web site at www.mhhe.com/adler10e.

channel 007	lateral communication 016
communication networks 012	message 007
content messages 009	networking 019
context 008	noise 007
decoding 007	organizational charts 012
downward communication 012	receiver 007
e-mail 027	relational messages 009
encoding 007	sender 007
feedback 007	teleconferencing 025
formal communication networks 012	text messaging 026
horizontal communication 016	Twitter 026
informal communication networks 017	upward communication 014
instant messaging (IM) 025	videoconferencing 025

activities



Go to the self-quizzes at the Online Learning Center at www.mhhe.com/adler10e to test your knowledge of chapter concepts.

1. Invitation to Insight

Keep a log of your work- (or school-) related communication over a 3-day period. Include who you have communicated with (superior, subordinate, peer, external) and your level of satisfaction. Based on your findings, analyze

- a. How much time you spend communicating.
- b. With whom you communicate.
- c. Your level of satisfaction.
- d. Areas where improving your communication skills would be desirable.

2. Invitation to Insight

Think about a situation you have experienced in which communication went wrong. Diagnose the problem by finding the parts of the communication process that contributed to the trouble. Suggest a remedy for each problem you identify:

- a. Sender: Did the wrong person send the message?
- b. Encoding: Did the sender use words or nonverbal cues that were confusing, inappropriate, or irrelevant?

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- c. Message: Was the message too short or too long? Were there too many messages? Was the timing wrong?
- d. Channel: Was the most appropriate channel chosen?
- e. Receiver: Was there no receiver at all? Was the message poorly formulated for the person(s) at whom it was aimed? Was it received by the wrong person?
- f. Decoding: Did the receiver read in meanings that were not intended?
- g. Feedback: Was feedback adequate to ensure understanding? What impact did the feedback have on the sender?
- h. Noise: Did external, physiological, or psychological noise distort the message? Provide specific examples.
- i. Context: In what ways did physical, social, chronological, and cultural contexts impede the interaction?

3. Skill Builder

Identify at least two possible relational meanings for the following statements. For each relational meaning, envision the context in which it might have been stated. Based on your chosen context, decide which relational dimensions the message involves: affinity, control, and/or respect.

- a. What's the matter with you?
- b. It's about time!
- c. I spent two days on this job.
- d. I'd rather do it this way . . .
- e. Let me pick up the lunch check.
- f. You were a half-hour late. Is something wrong?
- g. Give me a call sometime.

4. Invitation to Insight

Learn about upward communication in the workplace by asking several employees what types of information they share with their supervisors. What types of information do they avoid sharing with their supervisors? How does the organization encourage or discourage accurate upward communication?

5. Skill Builder

Develop your skill at cultivating informal communication networks by following these instructions:

- a. Choose one of the following information goals, or identify a school- or work-related goal of your own.
 1. Decide which instructors and/or courses in an academic department of your institution are worth seeking out and which you might want to avoid.
 2. Identify the qualities that would help you get the job of your dreams.
 3. Determine which software program best suits your needs for a given application (e.g., word processing, database) and context (e.g., customer tracking, report writing).
- b. Identify the people who can help you acquire the information you are seeking. Locate people from a variety of positions within the organization so you will gain a complete perspective. For each person, decide which channel you could use to begin to develop your network.

6. Skill Builder

With your group members, formulate a hypothetical context for each message to the right. Then use the information on pages xx–xx to decide which communication channel would be best for each message. Use the criteria from Table 1–3 to explain your choice:

- a. Informing your supervisor about difficulties with a co-worker.
- b. Asking for a few days of leave from work to attend a special reunion.
- c. Training a new employee to operate a complicated computer program.
- d. Notifying the manager of a local business that you still haven't received the refund you were promised.
- e. Reminding your busy boss about a long overdue reimbursement for out-of-pocket expenses.
- f. Apologizing to a customer for a mistake your company made.
- g. Getting your boss's reaction to the idea of giving you more responsibility.

resources



For extensive readings and Web sites on business communication, networks, channels, and ethics, see the Online Learning Center Web site at www.mhhe.com/adler10e.

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