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Introduction

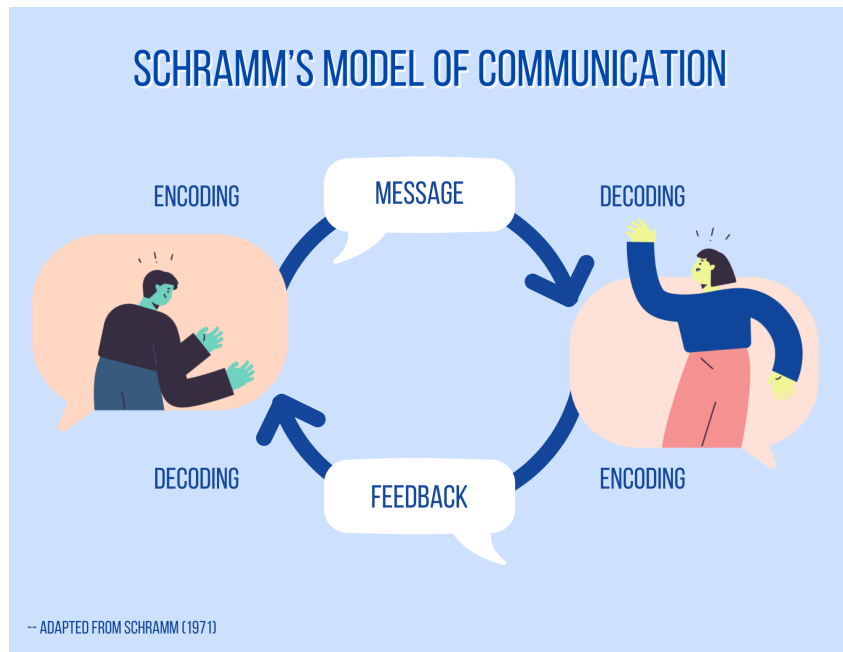
Most of us have witnessed or gone through communication failures. Although communication appears to be simple, we frequently find ourselves in situations where we could have improved our communication in hindsight.

According to Wilber Schramm (1971), every communication consists of a chain of events between the:

- Sources who send messages.
- Destinations who receive the messages and provide feedback to the sources.

If each link is properly connected, the result is effective communication between the two parties.

Understanding the different links in a communication chain can help you improve your internal communications. Specifically, you can use this [infographic](#) to strengthen the links that form your communication chains.



1. The source encodes a message for a destination

Sources encode and send a message that accurately represents their meaning. The message:

- Includes all key components or details.
- Contains accurate information.
- Uses terms that the destination is familiar with.
- Uses terms that are kind and cannot be misconstrued as offensive.

2. The destination accurately decodes the source's message

Destinations need to decode the source's message. To this end, they can:

- Receive the message by hearing it, seeing it, or reading it.
- Verify their interpretation of the message.
- Attend to the relevant portions of the message.

3. The destination encodes accurate feedback for the source

Having decoded the message, destinations encode the feedback they send back to the source. To ensure the feedback is useful, the destination can:

- Ensure the feedback is complete and accurate.
- Ensure they provide the feedback they've encoded.
- Send the feedback in a timely manner.
- Ensure the feedback is actionable.

4. The source accurately decodes the feedback from the destination

Finally, the source accurately decodes the destination's feedback. The feedback should:

- Use language that is easy to understand.
- Be relevant and useful to the source.
- Be complete, providing all the information to meet their needs.
- Be constructive rather than offensive.

Conclusion

At first blush, communication chains can appear easy. Encoding, decoding, and feedback seem straightforward. However, they present multiple links where sources and destinations can break the chain. And the more communication chains, the more opportunities for breaks. You can use the strategies in this white paper to strengthen the links in your organization's communication chains.

Now that you are more familiar with the links, the following white paper in this series will describe the characteristics of effective feedback in supporting stronger links.

References

Schramm, W. (1971). The nature of communication between humans. In W. Schramm & D. F. Roberts (Eds.), *The process and effects of mass communication* (2nd ed., pp. 3-53). University of Illinois Press.

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About the Authors



Steven W. Villachica is an emeritus professor of Organizational Performance & Workplace Learning (OWL) at Boise State University and co-investigator at the [Process Management Lab](#); SteveVillachica@boisestate.edu.



Destiny Byrd is a graduate from Boise State University where she obtained her MS In Organizational Performance and Workplace Learning and a Graduate Certificate in Workplace Performance Improvement. Destiny is a volunteer lab associate with Boise State University's Process Management Lab; destinybyrd@u.boisestate.edu.



Jeni Johnson is an instructional designer working toward earning a Workplace Performance Improvement Certificate through the OPWL program. With a strong passion for lifelong learning, Jeni constantly seeks ways to improve her skills and stay current in the field. She is a volunteer lab associate with Boise State University's Process Management Lab; jenijohnson@u.boisestate.edu

For more information, visit the [Process Management Lab](#).