

Lesson: Horizontal & Matrix Structures – Verbs for Describing Structure

Based on *English for Business Studies* by Ian Mackenzie

- Understanding Horizontal & Matrix Structures (10 minutes)

Types of Modern Organizational Structures

Organizations **that** want flexibility often use horizontal or matrix structures. These structures differ from traditional hierarchical models **that** have many management layers.

A **horizontal structure** (also called flat structure), **which** has few or no middle managers, places executives and employees on the same level. This structure **that** eliminates management layers **contains** fewer hierarchical levels **than** traditional models. The company **that** uses a horizontal structure **consists of** self-managing teams **that** make their own decisions. Employees, **who** have more autonomy, report directly to senior executives **instead of** middle managers. This structure **includes** wide spans of control **because** one executive supervises many employees. Flattenings **that** remove managers reduce costs **but** can overload leaders.

A **matrix structure**, **that** is more complex, combines functional and project-based organization. The organization **that** uses a matrix structure **is divided into** both departments **and** projects. Employees **who** work in matrix structures **are made up of** team members **from** different functions **that** collaborate on projects. Each employee **is composed of** multiple reporting lines: one to a functional manager **and** one to a project manager. The matrix structure **includes** cross-functional teams **that** work together temporarily. Employees report to two managers, **which** can create confusion **but** allows flexibility **and** better resource use. Companies **that** work on multiple projects simultaneously benefit **from** this structure.

- Definition: Structure Description Verbs

Structure description verbs are common verbs **that** explain what an organization **contains**, **how it is organized**, and **what it consists of**. These verbs are essential for describing organizational charts, departments, and reporting relationships in business English.

The 6 Common Verbs for Describing Structure

Verb	Definition	When to Use	Example
contains	Has or includes something as part of the whole	Describing what elements exist inside the structure	<i>The organization contains five departments.</i>
consists of	Is made up of several parts that together form the whole (NO passive form)	Describing the complete composition of something	<i>The team consists of eight members.</i>
includes	Has as part of a larger group (partial, not complete)	Mentioning some parts but not all	<i>The structure includes HR and Marketing.</i>

Verb	Definition	When to Use	Example
is divided into	Is separated or split into parts/groups	Showing how something is organized into sections	<i>The company is divided into three divisions.</i>
is made up of	Is composed of several parts that together form the whole (passive form)	Describing complete composition (same as "consists of")	<i>The team is made up of experts from different fields.</i>
is composed of	Is formed or created from several parts (formal)	Describing complete composition (formal alternative)	<i>The committee is composed of five members.</i>

Common Mistakes to Avoid

✗ WRONG	✓ CORRECT	Reason
<i>The team is consisted of 5 members.</i>	<i>The team consists of 5 members.</i>	"Consist" is never passive
<i>The org comprises of 3 departments.</i>	<i>The org comprises 3 departments.</i>	"Comprise" = NO "of"
<i>The team is made up 5 people.</i>	<i>The team is made up of 5 people.</i>	Need "of" after "made up"
<i>It contains only HR and Marketing (but has more).</i>	<i>It includes HR and Marketing.</i>	Use "includes" for partial lists

Diagrams – Horizontal & Matrix Structures

1. Horizontal (Flat) Structure

CEO/Owner

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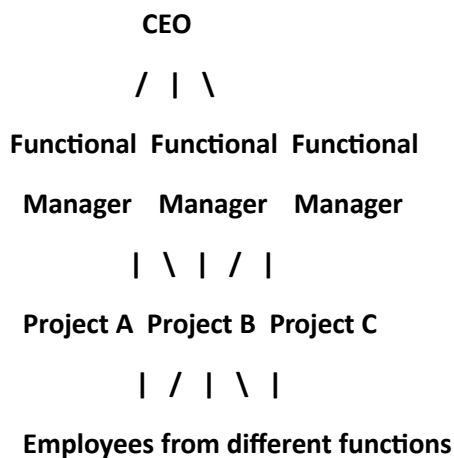
Employee Employee Employee Employee

Employee Employee Employee Employee

Description using structure verbs:

- "The horizontal structure contains only two levels."
- "The company consists of one executive and employees."
- "This structure includes self-managing teams."
- "The organization is divided into teams, not departments."
- "The team is made up of 8 employees and 1 CEO."
- "The staff is composed of generalists, not specialists."

2. Matrix Structure



Description using structure verbs:

- "The matrix structure contains dual reporting lines."
- "The organization consists of departments and projects."
- "This structure includes cross-functional teams."
- "The company is divided into functions and projects."
- "The team is made up of members from HR, Marketing, and Finance."
- "Employees is composed of team members who report to two managers."

Essential Vocabulary with Definitions

Term	Definition	Example Sentence
Organizational structure	The formal system that shows how roles, powers, and responsibilities are assigned within an organization	<i>The organizational structure, which shows reporting lines, is clearly defined.</i>

Term	Definition	Example Sentence
Horizontal structure (Flat structure)	An organizational structure that has few or no levels of middle management between staff and executives	<i>The horizontal structure, that eliminates managers, gives employees more autonomy.</i>
Matrix structure	An organizational structure that combines functional and project-based reporting, where employees report to two or more managers	<i>The matrix structure, which has dual reporting lines, allows flexibility.</i>
Functional structure	A structure that groups employees by specialized functions (e.g., HR, Marketing, Finance)	<i>The functional structure, that groups by department, improves specialization.</i>
Project-based structure	A structure that organizes work around projects rather than departments	<i>The project-based structure, which focuses on deliverables, is flexible.</i>
Dual reporting	When an employee who works in a matrix structure reports to more than one manager	<i>Dual reporting, that exists in matrix structures, can cause confusion.</i>
Middle management	Managers who are between senior executives and front-line employees	<i>Middle management, which horizontal structures eliminate, adds costs.</i>
Autonomy	The power that employees have to make decisions without approval	<i>Autonomy, that increases in flat structures, boosts motivation.</i>
Cross-functional team	A team that includes members from different departments working together	<i>Cross-functional teams, which exist in matrix structures, solve problems faster.</i>

