

The Leading Function: Groups, Teams, and Communication

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Learning Objectives

After completing this chapter, you should be able to:

- ◆ Identify the differences and similarities between groups and teams.
 - ◆ Establish and successfully direct groups and teams.
 - ◆ Communicate effectively with others.
 - ◆ Manage organizational communication systems effectively.
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6.1 Introduction

Chapter 5 described three major components of the leading function: power, leadership, and motivation. This chapter examines two additional factors that play major roles in the degree of success a manager achieves. The first, leading groups and teams, requires specific types of skills for coordinating the activities of others. The second, communication, is the glue that holds together groups and teams, as well as the entire organization.

In the first section of this chapter, we look at the differences and similarities between groups and teams. Next, we consider techniques for building effective teams. In the following section, we examine the nature of individual communication. Finally, we examine methods for effectively managing communication systems within organizations.

MANAGEMENT IN PRACTICE

The Changing Communication Landscape

The past three decades have witnessed an explosion of new technologies designed to connect people in various ways. Face-to-face interactions with people around the world are now possible by simply pressing a key. In a variety of ways, these new patterns of communication influence many of the topics described in this chapter.

First, the immediacy of available information and interaction has increased the pace of business. Online connections, by allowing access to all forms of data, offer the potential to speed up business activities ranging from research to the coordination of complex tasks. Many projects can be examined in real time, thereby shortening the time from idea development to final implementation. Second, workers interact in new ways via various personal communication devices. A decade ago, many companies began to integrate email systems into management programs. Intranets and other forms of communication replaced letters, memos, faxes, and other more outdated technologies. Currently, companies communicate with both internal and external publics in innovative new ways.

From the bakery that sends out tweets notifying customers that a new batch of goodies is just leaving the oven to the Twelpforce social media team that interacts with consumers at Best Buy, technology has shifted the customer–salesperson interaction. Further, dissatisfied customers can more quickly reach out to a wide audience to register complaints about a company. Many organizations, such as Southwest Airlines, have social media monitors who respond to problems as quickly as possible. Further, many managers have discovered that younger employees are far more comfortable sending instant messages to notify the company that they are sick or will be late to work. Several major



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▲ Advances in technology have made interactions with people around the world faster and easier than ever.

(continued)

organizations, including IBM, now use social media venues as key methods to make contact with individual workers.

Team and group interactions have been equally changed by innovative technologies. Workers can complete tasks from remote locations (such as through virtual teams, described in this chapter). Instant contacts have moved many team meetings away from conference rooms and into new spaces.

Informal groups communicate via these same tools. Friendships are formed and people follow one another through Facebook and other pages. Gossip travels in new ways. Managers are faced with the challenge of responding to these new methods of interaction, making sure negative rumors do not spread widely and quickly to ruin an innocent employee's reputation or standing in the company.

The future of leading teamwork and communication appears to hold a wide array of new opportunities to improve business functioning. At the same time, company leaders will need to be vigilant to ensure such technologies are not abused or used in malicious ways.

Discussion Questions

1. How can fast-moving communication negatively affect an employee via a rumor? What about a company?
2. In what ways can social media be used to improve the workplace environment?
3. How can social media be used to improve relationships between top-level managers and first-line employees?

6.2 Groups and Teams

A common misconception about groups and teams is that they are the same thing. That is not the case. A group consists of a collection of people, and a team is a unit of collective performance. Let's look more closely at the differences and similarities between the two.

Groups

A **group** consists of two or more people interacting who share collective norms and goals as well as a common identity. For example, a group could be a collection of 12 employees meeting to exchange information about how various company policies or procedures will affect them. In business organizations, employees routinely encounter group activities. Two types of groups are found in various companies: formal and informal.

Formal Groups

A **formal group** is established by the organization and seeks to achieve company goals and objectives. You can find evidence of the existence of a formal group in company documents, including an organization chart, a management directive to form a group, or group meeting minutes. Three common types of formal groups are work groups, committees, and project groups.

A work group consists of individuals who routinely perform organizational tasks. Work groups are identified by an organizational chart. In a newspaper company, work groups likely would be formed for the sports department, the local news, and the national/international news desk. Accountants and production employees also are included in work groups around their assigned responsibilities. A work group is sometimes known as a command group.

Committees are groups assigned to various company operations and processes. Normally, committees are ongoing groups, such as the set of individuals assigned to the workplace safety committee or the employee benefits committee. Members of committees often have temporary assignments, such as a one- or two-year term, after which someone else takes the position within the group.

Project groups, or task forces, oversee a project or assignment until it is completed. A task force may be assigned to write a report about a disaster such as a fire or accident in a plant. A project group may be designated to redesign the interior of a retail store. Another project group may be asked to develop and bring a new product or service to the marketplace. In each instance, the group disbands after completing the assignment.

Informal Groups

An **informal group** emerges without the endorsement of organizational leaders and does not have a designated structure or work toward organizational goals other than socialization and friendship (Shirky, 2004). These associations are sometimes referred to as friendship groups. Three forces tend to bring informal groups together: activities, shared sentiments, and interactions (Homans, 1950).

Activities drive the formation of many informal groups. They range from small groups that routinely play cards together during breaks to more elaborate company volleyball, softball, or bowling teams. A “lunch bunch” that meets every day for meals has formed around an activity.



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▲ Informal groups can form around an activity, such as eating lunch together.

Shared sentiments suggest that people make friends with and socialize with others who have the same value sets. Some groups form due to political similarities. Others revolve around religion. In some instances, groups of single mothers or company bachelors may form.

Interactions result from close physical associations. People who work on the same floor of an office building are more likely to socialize and form friendships. Those who labor at a remote location of a company may also band together into an informal group.

Group Members

Formal and informal groups consist of four types of members: the leader, opinion leaders, members in good standing, and the gatekeeper. The leader directs group activities. Formal leaders are assigned by the organization, as opposed to informal leaders, which emerge based on the group’s wishes. Opinion leaders are those group members who are most closely aligned with the leader. The name comes from their willingness to express group values. Members in good standing

are individuals who are included in the group but do not share in any leadership function. The last member, the gatekeeper, is one of the first three types: leader, opinion leader, or member in good standing. The gatekeeper determines who will and will not be included in the group. At

times, the entire group rather than a single individual may carry out the gatekeeping function (Cartwright & Zander, 1953).

Teams

A **team** consists of a small group of people, with complementary skills, who work together to achieve a common purpose and hold themselves mutually accountable for accomplishing certain goals. The essence of a team is a common commitment. One similarity of teams and groups is that both normally consist of from 2 to 10 employees. Both have leaders, opinion leaders, members in good standing, and provide a gatekeeping function. Both also seek various types of social and organizational goals.

The differences between teams and groups occur in the area of unit performance. Groups evolve into teams under the proper circumstances. A leader can tell the difference by observing instances of shared sacrifice and commitment to the group's success by individual members. A group becomes a team when the following criteria are met (Katzenbach & Smith, 1999):

- Leadership becomes a shared activity.
- Accountability shifts from strictly individual to both individual and collective.
- The group develops its own purpose or mission.
- Problem solving becomes a way of life, not a part-time activity.
- Effectiveness is measured by considering the group's collective outcomes and products.

Effective teams begin with the right number of members. Too few members create problems in terms of assigning tasks that members will be required to undertake. Too many members lead to breakdowns in communication and the inclusion of additional personal agendas, which can lead to conflict. The most common types of teams employed in today's workplace include cross-functional teams, virtual teams, and self-managed teams.

Cross-Functional Teams

Organizations today emphasize horizontal integration, problem solving, and information sharing. They also attempt to eliminate the tendency of workers to work in silos, or groups of individuals who are from the same department or perform the same type of work, because a silo prohibits communication across departments within the organization. Members of cross-functional teams come together from different functional areas of the organization to work on a particular problem or task and work together to reach company goals. They share information, explore new ideas, work toward creative solutions, and do not limit their ideas to their own functional areas.

Virtual Teams

The use of the Internet and specially designed software can support meetings between geographically dispersed employees. Virtual teams employ Internet and digital technologies (such as an intranet, web conferencing, teleconferencing, and videoconferencing) to achieve common goals, such as collaboration, sharing information, solving problems, and scheduling activities. Virtual teams are formed for short-term projects as well as long-range, ongoing issues.

Organizations create virtual teams to reduce travel costs and allow people from remote locations to collaborate. They are flexible in the sense that meetings can be arranged fairly quickly, especially when compared to the time spent traveling to a distant place. Both Volvo and Lockheed Martin have discovered the advantages of these types of teams (Ante, 2003; Naughton, 2003).

Virtual teams have three limitations, two of which reduce their ability to take on team-like characteristics. First, in virtual face-to-face meetings (conducted using webcams and microphones), paraverbal cues (voice tone and inflection) and nonverbal cues (eye contact, distance, gestures, and facial expression) cannot as easily be transmitted. This limits the richness of communications between members. Second, socialization is reduced. As meetings conclude and members go on to other work, they sign off the meeting website. They cannot remain “in the room” to discuss issues and fraternize. The third problem associated with virtual teams is that members must meet at differing times, depending on location. A meeting that begins at 4:00 p.m. in San Diego is taking place at 7:00 p.m. in New York, a time when most people have left the office. Scheduling becomes even more problematic for international virtual meetings.

Perhaps a better name for this type of operation would be a virtual group, because virtual collaborations do not generate the same trust level and member interdependence that are found in actual teams. At the same time, virtual teams with members from widely dispersed locations can deal effectively and efficiently with issues in a timely fashion. Consequently, their use has grown in popularity in many larger companies. The increasing internationalization of business has also led to increased usage of virtual teams.

Self-Managed Teams

Self-managed work teams are groups of employees who perform highly related or interdependent jobs and take on many of the responsibilities of their former supervisors. These responsibilities can include planning and scheduling work, assigning tasks to team members, controlling the pace of the work, making operating decisions, and taking action with problems. Things to consider when introducing self-managing teams are strength and makeup of team norms, the types of tasks the team undertakes, and the reward structure, which can affect how well the team performs.

Stages of Team Development

Both groups and teams go through stages of development. One theory proposes five stages of development: forming, storming, norming, performing, and adjourning (Tuckman, 1965). Let's look at each of the stages, keeping in mind that the different stages do not necessarily take the same amounts of time. Figure 6.1 depicts the relationships between the stages of group performance with the level of dependence and interdependence among members.

Forming

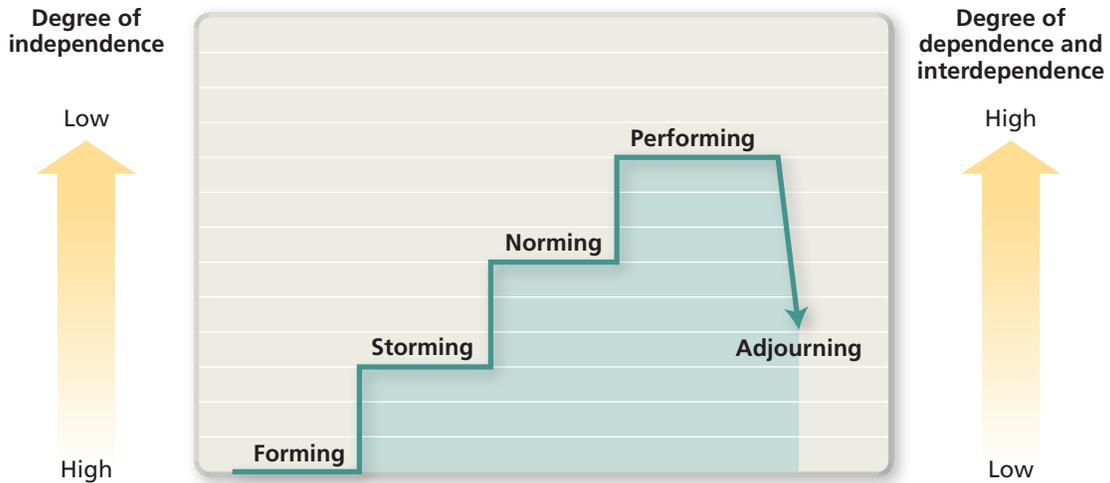
Forming is the process that takes place when members get oriented to the group and start getting to know each other. This stage is characterized by a high degree of uncertainty as members try to break the ice, figure out who is in charge, and determine what the group's goals will be. At this point trust is low, and people tend to hold back to see who takes charge and how that person will lead. The formal leader may assert some level of authority to establish the team's operation and build trust among members.

Storming

Storming takes place as the presence of individual personalities, roles, and conflicts emerge within the group. The storming stage may be short or very long and painful, depending on the clarity of goals and the commitment and maturity of the members. It is a time of testing. Individuals test the leader's policies and try to figure out where they fit in the group. Subgroups may take shape. Groups may stall here if power and political struggles go unconstrained and turn into open rebellion. Groups that overcome this stage do so because a respected member, usually not the leader, challenges the group to resolve its differences.

Figure 6.1 Degree of independence, dependence, and interdependence

As a group evolves, individuals gradually give up a sense of independence in favor of greater interdependence.



Norming

In the **norming** stage, conflicts have been resolved. Close relationships begin to develop and unity starts to evolve. Teams set guidelines related to what they will do together and how they will accomplish tasks. Questions about team authority have been resolved through frank discussions. A feeling of team spirit exists because members have found their role within the group. Positive group cohesiveness can become a major outcome of the norming stage.

Norms are rules governing behaviors in the group. As shown in Table 6.1, norms apply to three main areas in both formal and informal groups. In fact, norms often overlap between the two. Norms can be formally or informally sanctioned, based on approval or disapproval by group members.

Table 6.1 Types of norms

Category	Examples
Effort	Time on the job Units of production Sales calls, sales totals, follow-ups with customers
Work behaviors	Clothes worn Use of language, cursing, formality Following or ignoring work rules or procedures
Social behaviors	Fraternization between management and labor Office romances

Norms tend to develop slowly but then become difficult to change. They apply to the workplace more than to off-work activities. They also apply to behaviors rather than private feelings and thoughts; members may go along with some norms they think are foolish. Norms may not

apply to high-status group members who choose to ignore them. In general, norms summarize group influence processes, including the rules for joining and maintaining membership (Hackman, 2003).

Norms provide vital organizational functions. They clarify the group or organization's key values and convey a sense of identity. Enforcing norms, such as those listed in Table 6.1, can assist an individual in either meeting behavioral expectations or avoiding making behavioral mistakes (for example, refraining from cursing on the job or wearing clothing that the group deems acceptable). Some authors argue that norms help the group or the organization survive (Feldman, 1984).

Performing

In the **performing** stage, members focus on solving problems and completing their assigned tasks. The main concern for the team becomes doing the job right. Members assist each other, and conflicts are resolved constructively. Members become committed to the group's success. When the group reaches the point where its primary activities revolve around solving task problems, the performing stage has begun. Communication between members takes place openly; members support one another with cooperation, and disputes are handled quickly and constructively (Mason & Griffin, 2005). At this point, interdependence reaches its peak, and independence has been surrendered as much as it will be. Ongoing work groups and committees that reach the performing stage remain there unless drastic events interfere. Project teams and informal groups that have an end point (the bowling season ends) move to the final stage.

Adjourning

In the fifth and final stage, **adjourning**, members prepare to disband the group. Having worked hard to collaborate and accomplish their assigned task, members often feel a sense of loss, even though a party or celebration may be taking place.

As a leader, a major thing to remember is that building a high-performing team requires time and hard work. But the end result is a stronger, better-performing work unit. Strong leaders focus on task roles and maintenance roles. Task roles keep the group on track and focused on the work to be performed. Maintenance roles keep the group together in supportive and constructive ways. Leaders coordinate both types of roles to achieve success.

In summary, teams and groups have a great deal in common. At the same time, successful managers recognize the differences between the two. They then seek to find ways to direct groups into higher-performing teams. The next section considers methods for helping teams achieve at higher levels.

6.3 Leading and Effective Teamwork

It takes a talented leader to turn a group into a team. **Team building** consists of all activities designed to improve the internal functioning of work groups. Team builders can use techniques such as trust exercises, role-playing, and competitive games. Standard goals of team building include increasing trust between members, reducing conflicts between members, building better channels of communication among members, and increasing levels of support among team members. Of these four goals, trust is key. Trust requires communication, respect, fairness, consistency, and leader–member competence. When teammates do not trust each other, the quality of the team quickly deteriorates. Distrust can become a destructive force in both teams and groups.

Characteristics of Effective Teams

Effective teams have certain requisite characteristics. Cohesiveness results from an appropriate match between the team members and the work they will do. Contextual factors and process variables also influence a team's effectiveness.

Team Composition

Managers can play important roles in designing teams with the best chances for success. Doing so involves making sure the right personalities and skill sets are assigned to projects. Also, those chosen should have indicated an interest in being included in the group. Clear instructions allow members to fit in and move past storming and norming issues. As with groups, the team should consist of an appropriate number of members. One factor that can work against a team's well-being is heterogeneity or diversity in the team's membership, especially when a single member of a minority has been placed on a team. In general, member selection can make or break a team (Milliken & Martins, 1996). To build effective teams, managers often consult with the human resources department to determine sets of skills that individuals possess. They also consider personalities and various backgrounds as part of the process of creating compatible sets of individuals. Further, when recruiting, selection criteria make it possible to encourage applications by individuals interested in collaboration. During interviews, managers can discover those who have participated in team efforts as part of their education. Applicants with connections to sports teams, fraternities or sororities, and interest clubs such as Enactus (formerly called Students in Free Enterprise) have already demonstrated the willingness to engage in a larger group.

Work Design

The logical connection between a team and a project is complexity. Simple tasks are better handled by single individuals. Consequently, work design in a team setting involves a more complicated assignment. Team members should believe they have sufficient authority and autonomy to do their work in the best manner possible. When a project or task has an end point, it possesses task identity, which was noted as a motivational factor in Chapter 5 of this book. Further, the interactions between members, when coupled with an outcome that helps others in the organization, generate feelings of task significance, another motivational force. In essence, the work design should be focused on interesting, challenging, and important organizational chores (Kirkman & Rosen, 2000).

Contextual Variables

Effective teams operate in inviting contexts. Trust represents both a cause and an effect in team success. A trusting environment encourages cooperation and shared effort. Cooperation and shared effort build trust for the future. Other contextual variables that contribute to success include adequate resources, strong leadership, and the organizational reward system. Resources become necessary to assist team activities. Members who believe they have access to needed funds and technological support are more likely to buy in and support the team (Bishop, Scott, & Burroughs, 2000).

Good leadership occurs in two ways. The first, and most apparent, is found in the efforts of a leader dedicated to making sure the group functions smoothly. Effective leaders in this vein set challenging expectations and operate in a positive fashion (George & Bettenhausen, 1990). The second takes place when the group leads itself by setting schedules, resolving conflicts, making decisions, and coordinating activities, in much the same way as self-managed teams.

Also, several consulting companies offer teamwork-building programs designed to help employees become better team members. Part of this effort involves reorienting goals from individual to collective goals and encouraging team members to make a common effort to reach those goals.

The organizational reward system consists of the performance evaluation program and the delivery of rewards. Group-based incentives contribute to more effective teams. When performance rewards do not exist, the potential for team dissent and demise rises. Reward systems can be altered or modified to incorporate performance objectives related to cooperation and collaboration that will then reward individuals who improve or exhibit these characteristics. The system then can be changed to add group rewards and bonuses for team performance. Hallmark Cards, Inc. as well as one subsidiary of Blue Cross (Trigon), have successfully adapted reward systems to include team incentives in a manner that provides a model for other companies (Geber, 1995).

Process Variables

The final component in a successful team effort involves how the team operates. Four elements combine to ensure a more efficient operational process. Teams with a common purpose among members, confidence, specific goals, and managed conflict are more likely to experience positive outcomes. A common purpose evolves from factors such as group cohesiveness and well-developed norms. Team confidence, or team efficacy, results from successful endeavors. A team can build on previous victories, in much the same way that a sports team builds momentum

during a game and during a season. Specific goals clarify member roles. Difficult goals are associated with higher levels of effort and performance.

Managing conflict, the fourth element in team processes, necessitates careful managerial action. On the one hand, conflict is for the most part inevitable and can reduce problems such as overly cohesive groups and groupthink. On the other, too much conflict becomes a major distraction.

In the study of differences between cultures in various countries and nations, one trait that receives attention is the degree of individualism versus collectivism present. An individualistic culture exists when most people in a region are more self-oriented

than oriented toward any group, team, or organization. Collective cultures represent the opposite situation. The United States and other Western cultures tend to exhibit individualistic tendencies. In such a society, building and facilitating teamwork becomes more challenging than in other societies.

In summary, remember that effective teams are most likely to be present when all four features combine to create the best environment. A problem in any one of the four can disrupt group functioning. Managers who are seeking to generate team effectiveness need to see the big picture.



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▲ Teams with a common purpose are more likely to experience success.

Group Size

One variable a manager can carefully construct when seeking to optimize performance will be the group size. The group's goal should be the primary determinant of its size. The following are three basic objectives associated with a group:

1. Produce an item or complete a project.
2. Solve problems.
3. Collect information or input.

When the primary goal is producing an item or completing a project, something interesting occurs. As groups increase in size, productivity rises as well, but at a diminishing rate. In other words, adding a seventh member to a group will increase the team's productivity, but the increase will not be one-seventh more; it will be something less than that amount. To explain this outcome, researchers suggest that as team size increases, the amount of effort contributed per member declines (Shepperd, 1993). In some instances, extreme declines in individual effort result from the addition of new group members. **Social loafing** occurs when team members give less effort to a group than they would if working individually. At the extreme, social loafing involves a member taking a free ride and contributing nearly nothing. Social norms offer a method to induce a social loafer to at least provide some effort (Liden & Erdogan, 2003).

Managers often compose task teams at the level of five to seven members. Fewer than five reduces productivity due to the small group size. Seven is close to the point where diminishing returns per new member become more noticeable. Also, some research suggests that teams with odd numbers (five or seven) have better chances of success (Yetton & Bottger, 1983) because in any decision or course of action, a majority emerges (3–2, 4–3, etc.). Groups with even numbers can experience ties in votes and other decisions (2–2, 3–3). Problem-solving teams tend to require greater numbers of members. The best rationale for this observation may be that each member contributes unique ideas and skills when a group is managed effectively. Consequently, a team with seven or more members yields better results until the group becomes so large that members disengage and do not contribute.

Collecting information and input may not necessitate maximum effort, but rather insights and analysis. Teams with large numbers of members, again when successfully managed, generate better ideas and discussion. Diversity may lead to creative input. The paradox presented by larger problem-solving and information-collecting teams is that, while these groups induce high-quality ideas and combine unique skill sets, the team's size begins to work against actual implementation of the proposed solutions. In essence, larger teams produce better ideas; but, if kept at the same size, they experience greater difficulty implementing those ideas (Karau & Williams, 1993). It may be wise to pare down the group when moving toward action.

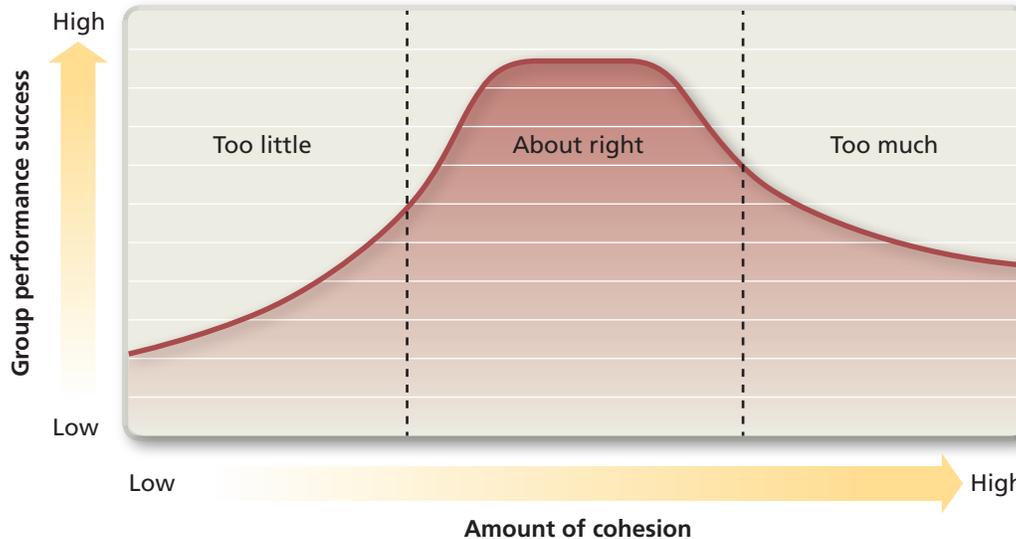
Group Cohesiveness

The degree of goal commitment, conformity, cooperation, and group control over members summarizes the level of **group cohesiveness**. The term *tight-knit* applies to groups exhibiting higher levels of cohesion, which helps turn a group into a team. The degree of cohesion in a group affects productivity and performance (Figure 6.2).

As shown, a group with too little cohesion often suffers from lack of productivity. The problems associated with low cohesion follow the concepts found in its definition. There will be goal disagreement rather than agreement. Members do not conform to any potential group norms. They fail to cooperate, and group sanctions do not affect them.

Figure 6.2 Degree of cohesion

The right balance of cohesion within a group can lead to success. Too little cohesion may result in a lack of cooperation, but too much cohesion may lead to setting norms that reduce output or decrease effort.



At the center of Figure 6.2, the curve ascends, showing that groups with desirable levels of cohesion tend to enjoy the highest levels of success. Cohesive groups offer these benefits:

- Group productivity increases.
- Members help out those experiencing problems.
- Extra effort is given during a crisis.
- Members work without supervision.
- A positive social atmosphere emerges.

Clearly, managers have vested interests in developing and maintaining cohesive groups (Litterer, 1973; Seashore, 1954). Figure 6.2 also suggests a zone in which the level of cohesion has grown to the point that problems begin to emerge. Overly cohesive groups are more likely to set norms to reduce output or lower levels of effort. They may be inclined to view other groups as rivals and create unnecessary conflicts. At times, the formal leader in the group becomes unable to function due to the influence of the informal leader. The most substantial problem with overly cohesive groups is known as **groupthink**. **Groupthink** results when group pressures for conformity become so intense that the group avoids unusual, minority, or unpopular views. At the extreme, groupthink becomes a process by which the group develops a sense of invulnerability, believing it can function without outside influence or sanction. The group self-censors information and fails to perform effectively within organizational confines (Janis, 1991). Team leaders and managers are advised to adjust the cohesiveness factors before groupthink emerges; once it begins, it becomes extremely difficult to manage or control.

Group cohesiveness and productivity or performance are affected by a series of internal factors. Table 6.2 summarizes circumstances in which these factors influence the level of cohesion. Group size, as noted, influences both cohesion and productivity. Opportunities to interact come from proximity as well as scheduled formal and informal gatherings. Heterogeneity is less common in

a diverse workplace. One method used to build a sense of heterogeneity is to create overarching superordinate goals to bond members together. Group status can make group membership more or less desirable. An outside threat can be real or suggested by management as a potential problem. Interdependence and independence result from norming processes. Membership stability is linked to opportunities to interact and bond. Effective leaders understand individual member needs; ineffective ones drive wedges between members (Homans, 1950).

Table 6.2 Factors influencing levels of cohesion

Increase cohesiveness	Decrease cohesiveness
Proper size (5–7 members)	Too many members
Opportunities to interact	Isolation
Similarities (homogeneity) between members	Dissimilar members
High status within organization	Low public image of group
Presence of outside threat	Placid environment
Interdependence among members	Opportunity to join other groups
Attractive (to members) group goals	Unsatisfactory goals or goal disagreements
Stable membership	High turnover
Effective leader	Ineffective leader

Becoming a Team Player

What will be your role in the workplace? Will you be among the staunch individualists who go their own way? Or, will coworkers and top management compliment your ability to get things done in teams and groups? A case can be made that a more enriching and successful career awaits good team players. Even so, opinions vary regarding the exact nature of an effective team player. Lists of effective member characteristics typically include from 10 to 17 items. One popular list was developed by Maxwell (2002). Team member skills include being adaptable, collaborative, committed, communicative, competent, dependable, enlarging, enthusiastic, intentional, mission conscious, prepared, relational, self-improving, selfless, solution oriented, and tenacious.

Rose (2007) suggests that team players exhibit good listening skills, are cooperative not competitive, remain optimistic and happy, are adaptable to change, and should be good negotiators. An effective team player demonstrates reliability, communicates constructively, listens actively, functions as an active participant, shares openly and willingly, cooperates and pitches in to help, exhibits flexibility, shows commitment, works as a problem solver, and treats others with respect.

Mariam (2003) lists a successful team member as someone who has excellent technical and professional competence; good interpersonal skills; a sharing, giving tendency; respect for authority; and concern for the customer. Such individuals are generally self-reliant, happy people who welcome feedback. They also have a finger on the pulse of the team, are dependable, and demonstrate integrity, honesty, and trust. As you can see, there are many ideas about the nature of an effective team player, thus giving each person several ways to engage in a group and become an effective member.

In summary, a team leader must be willing to take the time and make the effort to resolve the issues that arise during the stages of team development. As the complexity of work continues

to increase, and as business becomes more global, the use of cross-functional, virtual, and self-managed teams will also rise. Leaders determined to build the best team possible should conduct team-building programs designed to build trust, support, and communication while reducing conflicts.

In the last two sections of this chapter, we discuss the use of communication in the workplace.

6.4 Leading and Individual Communication

In this chapter the topic of communication may be presented last, but it certainly is not the least important. In fact, a case can be made that communication represents one of the most important aspects of managing and leading organizations.

Communication is the process of transmitting, receiving, and processing information. It occurs when one person transmits an idea to another person or to a group of people. It is also the flow of information that moves within an organization as well as across organizational boundaries. No group or organization can exist without communication. Communication involves much more than simply delivering a message and hoping that people understand; it also includes the transference and the understanding of meaning.

Communication and leading intersect on many levels. A leader or manager communicates with other individuals throughout the day. The same manager is part of an overall communication system within the organization. This section examines individual communication processes. Section 6.5 explores organizational communication systems. At the same time, communications at both levels (individual and company-wide systems) have some common characteristics.

Communication Basics

Communication is a process that includes several basic principles. These principles, which hold true throughout all types of organizations, tell us that communication is

- dynamic
- continuous
- unrepeatable
- irreversible
- complex

Communication is dynamic because it constantly undergoes change. One message feeds another message, and one type of experience feeds other experiences. The communication process is continuous because it never stops. Even by saying nothing, leaders are communicating something about what they value. Silence can be one of the most powerful communication tools.

Communication is unrepeatable. The very same message delivered to two different people is essentially two different messages. That principle holds true even when we deliver the same message twice to the same listener. The leader must frame the message for the intended audience. Leaders deliver financial information to finance people in different ways than they communicate such information to nonfinance people. Nonfinance people do not have the technical knowledge that finance-savvy people possess. For example, a finance person will know that the terms *yield* and *internal rate of return* have basically the same meaning. Someone not acquainted with finance might not. An effective communicator frames the message to match the intended audience.

Some processes can be reversed, but communication remains irreversible. We may wish we could take something back that we said, but we cannot. All we can do is try to clear up any confusion, perhaps apologize, and restate our position. Communication is also highly complex, not only because of its many parts but also because it involves human beings. People are all different, and they bring different experiences, insights, and biases to a conversation. There is nothing totally straightforward about the ways people communicate or interact with each other.

Barriers to Interpersonal Communication

As people at work interact with each other, a series of barriers can interfere with effective interpersonal communication. Table 6.3 presents some of the common barriers.

Table 6.3 Barriers to interpersonal communication

Individual differences	Situational factors	Transmission problems
Age	Emotions, such as mood and tone	Language
Gender	Distractions	Slang
Exclusive language	Settings	Technical terminology
Educational level		Disability—sender
Organizational rank		Disability—receiver
Personalities		Nonverbal contradictions

Individual Differences

Managers and supervisors are normally of different ages, which can create a generation gap in conversations. Substantial evidence suggests that women and men communicate in different ways on the job, especially when one gender supervises the other. Exclusive language involves using words and concepts known only to a select group (think of sports metaphors), thereby excluding others (people who do not follow sports). Entry-level workers and workers with low levels of education may have trouble following some specialized conversations related to high-level duties.

People at higher organizational rank are often intimidating to subordinates. At other times, the leader suffers from a lack of credibility. Without trust between the leader and the follower, communication tends to be flawed. Most of us tend to believe the messenger before we believe the message, and the resulting trust and credibility problems are destructive to clear communication.

And finally, some people just do not get along, which means their personalities can get in the way. Big egos can cause political battles, turf wars, and the overzealous



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▲ Differences in gender can create barriers to communication in the workplace, particularly when one gender supervises the other.

pursuit of power and resources. Egos influence how we treat each other and how receptive we are to being influenced by others.

Situational Factors

Numerous situational factors can derail an interaction with a colleague at work. It is important to be aware of your mood and tone when you speak to others, because things said in the heat of the moment often come back to haunt you. It is also important to be aware of distractions, such as construction noise near an office meeting, which may prevent people from giving their full attention to the conversation. Moreover, it is important to be aware of the timing and setting of sensitive communications or announcements, especially when they involve layoffs and terminations, closing a location, or the death of an employee. In each of these scenarios, transmitting and receiving significant information becomes much more difficult.

Transmission Problems

Language and slang can create confusing messages in domestic and international settings. Someone who is not versed in popular culture may not understand current terminology, such as *twerking*, introduced in the early part of the 2000s. Conversations become far more complex when two people who have different first languages attempt to communicate.

Technical terminology includes the usage of terms specific to a person's vocation or occupation. Technical terms are used in many areas, including information technology, accounting, research and development, and others.

Sender disabilities are mostly related to speech and speech impairments. Receiver disabilities include hearing and sight problems. Nonverbal contradictions occur when a person's body language does not match the verbal message. Someone who says, "Yeah, that's great work," while looking disinterested and bored is not exactly sending a ringing endorsement. Employees will pick up on the disparate messages when a leader delivers information in this way.

Overcoming Interpersonal Communication Barriers

When carrying on a conversation, the sender and receiver both have important duties. Fulfilling your end of the conversation can help you avoid problems associated with miscommunication, especially those that lead to unnecessary conflicts. The requirements for the two persons engaged in a conversation are outlined in Table 6.4.

Table 6.4 Creating high-quality individual communication

Sender duties	Receiver duties
Awareness of barriers	Active listening
Empathy	Seek clarification of the message
Careful attention to nonverbal cues	Provide constructive feedback
Confirmation of the message	

Senders should be aware of all types of barriers. Effective leaders are especially gifted at understanding what might prevent a message from arriving as it was intended. They exhibit empathy and understanding of the audience by "walking a mile in their shoes." Good communicators

make sure what they say verbally matches with their body language, including posture, eye contact, physical distance from the other person, and other nonverbal messages. Effective leaders make sure messages arrive as they are intended. They confirm by asking simple questions, such as, “Do you understand?”

Remember that a sender or speaker makes up only half of the formula. All members of an organization appreciate effective receivers who are well versed in the following active listening skills:

- Listen for content: Try to hear exactly the content of the message.
- Listen for feelings: Find out how the source feels about the message.
- Respond to feelings: Let speakers know their feelings are recognized.
- Note cues: Be sensitive to verbal and nonverbal messages.

Receivers who work well with others seek clarification when a message is unclear. It is better to say, “I don’t understand” than simply guess at a sender’s meaning. This step is especially important when carrying out orders or following a supervisor’s directions. Good receivers also offer constructive feedback. This includes telling others how you honestly feel about something they said or did. Be sure to provide feedback with real feeling based on trust. Make the feedback specific. Give the feedback when the receiver is ready to receive it. Finally, offer the feedback in smaller doses; never give more than the receiver can handle.

Successful interpersonal communication involves a shared commitment by two people. It is easy to multitask while on the phone, avoid eye contact with and remain disinterested in someone of lower rank, or send messages in other ways that communicate to the person that his or her message is not that important. Good leaders avoid making those kinds of mistakes. If you’ve ever seen someone who makes everyone around him or her “feel” important, you have been watching an effective communicator.

The Role of Nonverbal Communication

In interpersonal communication, the tone, the actual words, and the nonverbal cues complement and complete every message, which means nonverbal cues deserve careful attention. Nonverbal communication plays a major role in one-on-one interactions. Table 6.5 presents some important things to remember about nonverbal communication.

Table 6.5 The nature of nonverbal communication

Principle (nonverbal communication . . .)	Implications
Takes place in a context	The same nonverbal message has different meanings, depending on where it is transmitted.
Consists of packages or clusters	Several cues are transmitted simultaneously.
Is governed by rules	Social norms and traditions shape the use of nonverbal cues.
Provides clues to the real message	Nonverbal cues are difficult to fake.
Connects with verbal to form the full message	Behaviors connect with nonverbal actions.
Always communicates	Even when you are trying to avoid sending a message, your nonverbal cues continue to communicate.

Source: Adapted from DeVito, J. (2009). *The interpersonal communication book*, 12th edition. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

Table 6.5 offers several sweeping inferences. The concept that nonverbal communication takes place in a context suggests that folding your arms and leaning back in one context may mean you're relaxed and are taking everything in; but in another context, the same body language suggests frustration or boredom. Packages or clusters of nonverbal cues are normally transmitted, which means words are not all that matters. Eye contact, hand gestures, posture, pacing, facial expression, leg movements, and breathing will be considered simultaneously with the words. Social norms strongly influence the interpretation of nonverbal cues. The "V" signal made with two fingers meant "Victory" during World War II in England, symbolized "Peace" during the Vietnam War in the United States, and is an obscene gesture in some cultures. A wink signals flirtation in one context and implies that "you're an insider" in another.

Most of the time, nonverbal communication cannot be used to fool someone. Someone who disagrees with you may verbally signal concurrence but will send other signals, such as looking away or looking down, that contradict the message. The combination of verbal and nonverbal cues can send a strong message. A person expressing adamant support for an idea may pound a fist or shake one in the air. Nonverbal cues communicate even when you are trying to avoid sending a message. When you are sad or frustrated, body language sends that message even when the words being spoken are "I'm okay," or "I'm fine."

Forms of Nonverbal Communication

Many forms of nonverbal communication take place. People make judgments about the words you speak, but many other factors come into play as they interpret the message. Among the more notable forms of nonverbal communication are the following:

- kinesic cues
- appearance
- dress
- artifacts
- touch
- space
- paralanguage
- time
- manners

Kinesic Cues

Kinesic cues are messages communicated by nonlinguistic body language or movements. These include messages conveyed by various parts of the body. Examples of kinesic cues are provided in Table 6.6 (Birdwhistell, 1970).

► A handshake is a form of touch that conveys an important message.



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Table 6.6 Selected kinesic cues and interpretations

Body element	Movement	Interpretation
Head	nodding tilting downward movement	agreement, listening interest defensiveness
Eyes	gazing shifting, darting	attentive, honesty uncertain, lying
Mouth	smile	enjoyment, pleasure
Shoulders	leaning forward leaning away slouching	interest, rapport lack of interest, skepticism low self-esteem
Hands	touching others touching self hand over mouth hands on hips	powerful nervous, anxious wishing to escape challenging
Arms	crossed	closed to ideas, bored

Sources: Adapted from Pentland, A. (2008). *Honest signals: How they shape our world*. Boston: M.I.T. Press, 10–40, 105, and Malandro, L. A., & Barker, L. (1983). *Nonverbal communication*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing, 226–230.

Appearance

Appearance consists of elements you can control and some that are less controllable. A less controllable element is physical appearance as determined by what others consider to be attractive. Several studies indicate that people who are physically attractive enjoy a kind of halo effect, in which others tend to assume they are more intelligent, witty, charming—and even more honest—than others (Harper, 1993; Schoenberger, 1997).

The other component of appearance can be controlled. Hair styles, dress, and the use of makeup also convey nonverbal images and messages. Think, for example, of how you react to someone wearing sunglasses indoors in a dark room or at night. Gaudy makeup or ostentatious hair styles attract a certain type of attention, which may convey the image of being unprofessional or someone who need not be taken seriously. Tattoos also send messages, especially visible, extreme versions. Women wearing low-cut, provocative, and revealing clothing send different nonverbal messages than those with conservative outfits. Men who insist on unbuttoning one more button to reveal more chest also send messages.

Artifacts

Artifacts include additional items, such as jewelry, eyeglasses, and even the car you drive. Piercings, while more common, still connote an element of rebellion to many people. Both men and women notice expensive rings, necklaces, and other forms of jewelry. And, some may judge a person who drives an old, beat-up car as less successful and talented than an individual in the same profession who is driving an upscale vehicle.

Touch

Physical touch has undergone a metamorphosis, in terms of what may be considered acceptable or unacceptable. Hugging, backslapping, and other forms of touch have largely been removed from the workplace, unless express permission has been granted.

One element of touch, the handshake, continues to convey important messages. A firm handshake accompanied by eye contact expresses confidence. A weak handshake with eyes averted signals shyness and other less desirable traits (Brown, 2000). For both men and women, a firm handshake can create a favorable first impression. At the same time, always be aware of the possibility that the other person has arthritis or some other condition that makes a firm grip painful.

Space

Space, or physical distance, sends powerful signals. Substantial evidence suggests the concepts of personal space vary widely by culture. In the United States, maintaining physical distance creates a certain level of comfort. Someone who feels his or her personal space has been invaded quickly becomes defensive. Table 6.7 indicates the five levels of personal space.

Table 6.7 Levels of personal space

Level	Distance	Communication
Public	12–15 ft	To feel protected; eye contact may or may not take place; able to move freely past the person
Social	4–12 ft	Making eye contact, shaking hands, casual conversations
Formal business	7–12 ft	Greater distance implies social power (distance from visitor chair to CEO chair in an office)
Personal	18 in.–4 ft	People are able to touch each other; expresses closeness “at an arm’s length”; for friends and family members; not appropriate for business
Intimate	18 in. or less	Expresses closeness and affection; uncomfortable when forced upon a person (elevators, subway cars, airline seats)

Source: Adapted from Hall, E. T. (1982). *The Hidden Dimension*. New York: Doubleday.

Violating personal space, or “getting in someone’s face,” indicates aggression and often accompanies an argument or more violent interaction. Effective communicators are always aware of the proper distance.

Paralanguage

Paralanguage refers to how something is said rather than what is said in a message. Key elements include tone, phrasing, pacing, pitch, and intensity (Knapp & Hall, 1992). Paralanguage changes messages from surprised to sarcastic—for example, consider the ways you can say, “Oh, really?” Pacing indicates when someone wishes to speak or stop speaking. Paralanguage conveys urgency, especially through pitch. As a speaker in a conversation, awareness of how you are delivering a message plays an important role. The wrong paralanguage conflicts with the words that you say.

Time

Time contains two elements: punctuality and promptness, and the pace of life, including business transactions. Regarding punctuality, in North America, a strong emphasis on being early or on time exists. Failure to arrive on time signals either irresponsibility or disrespect of the person you have inconvenienced by being late. In many other cultures, being late may be fashionable or is at least to be expected. Knowing the arrival habits of business partners constitutes an adjustment for many persons engaged in international commerce.

The pace of life determines the use of time. In cultures where time takes on the characteristics of a commodity, as in the saying, “Time is money,” it is not to be wasted. Saving time constitutes a virtue. Other cultures view time differently, seeing it as more fluid (Hall, 1989).

To be on the safe side, your best bet in the United States is to develop a reputation for being punctual. If you have an accident or unavoidable delay, promptly contact the person you were to meet and explain why you will be late. Failure to do so may harm the business relationship. Chronic tardiness is likely to inhibit your career. Being known as someone who makes deadlines is a major career asset.

Manners

Manners are an underappreciated aspect of both verbal and nonverbal communication. Cultural norms have shifted, and what once was considered common courtesy has changed. At the same time, you can gain a career advantage by demonstrating good manners. Here are some examples:

- Open the door for others, regardless of gender, with a pleasant greeting.
- Avoid the use of profanity in formal business relationships, even when those around you curse.
- Keep your mouth closed while chewing food; do not talk with food in your mouth.
- Let others finish their sentences without interrupting.
- Generously use the words *please* and *thank you*.
- Compliment others for work, effort, and cooperation rather than for their appearance.

In summary, a great deal of what we communicate and how we communicate will be dictated by nonverbal cues. Taking the time to understand the effective use of nonverbal communication, including appearance, dress, artifacts, touch, space, paralanguage, time, and manners will help you become a more effective businessperson, manager, and leader in any context.

MANAGEMENT IN PRACTICE

Communication and Conflict

A strong relationship exists between communication and conflict in organizations. Poor communication can lead to conflict, while high-quality communication can prevent or help resolve conflicts. As a manager or leader, your role often is to settle various kinds of disputes among members of your company or organization. Effective communication skills can assist in every step of the process. Following are the classic steps involved in resolving a conflict:

1. Identify the nature of the conflict.
2. Identify all parties involved in the conflict.
3. Discover the positions of all parties involved.
4. Look for a bargaining zone.
5. Reach a resolution.

Communication skills are vital when seeking to understand the nature of a conflict. Effective managers know the right kinds of questions to ask in order to fully comprehend what has happened.

(continued)

Oftentimes, an outburst such as a shouting match or a deliberate violation of a rule is the end product of the conflict, not the cause. Part of the process, at the point, begins with establishing a sense of calm and order by using both verbal and nonverbal cues.

Next, although only two persons may seem to be involved in a dispute, others close by often have a vested interest in the outcome. Your communication skills can help you find out who is involved and why. Listening becomes an important ingredient in the process.

The third step, discovering the positions of all parties involved, requires restraint, listening, and posing the right kinds of questions. An effective conflict manager knows that it is important to follow up in order to gain the greatest level of clarity in a person's response. The conflict cannot be effectively resolved if you don't know exactly what each party wants.

When seeking to find the bargaining zone, the concept of best alternative to a negotiated agreement (BATNA) can be helpful. It identifies the lowest acceptable value to a person engaged in the conflict or in a negotiation. BATNA allows the manager to know what will cause an impasse in trying to reach an agreement (Bazerman & Neale, 1992, pp. 67–68). Effective communication skills help to identify a person's "go to the wall" breaking point.

Finally, the conflict will be ended with a win-win, win-lose, or lose-lose settlement. In a win-win, both sides gain something and believe they are better off. At times, the right question or comment can reveal such an outcome. In a win-lose, one side gets its way and the other does not. The manager's job is to carefully explain the rationale for such a decision, thereby reducing the potential for another conflict in the future. A lose-lose, or compromise, also involves careful explanations to all parties involved, including the manager's reasoning for choosing such a course of action.

An effective problem solver remains constantly aware of the barriers to individual communication while seeking to settle an argument or clash. The individual also employs all possible methods to improve communication, in his or her role as both sender and receiver when dealing with each party. Is this an art or a science? The answer is probably both. You can become a more effective leader by understanding how to help people in your organization get past conflict and move into a more constructive course of action.

Discussion Questions

1. When trying to identify the nature and parties involved in a conflict, what kinds of questions might make the situation worse rather than better?
2. If the two sides are at a complete impasse, which type of resolution becomes most and least likely—win-win, win-lose, lose-lose, or compromise?
3. How do listening skills affect a manager's ability to resolve conflicts?

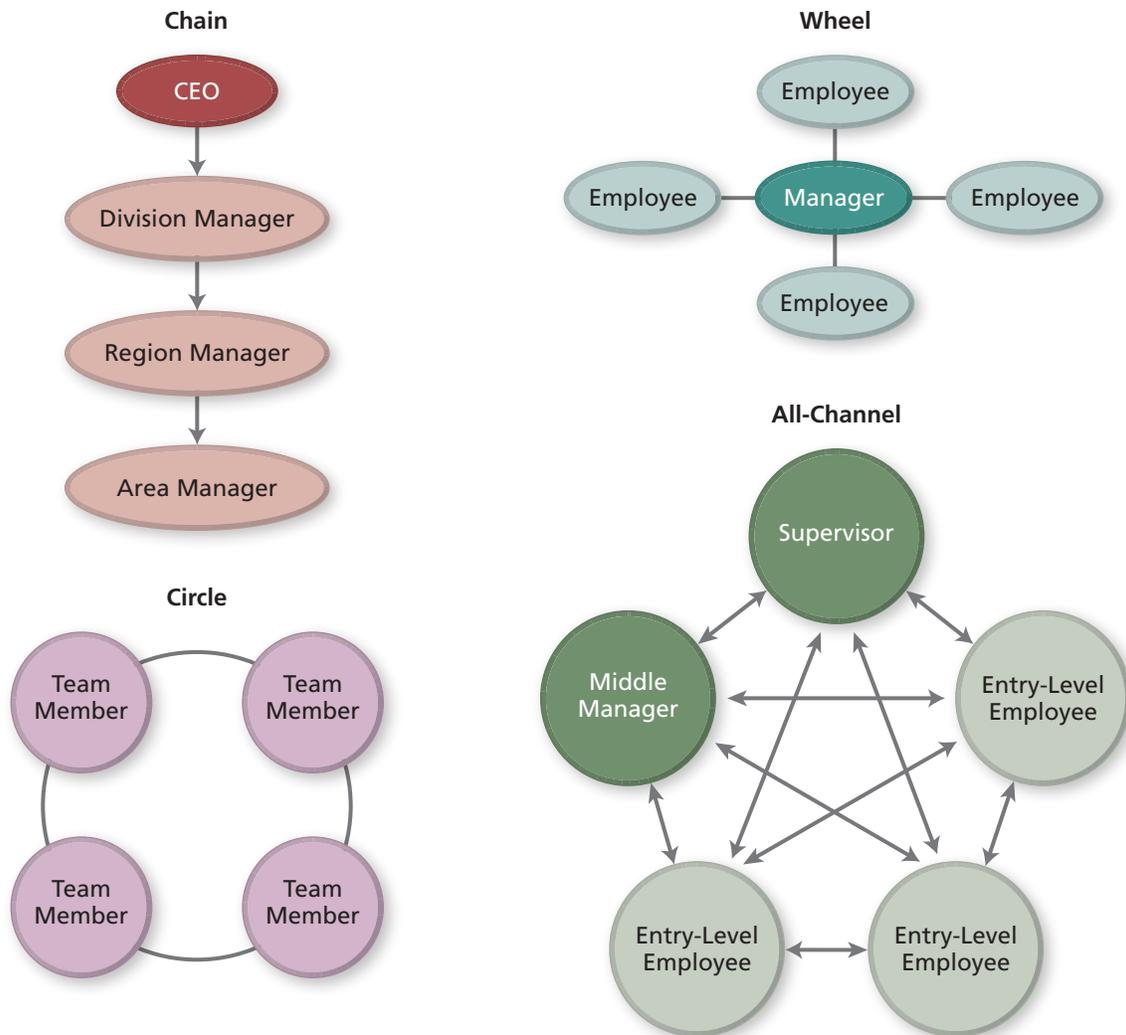
6.5 Leading and Organizational Communication

Although it is clear that individual communication and organizational communication are not, and cannot be, completely separate topics, here we will look at them independently. In general, two communication systems pass messages through the organization. The **formal communication system** is composed of every organizationally approved channel. These include letters, memos, meetings, direct conversations, bulletin boards, the company's website, company magazines and newspapers, satellite transmissions, cell phones, and interconnected laptop systems, including those with GPS locators. The second network—the grapevine, or **informal communication**—emerges through social interactions among employees.

Formal Communication Patterns

Each organization is unique. Company leaders design organizational structures suited to the organization’s unique needs. The same is true for communication systems. In both organizational structure and communication systems, certain identifiable patterns emerge. Figure 6.3 depicts four common communication patterns found in business settings: chain, wheel, circle, and all-channel (Guetzkow & Simon, 1955).

Figure 6.3 Formal communication patterns: Chain, wheel, circle, all-channel



Source: From GRIFFIN/MOORHEAD. ORGANIZATIONAL BEHAVIOUR, 7E. © 2004 South-Western, a part of Cengage Learning, Inc. Reproduced by permission. www.cengage.com/permissions

Chain

The chain approach to management communication parallels the concepts of “chain of command” or “hierarchy of authority.” Messages flow primarily in two directions, upward and downward. Top managers issue orders and relay decisions to middle managers. Middle managers transfer the information to front-line supervisors. Front-line supervisors inform entry-level workers. Questions, inquiries, and requests for clarification are relayed in the reverse order.

Directives sent through the chain approach to management communication indicate centralization: a form of organizational structure in which a low degree of delegation of decision making, authority, and power takes place. Lower-level employees become so-called order takers and order followers in such a system. Managers and employees who violate the chain of command by communicating directly with other departments are said to “walk the gangplank” and disrupt the communication system. The chain design can be characterized as a mechanistic approach to organizational communication, largely driven by rules, procedures, titles that indicate organizational status, and formal relationships between employees.

The chain design offers benefits to certain types of organizations. The model fits situations in which precision in carrying out tasks or assignments holds high priority. Military and police organizations serve as prime examples; although the chain works well only within the organization rather than when one unit (police) must coordinate with other units (fire, storm cleanup departments, etc.). The chain model can also be found in companies that produce standardized products and have few needs for innovation or change.

Wheel

In a wheel arrangement, a manager or supervisor is the center of the wheel. Individual spokes, or communication channels, connect the manager to subordinates. In such a system, the manager retains information and dispenses it to employees as needed, serving as a control center. Individual employees communicate only with the manager and not with one another.

The wheel approach may be used in task forces or project teams, especially when members are disbursed geographically. For example, should a team be formed to identify and purchase a new manufacturing site, members of the group may be sent to a variety of locations where they collect information about the costs of land, the availability of contractors and laborers, access to transportation systems, the nature of the local government, prevailing wages, and other factors. Each reports to the head of the task force, who then can relay the information to decision makers. A similar situation arises when teams are disbursed to various countries to identify those that would be targets for international expansion.

Normally, a wheel approach is not appropriate to a continuing managerial situation. Over time, employees do not usually remain isolated from each other. Exceptions are possible, such as when a series of park rangers reports to a central office regarding fire threats and other activities in the park system.

Circle

A circle resembles the wheel approach, only without the central hub. In a circle system, members communicate freely with other members, even when one member of the circle is the formally designated leader. The flow of communication, however, goes around the wheel, either clockwise or counterclockwise. This method matches work that takes place sequentially. One member's end product becomes the beginning point for the next member, for example, when one member involved in a project completes his part of a project report about the work and passes it along to the next team member who then adds her section.

The circle approach may be found in task force operations as well as in laboratory settings where experiments take place in a carefully constructed format. It might also fit with certain creative endeavors, such as preparing advertisements or market research projects.

All-Channel

In an all-channel communication arrangement, messages move freely across organizational ranks and members of a team, group, or department. Members determine which people should receive messages, regardless of title or status. The all-channel approach to communication design matches an increasing number of departments and companies. Many Internet firms, such as Google, maintain open work spaces that have no doors and walls. Employees move about freely and are encouraged to develop and propose new and innovative ideas. Managers work side by side with other organizational members. The all-channel method empowers employees and encourages innovation. Consequently, it has often become the method of choice for research and development departments as well as other units that emphasize creativity.

A person is not likely to go into a company and quickly identify the communication pattern. Some clues may be obtained from the information provided in Table 6.8. Many organizations incorporate elements of least two of the systems. Some projects are directed by using a wheel pattern, others by a circle (Lin & Benbasat, 1991). Other companies may maintain an all-channel approach organization-wide, but use a wheel or circle in certain circumstances. The least flexible chain approach, while less common, may be the most visible to an outsider.

Table 6.8 Managerial messages and communication systems

Pattern	Common messages
Chain	Memo/directive, bulk email, formal presentation by manager; little or no feedback expected
Wheel	Interpersonal conversations, email exchanges, calls, meetings directed by a supervisor; feedback needed
Circle	Checklist with notation when task is completed, interpersonal conversations between members, emails, calls; less structured meetings with feedback expected
All-Channel	Interpersonal conversations, unstructured meetings, emails, calls; constant feedback in all directions

Types of Messages and Communication Goals

Company leaders guide organizations through dull periods and dramatic challenges. Messages vary from straightforward concepts to complex presentations designed to change attitudes, opinions, or values. Table 6.9 indicates a series of messages and their goals and the corresponding degree of complexity associated with each goal.

Table 6.9 Messages and goals

Type of message or goal	Degree of message complexity
Remind Schedule/coordinate	Lowest
Inform Solicit input Report findings	Moderate
Persuade	Highest

A message designed to remind can target individuals, groups, or the entire organization. Reminders of meetings, deadlines, and other time-related issues are commonplace in companies. Messages that schedule or coordinate activities are sent to sets of individuals working on a common project or task. Planning processes dictate schedules. Informational messages vary more widely. At times the information can be relatively mundane; at others, key organizational events, outcomes, or decisions are transmitted. Soliciting input ranges from collecting opinions to gathering full sets of data to make the most informed decision possible. Reporting findings requires complete descriptions of an analysis and may invite further discussion and evaluation. The greatest message complexity occurs in attempts to persuade because either a logical or emotional presentation designed to change an attitude must be constructed. Faulty reasoning or lack of a compelling argument will cause the persuasion attempt to fail (Burnes, 2004).

Types of Formal Messages

Formal communication systems move information throughout the organization. The information can travel upward, downward, laterally, or in all directions at once. The most common types of messages transmitted via formal channels include

- job instructions
- job rationale
- standardized information
- team and group coordination
- questions and answers
- decisions and plans
- ideological indoctrination

Job instructions take many forms. A direct address by a supervisor instructs an employee how to carry out a task or set of tasks. Employee training programs provide information to new hires. Performance appraisal systems correct ineffective performance. Mentoring programs render additional insights and information about how to successfully perform a task or job.

A job rationale answers the “why” questions. In other words, managers explain why a job should be completed in a certain way and what makes the job important. A manager who tells the employee, “We do the job this way, because it saves time,” or “We ask you to compile sales statistics by store so that we know which products do well in each unit, and which do not,” has provided the rationale for the job.

Standardized information consists of items that apply equally to everyone in the firm, or to every person in a given department. Examples include the company’s list of rules, protocols for evacuation in case of an emergency, and any procedures that apply to specific units in the company. Standardized information in a retail store consists of how inventory is managed (move the oldest merchandise to the front of the shelf), how cash is handled (leave \$100.00 in bills and coins in the register each day), and protocols for accepting two-party checks and other forms of payment. Standardized information in the production department includes safety procedures and rules as well as methods for completing each task. Standardized information in accounting contains messages about which procedures are used, such as methods of depreciation and methods of valuing inventory.

Team and group coordination messages set meeting times, dates, and deadlines, and they help establish relationships between members. Members of the workplace safety committee know

that the group meets the third Monday of each month, that a deadline for completing a report about a recent series of accidents looms, and that the committee always consists of six members—two from production, one from human resources, one from quality control, and two other individuals. Systems for electing a committee chair may also be part of the coordination effort.

Questions and answers move upward, downward, and laterally in business organizations. Questions may be posed by employees to managers, by managers to employees, or by members at the same rank, such as from one supervisor to another.

Decisions and plans shape the direction of the company. Managers convey them verbally and in writing. Effective organizations chart planned courses that every employee can understand and follow.

Ideological indoctrination statements tell employees, “This is a great place to work.” At times, the message begins with a company’s statement of mission. Support for ethical behaviors, social responsibility, and the conservation of resources accompanies ideas about the company’s internal environment as being welcoming and helpful.

Information Richness

One method used to describe business and management communication employs the concept of **information richness**, or the potential information-carrying capacity of a communication channel. At one extreme, rich communication means the channel provides opportunities for feedback, has a full range of visual and audio communication, and presents the opportunity to personalize a message. At the other extreme, a lean channel offers no venue for feedback, is impersonal, and can transmit only a limited amount of information (Lengel & Daft, 1988). Table 6.10 summarizes the continuum from the leanest channel to the richest channel.



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▲ Interactive channels such as videoconferencing maintain many of the benefits of face-to-face interactions.

Table 6.10 Channel richness

Leanest channel	Moderate richness		Richest channel
←			→
Impersonal static channel	Personal static channel	Interactive channel	Face-to-face
Routine, clear, general; simple messages	Personal message, prompt response needed; slightly complex messages	Some interaction is valuable; moderately difficult messages	Nonroutine, ambiguous; difficult messages

Source: Adapted from Lengel, R. H. & Daft, R. L. (1988). The selection of communication media as an executive skill, *Academy of Management Executive*, (2) August, 225–232.

The richest channels suit the most complex messages and circumstances that require discussion and interaction. Interactions take place in person or face to face. As a result, the channel provides for both verbal and nonverbal transmissions. Intonation and other cues accompany the person's words. These interactions resemble a dance featuring an exchange of information, ideas, and opinions. In presentations and other more formal settings, other cues can be added by using visual aids, such as a PowerPoint presentation or printed handout materials.

Interactive channels offer many of the benefits of face-to-face meetings. Videoconferencing and conference calls retain the ability to move beyond words to inflection and other cues. In the case of videoconferencing, visual cues are available. While not at the same level as the immediate feedback of an actual face-to-face meeting, interactive channels allow participants to visit concurrently.

Personal static channels such as telephone calls, text messages, and instant messages provide leaner communication, because visual elements and nonverbal cues are absent. Quick response systems such as instant messaging create what are nearly conversations, in which users can pose questions and answers along with proposals and counterproposals. Personal static channels facilitate a great deal of today's business operations, because employees and customers can communicate via these channels.

The leanest communication channels are impersonal static channels. Verbal intonation and nonverbal cues cannot be transmitted through these channels. Lean formats include most printed documents, such as letters, reports, and proposals. Standardized information with less complexity can be sent through leaner channels. In-depth explanations of complicated issues are possible; however, they are transmitted without the benefits of other channels. In summary, channel richness is an effective tool for use in selecting the best way to send a message. By analyzing channel richness, a manager can select the best channel for any communication effort.

Barriers to Formal Organizational Communication

Communication systems in organizations require careful construction and constant maintenance. As new technologies have emerged, the potential barriers to high-quality communication have risen. Effective leaders recognize the importance of efficient communication systems. Barriers that can inhibit formal communication include

- information overload
- physical barriers
- interpersonal barriers
- informal contradiction of the formal message

Information overload problems have grown in the past two decades, primarily due to the influence of additional new technologies. Any manager who takes time away from the job is likely to return to a filled email inbox. People can be reached in various ways, and monitoring each communication takes time. The possibility of lost messages or misunderstood messages results from information overload.

Some physical barriers include time zone differences, telephone line static, and computers that crash. Office walls also can be physical barriers to effective communication, which is one reason that many organizations are adapting open floor plans with cubicles instead of traditional walls.

All the interpersonal barriers that interrupt communication between individuals can also create formal communication problems. Issues such as organizational rank and personalities are primary examples of these problems.

Informal communication, which can sometimes take the form of gossip, is fun. Consequently, rumors often continue even after management has disputed them through the formal communication system. The persistent rumor problem can affect morale when the stories are about layoffs, lack of pay raises, and terminations of popular managers.

Overcoming Barriers to Formal Communication

To make sure messages and information travel efficiently and effectively through an organization, the company should establish and maintain a good management information system (MIS). A well-designed **management information system** consists of the people and technologies used to collect and process organizational information. An effective MIS begins with effective people who know how to collect important organizational information. These individuals are found in many areas including accounting, forecasting, production, quality control, and human resources, as well as at executive levels in the organization.

An effective MIS maintains the best technologies. Company phone systems should be easy to use, the website should be easy to negotiate, and systems should be in place to make sure that key decisions and announcements reach every person who needs to hear them.

An effective MIS carries quality information. Key company information will be timely, accurate, important, and summarized. A manager needs to quickly access important statistics and information for decision-making processes. Individual employees need to find the types of data that help them perform their jobs most effectively. For example, to best serve the client's needs, a customer service representative should be able to access information about previous contacts a person or business has made with the company.

Managing the Grapevine

The grapevine has three main characteristics. First, an organization's leadership does not control it. Second, employees frequently perceive the information as accurate and believable, even more than a formal communication issued by top management. Third, the grapevine is used largely to serve the self-interests of the people within the grapevine stream. One important consideration is how information gets moving through the grapevine.

Many employees assume that rumors start because they make interesting gossip. Actually, the grapevine is fed by situations that are important to people, ambiguity in the workplace, and conditions that arouse anxiety in employees. The grapevine flourishes in organizations because work situations frequently contain these three elements. The secrecy and competition typically present in organizations around issues such as a new boss coming on board, downsizing, and organizational realignment create the conditions that both encourage and sustain the grapevine.

While managers cannot eliminate the grapevine, they can manage it by infusing as much correct information into the front end of the communication pipeline as is possible. They can also deal quickly with false rumors, both through formal denials and by exerting pressure on the informal channel. Effective leaders also recognize the potential of the grapevine to pass along compliments to a worker through the employee's social network on the job.

The terms *complement* and *supplement* have been applied to the grapevine. It adds additional richness to formal communication channels. When managed correctly, its damaging effects can be limited, and positive aspects can be accentuated.

Communication systems are the lifelines of organizations. Effective communicators often enjoy successful careers and personal lives. They understand the factors that can disrupt quality

communication and take steps to overcome those problems. They are good listeners. They also monitor messages in the formal and informal communication channels to make certain the proper information arrives where and when it is needed. Anyone who can work a room or make an impressive speech has a major advantage in the area of leadership and communication.

Summary

A group consists of two or more people interacting who share collective norms and goals and have a common identity. Members of the organization establish formal groups to achieve company goals and objectives. Three of the most common types of formal groups are work groups, committees, and project groups. An informal group emerges without the endorsement of organizational leaders; it does not have a designated structure or work toward organizational goals other than socialization and friendship. Three forces tend to bring informal groups together: activities, shared sentiments, and interactions. Formal and informal groups consist of four types of members: the leader, opinion leaders, members in good standing, and the gatekeeper.

The essence of a team is a shared commitment. The most common types of teams include cross-functional teams, virtual teams, and self-managed teams. Both groups and teams go through stages of development that include forming, storming, norming, performing, and adjourning. Good teams result from a match between the composition of the team, the design of the work, contextual factors, and process variables. Three managerial activities that can help managers lead employees to greater degrees of team participation are found in recruiting and selection, coaching, and reward systems.

Social loafing occurs when team members give less effort to a group than they would if working individually. Group size can affect the degree of employee effort in the group, as can the level of group cohesiveness. Overly cohesive groups, however, may be prone to problems such as groupthink, when group pressures for conformity become so intense that the group avoids unusual, minority, or unpopular views. Individual employees can take steps to become better team players, regardless of other circumstances.

Communication is the process of transmitting, receiving, and processing information. It takes place on an individual, interpersonal level and travels through organizational systems. Barriers to individual communication include individual differences, situational factors, and transmission problems. Both senders and receivers can seek to resolve these problems. Nonverbal communication includes kinesic cues, appearance, dress, artifacts, touch, space, paralanguage, time, and manners. Effective communicators are aware of the messages they send via these nonverbal signals.

An organization's formal communication system is composed of every channel that has been approved by management. Four common communication patterns found in organizations include the chain, wheel, circle, and all-channel forms. The most common types of messages transmitted via formal channels include job instructions, a job rationale, standardized information, team and group coordination information, questions and answers, decisions and plans, and ideological indoctrination. Information richness is the potential information-carrying capacity of a communication channel, ranging from lean to rich. The barriers that can inhibit formal communication include information overload, physical barriers, interpersonal barriers, and informal contradiction of a formal message. A management information system consists of the people and technologies used to collect and process organizational information that can help overcome the barriers to formal communication.

The grapevine, or informal organizational communication, exhibits three characteristics. First, an organization's leadership does not control it. Second, the information often is perceived as

accurate and believable, even more than a formal communication issued by top management. Third, it is largely used to serve the self-interests of the people within the grapevine stream. One important consideration is how information gets moving through the grapevine. Managers can work to make sure that informal information complements and supplements what has been sent through formal channels.

CASE STUDY

The Slacker

Margaret Kontras is at her wit's end. Two months ago, she was placed in charge of a task force created to oversee the opening of a second location for a high-end fashion retailer. The original store, Chic Central, had achieved a great deal of success in a freestanding location in a downtown trading district. Now, the store's manager and owner has decided to find a property for a second store, on the opposite side of the city. She places Margaret in charge of three activities. Her first task is to identify the best physical property. Second, she will be involved in hiring an architect and interior designer to create a retail experience that feels similar to that at the first location, yet is different enough so that it does not appear to be simply another store in a chain of stores. And third, Margaret will direct the purchases of inventory for the new location, whose grand opening is targeted to take place between Halloween and the first week in November.

The task force consists of three other individuals from different parts of the company. An accountant, a successful salesperson, and a human resource assistant manager make up the rest of the team. Each member has been chosen for a specific reason. The accountant will focus on financial aspects of the property purchase. The salesperson will be involved in helping to design the interior of the store and selecting inventory, and the human resource manager will contribute to each activity as needed.

One problem facing Margaret is that the salesperson, Kendrick, is less than thrilled to be assigned his task. Kendrick believes that he is losing money by not staying full-time on his sales station, because he will miss serving some of his favorite customers when they visit the original store. Consequently, Kendrick has been making a series of excuses to stay out of site visits when the team examines various properties. As the process of purchasing inventory moves forward, Kendrick sits lifeless in meetings without contributing ideas or commentary.

Unfortunately, Kendrick's attitude is beginning to rub off on the other team members. They grumble that finding the best location is "taking too long" and "wasting time." No one seems to want to engage in creating the store's look. It doesn't help that the three team members have not seemed to bond with each other in any way; instead, each of them goes his or her separate way.

Soon Margaret feels like she is doing all of the work and not getting any help. She worries that store management will blame her for the slow pace of the task assignment, which might result in the store not being ready in time for the lucrative shopping season from Thanksgiving to Christmas. She knows that unless she inspires some effort in the team, especially from Kendrick, the success of the second store might be in jeopardy before it even opens.

Discussion Questions

1. What stage of team development is taking place in this scenario?
2. How can Margaret manage these individuals to get them to cooperate and give greater effort to the task?
3. What type of communication should Margaret use to deal with Kendrick?
4. Should Margaret communicate with the store owner-manager at the primary location about the problems she is encountering? Why or why not?

Key Terms

adjourning The process that occurs when members prepare to disband the group.

communication The sequence of transmitting, receiving, and processing information.

formal communication system Messages that travel through organizationally approved channels.

formal group A group that an organization establishes to seek company goals and objectives.

forming The process that occurs when members get oriented to the group and start getting to know each other.

group A collection of two or more people interacting who share collective norms and goals and have a common identity.

group cohesiveness The degree of goal commitment, conformity, cooperation, and group control over members that exists.

groupthink A phenomenon that results when group pressures for conformity become so intense that the group avoids any unusual, minority, or unpopular views.

informal communication Messages that travel through social interactions among employees.

informal group A group that emerges without the endorsement of organizational leaders.

information richness The potential information-carrying capacity of a communication channel.

kinesic cues Messages communicated by nonlinguistic body language or movements.

management information system A group consisting of the people and technologies used to collect and process organizational information.

norming The stage that takes place after conflicts have been resolved.

norms Rules that govern behaviors in a group.

performing The stage that occurs when members focus on solving problems and completing their assigned tasks.

social loafing The behavior that occurs when team members give less effort to a group than they would if working individually.

storming The stage that takes place as individual personalities, roles, and conflicts emerge within the group.

team A small group of people, with complementary skills, who work together to achieve a common purpose and hold themselves mutually accountable for accomplishing group goals.

team building An effort that consists of all activities designed to improve the internal functioning of work groups.

Critical Thinking

Review Questions

1. Define the term *group*.
2. What two types of groups form in organizations?
3. Describe three types of formal groups that are present in business organizations.
4. What types of teams are present in today's organizations?
5. What are the stages of team development?
6. What is a norm, and what three types of norms are present in business organizations?
7. What four characteristics are parts of forming effective teams?
8. What is social loafing?
9. Define group cohesiveness.
10. Define communication, and name the two primary forms in business organizations.
11. What are the three categories of barriers to individual interpersonal communication?
12. What can the sender and receiver do to improve individual interpersonal communication?
13. What four patterns of formal communication are present in business organizations?
14. What types of information are passed via formal communication channels?
15. Define information richness.
16. What are the barriers to formal communication?
17. Describe a management information system.
18. Define grapevine, and explain how leaders can use such a channel effectively.

Analytical Exercises

1. Explain the role of a leader, opinion leaders, members in good standing, and a gatekeeper in these situations:
 - Group of employees forming a bowling team
 - Team of advertising agency employees assigned to create a television commercial
 - Work safety committee in a manufacturing company
 - City council subcommittee assigned to investigate a mayor's potential misconduct
2. Explain how the stages of team development would be different in a virtual team as opposed to an on-site, cross-functional team.
3. Explain how the four characteristics of effective teams would be related to the factors that increase or decrease group cohesiveness.
4. How would the three types of norms noted in Table 6.1 appear in the following situations?
 - Loading dock team at a large trucking firm
 - Team of scientists working on a new vaccination
 - Professional basketball team

5. A semantics problem occurs when a word or comment could be interpreted in different ways. When a leader tells a subordinate, "I need this project completed as soon as possible," what does the leader mean? Is the meaning potentially different from what the employee hears? List five additional examples of semantics and language problems that could occur at work. Share your answers with the class.
6. Explain the relationships between group norms, social loafing, and informal communication.
7. Explain how nonverbal cues might complicate the following situations:
 - Employee who believes she is being sexually harassed by a coworker
 - Employee who believes his performance appraisal results are unfair
 - Supervisor who must terminate a popular employee due to the individual's unethical actions
8. Explain whether a leader should design a chain, wheel, circle, or all-channel form of communication in each of these situations:
 - Virtual team looking for a new geographic location for a store in a foreign country
 - Project team bringing a new product to market in a pharmaceutical company
 - Work group in a manufacturing plant