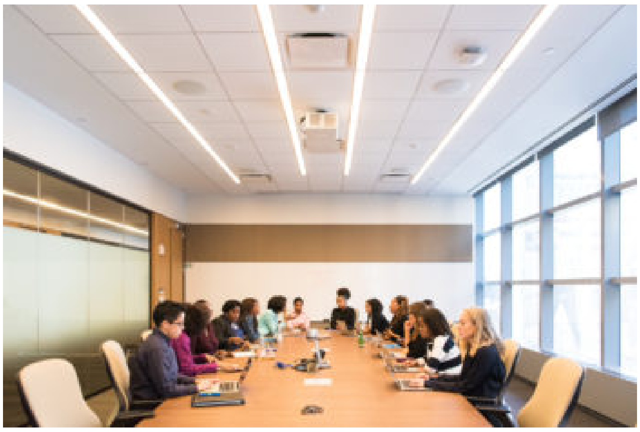
In this section, we'll look more closely at the patterns of communication in business—who sends the messages, who receives them, and the different types of messages businesses typically use.

Communication Channels

In communications, a channel is the means of passing information from a sender to a recipient. Determining the most appropriate channel, or medium, is critical to the effectiveness of communication. Channels include oral means such as telephone calls and presentations, and written modes such as reports, memos, and email.



Communication channels differ along a scale from rich to lean. Think about how you would select a steak—some have more fat than others; they are **rich** and full of flavor and body. If, however, you are on a diet and just want the meat, you will select a **lean** steak. Communication channels are the similar: rich channels are more interactive, provide opportunities for two-way communication, and allow both the sender and receiver to read the nonverbal messages. The leanest channels, on the other hand, trim the "fat" and present information without allowing for immediate interaction, and they often convey "just the facts." The main channels of communication are grouped below from richest to leanest:

- Richest channels: face-to-face meeting; in-person oral presentation
- Rich channels: online meeting; video conference
- Lean channels: teleconference; phone call; voice message; video (e.g., Facetime)
- Leanest channels: blog; report; brochure; newsletter; flier; email; phone text; social media posts (e.g., Twitter, Facebook)

Oral communications tend to be richer channels because information can be conveyed through speech as well as nonverbally through tone of voice and body language. Oral forms of communication can range from a casual conversation with a colleague to a formal presentation in front of many employees. Richer channels are well suited to complex (or potentially unsettling) information, since they can provide opportunities to clarify meaning, reiterate information, and display emotions.

While written communication does not have the advantage of immediacy and interaction, it can be the most effective means of conveying large amounts of information. Written communication is an effective channel when context, supporting data, and detailed explanations are necessary to inform or persuade others. One drawback to written communications is that they can be misunderstood or misinterpreted by an audience that doesn’t have subsequent opportunities to ask clarifying questions or otherwise respond.

So, we have written and oral channels, channels that range from rich to lean, and then, within those, multiple channels from which the sender can choose. How do you decide the best channel for your message? When deciding which communication channel to use, the following are some of the important factors to consider:

- the audience and their reaction to the message;
- the length of time it will take to convey the information;
- the complexity of the message;
- the need for a permanent record of the communication;
- the degree to which the information is confidential; and
- the cost of the communication.

If you choose the wrong channel—that is, if the channel is not effective for the type of message and meaning you want to create—you are likely to generate misunderstanding and possibly end up making matters worse. Using the wrong channels can impede communication and can even create mistrust. For example, a manager wants to compliment an employee for his work on a recent project. She can use different approaches and channels to do this. She could send the an employee a text: “Hey, nice work on the project!” Or she could send him an email containing the same message. She could also stop by his desk and personally compliment him. She could also praise him in front of the whole department during a meeting. In each case the message is the same, but the different channels alter the way the message is perceived. If the employee spent months working on the project, getting a “Hey, nice work on the project!” text message might seem like thin praise—insulting even. If the employee is shy, being singled out for praise during a departmental meeting might be embarrassing. A face-to-face compliment during a private meeting might be received better. As you can see, getting the channel right is just as important as sending the right message.

Communication Flows

Communication within a business can involve different types of employees and different functional parts of an organization. These patterns of communication are called **flows**, and they are commonly classified according to the direction of interaction: downward, upward, horizontal, diagonal, external. As you learn about each of these, we will discuss how these flows function at Little Joe's Auto.

Downward Communication

When leaders and managers share information with lower-level employees, it's called **downward,** or **top-down communication**. In other words, communication from superiors to subordinates in a chain of command is a downward communication. This communication flow is used by the managers to transmit work-related information to the employees at lower levels. Ensuring effective downward communication isn't always easy. Differences in experience, knowledge, levels of authority, and status make it possible that the sender and recipient do not share the same assumptions or understanding of context, which can result in messages being misunderstood or misinterpreted. Creating clearly worded, unambiguous communications and maintaining a respectful tone can facilitate effective downward communication.

LITTLE JOE'S AUTO: DOWNWARD COMMUNICATION

Little Joe holds a meeting every morning with his entire sales staff. In this meeting he gives them information on new cars on the lot, current interest rates available to customers, and how close they are to meeting the

company's monthly sales goals. The most important information shared is a "hot sheet" that lists the cars that need to be sold ASAP because they have been on the lot for more than forty-five days. Every car sold from the hot sheet earns the salesperson a $500 bonus, adding more than a little motivation to the mix.

As Little Joe goes through his morning briefing, the sales staff listen, take notes, and sometimes ask a few clarifying questions, but clearly the purpose of this daily pow-wow is for Little Joe to convey the information his staff need to perform their jobs and meet the expectations of management.

Upward Communication

Upward communication is the transmission of information from lower levels of an organization to higher ones; the most common situation is employees communicating with managers. Managers who encourage upward communication foster cooperation, gain support, and reduce frustration among their employees. The content of such communication can include requests, estimations, proposals, complaints, appeals, reports, and any other information directed from subordinates to superiors. Upward communication is often made in response to downward communication; for instance, when employees answer a question from their manager. In this respect, upward communication is a good measure of whether a company's downward communication is effective.

The availability of communication channels affects employees' overall satisfaction with upward communication. For example, an open-door policy sends the signal to employees that the manager welcomes impromptu conversations and other communication. This is likely to make employees feel satisfied with their level of access to channels of upward communication and less apprehensive about communicating with their superiors. For management, upward communication is an important source of information that can inform business decisions. It helps to alert management of new developments, levels of performance, and other issues that may require their attention.

LITTLE JOE'S AUTO: UPWARD COMMUNICATION

One afternoon, Frances knocks at Little Joe's office door, which is always open. Frances wants Little Joe to know that he has a couple interested in one of the new cars on the hot sheet, a 2015 Sonata, but the car is out of their price range by just a hair. Frances knows the couple from his church and really wants to help them get reliable transportation, but he also knows he needs to get the deal past the finance manager. Frances wants to know if it's possible for him to cut the price to his customers and give up his $500 bonus for selling the car. Little Joe agrees, since it really makes no difference who gets the $500—Frances or the customer.

Horizontal Communication

Horizontal communication, also called lateral communication, involves the flow of messages between individuals and groups on the same level of an organization, as opposed to up or down. Sharing information, solving problems, and collaborating horizontally is often more timely, direct, and efficient than up or down communication, since it occurs directly between people working in the same environment. Communication within a team is an example of horizontal communication; members coordinate tasks, work together, and resolve conflicts. Horizontal communication occurs formally in meetings, presentations, and formal electronic communication, and informally in other, more casual exchanges within the office.

When there are differences in style, personality, or roles among coworkers, horizontal communication may not run smoothly. According to Professor Michael Papa, horizontal communication problems can occur because of territoriality, rivalry, specialization, and simple lack of motivation. Territoriality occurs when members of an organization regard other people's involvement in their area as inappropriate or unw