An integrative Approach to Management: Combining Communication and Organizational Theory

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   . . . By organizations influences the environment & the environment influences the organization.

   . . . Skills are central to career Development.
   . . . Skills are central to organizational development.

An Integrative Approach to Management

Why should you read this book? Beyond obvious reasons like passing a test or understanding a lecture, we think this book will make you a better manager and enhance your communication skills. Dozens of books about organizational communication have been written since 1970. A significantly greater number about management has been published. Books in communication have focused on communication outcomes, often treating organizational outcomes as secondary; management books have emphasized organizational effectiveness through leadership and process design techniques, with limited treatment about the communication process, often treating communication as an artifact or secondary to organizational processes.

In contrast to these disparate approaches, we have integrated communication and management concerns with equal emphasis on both. Essentially, we have analyzed and presented communication effectiveness as an important organizational outcome and as a means for selecting and implementing the most appropriate, of many, management alternatives for enhancing total productive efficiency, maximizing subordinate satisfaction, and contributing to employees’ and society’s quality of life. In this way,
we hope to contribute to your development as a truly outstanding communicator and manager.

Why is this approach needed? There are many excellent books that describe how to develop effective communication processes – interviewing, business communication, public speaking, managing small groups, etc. Likewise, there are many excellent books about management theories and applications. After you read these books, you will undoubtedly increase your knowledge and skill in each area, independently. In essence, you will acquire a lot of different communication and management tools to use in organizations. However, having a box of tools does not imply that you know which tool to use for each circumstance. Some tools work well for some tasks, while some do not. For example, it is inappropriate to use a ten-pound sledgehammer to tighten a screw. Likewise, it is foolhardy to force your subordinates into participative management if they lack the mental readiness and communication skills required in group decision-making. Our simultaneous integration of communication and management knowledge, then, provides a basis for determining which techniques have a higher level of success potential, with the fewest negative consequences.

By the time you begin reading this book, you will have already developed some level of knowledge and skill in communication and social management. Your training and experiences began when you were a toddler, orchestrating how your play with others could be more satisfying. Later, you came to realize that collaboration with others was necessary in order to realize specific outcomes, such as the teamwork required to win a soccer game. As a result, your management and relational development practices were probably modified. To date, most of you have had organizational work experiences, perhaps at a management level. In addition, some of you have had formal communication and management training. Regardless of experience and proficiency levels, it is our goal to enhance your effectiveness by integrating what we know about communication and management theory and practice.

What is Effectiveness?

Methods for determining organizational effectiveness have been influenced by preoccupation or emphasis on short, intermediate, and long-run organizational goals. In the short-run, effectiveness is a function of organizational efficiency, productivity, and employee satisfaction. If intermediate goals are emphasized, effectiveness is measured by success in developing, adapting to, and, sometimes, altering internal and external environments. In the long-run, organizational survivability provides an index of effectiveness.

**Short-Run Goal Model of Effectiveness.** Persons using effectiveness measures that emphasize short-run goals have been called “traditionalist” managers (Daniels, Spiker, & Papa, 1997). This perspective emphasizes the use of empirical methods for understanding and explaining organizational outcomes. Here, *communicative effectiveness* exists when messages induce the desired response and contribute to short-run organizational goals.
What are the primary components of short-run management effectiveness? Although many definitions exist, Rensis Likert’s conceptualization has been one of the most often cited and used. He characterized organizations as a series of antecedent, intervening, and end-result variables (see Figure 1-1).

Antecedent variables were those associated with behaviors and characteristics of individuals in management roles. Intervening variables included relationships among work group members (i.e., group process) and differential levels of influence (i.e., peer leadership) exerted by individuals within the group. End-result variables were outcomes—subordinate satisfaction and productivity levels of individuals and the group as a whole. From a communication perspective, this model suggests that relational development via the communication process between managers and subordinates, i.e., antecedent and intervening variables, could facilitate or hinder production and satisfaction outcomes, i.e., end-result variables.

There are multiple interacting influences of antecedent and intervening variables on outcomes or end-result variables. For example, “people-oriented” managers can positively impact on a subordinate’s level of satisfaction and moderate negative influences of an unhealthy group environment, yet have a negligible influence on productivity. Likewise, a healthy group environment can overcome a manager’s leadership weakness and contribute to increases in satisfaction and productivity. Further, a strong task leader might induce high levels of productivity in a work group while morale deteriorates. Of course, effectiveness requires that both end-result variables, satisfaction and productivity, are increased.
There is a common misconception that satisfaction and productivity are always positively related. However, all of us can probably cite instances where one outcome is low and the other high; both are low; both are high (see Figure 1-2). For example, you have undoubtedly known persons who were poor performers and unhappy with their work; people who liked their work but didn’t produce much; persons who were productive, yet dissatisfied; employees who were both satisfied and productive. The most common consequence of low satisfaction is not low productivity, but increased absenteeism and employee turnover. The causes of low productivity are many. These include physical and mental deficiencies, insufficient job knowledge or skill, and co-worker or peer pressure. The challenge, then, is to determine how to simultaneously enhance satisfaction and productivity of individuals while contributing to organizational goal accomplishment.

Traditional management approaches, recognizing the independence of productivity and satisfaction outcomes, modified their concept of subordinate satisfaction to include the broader conceptualization of the organization’s “quality of work life.” Many societal factors contributed to this shift in emphasis:

- A better educated work force
- Negative connotations of management “control & manipulation”
- Improvements in technology
- Advances in social science
- International competition
- Concern for quality

Figure 1-2, Outcome Relationships
- Recognition of the organization as a member of the community
- Application of “systems theory” thinking
- Development of cultural perspectives for understanding organizations
- Recognition of diversity

These influences, and many others, lead to increased attention on developing organizational members and the interface between the organization and its environment.

Short-term effectiveness goals tend to have a 1-year frame of reference, although there is considerable variation across industry types. Retail business relies on annual comparisons; computer chip manufacturers tend to observe a 1-month cycle; some state governments use a 2-year planning process. Hence, effectiveness measures are used to compare the current time frame to the previous time frame and make projections for the next period (e.g., comparing this year’s holiday sales to last year’s figures and planning for the next holiday period).

**Intermediate Goal Model of Effectiveness.** Intermediate goals do not directly focus on specific outcomes, but are concerned with relational development. Outcomes are not direct, objective results of a series of actions. Rather, “organization” is conceived as a process, not just a place people go to perform job duties (see Figure 1-3).

![Figure 1-3 Organization-Environment Interface](image)

Consequently, intermediate goals do not clearly lend themselves to an objective, measurable outcome. Rather, they pose a series of questions that are continually addressed:

- How must the organization develop in order to maintain a positive relationship with its environment? Its community? Its society? Etc.?
- How must the organization adapt or change in order to maintain a positive relationship with its environment? Its community? Its society? Etc.?
- How must the organization develop in order to maintain positive internal relationships? For individuals? For groups? Etc.?
- How must the organization adapt or change in order to maintain positive internal relationships? For individuals? For groups? Etc.?

These questions (and many others) emphasize the importance of continuous individual-organizational-societal evolution and growth. Thus, effectiveness assessment is often a qualitative activity that deals with organizational value, policy, and cultural issues as the basis for development, adaptation, and maintenance.
Long-Run Goal Model of Effectiveness. Survival is the long-run goal of organizations. We are not ignoring the fact that some organizations may have the stated goal of dissolution once certain objectives are accomplished; if termination is a desired objective, consequent effectiveness evaluations then must be based upon the context in which the organization was dissolved. This implies that the dissolution was probably a short-run or intermediate goal for another entity. For example, a task force may be created to determine the design and how to implement a new company web site. But, when the web site becomes operational, the task force will no longer be needed and will be dissolved. In contrast, we assume that survival is a long-run goal, effectiveness is the consequence of success in achieving short-run and intermediate goals -- organizations must be productive, have satisfied employees, and contribute to the quality of life; and, they must accommodate continual development and adaptation, internally and externally, to maintain positive relationships for members and with society.

Your Payoff

The primary purpose of this book, then, is to assist you in becoming more effective in developing and maintaining satisfying and productive relationships in organizations in the short, intermediate, and long run. In addition, we know that effective managers (which we view as effective relationship developers) will share the information they gain here with subordinates since productive, satisfying relationships contribute to common understanding and goal accomplishment. In addition, we believe that sharing information with subordinates leads to assumption of more responsibility for individual and organizational development. In this way, the effective manager will perform many roles, such as coach, motivator, problem-solver, team leader, and, when appropriate, follower.

Examining organizational effectiveness from an integration of communication and management thought assumes a proactive approach to outcomes and places communication as the central process. Why should communication be the central focus? There are several reasons:

1. Communication skills are central to career development.

People in organizations spend much of their time communicating in order to accomplish objectives and goals. In other words, the communication process is a primary means for effecting outcomes and accomplishing goals. So, it is not surprising that most organizations evaluate individual communication skills on quarterly performance appraisals and that these evaluations have a direct impact on salary increases and promotions.

Research in organizational psychology has found that management motivation and intelligence, together, are strong predictors of effectiveness. Management motivation (called “The Will to Manage” by John Miner) is a critical ingredient to effectiveness because if the desire did not exist, effort to perform the management act would not occur. However, strong management motivation will not overcome weaknesses in communication. For example, researchers controlled for management motivation and
found that effective and ineffective managers differed significantly on one particular aspect of intelligence – typical measures of intelligence are multi-dimensional, containing verbal, spatial, numerical, and mechanical components. But, one’s verbal aptitude was, by far, the most important discriminator between effective and ineffective managers. Verbal aptitude is a strong correlate of communication skill and a predictor of managerial success.

Other studies cite the importance of communication in management processes. For example, the American 2000 Report (begun during the George Bush administration) pointed out dangers inherent in the lack of communication skills among the American workforce. Summaries of this and other studies suggest that:

- Communication knowledge and skills are prerequisites for successful job interviews among college graduates.
- Successful career development is largely influenced by the ability to communicate.
- Communication skill and knowledge rank ahead of specific job-related skills.
- Our recent research among Fortune 500 training and development executives found several human resource shortages that were derivatives of communication skill and ability. Executives indicated that employees needed improved knowledge and skill in change and stress management, work role flexibility, diversity, achieving greater productivity with fewer people, client sensitivity and partnering, writing (e.g., organizing reports), business communication, presentation skills and procedures, virtual teaming, being an “in-house” consultant, and dealing with regulatory initiatives. Each of these of these topic areas directly and indirectly assumes the need for increased communication proficiency.

A simple content analysis of management opportunities in the “help wanted” sections of any newspaper will illustrate the high value placed on communication skills. For example, we evaluated items in a recent edition of the Raleigh (North Carolina) News and Observer. Job qualifications contained such descriptions as good customer service skills, looking for people-people, good people skills required, customer service demeanor essential, like to work with people, cheerful & friendly, good phone skills, organizational and people skills required, likes to solve customer problems, and team player. Although communication and people skills were emphasized, it was interesting to note that these descriptions were for “non-management” positions. Even greater value for communication-related skills and abilities was found when management position announcements were evaluated: leader and strong administrator, strong grammar and proofing skills, people and diplomacy skills required, team player, upbeat attitude, excellent communication skills, like working in a team environment, and ability to motivate and supervise staff. These observations were not atypical. Check any newspaper, any day of the week – you will find the same descriptors.

2. Communication skills are central to organizational development.
Organizations are typically described as systems that require physical (e.g., raw materials, objects, etc.), capital (e.g., money or some medium of exchange), and human (i.e., people) resources in order to conduct business. Organizations also need communication resources to create, maintain or modify, and dissolve relationships in order to manage physical, capital, and human resources. For example:

- Sharing information about business trends during budget negotiations will influence the level of capital resources received.
- The effectiveness of corporate trainers in communicating steps for task accomplishment will influence the goodness of fit between employees and their job requirements.
- A manager’s communication ability will influence effectiveness in putting together and leading a work process improvement team.
- A market researchers’ skill in asking consumers the “right” question will determine the validity of the answers they get.

These are just of few of many circumstances requiring communication resources. In fact, it is very difficult to identify any work relationship that does not require the use of symbols. As such, communication is an important symbolic resource both inside and outside the organization.

So far, we have described the implicit need for communication, yet organizations have also recognized an explicit need. Communication activities referred to as human relations, human resources, employee relations, public relations, corporate communication, and public affairs are formally recognized, codified, explicit organizational outcomes and are recognized as processes that transform symbolic resources into communication products. These include professional development programs, employee forums, company newsletters, legislative lobbying activities, press releases, special events, community philanthropy, and so on. Long and Hazelton (1986; 1987), in defining public relations, described this explicit communication act as a communication function of management that is used to assist the organization in changing or adapting to its environment (both internal and external) to achieve goals.

Communication is at the very center of organizations. It is the mechanism for organizational creation, maintenance, and destruction. Why? Because communication, or the act of exchanging symbols with others, creates meaning and the exchange of meanings gives rise to all features of our existence, e.g., culture, governments, institutions, music art, relationships, sports, economic systems, and our organizations. The successful organization is a “communicating” organization -- it is one that can successfully manage the complexity and scope of human behavior, of which communication, itself, is a significant part. As organizational members become “competent” as communicators, organizational effectiveness is enhanced and goal achieved becomes a reality.

3. Communication is the most obvious manifestation of the management act.
Scholars in business, management, sociology, and organizational psychology have produced a vast body of knowledge in their attempt to answer the question – “what is the best way to manage?” No doubt many of you have read some of the popular books and articles that have been derived from this work, such as “The One Minute Manager,” “Seven Habits of Highly Successful People,” “In Pursuit of Excellence,” etc. An interesting aspect of all these publications is that they usually contain extensive lists of “do’s and don’ts” for management effectiveness that are derived from principles of effective communication. And, if you have ever been a student in a management training session, you have probably been told things like “you should be an active listener,” “you should carefully organize your thoughts before communicating job instructions to your subordinates,” “you should, when possible, encourage employees to participate in decision-making,” “clearly define and use your chain of command,” and “verbally acknowledge a subordinate for a job well done.” Although these recommendations sound a lot like “truisms”, each has roots in different schools of thought about the best way to manage and assumes specific communication behaviors.

4. **Communication functions are inevitable consequences of the act of managing.**

In the *Social Psychology of Organizations* (1968), Katz and Kahn emphasized the importance of communication across five major subsystems (these included production or technical, supportive, maintenance, adaptive, and managerial subsystems). All subsystems were viewed as essential to organizational effectiveness. Management activities, which are located in the managerial subsystem, are viewed as necessary for elaborated social patterns of behavior or organizations. Specifically, the management subsystem and its inherent communication systems are necessary to coordinate, manage conflict, and control activities in the other four subsystems. Furthermore:

“. . . communication – the exchange of information and the transmission of meaning – is the very essence of a social system or an organization. The input of physical energy is dependent upon information about it, and the input of human energy is made possible through communicative acts. Similarly, the transformation of energy (the accomplishment of work) depends upon communication between people in each organizational subsystem and upon communication between subsystems. The product exported carries meaning as it meets needs and wants, and its use is further influenced by the advertising or public relations material about it. The amount of support which an organization receives from its social environment is also affected by the information which elite groups and wider publics have acquired about its goals, activities, and accomplishments.” (Katz & Kahn, pp. 223-224)

Several taxonomies have been used to describe uses and functions of communication in organizations. Lee Thayer described four functions - informative, regulative, persuasive, and integrative; Frank Dance developed three - linking, mentation, and regulation; Greenbaum had four - regulative, innovative, integrative, and informative;
Goldhaber listed four functions/purposes of communication - task, maintenance, human, innovative. Based on evaluations of this literature and original investigations, Cummings, Long, and Lewis identified four distinct functions/purposes of communication that were subsequently applied to organizational settings. These functions are information exchange, problem/solution identification, conflict management, and behavior regulation.

5. **Communication contexts define critical units of analysis.**

   A simple, common approach to identifying and solving problems is to use the symptom as a clue to locating the cause of a problem within a specified process or system. Likewise, management and communication effectiveness is enhanced when parameters and area of an activity's influence are clearly defined. Communication has a rich history of investigating the use of symbols in interpersonal, group, organizational, and social settings. Similarly, management theorists have organized their research findings with individual employees, work groups, organizations, and various industries as units of analysis. Effectiveness requires definition of systems, first, and then assessments of compatibility between communication and organizational systems, subsystems, and supersystems.

6. **Communication processes contain assumptions about strategies for achieving outcomes?**

   Methods for improving communication and organizational outcomes are based on various assumptions about human and social motives, beliefs, and values; some of these assumptions are compatible with each other, while some are not. For example, assumptions about a “best” way to manage contain expectations about appropriate communication behavior. For example, participative management approaches assume that governance and decision-making should always be equally shared; however, research and practice shows that this approach is more time consuming than centralized approaches and often ineffective if leadership is not trusted or when team members are not competent communicators or possess hidden agendas.

7. **Communication is integral to organizational development.**

   Communication has been consistently referred to as a barometer of conditions, circumstances, or a set of cues to indicate a needed action. As such, much of the impetus for individual and organizational development is derived from formal and informal monitoring of information within the organization and between the organization and its external audiences.

8. **Communicating organizations influence and are influenced by their environment.**

   Organizations are open systems. In other words, they are social constructs, consisting of relational interdependencies. They also interact with their environments by
exchanging energy in the form of human, capital, physical, and symbolic resources. As such, the organizing process influences and is influenced by the environment. Long and Hazelton (1986) described this reciprocal relationship in terms of five environmental dimensions: legal/political, social, technological, competitive, and economic.

The Bottom Line

Understanding organizational and communication behavior complicated because our body of knowledge has come from research and experiences by those trained in many disciplines. To illustrate the “organizing process,” figure 1-4 provides a visual display of foundational, design, communication, and outcome phases (see below).

**Phase 1, Foundation.** Several foundations for explaining organizational behavior exist, but the dominant perspectives have come from psychology and sociology.

**Phase 2, Design.** Based on foundational bases, communication and organizational designs are selected. Management principles can vary tremendously when they are based on divergent foundations, such as Classical, Human Relations, and Systems approaches.

**Phase 3, Communication.** Based on design, communication policies for information exchange, problem/solution identification, behavior regulation, and conflict management are implemented. In addition, they are managed vis-à-vis specific units of analysis, i.e., contexts. The contexts allow emphasis on unique characteristics of individuals, groups, organizations, and societies.

**Phase 4, Outcomes.** Foundations, design, and communication influence the nature of outcomes, or motivation, productivity, and satisfaction or quality of work life. Assessment of these variables provides an indicator of effectiveness and provides insight for maintenance, development, and adaptation of processes.