



Kayak.com's chief technology officer Paul English placed a two-foot-tall elephant toy, Annabelle, in the conference room where it can't be ignored. "So often at work," he says, "people have issues that they can't resolve because they won't talk about it."

18

Communication and Collaboration

Listening is the key to understanding

CHAPTER QUICK START

A lot of what we accomplish in life and at work depends on our abilities to communicate well and collaborate with others. Recruiters prize job candidates with strong communication skills who can achieve positive impact through their writing and presentations, and in teamwork and interpersonal settings. The ability to communicate and collaborate also includes conflict and negotiation situations. How well we handle them often makes the difference between success and failure when multiple interests are at play.

Key Takeaways

- Describe the elements in the communication process.
- Identify ways to improve the effectiveness of communication.
- Discuss how conflict can be functional and managed successfully.
- Explain ways to negotiate successfully and avoid negotiation pitfalls.

what to look for inside >

MANAGEMENT IS REAL

analysis> MAKE DATA YOUR FRIEND

Value of Performance Reviews Gets Increasing Scrutiny

choices> THINK BEFORE YOU ACT

Tapping into the Science of Persuasion

ethics> KNOW RIGHT FROM WRONG

Blogging Is Easy, but Bloggers Should Beware

insight> LEARN ABOUT YOURSELF

Collaboration Begins with Communication and Networking

wisdom> LEARN FROM ROLE MODELS

Lane Bryant CEO Linda Heasley Gives Others Reasons to Work with Her

SKILLS MAKE YOU VALUABLE

- **EVALUATE Career Situations:**
What Would You Do?
- **REFLECT On the Self-Assessment:**
Conflict Management Strategies

- **CONTRIBUTE** *To the Class Exercise:*
Feedback Sensitivities
- **MANAGE** *A Critical Incident:*
Headphones on in the Office
- **COLLABORATE** *On the Team Activity:*
How Words Count
- **ANALYZE** *The Case Study:*
Twitter: Rewriting (or Killing) Communication

Whether you work at the top of an organization—building support for strategies and goals, or in teams at other levels—interacting with teammates and co-workers to support their efforts and your own, your career toolkit must include the abilities to achieve positive impact through communication and collaboration. They are foundations for **social capital**, the capacity to attract support and help from others in order to get things done. Whereas intellectual capital comes from what you know, social capital comes from the people you know and how well you relate to them. It's something all managers need, and it's all about communication, connections, and relationships. Pam Alexander, former CEO of Ogilvy Public Relations Worldwide, says: "Relationships are the most powerful form of media. Ideas will only get you so far these days. Count on personal relationships to carry you further."¹

Social capital is a capacity to get things done with the support and help of others.

The Communication Process

TAKEAWAY 1 What is the communication process?

LEARN MORE ABOUT | Effective communication • Persuasion and credibility in communication

Communication barriers • Cross-cultural communication

[Figure 18.1](#) describes **communication** as an interpersonal process of sending and receiving symbols with messages attached to them. This process can be understood as a series of questions: "Who?" (*sender*) "says what?" (*message*) "in what ways?" (*channel*) "to whom?" (*receiver*) "with what result?" (*meaning*). It is through this process that people build and use social capital, exchange and share information, lead and inspire followers, and influence one another's attitudes, behaviors, and understandings.

Communication is the process of sending and receiving symbols with meanings attached.

It is important to respect and understand the communication process as the glue that binds together the four functions of planning, organizing, leading, and controlling.² *Planning* is accomplished and plans are shared through the communication of information. *Organizing* identifies and structures communication links among people and positions. *Leading* uses communication to achieve positive influence over organization members and stakeholders. *Controlling* relies on communication to process information to measure performance results.

Effective Communication

Most of us probably think we're pretty good at communicating. However, this sense of confidence can cause a significant problem in the communication process: We take our abilities for granted and end up disappointed when things go wrong. Getting things to "go right" requires alertness to issues of "effectiveness" and "efficiency" in the ways we communicate. **Effective communication** occurs when the sender's message is fully understood

by the receiver. **Efficient communication** occurs at minimum cost in terms of resources expended. It's great when our communications are both effective and efficient. But, trade offs between the two are common.

In **effective communication** the intended meaning is fully understood by the receiver.

Efficient communication occurs at minimum cost.

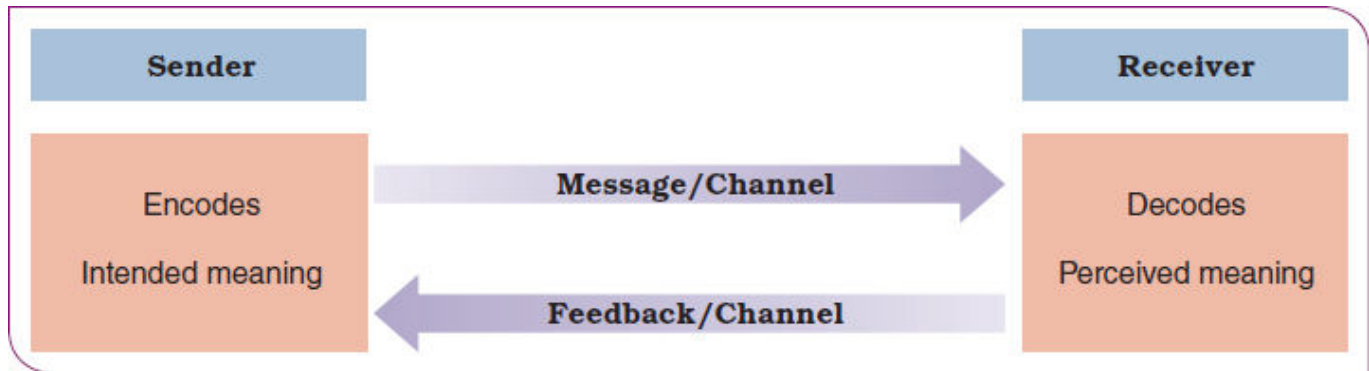


FIGURE 18.1 The interactive two-way process of interpersonal communication.

An efficient communication may not be effective. We are often too busy or too lazy to invest enough time to make sure that communication is effective. Instead, we shoot for efficiency. Picture your instructor taking the time to communicate individually with each student about this chapter. It would be virtually impossible and certainly very costly in terms of the instructor's time. This is why managers, co-workers, and even family members often communicate with others by leaving voice mail and sending texts and messages rather than visiting face-to-face. These choices are efficient but not always effective ways of communicating. Although an e-mail note sent to several people on a distribution list may save the sender's time, not all receivers might interpret the message in the same way.

By the same token, an effective communication may not be efficient. If a team leader visits each team member individually to explain new procedures, this may guarantee that everyone truly understands the change. But, it also requires a lot of the leader's time. And rightly or wrongly, saving time may be our top priority.

Persuasion and Credibility in Communication

Communication is not only about sharing information or being "heard." It's about the intent of one party to influence or motivate the other in a desired way. **Persuasive communication** results in a recipient agreeing with or supporting the message being presented.³ Managers, for example, get things done by drawing on social capital in their relationships

with peers, teammates, co-workers, and bosses. Their success often comes about more through convincing than by order giving. Scholar and consultant Jay Conger says that without credibility there is little chance that persuasion can be successful.⁴ He describes **credible communication** as that which is based on trust, respect, and integrity in the eyes of others.

Persuasive communication presents a message in a manner that causes the other person to support it.

Credible communication earns trust, respect, and integrity in the eyes of others.

choices> THINK BEFORE YOU ACT

> *Researchers found that tip giving increased when servers gave customers a piece of candy when presenting the bill.*

Tapping into the Science of Persuasion



© Rana Faure/Fancy/Corbis

Scene 1. Hoteliers want to wash fewer towels. So how do they get their customers to reuse more of them? The science of persuading suggests that it's best to identify the request with a social norm. Researchers found that guests reused 33% more towels when left a message card that said "75% of customers who stay in this room reuse their towels."

Lesson: Want to persuade? Identify with the social norm.

Scene 2. Restaurant servers want to maximize tips. How can they get more customers to leave bigger tips? The science of persuading suggests that it's best to create a sense of reciprocity in the server–customer relationship. Researchers found that tip giving increased when servers gave customers a piece of candy when presenting the bill.

Lesson: Want to persuade? Create a sense of reciprocity.

YOUR TAKE?

Can these lessons be turned into advice for leaders? Leadership is complicated in any setting. But, it ultimately requires success at influencing other people. Do a self-check of your success in leadership situations: To what extent is “persuasion” part of your leadership skill portfolio? How about the leaders you work with: Do they pass or fail as masters of the science of persuasion? If persuasion is so important, should we spend more time learning and practicing how to do it really well?

Credibility is gained through expertise, when you are knowledgeable about the issue in question or have a successful track record in dealing with similar issues in the past. In a hiring situation where you are trying to persuade team members to select candidate A rather than B, for example, you must be able to defend your reasons for this choice. And, it will always be better if your past recommendations turned out to be good for the team.

Credibility is also gained through relationships, when you work well and get along with the people to be persuaded. In a hiring situation where you want to persuade your boss to provide a special bonus package to attract top job candidates, for example, having a good relationship with your boss can add credibility to your request. This is social capital again: It is always easier to get someone to do what you want if that person likes you.

Communication Barriers

Scene: A Japanese executive used an interpreter when meeting with representatives of the firm’s American joint venture partner. *Result:* About 20% of his intended meaning was lost in the exchange between himself and the interpreter, while another 20% was lost between the interpreter and the Americans.⁵

Noise, as shown in [Figure 18.2](#), is anything that interferes with the effectiveness of the communication process. And, this isn’t just a cross-cultural issue. Do you recognize its potential in everyday conversations, such as the nearby text messages exchanged between a high-tech millennial and her low-tech baby boomer manager? The differences show a clash of generational cultures and the challenges of communicating across these boundaries. Common sources of noise include information filtering, poor choice of channels, poor written or oral expression, failure to recognize nonverbal signals, and physical distractions.

Noise is anything that interferes with the effectiveness of communication.

Millennial to Baby Boomer

- sry abt mtg b rdy nxt 1

Baby Boomer to Millennial

- Missed you at important meeting. Don’t forget next one. Stop by to discuss.

Information Filtering

“Criticize my boss? I don’t have the right to.” “I’d get fired.” “It’s her company, not mine.” These comments display tendencies toward **information filtering**—the intentional distortion of information to make it appear favorable to the recipient. Management author and consultant Tom Peters calls it “Management Enemy Number 1.” He even goes so far as to say that “once you become a boss you will never hear the unadulterated truth again.”⁶

Information filtering is the intentional distortion of information to make it appear more favorable to the recipient.

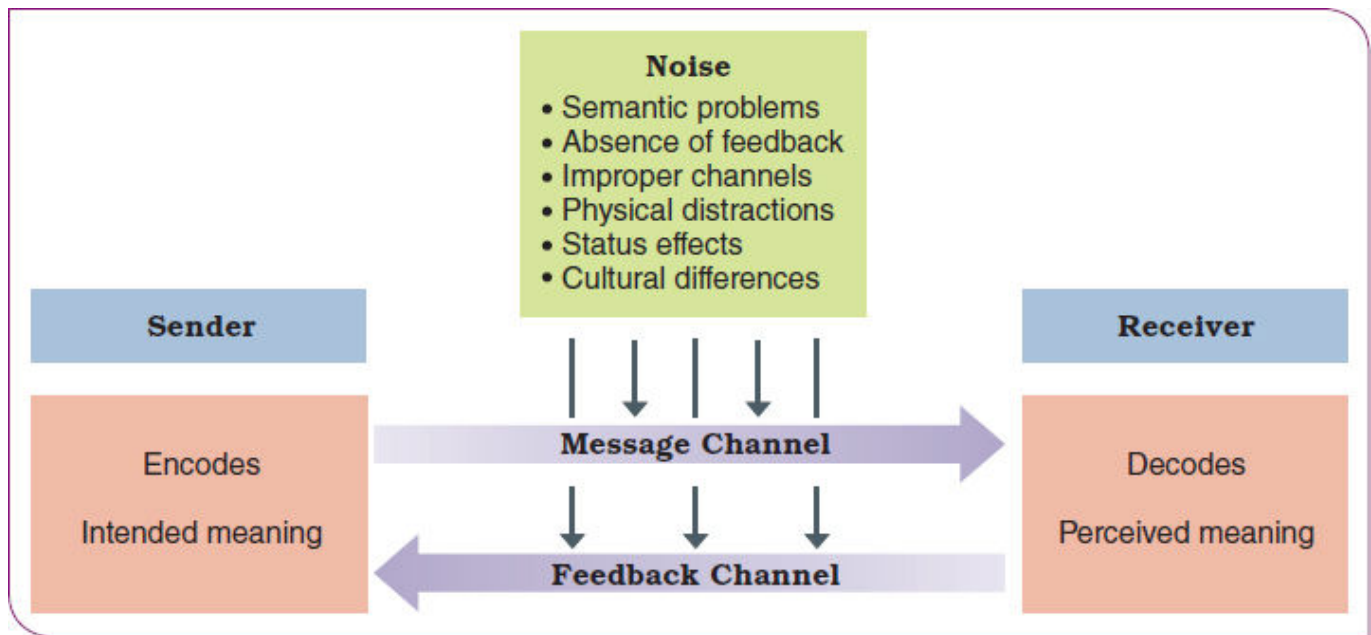


FIGURE 18.2 Downsides of noise, shown as anything that interferes with the effectiveness of the communication process.

The problem with information filtering is that someone tells the boss only what they think he or she wants to hear. Whether the reason is career protection, fear of retribution for bringing bad news, unwillingness to identify personal mistakes, or just a general desire to please, the end result is the same. The higher level gets biased and inaccurate information from below and ends up making bad decisions. It's a continuing challenge for managers to fight this problem, and the larger the organization, the bigger the problem seems to get. Leadership consultant Deborah J. Cornwall says: "There's a tendency for people in large, hierarchical organizations to tell the boss what he wants to hear." During Congressional hearings on the General Motors ignition switch recall scandal, CEO Mary Barra confirms this view in her comment: "I cannot tell you why it took years for the safety defect to be announced in that program." Former Ford global vice president Martin Zimmerman says: "You get blindsided when things deteriorate. You want to know about mistakes."⁷

Poor Choice of Channels

A **communication channel** is the pathway or medium through which a message is conveyed from sender to receiver. Good communicators choose the right channel or combination of channels to accomplish their intended purpose.⁸

A **communication channel** is the pathway through which a message moves from sender to receiver.

Written channels—paper or electronic—are most acceptable for simple messages that are easy to convey, and for those that require quick and extensive dissemination to a wide audience. They also are useful when it is important to document information or directives. But, it's important to remember that these messages are largely impersonal and one-way interactions with only limited opportunity for feedback from recipients. *Spoken channels*—face-to-face or electronic—work best for complex and difficult messages and where immediate feedback to the sender is valuable. They are more personal and more likely to be perceived by the receiver as supportive or inspirational.



Poor Written or Oral Expression

Communication will only be effective when the sender expresses the message in a way that is clearly understood by the receiver. Words must be well chosen and used properly, something we all too often fail to do. Consider the following "bafflegab" found among some executive communications.⁹

Issues&Trends

Boss Goes Underground to Open Communication Channels



Courtesy Clugston Group Limited

CEO Stephen Martin “went underground” at a firm in England for two weeks. He posed with an assumed name as an office worker and kept his ears and eyes open wide while going about his daily work. After the experience, Martin said: “They (workers) said things to me that they never would have told their manager” ... “Our key messages were just not getting through to people” ... “We were asking the impossible of some of them.” But when he shared these concerns with the firm’s managers, the response was: “They never told us that!”

A business report said: “Consumer elements are continuing to stress the fundamental necessity of a stabilization of the price structure at a lower level than exists at the present time.”

Translation: Consumers keep saying that prices must go down and stay down.

A manager said: “Substantial economies were affected in this division by increasing the time interval between distributions of data-eliciting forms to business entities.”

Translation: The division saved money by sending out fewer questionnaires.

A university president said: “We have strived to be as transparent as possible about the strategic alliance plans within the confines of our ... closed negotiations.”

Translation: The negotiations were confidential.

Failure to Recognize Nonverbal Signals

Nonverbal communication takes place through gestures, facial expressions, body posture, eye contact, and the use of interpersonal space. Research shows that up to 55% of a message’s impact may come through nonverbal communication.¹⁰ A lack of gestures and other nonverbal signals is one of the weaknesses of voice mail, texts, and other electronic communications. It’s hard for things like clickable emoticons to make up for their absence.

Nonverbal communication takes place through gestures and body language.

Think of how nonverbal signals play out in your own communications.¹¹ Sometimes our body language “talks” even as we maintain silence. And when we do speak, our body may “say” different things than our words actually convey. This is called a **mixed message**—where words communicate one message while actions and body language communicate something else. Watch how people behave in a meeting. A person who feels under attack may move back in a chair or lean away from the presumed antagonist, even while expressing verbal agreement. All of this may be done quite unconsciously, but the mixed message will be picked up by those tuned in to nonverbal signals.

A **mixed message** results when words communicate one message while actions, body language, or appearance communicate something else.

Overloads and Distractions

Overloads and distractions caused by the availability and abundance of electronic communications and social media can make it hard to communicate well. McKinsey reports that professionals are spending 28% of their time dealing with e-mail, while the Radicati Group reports that the average business person deals with 108 e-mails per day.¹² Scholar Gloria Mark’s research found that people check their e-mail inboxes as many as 74 times per day, causing her to say “It’s really out of control.”¹³ Couple this information with everyday personal experience—e-mails, messages, and chats pretty much follow us wherever we go 24/7. They coexist simultaneously on our computer screens and smart devices, and they compete with one another, social media, and video streams for our attention. Our effectiveness in attending to this ever-present and shifting mix of electronic communications is often compromised by the size and stress of overwhelming demands.

Even a scheduled meeting may be compromised by overloads and distractions in the form of telephone interruptions, texts, e-mails, drop-in visitors, and lack of privacy. Consider the following exchange between George and his manager.¹⁴

Okay, George, let's hear your problem [phone rings, manager answers it and promises caller to deliver a report "just as soon as I can get it done"]. Uh, now, where were we—oh, you're having a problem with your technician. She's ... [manager's assistant brings in some papers that need his immediate signature] ... you say she's overstressed lately, wants to leave. I tell you what, George, why don't you [phone beeps a reminder, boss looks and realizes he has a lunch meeting] ... uh, take a stab at handling it yourself. I've got to go now [starts texting].

It's obvious that this manager was not effective in communicating with George, even if he really wanted to. But, errors like these can be easily avoided by anyone sincerely interested in communicating face-to-face with someone. At a minimum, adequate time should be set aside and arrangements made for privacy. The likelihood of interruptions such as the

telephone, drop-in visitors, and electronic messages should be anticipated and then avoided by good planning and the discipline to stay focused on the visitor rather than on devices.

Issues&Trends

Things Bad Managers and Lousy Team Leaders Say



Fuse/Getty Images

Talk about poor communication skills. How would you like to be on the receiving end of messages reported in a *Forbes* magazine list of things only bad managers say? The writer hopes that reading them will “remind you how not to communicate with your team and to cheer you on if you are living under a less-than-sensational boss right now.” You know you’ve got—or are—a lousy boss when the conversation includes: “It’s work, it’s not supposed to be fun” ... “You are not my only employee” ... “If you don’t want the job I’ll find someone that does” ... “I don’t care what your priorities are, this is your new priority” ... “This is the way we’ve always done it” ... “I don’t pay you to think.”

Cross-Cultural Communication

After taking over as the CEO of the Dutch publisher Wolters Kluwer, Nancy McKinstry initiated major changes in strategy and operations—cutting staff, restructuring divisions, and investing in new business areas. She was the first American to head the firm, and she described herself as “aggressive” when first meeting with her management team. After learning her use of that word wasn’t well received by Europeans, she switched to “decisive.” McKinstry says: “I was coming across as too harsh, too much of a results-driven American to the people I needed to get on board.”¹⁵

Communicating across cultures requires lots of sensitivity, awareness, and the ability to quickly learn local rights and wrongs. The most difficult situation is when you don’t speak the local language, or when one or both of the people trying to communicate are weak in a shared second language. Advertising messages are notorious for getting lost in translation. A Pepsi ad in Taiwan that was intended to say “The Pepsi Generation” came out as “Pepsi will bring your ancestors back from the dead.” A KFC ad in China that was intended to say “finger lickin’ good” came out as “eat your fingers off.”¹⁶

Ethnocentrism is a major enemy of effective cross-cultural communication. This is the tendency to consider one's culture superior to other cultures. It hurts communication in at least three major ways. First, it may lead to poor listening. Second, it may cause someone to address or speak with others in ways that alienate them. Third, it may lead to the use of inappropriate stereotypes.¹⁷

Ethnocentrism is the tendency to consider one's culture superior to any and all others.

One of the ways ethnocentrism shows up is as a failure to respect cultural differences in nonverbal communication.¹⁸ The American "thumbs-up" sign is an insult in Ghana and Australia; signaling "OK" with thumb and forefinger circled together is not okay in parts of Europe. Waving "hello" with an open palm is an insult in West Africa, suggesting the other person has five fathers.¹⁹

Learning Check 1

TAKEAWAYQUESTION 1 What is the communication process?

BE SURE YOU CAN • describe the communication process and identify its key components • differentiate between effective and efficient communication • explain the role of credibility in persuasive communication • list the common sources of noise that limit effective communication • explain how mixed messages interfere with communication • explain how ethnocentrism affects cross-cultural communication

Improving Collaboration through Communication

TAKEAWAY 2 How can we improve collaboration through communication?

LEARN MORE ABOUT | Transparency and openness • Use of electronic media • Active listening
Constructive feedback • Space design

Effective communication is essential as people work together in teams and organizations. The better the communication, the more likely it is that collaboration will be successful. Pathways toward better communication are found in such things as attention to transparency and openness, good use of electronic media, active listening practices, focusing on constructive feedback, and appropriate space design.

Transparency and Openness

At HCL Industries, a large technology outsourcing firm, former CEO and currently Senior Advisor to HCL Vineet Nayar believes that one of his most important tasks as CEO was to create transparency so that a “culture of trust” exists within the firm. Transparency at HCL means that the firm’s financial information is fully posted on the internal Web. “We put all the dirty linen on the table,” Nayar says. Transparency also means that the results of 360-degree feedback reviews for HCL’s 3,800 managers get posted as well, including Nayar’s

own reviews. When managers present plans to the top management team, Nayar insists that they also get posted so that everyone can read them and offer comments. His intent was to stimulate what he calls a company-wide process of “massive collaborative learning.” This ensures that by the time a plan gets approved, it’s most likely to be a good one.²⁰

wisdom> LEARN FROM ROLE MODELS

> “I like to know the bad news as soon as you know it—I promise no recriminations.”

Lane Bryant CEO Linda Heasley Gives Others Reasons to Work with Her



Will Ragozzino/BFA/SIPA/Newscom

Would you like to work for a boss who encourages you to keep your eyes open for other job opportunities? That’s the message Linda Heasley, current CEO of Lane Bryant, communicated to members of her former team at the Limited. That message contributed to her executive success. About employees, she says it’s her job to “re-recruit them every day and give them a reason to choose to work for us and for me as opposed to anyone else.” This is part of a leadership philosophy based on the belief that “it’s not about me ... it’s very much about the team.”

Newcomers to Heasley’s team are advised to follow a 90-day rule when it comes to communication. Based on her experience living in Thailand as a high school exchange student, she believes in taking the first 90 days to “watch and listen,” trying “not to talk at meetings,” and working to build relationships. And when it comes to performance, she also says: “I like to know the bad news as soon as you know it—I promise no recriminations—but I will expect to know what we could’ve avoided so it doesn’t happen again.”

When asked what she looks for in new hires, Heasley highlights things like passion, curiosity, energy, willingness to take risks, and a sense of humor. During interviews she uses proven questions to try to draw out job candidates and discover their capabilities. She might ask “What books have you read lately?” or “Can you describe a challenging situation you’ve been in and where you took a controversial position?”

FIND THE INSPIRATION

Linda Heasley seems very comfortable with herself and her role as CEO of this major retailer. Can you see where communication is one of her strengths? Would you respond well to a leader like this? In what respects might Heasley become a role model for making communication skills part of your own leadership approach?

Communication transparency involves being honest in sharing accurate and complete information about the organization and workplace affairs. A lack of communication transparency is evident when managers try to hide information and restrict access to it by organizational members. High communication transparency, such as that just illustrated in the HCL case, is evident when managers openly share information throughout an organization.

Communication transparency involves openly sharing honest and complete information about the organization and workplace affairs.

The term **open book management** describes a form of communication transparency where employees are provided with essential financial information about their companies. At Bailard, Inc., a private investment firm, this openness extends to salaries. If you want to know what others are making at the firm, all you need to do is ask the chief financial officer. The firm’s co-founder and CEO, Thomas Bailard, believes open book management is a good way to defeat office politics. “As a manager,” he says, “if you know that your compensation decisions are essentially going to be public, you have to have pretty strong conviction about any decision you make.”²¹

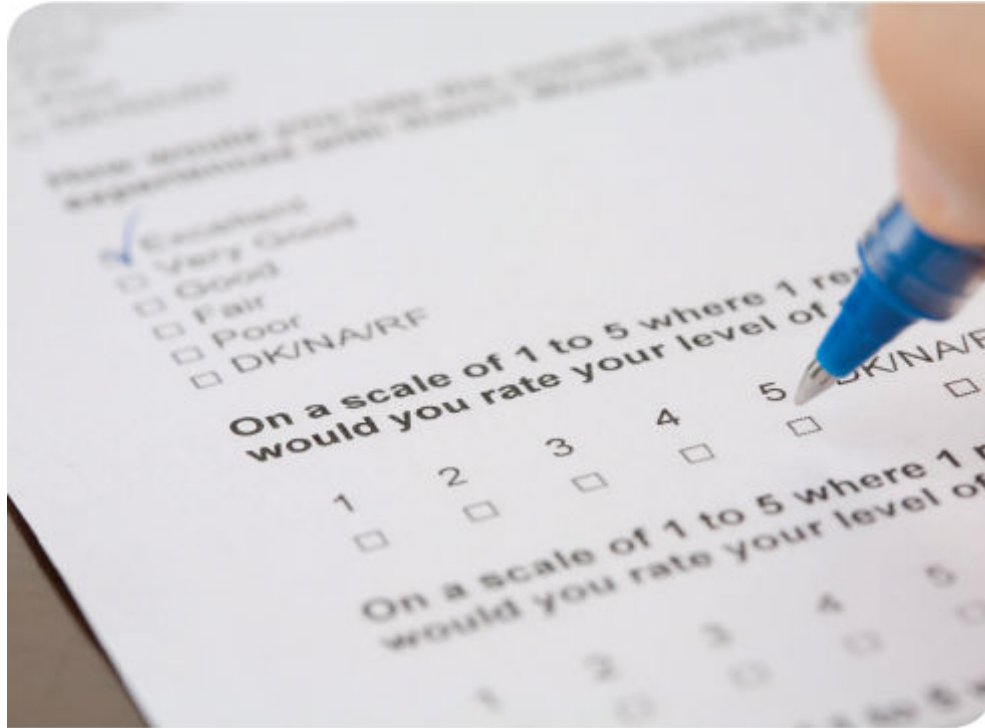
Open book management is where managers provide employees with essential financial information about their companies.

As the prior examples suggest, the benefits of communication transparency start with better decision making. When people are well informed, they can be expected to make good decisions that serve the best interests of the organization. But, the benefits of transparency also extend into the realm of motivation and engagement. When people are trusted with information, they also can be expected to feel more loyal and show more engagement as organizational members.

analysis> MAKE DATA YOUR FRIEND

> Only 3% of HR executives give “A” grades to their firms’ performance measurement systems.

Value of Performance Reviews Gets Increasing Scrutiny



enis izgi/iStockphoto

Surveys show people aren’t always pleased with the way managers in their organizations do performance reviews. Some are so concerned that they suggest dropping them altogether. Check these survey findings:

- Only 30% of HR executives believed that employees trust their employer’s performance measurement system.
- 60% of HR executives give their performance management systems “C” grades or worse.
- Top concerns of HR executives are that managers aren’t willing to face employees and give constructive feedback, and employees don’t have a clear understanding of what rates as good and bad performance.
- 1% of firms are completely doing away with performance reviews and shifting to regular one-on-one meetings where performance is discussed.

YOUR THOUGHTS?

Performance review is often a hot topic. The buzzwords are “merit pay” and “performance accountability.” But is it really possible to have a performance measurement system that is respected by managers and workers alike? Do the data reported here fit with your own experiences? What are their implications for management practice? Will we soon see a dramatic increase in the number of employers who shift away from formal annual reviews and replace them with something less formal and more timely?

Use of Electronic Media

Are you part of the Twitter community, post to Facebook, a frequent messenger on WhatsApp or Line, or generally a heavy user of your smart mobile devices? Technology hasn't just changed how we communicate. It has created a social media revolution—one that can be a performance asset or detriment in the world of work.²²

To begin, we may be getting so familiar with writing online shorthand that we use it in the wrong places. Sending a message like “Thnx for the IView! I Wd Lv to Wrk 4 U!! ;)” isn't the follow-up most employers like to receive from job candidates. When Tory Johnson, founder and CEO of Women for Hire, Inc., received a thank-you note by e-mail from an intern candidate, it included “hiya,” “thanx,” three exclamation points, and two emoticons. She says: “That e-mail just ruined it for me.”²³ Textspeak and emoticons may be the norm in social networks, but their use can be inappropriate in work settings.

Privacy also is a concern in any form of electronic communication.²⁴ When Facebook's CEO, Mark Zuckerberg, says privacy is “no longer a social norm,” it's time to take the issue seriously. An American Management Association survey of 304 U.S. companies found that 66% monitor Internet connections; 43% store and review computer files and monitor e-mail; 45% monitor telephone time and numbers dialed; and 30% have fired employees for misuse of the Internet.²⁵ When it comes to Web browsing and using social media at work, the best advice comes down to this: Find out the employer's policy and follow it. Don't ever assume that you have electronic privacy; chances are the employer is checking or can easily check on you.²⁶

The electronic grapevine that passes messages and information among members of social networks is now a fact of life. Electronic messages—both accurate and inaccurate—fly with great speed around our world. The YouTube grapevine stung Domino's Pizza executives when a posted video showed two employees doing nasty things to sandwiches. It was soon viewed over a million times. By the time the video was pulled (by one of its authors who apologized for “faking”), Domino's faced a crisis in customer confidence. The CEO finally created a Twitter account and posted a YouTube video message to present the company's own view of the story.²⁷

Guidelines for Active Listening

1. *Listen for message content:* Try to hear exactly what content is being conveyed in the message.
2. *Listen for feelings:* Try to identify how the source feels about the content in the message.
3. *Respond to feelings:* Let the source know that her or his feelings are being recognized.
4. *Note all cues:* Be sensitive to nonverbal and verbal messages; be alert for mixed messages.
5. *Paraphrase and restate:* State back to the source what you think you are hearing.

Active Listening

Whether trying to communicate electronically or face to face, managers must be very good at listening. When people “talk,” they are trying to communicate something. That “something” may or may not be what they are actually saying.

Active listening is the process of taking action to help someone say exactly what he or she really means or wants to communicate.²⁸ It involves being sincere and trying to find out the full meaning of what is being expressed. It also involves being disciplined in controlling emotions and withholding premature evaluations or interpretations. Different responses to the following two questions contrast how a “passive” listener and an “active” listener might act in real workplace conversations.²⁹

Active listening helps the source of a message say what he or she really means.

Question 1: “Don’t you think employees should be promoted on the basis of seniority?”

Passive listener’s response: “No, I don’t!” *Active listener’s response:* “It seems to you that they should, I take it?”

Question 2: “What does the supervisor expect us to do about these out-of-date computers?”

Passive listener’s response: “Do the best you can, I guess.” *Active listener’s response:* “You’re pretty frustrated with those machines, aren’t you?”

Constructive Feedback

The process of telling other people how you feel about something they did or said, or about the situation in general, is called **feedback**. It occurs in the normal give-and-take of working relationships, and in more formal performance review sessions.

Feedback is the process of telling someone else how you feel about something that person did or said.

The art of giving feedback is an indispensable skill, particularly for managers who must regularly give feedback to other people. When poorly done, feedback can be threatening to the recipient and cause resentment. Properly handled feedback—even performance criticism—can be listened to, accepted, and used to good advantage by the receiver.³⁰ Consider someone who comes late to meetings. Feedback from the meeting chair might be *evaluative*—“You are unreliable and always late for everything.” It might be *interpretive*—“You’re coming late to meetings; you might be spreading yourself too thin and have trouble meeting your obligations.” It might also be *descriptive*—“You were 30 minutes late for today’s meeting and missed a lot of the context for our discussion.”³¹

Feedback is most useful and constructive, rather than harmful, when it offers real benefits to the receiver and doesn’t just satisfy some personal need of the sender. A supervisor who berates a computer programmer for errors, for example, may actually be angry about failing to give clear instructions in the first place. Some thoughts on becoming a better receiver of critical feedback are shown in the small box.³² Advice on becoming a better giver of constructive feedback includes the following tips.³³

- Give feedback directly and with real feeling, based on trust between you and the receiver.
- Make sure that feedback is specific rather than general; use good, clear, and preferably recent examples to make your points.
- Give feedback at a time when the receiver seems most willing or able to accept it.
- Make sure the feedback is valid; limit it to issues the receiver can be expected to address.
- Give feedback in small doses; never give more than the receiver can handle at any particular time.

Don'ts and Do's for Handling Criticism

Don't get mad or cry.

Do say: “Let me give this some thought and we can talk later.”

Don't be defensive or deny things.

Do say: “I’m surprised. Can you give me some examples?”

Don't blame others.

Do say: “That wasn’t my impression. How did you come to see it that way?”

Space Design

Proxemics is the study of how we use space.³⁴ And, space counts in communication. The distance between people conveys varying intentions in terms of intimacy, openness, and status in interpersonal communications. Even the physical layout of an office or room is a form of nonverbal communication. Think about it. Offices with chairs available for side-by-side seating convey different messages than offices where the manager's chair sits behind the desk and those for visitors sit facing it in front.

Proxemics involves the use of space in communication.

Organizations today are being run with the premise that the better people communicate with one another, the better the organization will perform. We live in an increasingly connected world, and the same levels of connectedness are sought in the workplace. Google, for example, thrives and depends on high levels of innovation. So, the company's new headquarters is designed to make it easy for employees to have casual, not just formal, communications. "We want it to be easy [for] Googlers to bump into one another," says a spokeswoman.³⁵

Part of the push toward greater connectedness and more casual conversations is found in what might be called the demise of the office cubicle. It's been popular for quite awhile to design office spaces with small cubicles for individual workers and larger meeting rooms for meetings. The new trend is toward smaller teams, less formal meetings, and more frequent casual interaction. Architects and office supply firms are responding with designs that eliminate or open up cubicles by giving them shorter walls or no walls at all. They are also creating

PRINTED BY: jromero0950@email.phoenix.edu. Printing is for personal, private use only. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted without publisher's prior permission. Violators will be prosecuted.