

it's being taken care of," or "I'm sorry, but it can't be done (for such and such a reason)." However, without feedback your employees are likely to regard their concerns as "swallowed up by the system" and will be discouraged from communicating at all.

Problems Involving Employees

Employee View of Downward Communication

Employees will invariably see downward communication as occurring more freely and frequently than upward communication could possibly occur. Tradition, authority, and prestige are all on the side of the management hierarchy in the way they favor downward communication over upward contact. After all, you feel free to call on your employees at just about any time, just as your manager is likely to feel free to call on you at any time. However, rarely will nonsupervisory employees feel that same degree of freedom in their ability to call on their supervisors.

Employees' Perceived Lack of Control

Most of the mechanics of organizational communication favor the downward flow of communication, and management controls most of the means. Bulletin boards, public address systems, employee newspapers and other printed matter, and duplicating services are largely controlled by elements of management. The individual employee with something to communicate must usually do so either by writing it out or relating it orally to another person. Some things never get communicated upward because some employees are unwilling to communicate certain kinds of information. Some people simply will not relay a problem or concern to the supervisor because it has a personal dimension that they do not wish to reveal. Some may also hesitate to point out certain problems for fear of being blamed for causing them, and for like reason they will say nothing they might consider to be self-incriminating or self-deprecating in any way.

Negative View of Management

A final and sometimes insurmountable barrier to upward communication is found in emotion and prejudice on the part of some employees. To a limited number of nonsupervisory employees, management, even though it may be enlightened, humane, and people-centered, is to be regarded as exploitative and untrustworthy simply because it is management. Frequently this attitude extends so far as to regard the new supervisor moving up from the ranks as abandoning the good guys and joining the bad guys. Rarely will an employee harboring such a view of management discuss any serious concerns with the supervisor—unless the supervisor has conscientiously worked to earn the employees' trust and confidence.

YOUR ROLE IN ORGANIZATIONAL COMMUNICATION

Have you ever found yourself, perhaps in anger or frustration, voicing the opening quotation: "The trouble with this place is there's no communication?"

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If the truth could be determined, we would probably discover that most supervisors have said this (or something very much like it) more than just a few times. However, the next time you feel inclined to cry "no communication," you might do well to consider that much of the supervisor's role in organizational communication depends on you and what you do and say. Before dwelling on the shortcomings that "they" exhibit—"they" being the often-blamed but never specifically identified villains of "they won't let me do it" and "they didn't tell me," for example—it might prove more productive to work on your own communications practices. You cannot change someone else's habits and practices, but you can encourage them to change these for themselves and you can best do this by changing your own behavior.

Look at the simplified diagram of **Figure 29-1**. You, the supervisor, are in the middle. Your lines of communication run between you and other people in the organization. Your strictly formal lines of communication are those numbered 1, 2, 5, and 6; these depict the direct reporting relationships that exist between you and your employees and you and your immediate superior. Lines 3 and 4 suggest a large number of less rigid but still formal communicating relationships. These relationships are still formal because although you neither manage nor report to any of the people who work in or manage other functions and departments throughout the institution, you nevertheless require communication with many of them in the performance of your job.

First appreciate that communication along three of the six lines shown (those outgoing lines, numbered 1, 3, and 5) is completely in your hands. As the sender of a message, the originator of a communication, you have full control over all information leaving you. You control what is sent, why it is sent, how it is sent, to whom it is sent, and where it goes. And you can always send something. Even when a communication you wish to send is dependent on your first receiving something from another party, you can at least say "I don't know yet," "I'm still waiting," or "I'll call you as soon as I hear."

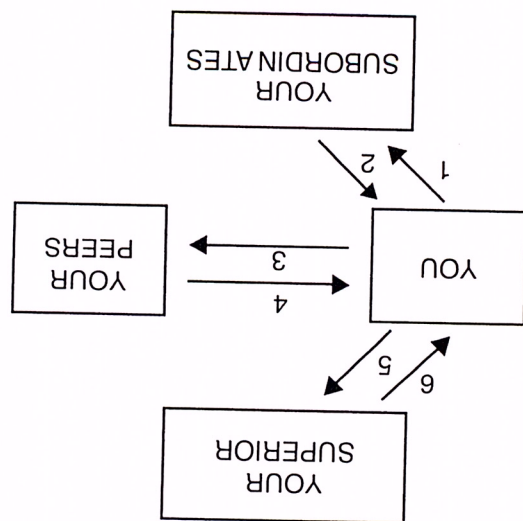


Figure 29-1 Your Communications Channels

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The point of this discussion is twofold: (1) your outgoing channels of communication are completely under your control, and (2) the best way to get information moving along your incoming lines of communication is to assure that the outgoing lines are open and operating.

Of your incoming lines of communication you have the greatest degree of control over number 2, information flowing from your employees. Some of this control is due to the authority of your position; these people report to you, so most of them expect to give you certain information at certain times.

An additional measure of control will stem from your degree of success in requesting and receiving feedback from your employees. This is where assignment completion targets and deadlines and periodic reports come into the picture, along with your effective use of follow-up. In short, you can manage in a way that assures you will receive a great deal of work-related communication simply because your style tells your employees you both need it and expect it. However, there remains a sometimes considerable amount of information you would like to know as a supervisor, such as individual complaints, claims of unfair treatment, and dissension between employees, that cannot be mandated by structure or approach. You will receive this added information only by earning the trust and confidence of your employees and by showing through your actions that you are willing to communicate openly, honestly, and in confidence.

Some of the most valuable feedback you can receive from employees concerns your continuing performance and especially any mistakes you make. If an employee will tell you, willingly, honestly, and constructively, that a decision of yours appears inappropriate or that you seem to be heading in an improper direction, you will have achieved a positive communicating relationship with that employee. Many employees will say nothing if they see "the boss" getting into trouble. But if you have the employees' trust and respect, if you have proven they can be critical of you without negative repercussions, they will speak up. One of the most valuable assets you can have as a supervisor consists of employees who will prevent you from "shooting yourself in the foot."

You have considerably less control over the information reaching you by way of line 4, the channel running from other organizational elements to you. You do not work for any of these people and they do not work for you. Because of your level or position you may possess some implied authority with some of these people, but you will have no authority at all with numerous others. Therefore, your communicating relationship with these people has to be based on cooperation. You must display the willingness to communicate and the ability to decide when you are ready to send something out; who else truly needs it, who should be aware of it, and to whom it should go as a matter of information or simple courtesy.

Again, the best way to get information moving in is first to see that it is freely moving out. Do so even if you have to shake off the old "50-50 ethic," the pressure suggesting that in our communication, as well as in other endeavors, it is only "fair" for each party to go halfway. Some people will respond to your conscientious efforts in kind; others, however, will respond inadequately or not at all. Nevertheless, you should be prepared consistently to go more than

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Getting Your

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Do Your Homework

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