

ORGANIZATIONAL COMMUNICATION

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Chapter 1 defines and conceptualizes organizational communication.

Chapter 2 describes and illustrates the three main schools of thought on organizations.

Chapter 3 presents the key theories, propositions, and directions of organizational communication climate.

1

WHAT IS ORGANIZATIONAL COMMUNICATION?

The age of “information shock” is upon us. We are all subjected to instant communication. A computer makes it possible for us to read immediately any book stored in the major libraries. A word-processing machine makes typesetting revision of this book possible in less than a day. Within five minutes we can talk by telephone to almost any part of the world. Satellite networks enable us to be eyewitness observers at the impeachment of a president, of the landing of a spaceship on the moon, and even of a full-scale war—without leaving our living rooms.

Our industrial society has truly become the information society. One out of every two Americans now works in some aspect of information processing. No matter what your field, if you remain competitive, you are affected by information processing—by more machines, better systems, more trained personnel.

Because of rapid changes brought on by such unexpected new problems as soaring fuel costs, scarcity of raw materials, and double-digit inflation, companies need more and better information to speed up their response time to sudden economic shifts and to plan more accurately. Information has become a vital asset.

Corporate planners need information about scientific and technological developments; economic, political, and social trends; shifts in consumer behavior; population densities; and worldwide supply data on raw materials.

Financial officers need information about earning reports; public disclosure requirements; industry group capital investment patterns; merger, acquisition, and consolidation data; accounting standards and regulations; and economic forecasts.

Marketing executives need information about new products; competition; demographic profiles and social forces; and consumer spending patterns.

General counsels need information about status of litigation related to companies, products, and services in their field; trends in trademark, copyright, and patent laws; liability and damage claims; regulatory commission activities; and “privacy” legislation.

Public affairs officers need information about the company’s position as seen by the media, the financial press, and public interest groups; environmental activity related to the company; corporate social responsibility; shareholder relations; and the public’s attitudes on private enterprise.

We need *so much* information and we need it *now!* As James Robinson, CEO of *American Express Company*, recently said, “We have become a nation of fast-fact addicts.” However, just as our fast-snacks industry has become a junk-food industry, so have our fast-fact

industries—television and advertising—become our junk-fact industries. Like junk food, junk communication provides substance but not nourishment. We will be starving for the quality communication that feeds the inner dialogue—the continuous conversation between the you onstage and the you standing in the wings—that works on the questions, Who am I? What am I?

When our only companions are the machines, the media of junk communication, we will have to wait a long time for the answers.

In 1974, the United States government passed the Employee Retirement Income Security Act (ERISA), requiring complete and readable disclosure of benefits programs to employees. As a result, a radical shift in the corporate balance of power occurred—in favor of the communication function.

As evidence of its importance, organizational communication has been called “the *life-blood* of the organization,” “the *glue* that binds the organization,” “the *oil* that smooths the organization’s functions,” “the *thread* that ties the system together,” the “*force* that pervades the organization,” and the “*binding agent* that cements all relationships.” Only half facetiously, I once labeled communication “the organizational embalming fluid.”

Research findings documenting the value of organizational communication show the correlation between an effective communication system and high overall organizational performance. Today, some business leaders are speaking out about the importance of good communication in their organizations. For example, Fred T. Allen, chairman and president of Pitney Bowes, believes that the better informed employees are, the better employees they will be. Among other innovative communication programs, he holds an annual “jobholders meeting” during which he answers tough questions from any employee. According to Pitney Bowes, worker productivity is high, turnover in work force is low, and employees chose not to be represented by labor unions. Another example is former chairman and CEO of United Airlines, Edward Carlson, who estimated that he traveled more than 20,000 miles every year to communicate with United’s 50,000 employees. He held formal meetings, informal chats, and handshaking tours to launch a program called visible management. The airline credits this program with being a major factor in a financial turnaround.

At Hewlett-Packard Company, all members of a 1,000 person department get together at least once every two weeks. While refreshments are served, everyone shares information about the projects they are working on. As people are encouraged to talk with each other, employees become “Hewlett-Packard persons” rather than salespeople, engineers, or managers. At Lucasfilms, producers of the *Star Wars* trilogy, internal research findings indicated virtually no horizontal communication among editors, cinematographers and artists. They formed softball teams which were limited to no more than one member from any one department, thus forcing people from different departments to get to know each other and start talking.

In one of the most massive efforts to improve corporate communication in recent years, Allstate Insurance Company developed a program called PPI—Participative Performance Improvement. Over a two-year period, all 40,000 managers and employees received training in basic communication skills. Next, Allstate formed “growth teams”—small groups of 12–15 employees from several departments in many field offices whose mandate was to increase Allstate’s market and sell more insurance. Then, at least three times a year, the Chairman and President participated in upward communication sessions held at regional offices with 15–20 employees from various levels and departments. Their agenda included discussions

about how the company was doing and where it was going. Simultaneously, middle management was doing the same thing. Periodic employee surveys monitored the success of the programs. A "communications board" was created, consisting of the CEO, president, senior vice presidents, top executives, and communication professionals to coordinate all company communication activities with overall corporate strategy. Finally, all communication media and publications were redeveloped and refined using "key contacts" within each of the major business units to guarantee that the information being communicated was accurate and timely. Allstate executives contend that their initial readings of PPI indicate that it has been a tremendous success.

Communication is essential to an organization. Information is vital to effective communication. Persons who control information control power—a fact that customs agents at the United States-Canadian border understand. I was once stopped crossing the border when an agent spotted five boxes of computer cards that I was taking to a colleague at a Canadian university. He insisted that I pay duty on the cards. Despite my utter astonishment at his request, I managed to blurt out, "Just how do you plan to determine the duty? After all, these cards contain nothing more than information for a research article to be published in a journal!" He calmly responded, "Since the cards contain information, we will weigh them, and you will be charged by the pound."

Advances in technological communications apparently are not positively related to successful interpersonal communication. In fact, there may be an inverse relationship between the two. Picture a woman talking to her lover on the phone. She curls her body around the phone, caresses it, and touches the mouthpiece with her lips. She can't see her lover, feel his touch, enjoy his scent, or taste his kisses, so she tries to compensate for the sensory component that is missing from this electronic communication. This is an exceedingly simple example of how the machines of communication affect communication, but at least in this instance a message is getting through.

The communication machines are also capable of spawning such a volume of messages that we tune out in self-defense. First, they rob us of the nonverbal component we might experience in face-to-face communication. Second, the overload they provide blunts our sensitivity to other messages occurring simultaneously. To obtain quality communication from one another, we need maximum input from the body, the voice, and the environment. The 1980s may well be a decade where a growing number of people will strain to return to such quality communication.

If we want evidence of the search for such communication, we need only look to the nation's 17 million young urban professionals, dubbed "yuppies," who are the cream of the crop of the baby boomers. Organizations must meet the renewed demand for straightforward information from these educated elitists who represent the future of our work force. They seek opportunities to win and shun patronizing. Successful organizational communicators will nurture these upwardly mobile and independent egos by appealing to them as both employees and customers.

Our technological isolation has grown so slowly and insidiously that we barely remember what life was like before. Look what happened to the little stationery store on Main Street. It was once the gathering place for the business people of the community. The proprietor was an important communications link. Then, the ring of the phone replaced the jingling of the store bell, and the proprietor began spending most of the day alone.

At first we used phones to call from one office to another, but before long we could call from cubicle to cubicle within an office. So the person who worked alone in a walled-off space had little excuse to leave it and enjoy human contact once in a while.

Today, society has many people, such as transients and singles, who have lost human communications networks and have not yet established new links. They depend upon their communications machines—the telephone to disembody them and the computer terminal to take away their voices.

Electronics has isolated us not only in the business area. Look what happened to Grandmother when she got wired into the phone system. Great, you thought. Now she won't be lonely, and I won't have to run over there every other day. Indeed, Grandmother talked to you more, but she saw you less. Even her neighbor phoned sometimes instead of running over to visit. Days passed when Grandmother saw no one.

Computers now allow homemakers to do comparison shopping, order tickets for the theater, make plane reservations, and bank—all at the touch of a button. Wonderful. People can stay home all day, alone, or with only children for company.

CB radio, Qube, and video-conferencing are other examples of communication that isolates us. CB radio, *except as it is used in business and for emergencies*, is simply fantasy communication. We project a personal image we would like to match. Think of the handles: Tall Texan, Sexy Sue, Range Rider. Ever hear of Square Claire, Fat Francis, or Dopey Dan? We use CB just as we sometimes use the radio, to escape communicating with people directly. We might get some road information and avoid lurking smokies, but the conversations are superficial communication.

Qube, the two-way cable television being demonstrated in Columbus, Ohio, has been exploring the potential of the cathode-ray tube. Qube is more than ordinary TV, but it is not, as its producers claim, truly two-way TV. Our only input involves responses to canned questions. We cannot ask questions; we cannot give qualified replies. Besides, our input leads to a privacy problem. Our answers are fed into a computer. Do we really *want* a record of how we responded to the questions? Think of the implications. Each new cathode-ray-tube service will demand another chunk of our privacy.

In 1987, Nielsen announced plans to install "people meters" for the fall season to elicit more accurate ratings. Biagi (1988) cited that people meters combine the data gathered by Audimeters and Nielsen diaries into one data-gathering system based on a four-inch by ten-inch people meter box that sits on the television set in the metered homes. Family members punch in an assigned button on top of the set when they begin to watch TV. The system's central computer, linked to the home by telephone lines, correlates each viewer's number with information about that person stored in its memory. Biagi went on to state that in early trials, people meters recorded lower ratings for the networks, especially among certain important groups, such as adult women. This could mean lower prices for network advertising.

TV has also given us the videoconference, which seems like an excellent substitute for long-distance travel in order to have a meeting. However, the small group dynamics just do not work. The concessions that must be made to the camera put the communicators in poor positions. They cannot all see one another. If the camera concentrates on a face, it misses a tapping foot, a clenched hand. The International Communication Association's audits have consistently indicated that employees want more contact with managers, but managers rely more and more on machines instead of human contacts.

It may sound simplistic, but people need people. We need other people to compare notes with, to affirm our worth, to anchor us to reality. We need the quality of communication that allows us to ask, "What answers have you found?"

If we hole up with machines, we will exchange only facts—machines do a superior job of that. However, we will suffer from the junk-communication phenomenon mentioned earlier.

Marriage counselors tell us that the divorce rate has never been higher and that a leading cause of divorce is failure of husbands and wives to achieve effective communication. A youth poll indicates that half the teenagers in the United States think communication between themselves and their parents is poor and the causes are mostly lack of time, lack of input into family decisions, and poor listening behavior. Political scientists tell us that 45 percent of Americans believe that the leaders of our most important institutions and professions are out of touch with the people—the very ones they are supposed to lead or help. A presidential commission points out that the cost of federal paperwork exceeds \$100 billion per year—about \$500 for every American citizen—just to fill out the more than 4,500 different forms the federal bureaucracy requires. Is it any wonder that the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education in 1981 turned down \$950,000 in federal funds for collegiate programs in technical and occupational education? The federal reporting requirements and the associated paperwork would have cost participating Oklahoma institutions an estimated \$3 in administrative expenses for every \$1 received in federal aid.

More than a century ago Alex de Tocqueville, French statesman and philosopher, observed that regulation "blankets society with a network of small complicated rules, minute and uniform, through which the most original minds and the most energetic characters cannot penetrate." De Tocqueville later said, "America is the only nation to go directly from barbarism to decadence without any intervening civilization." Perhaps he was thinking about America's regulatory and paperwork mess.

In the ten minutes or so that it takes you to read this page, the federal government will spend \$47 million of your money, much of it due to wasteful inefficiencies. Recognizing this waste, in 1981 President Reagan set up the Grace Commission whose charge was to examine the federal system and identify simple ways for the government to save money through better management. As a consultant to the Grace Commission, I noticed such frivolities as the existence of more than 12,000 U.S. post offices that serve fewer than 100 customers apiece and that the Army spends \$4 to process a payroll check compared with the \$1 spent in private business and, due to the absence of competition, that the military spends \$100 for 25-cent compressor caps, \$114 for 9-cent batteries, and \$511 for 60-cent lamps.

Reliance Insurance Company of Philadelphia did a study in 1980 which showed that 25 percent of its workers' time was spent creating, storing, and shepherding paper. The study also showed that *80 percent of that paper was never referred to again!* In response, Reliance declared a "paper-free" day during which all employees were forbidden to use the photocopy machine or to exchange memos, reports, and papers.

Management and communication consultants say that more than 10 percent of U.S. business enterprises fail every year primarily because of bad management and ineffective employee communication.

This is the most unfortunate since several studies link communication effectiveness to improved productivity in organizations. Tubbs and Hain (1979), in combining the results from eight studies, found “consistent and strong support for the assumption that management communication behaviors do play a significant part in contributing to or detracting from total organizational effectiveness.” Tubbs and Widgery (1978) designed a communication training program for a manufacturing plant that, after its implementation, saved \$7 million in productivity costs and decreased absenteeism. Another group of studies done in the military by O’Reilly and Roberts (1977) found the following results:

1. Individuals who passed information freely were rated as higher performers.
2. Individuals who were rated as having lower performance levels tended to be seen in terms of information overload, redundancy, and gatekeeping functions.
3. Individuals who were active participants in communication networks were seen as more productive than isolates.

Finally, Clampitt and Downs in research reported in 1983 found that feedback significantly improved productivity.

In the 1950s, the presidents of the top 100 corporations identified their major communication problems as follows: inadequate use of communication media; lack of communicative ability in management personnel; withholding of information from subordinates by management; and little opportunity for upward communication. The following are the results of my major study of sixteen organizations, released in 1980:

1. Employees receive insufficient information about their jobs and organizations.
2. Management doesn’t follow up on employee messages.
3. Messages are sent too early or too late to be of use.
4. The grapevine supplements the void filled by the lack of openness, candor, and visibility of top management.
5. Impersonal channels substitute for face-to-face contact.
6. Lack of employee input into decisions that affect them is common.

What is alarming about these findings is not so much their indication of faulty communication systems as their striking similarity to the problems identified by corporate presidents *over thirty years ago!* Our research apparently confirms and quantifies what corporate leaders have known in their gut and heart for years. These research findings also bear close resemblance to the answers from the teenagers surveyed in the youth poll. Perhaps the parents who have difficulty communicating with their children at home are also the bosses who have difficulty communicating with their employees at work. Thomas Jefferson said, “If the people know all the facts, the people won’t make a mistake.” Much later, industrialist Bernard Baruch proclaimed, “The American people can do anything if you tell them *why*, but you must tell them.” My research findings indicate that in the corporate world we have not done a good job of telling them why.

Our organizational leaders today must confront the reality of inadequately informed and uninvolved employees, distant and aloof management teams, poor-quality messages, and an overall poor state of organizational communication systems.

Is it fair to blame the problems of our families, governments, and businesses on “ineffective communication?” Maybe we oversimplify complex problems by analyzing them as “failure to communicate” or “communication breakdown.” Perhaps we are all guilty of

abusing and misusing the term *communication*. One of the purposes of this book is to help clear away the clichés and destroy some of the popular myths surrounding communication. The specific subject of this book is communication within large, complex organizations: hospitals, banks, industries, schools, universities, labor unions, and government agencies.

An increasingly important area of study in these types of organizations is organization development (OD). OD is a method of changing an organization and its beliefs, values, attitudes, and structures so that it can better adapt to the changing and turbulent environment of coming decades. Neilsen (1984) describes the importance of OD: "Organizational processes such as decision making, problem solving, planning, communication, and teamwork can be identified as important targets of OD efforts because they are likely to change in ways that reflect and reinforce changes in values regarding candidness and personal responsibility." OD will be covered in more depth in part four of this text.

Osmo Wiio, a colleague from Finland, has developed six "laws" of communication based on his years of teaching and writing about organizational communication.¹ I believe his laws summarize many of my findings. Wiio's first law states:

Communication usually fails—except by chance. If we begin a communication with this assumption, the result may then be better than if we start with the opposite assumption that a communication usually succeeds. There is a wealth of research data showing that the general efficiency of the communication process is very low, often under 5 percent—a figure approaching statistical randomness.

Wiio's first law of communication has four corollaries:

1. *If communication can fail, it will.* This corollary means that if you give communication a chance to fail, it will fail. If you as a communicator are careless, indifferent, unskillful, or just plain lazy, you usually fail in communication.
2. *If communication cannot fail, it nevertheless usually does fail.* Even with the best of intentions, your communication is bound to fail because nature is against you and will use hidden flaws, deficiencies, misprints, and misunderstandings to defeat you.
3. *If communication seems to succeed in the way intended, it must be in a way which was not intended.* If everything seems to go fine, be careful; success may be illusory. Receivers may think they understand your message. In reality, they misunderstand it or just want to humor you or do not want to admit misunderstanding.
4. *If you are satisfied that your communication is bound to succeed, it is then bound to fail.* To be content with your own communication usually means that you designed the communication process according to your own taste and did not consider the receiver. The message should be designed for the receiver, not for the sender.

Wiio's second law is this:

If a message can be understood in different ways, it will be understood in just that way which does the most harm. If there is a misunderstanding, the maximum damage will then result. Again, nature is against you: misprints, misunderstandings, and noise all have a multiplier effect instead of canceling each other out.

1. Wiio's laws are adapted from Osmo Wiio, *Wiio's Laws—and Some Others* (Espoo, Finland: Welin-Göös, 1978).



The more communication there is, the more difficult it is for communication to succeed.

Wiio's third law is as follows:

There is always somebody who knows better than you what you meant by your message. Many people think they can read our thoughts better than we can ourselves. If only we were half as smart as we would have to be to say the things these people think we are saying! We are, unfortunately, stupid enough to try to say only what we mean.

Wiio's fourth law is the following:

The more communication there is, the more difficult it is for communication to succeed. First of all, our information-processing capacity is limited. In modern industrial societies, we are subjected to an increasing amount of information. The amount of information increases so rapidly in many professions that it is impossible to keep up with it. The result is overload, and channels become blocked. Further, it is naïve to believe that increased communication is always for the better—that organizations function better the more communication they generate; that human relations are better and people trust each other more the more they communicate; and that conflicts and even wars can be avoided if we just communicate more. Wiio's organizational studies indicate that the correlation between the amount of communication and satisfactory social relationships is not linear. Too much information may be as bad as too little information. It may be better not to know what some people think and thus be able, perhaps, to avoid conflict.

Wiio's fifth law states:

In mass communication, it is not important how things are, the important thing is how things seem to be. Mass media—press, radio, television, etc.—often create a world of their own which has few, if any, links with observable reality. They create happenings that never took place, plots never plotted, words never said, and deeds never done. To the general public this, then, is reality. We may even have two parallel worlds: the imaginary world of mass media and the real world of everyday life. Very seldom do they meet.

The sixth and last of Wiio's laws is the following:

The importance of a news item is inversely correlated with the square of distance. This law is included mainly to impress Wiio's learned colleagues—professors and otherwise—because it shows them that he is not talking nonsense. He is stating a mathematical law of causal relationships, and who can argue with such wisdom? In plain language, the law means that a fist fight in my neighbor's family is to me a more important news item than 10,000 persons killed in a flood 10,000 miles away.

The specific subject of this book is communication within large, complex organizations.

In 1956, William Whyte labeled most men organization men because of the large amount of time they spent within organizations. Recently, Harry Levinson claimed that this is still true, that 90 percent of all working people work in organizations. When the time we spend in civic and social clubs, religious and educational institutions, hospitals, and banks is added, it is relatively simple to conclude that all of us today are organization men and women.

Since we spend most of our waking time in organizations, it is obvious that the problems of our governments, universities, and businesses are organizational problems. We might hypothesize that, given the technology to conquer outer space, we should be able to master the daily people problems that face complex organizations. We might also hypothesize that, given our current sociopsychological and clinical-medical models of handling people, we should be able to minimize intragroup and intergroup conflict and the morale and motivation problems associated with managing complex organizations.

Yet, despite the research reported by the nation's leading organizational experts who advocate new approaches to structuring organizations and managing people, most organizations today rigidly adhere to the military model of structuring the organization with control directed from the top of the hierarchy. Despite the findings of behavioral scientists, most organizations maintain detailed job descriptions and specific goal-oriented objectives, with an absolute minimum of flexibility. To compound the problem, many managers, fresh from a sensitivity training session or a group dynamics workshop or an organization development seminar, claim to be new people with a changed outlook on life and their job. Only a few weeks or even days are needed for them to return to their old ways of management based upon carrot-and-stick philosophies of dealing with people. Levinson calls this the "jackass fallacy" and predicts organizational crises will continue as long as managers, superiors, and leaders maintain their basic attitudes of "the powerful treating the powerless as objects as they maintain anachronistic organizational structures that destroy the individual's sense of worth and accomplishment." The evidence ("increased inefficiency, lowered productivity, heightened absenteeism, theft, and sometimes outright sabotage") seems to support Levinson's conclusion that organizations are still in a state of crisis that will ultimately result in both destruction of the organization and alienation of youth.

Since 1938 when Chester Barnard defined the main task of an executive as that of communication, it has been demonstrated continuously that organization members are communicating men and women. Our focus in later chapters will be to examine the key variables influencing the communication behavior of people in organizations and those variables most affected by that behavior. Our frame of reference will be the organization as a living, open system connected by the flow of information between and among people who occupy various roles and positions.

Each chapter in the book begins by stating its instructional objectives, that is, defining the behavior you should be able to perform after reading the chapter. They are “informational objectives.” For example, after reading the chapter on planning communication diagnosis (chapter 9), you should be able to do the following: describe and illustrate the factors affecting the establishment of the consultant-client relationship; list and exemplify problems encountered by the communication consultant during intervention activities; describe and illustrate the factors affecting the termination of the consultant-client relationship, etc. Note that you are not expected to be able to perform the duties of a communication consultant after reading the chapter. The instructional objectives throughout this book are cognitive and informational; that is, they are limited to presenting factual data and do not include the teaching of skills. A more complete discussion of the nature of informational objectives is given in chapter 11 on implementing communication changes.

The specific objectives of this first chapter follow:

1. To describe several authors’ perceptions of the field of organizational communication
2. To present a paradigm of the field of organizational communication and illustrate the limits of the field discussed in this book
3. To define organizational communication as the term is used in this book
4. To define and illustrate the following concepts as they are used in this book:
 - a. process
 - b. message
 - c. network
 - d. interdependence
 - e. relationship
 - f. environment
 - g. uncertainty

Perceptions of Organizational Communication

In 1981, Pace and Ross released the results of a national survey of introductory organizational communication courses. Among their findings were the following:

1. Communication and speech communication departments are the ones most likely to offer a basic organizational communication course.
2. The course is required by one-third of the departments for its majors and minors.
3. Typical enrollment in the course is between twenty-five and fifty students per section.
4. The primary and secondary books used in the course were most often published after 1976.
5. Content of most courses includes: communication networks; informal/grapevine communication; communication climate; communication theory/models; organization theory; leadership; management styles; theory of organizational communication; motivation theory; and conflict/conflict management.

It is apparent from the results of this survey that the field of organizational communication has grown remarkably in just a few years. All indications are that this growth will continue. Students who enter the field of communication demand that their education lead

directly to a future occupation or profession rather than more education. Organizational communication as a field appears to answer these demands. What is organizational communication? What does it include and what does it exclude?

Several authors have attempted to offer their perceptions of the limits of this relatively new discipline. Redding and Sanborn define organizational communication as the sending and receiving of information within a complex organization. Their perception of the field includes the following: internal communication; human relations; management-union relations; downward, upward, and horizontal communication; communication skills of speaking, listening, and writing; and communication program evaluation. Katz and Kahn perceive organizational communication as the flow of information—the exchange of information and the transmission of meaning—within an organization. Using the general systems model developed for the physical sciences by von Bertalanffy (1956, 1962) and others, Katz and Kahn define organizations as open systems and discuss such properties as the importing of energy from the environment; the transformation of this energy into a product or service characteristic of the system; the exporting of that product or service into the environment; and the reenergizing of the system from energy sources found once again in the environment. Zelko and Dance primarily discuss the “skills” of communicating in businesses and professions (speech making, listening, interviewing, counseling, conferences, selling, persuading). They perceive organizational communication as an interdependent system that includes both internal (upward, downward, and horizontal) and external (public relations, sales, advertising) communications. Lesikar shares Zelko and Dance’s perceptions of internal-external communication and adds a third dimension, personal communication (the informal exchange of information and feelings among organizational members).

Thayer, also using the general systems approach to communication, refers to organizational communication as those data flows that subserve the organization’s communication and intercommunication processes in some way. He identifies three communication systems within the organization: operational (task- or operations-related data), regulatory (orders, rules, instructions), and maintenance and development (public and employee relations, advertising, training). Bormann and others limit their study of organizational communication to “speech communication” (as opposed to written communication) within a system of overlapping and interdependent groups. They emphasize the communication skills of listening, meeting in small groups, and speaking to persuade. Huseman and others (1969) limit the field of organizational communication to organizational structure, motivation, and such communicative skills as listening, speaking, writing, interviewing, and discussing. Several writers emphasize the written media of communication: reports, letters, memos, bulletins, proposals, and the like.

Greenbaum (1971, 1972) perceives the field of organizational communication as including the formal and informal communication flows *within* the organization. He separates internal from external organizational communication and views the role of communication primarily as *coordination* of personal and organizational objectives and problem-generating activities. Witkin and Stephens define an organizational communication system as “those interdependencies and interactions among and within subsystems, through the act of communication, which serve the purposes of the organization.” Haney, using a general semantics approach to communication, defines organizational communication as the coordination by communication of a number of people who are interdependently related.

This conceptual disparity is further illustrated by the finding of Downs and Larimer that the following twenty-one areas of subject matter are currently being taught in organizational communication courses: downward communication; upward communication; organizational theory; horizontal communication; decision making; small group communication; leadership; research techniques; motivation; interviewing; change and innovation; conflict management; organizational development; organizational culture; conference techniques; management theory; consultation training; listening; job satisfaction; public speaking; writing; and sensitivity training.

Several writers have developed their own taxonomies to, supposedly, bring clarity out of the confusion. Voos divides the field into decision making; upward, downward, and horizontal communication; persuasion; cognitive dissonance; networks; and feedback. Knapp writes about interpersonal and intergroup communication in organizations; individual-organizational interaction; organizational communication as a field; training and research in organizational communication; characteristics of communicators and receivers; channels of information flow; communication media; and the total system of communication within an organization. Carter (1972) speaks of theories and systems of organizational communication; barriers to organizational communication; vertical and horizontal communication; media and informal channels; organizational change; and evaluation of the effectiveness of organizational communication.

Bernstein (1976), summarizing findings of an Industrial Communication Council survey, identifies the most important concern of organizational communicators to be interaction between management and the organization, employees, and external publics.

Falcione and Greenbaum (1976) developed a taxonomy for the following series of organizational communication abstracts: interpersonal, intragroup, and intergroup communication in organizations; communication factors and organization goals; skills improvement and training; communication media; communication system analysis and research methodology; and general review of the field. Finally, in 1981, Foltz defined organizational communication as "the exchange of information, ideas, feelings down, up and across organizational lines."

If these different perceptions and viewpoints seem confusing, consider the survey by my colleague, Don Rogers, of twenty-six organizational communication textbooks. He identified thirty-nine major topic areas in these books, 80 percent of which were published after 1972. His conclusion is *no topic is covered in every textbook, and the majority of topics are covered in less than one-half the textbooks.*

Most of the above perceptions, however, seem to share an empirical logical-positivist view of organizational communication, a paradigm often referred to as "functionalist." The functionalist perspective views organizational life as mechanistic, using systems theory to posit that organizations control and coordinate people and resources through communication (Farace, Taylor, Stewart, 1978). According to Putnam and Cheney (1983), the functionalist paradigm's assumptions include the following:

1. Work as purposeful-rational action dominates social existence.
2. Social reality is objective, materialistic, and subject to prediction and technical control.
3. The goals of research are understanding and prediction for the purpose of exerting technical control.

While the functionalist relies upon an empirical tradition and orientation, a perspective that relies more upon an anecdotalist's mode of thinking is growing in popularity among some organizational communication scholars and researchers. This paradigm, called "interpretive," presumes that social reality is intersubjectively created (Sotirin, 1984) and that organizing and communicating are interdependent processes of organizational life (Putnam, 1982). Further, if organizational life is identified as culture, then (according to Sotirin) organizing and communicating become the focal activities of organizational culture. In fact, Pacanowsky and O'Donnell-Trujillo have stated (1982):

Organizational culture is not just another piece of the puzzle, it *is* the puzzle. From our point of view, a culture is not something an organization has; a culture is something an organization *is*.

Those who subscribe to the interpretive approach tend to conduct naturalistic research using participant-observation techniques to collect the "talking and writing," the primary data that reflects the social reality of the organization's participants (Hawes, 1976).

Paradigm and Definition of Organizational Communication

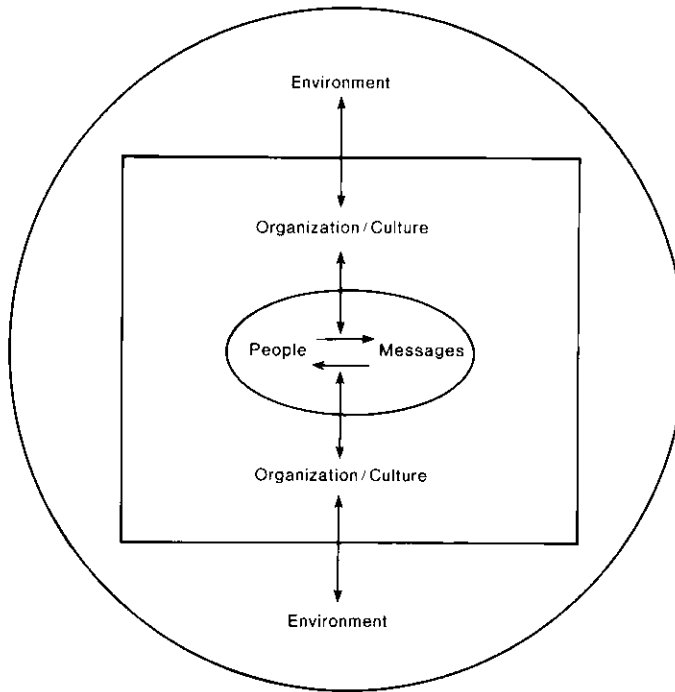
It is apparent that approaches to and definitions and perceptions of organizational communication are legion. Organizational communication can mean and refer to whatever an author wants. Despite such a variety of viewpoints, a few common strands can be detected in many of these perceptions. (1) Organizational communication occurs within a complex open system which is influenced by and influences its environments, both internal (called culture) and external. (2) Organizational communication involves messages and their flow, purpose, direction, and media. (3) Organizational communication involves people and their attitudes, feelings, relationships, and skills.

These propositions are illustrated in figure 1.1. This functionalist paradigm leads to the definition of organizational communication used in this book: *Organizational communication is the process of creating and exchanging messages within a network of interdependent relationships to cope with environmental uncertainty.* This perception of the field of organizational communication includes seven key concepts: process, message, network, interdependence, relationship, environment, and uncertainty. Each concept is defined and illustrated briefly in the following sections of this chapter and in more detail in later chapters.

Process

An organization is a dynamic open system that creates and exchanges messages among its members and between its members and its environment. We talk about "process" because the phenomenon of creating and exchanging messages is *ongoing, ever changing, and continuous*. To illustrate the notion of process, let us build a banking organization. As we construct our bank, note the relationship between environmental interactions and internal exchanges.

Figure 1.1 Paradigm of organizational communication.



Eleven people in a small town gathered one evening in the home of Jasper Smith, a leading citizen of the town, to discuss the need for a bank. The town's population had grown from 200 to 1,500, and community members needed a place both to store excess funds and to seek additional funds in the form of loans. Jasper proposed to his ten guests that collectively they form a bank, name Jasper president, sell stock at \$5 per share, seek a loan from an upstate bank to finance a building, and attempt to service both the savings and borrowing needs of the town's population. One of Jasper's guests mentioned the federal and state banking regulations that would govern both the interest rates and methods of operation of the bank. Another guest suggested that the new bank would need a computer, an automatic teller, and a drive-in window to run the bank efficiently and provide fast service for its customers. Another mentioned the poor state of the economy and its effect on the bank's ability to provide housing loans. Finally, someone else said that the group would need to tell the rest of the town about their decision and explain the beginning operations of the bank.

Toward the end of the meeting, all agreed to do as Jasper requested. They produced a written document outlining exactly what the bank's goals would be; how the goals would be achieved; who would assume what role in reaching the goals; and how much of their own resources they would expend toward helping the bank become effective.

The group had formed an organization, the Smith Bank, in response to environmental needs. They had organized and assigned various roles to their members, again in response to their environment. Each member would have to interact with certain parts of the environment and with the other members, whatever their roles. Notice the steps that they followed:

1. Environmental needs in the town changed.
 - a. Population changes (social factor) occurred, resulting in people's desire for a bank.
 - b. Recession (economic factor) was underway, forcing the bank to sell stock and borrow money to start its business.
 - c. Banking technologies (technological factor) required computers, drive-in windows, and automatic banking.
 - d. Federal and local regulations (legal factor) limited the amount of interest the bank could charge and pay.
2. People interacted to discuss environmental changes.
 - a. Environmental changes produced uncertainty among residents.
 - b. Alternatives for coping with this uncertainty were discussed.
3. People initiated and exchanged messages among themselves, defining roles and functions needed in the bank to cope with environmental uncertainty.
 - a. The goals for the bank were decided: to provide fast and reliable savings and lending services to the town's residents.
 - b. The kinds of roles and functions needed to meet the goals were determined: customer services, legal services, research and development, financial services, and advertising and communications.
 - c. Division of responsibility and roles or functions were assigned people within the organization.
 - d. Allocation of resources of members of the bank was made.
 - e. A written charter and corporate plan outlining the bank's goals, objectives, and methods of operating were developed.

One year later the eleven people who had assembled in Jasper Smith's house opened the doors of the Smith Bank, a small bank with legal, finance, customer service, communications, and research development departments. Jasper Smith was president and chief executive officer, and the other ten members were treated equally, two in each of the five departments.

During the first few months of the bank's operation, the recession began to ease somewhat, and more money became available for the town's economy. These factors prompted the finance department to propose to Jasper that the Smith Bank consider forming a trust department. Jasper asked the communication department to interview a sample of the town's residents to confirm the need for the new program. The legal department studied the implications of state banking codes for the trust department and reported its findings to the finance department and to Jasper. While this research was underway, an employee of the bank asked the communications department to indicate when the bank's first dividend would be paid. Before an answer could be provided, the legal department told the communications department to consider the Security and Exchange Commission guidelines on giving an insider information without making it available simultaneously to all stockholders.

In all of these interactions or environmental shifts, organizational uncertainty was reduced by the creation and exchange of messages among the members of the organization and between organizational members and members of various publics. Thus, *an organization is an open system in which messages are created and exchanged within a network of interdependent relationships to cope with environmental uncertainty.*

Message

A symbol is something that stands for something else. A word, for example, is a symbol when it refers to an object. To communicate, a person must be able to evolve a mental picture of something (create a concept), give it a name, and develop a feeling about it. Effective communication with another person implies that the concept, the name, and the feeling are similar to those of the other person. In other words, effective communication means that you and I refer to the same things when we talk. We share understanding.

A *message* is one or more symbols that we perceive and to which we attach meaning. We may be simultaneously sending and receiving the same symbols. The symbols may be verbal or nonverbal. The creation of meaning is what changes the symbols into messages. Thus, messages are composed of meaningful symbols about people, objects, and events and are generated by the interaction of people.

In organizational communication, we study the creation and exchange of messages throughout organizations. Organizational message behavior can be examined according to several taxonomies: language modality, intended receivers, method of diffusion, and purpose flow. *Language modality* differentiates *verbal* (linguistic) from *nonverbal* (nonlinguistic) messages. Examples of verbal messages in organizations are letters, speeches, and conversations. With verbal messages, we are most interested in studying the exact word choice used in the speech, letter, or conversation. Nonverbal messages are primarily unspoken or unwritten. Examples of nonverbal messages are body language (eye movement, gesturing); physical characteristics (height, weight, hair length); touching behavior (handshaking, stroking, hitting); vocal cues (tone, pitch, rhythm); personal space (spatial arrangements, territoriality); objects (glasses, wigs, clothing); and environment (room size, furniture, music).

Intended receivers include people either within or outside the organization. Messages in the first instance are intended for *internal* use, and those in the second instance, for *external* use. Examples of internal message systems include memos, bulletins, and meetings. External message behavior is illustrated by advertising campaigns, public relations efforts, sales efforts, and civic duties. Internal messages are intended for consumption by the employees of the organization. In this book we will study primarily internal messages. However, within the systems framework, it is important to realize that external messages satisfy the needs of an open system by linking the organization to its public and its environment.

Method of diffusion identifies the particular communication activity employed during the sending of the messages to other people. Diffusion implies that messages are spread throughout the organization, either widely or narrowly. Here we are interested in *how* messages are spread. Most organizational communication diffusion methods can be divided into two general categories: those using software, and those using hardware for dissemination. Hardware methods depend upon electrical or mechanical *power* to make them function.

Software methods depend upon our individual abilities and skills—particularly thinking, writing, speaking, and listening—to communicate to and with others. Included in the software methods are such *oral* face-to-face communication activities as conversations, meetings, interviews, and discussions and such *written* activities as memos, letters, bulletins, reports, proposals, policies, and manuals. Hardware methods use such *technological* processes as the telephone, teletype, word-processing machines, microfilm, radio, walkie-talkie, videotape, and computers. In this book, we will be concerned most with *oral software* methods of message diffusion. (Many current books deal exclusively with written and technological communication activities.)

Purpose of flow refers to *why* messages are sent and received in organizations and *what* specific functions they serve. Redding suggests three general reasons for message flow within an organization: task, maintenance, and human. *Task* messages relate to those products, services, and activities of specific concern to the organization, for example, messages about improving sales, markets, quality of service, and quality of products. *Maintenance* messages, such as policy or regulation messages, help the organization to remain alive and perpetuate itself. *Human* messages are directed at people within the organization—their attitudes, morale, satisfaction, and fulfillment.

Thayer presents four specific functions of message flow within an organization: to inform, to regulate, to persuade, and to integrate. Informative and persuasive messages most likely fall within Redding's category of task messages. Regulatory functions, approximate maintenance messages, and integrative messages serve functions similar to human messages. In this book, we will examine these three types of message behavior plus *innovative* messages—those messages that enable the organization to adapt to its changing environment. For example, new plans, new activities, and new programs or directions generated in problem-solving and planning sessions are typical of innovative messages.

In sum, we recognize the different modalities, audiences, diffusion methods, and purposes of messages. Since we are primarily concerned with *speech communication* phenomena within organizations, our discussion of message behavior emphasizes the following kinds of messages: *verbal and nonverbal messages orally diffused to internal audiences for task, maintenance, human, and innovative purposes.*

Network

The colonel communicated the following message² to the major: "At nine o'clock tomorrow there will be an eclipse of the sun, something which does not occur every day. Get the men to fall out in the company street in their fatigues so that they will see this rare phenomenon, and I will then explain it to them. Now, in case of rain, we will not be able to see anything, of course, so then take the men to the gym."

The major passed on the message to the captain: "By order of the colonel tomorrow at nine o'clock there will be an eclipse of the sun. If it rains, you will not be able to see it from the company street, so then, in fatigues, the eclipse of the sun will take place in the gym, something which does not occur every day."

2. I first heard this story in a speech delivered by W. C. Redding at the University of New Mexico, March 6, 1973. The source is believed to be the United States Military Academy, West Point, New York.

The captain then said to the lieutenant: "By order of the colonel in fatigues tomorrow at nine o'clock in the morning the inauguration of the eclipse of the sun will take place in the gym. The colonel will give the order if it should rain, something which does occur every day."

The lieutenant then told the sergeant: "Tomorrow at nine the colonel in fatigues will eclipse the sun in the gym, as it occurs every day if it's a nice day. If it rains, then this occurs in the company street."

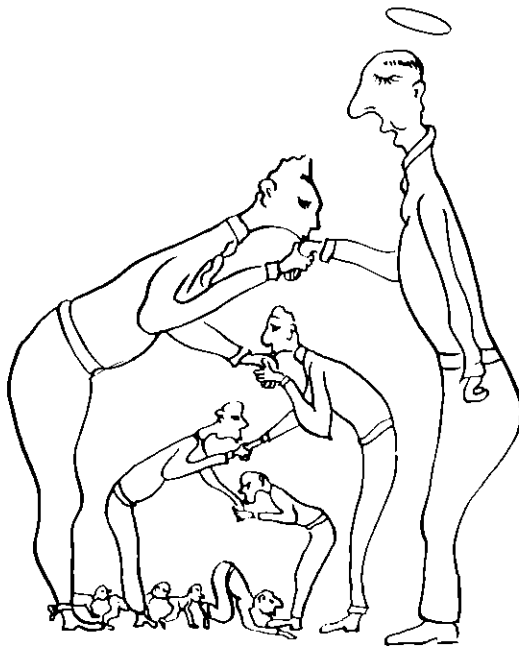
The sergeant then assured the corporal: "Tomorrow at nine the eclipse of the colonel in fatigues will take place because of the sun. If it rains in the gym, something which does not take place every day, you will fall out in the company street."

Finally, one private said to another private: "Tomorrow, if it rains, it looks as if the sun will eclipse the colonel in the gym. It's a shame that this does not occur every day."

This story illustrates the most common written-about pattern of communication within an organization: the downward pattern that progresses from superior to subordinate until the message is diffused throughout the organization. This is not the only pattern, or even the major pattern, used in most organizations. Organizations are composed of a series of people, each of whom occupies a specific position or role. Creation and exchange of messages among these people takes place over a set of pathways called a *communication network*. A communication network may include two people only, a few people, or an entire organization. Many factors influence the nature and scope of the network such as, role relationships, direction of the message flow, serial nature of message flow, and content of the message. Since message content was considered previously, we will now briefly discuss the role of a person in the network, the direction of the message, and the serial process that influences the effectiveness of the network.

Role behavior in an organization dictates who occupies what specific position or job, either formally or informally prescribed. For example, an employee may be hired as a secretary and be told that the job duties include such behaviors as typing, taking shorthand, running errands, and setting appointments. These duties constitute the *formal* role of a secretary. This formal role influences to whom the employee communicates in the course of the job. The secretary may ask the boss a question about a filing error, may have lunch with other secretaries, or may supervise other secretaries or clerical personnel. Besides communicating with people through normal channels in the course of the job, the secretary may also talk with certain employees in other departments or divisions within the organization, may communicate with other secretaries about nonjob-related events or activities, and may discuss rumors about the boss or certain recent unofficial reports. In all cases, the secretary is communicating unofficially via a network of *informal* relationships. This basic difference between formal and informal networks of communication explains why much, perhaps most, communication within an organization does *not* follow a prescribed pattern dictated by such management bibles as the organization chart. We will study extensively the relationship between formal and informal networks in subsequent chapters of this book.

We will examine the various network roles people may assume as they create and exchange messages. Specifically, we will compare the behavior of network participants (members of communication groups, group members who link with members of other groups, and liaisons who connect groups without belonging to any one group) with the behavior of non-participants (that is, isolates who exchange very few messages). We will see the degree to



Organization chart

which network members are integrated into the entire system as well as the degree to which groups are connected to each other and to the system.

Direction of the network has been traditionally trichotomized into downward, upward, and horizontal communication—depending upon who initiates the message and who receives it or is supposed to receive it. *Downward communication* refers to messages that flow from superiors to subordinates, as in the military example given earlier. Most downward communication concerns task or maintenance messages related to directions, goals, discipline, orders, or questions. *Upward communication* refers to messages that flow from subordinates to superiors, usually for such purposes as asking questions, providing feedback, and making suggestions. Upward communication has the effect of improving morale and employee attitude. Therefore, upwardly directed messages usually are classified as integrative or humanly related. *Horizontal communication* is the lateral exchange of messages among people on the same organizational level of authority. Messages communicated horizontally usually relate to problem solving, coordination, conflict resolution, and rumors. Each of these three network directions is examined more closely in a later chapter.

Serial process is a term meaning step-by-step and implies that the communication process in organizations goes from person-to-person-to-person. Imagine five small children playing the telephone game where one youngster whispers a secret to another, and so on, until the last child repeats aloud the secret. Comparisons with the initial secret usually reveal marked differences. When messages are passed up, down, or across the organization, they

are being reproduced serially as they flow over the various networks. When rumors spread via the organization's grapevine, they are being spread serially.

Usually several things happen to a message as it travels in an organization. Details are omitted (leveling), added (adding), highlighted (sharpening), or modified (assimilating) to conform to the interests, needs, and feelings of the reproducer. Members of organizations soon find that as the number of links in a human message transmission system increases, so also does the probability for error, distortion, and omission. March and Simon call this phenomenon "uncertainty absorption." Pace and others have proposed that errors tend to develop in the serial reproduction process when messages from more than one channel are mixed, when too many messages are processed at the same time, and when messages come too fast. Applying the concept of uncertainty absorption to decision making along the organizational hierarchy, Redding (1967) concludes: "*The higher one goes in the hierarchy, the more must decisions be based upon less and less detailed information of the 'life-facts.'*"

Before you claim that the world is ruled by "Peter-Principled managers," be advised that if the top of an organization were to receive all available information, the organization would probably collapse from information overload. Other variables to study in order to understand the effects of the serial process on message flow are type of network, rate of message flow, redundancy in messages, efficiency of network pathway, and function of network.

In sum, we will examine both formal and informal upward, downward, and horizontal messages as they travel serially through organizational networks.

Interdependence

Earlier, we defined an organization as an open system whose parts are all related to its whole and to its environment. We say that the nature of this relationship is *interdependent* or interlocking because all parts within the system, called subsystems, affect and are affected by each other. This means that a change in any part of the system will affect all other parts of the system. This also means that, in a sense, communication networks within an organization *overlap*.

Implications for the concept of interdependence center on the relationships between the people who occupy the various organizational roles. For example, when managers make a decision, they would be wise to account for the implications of their decision on the entire organization. Of course, one way to compensate for the interdependent relationships affected by and affecting a decision is to communicate all possible messages to all possible people within the organization. Naturally, so much information would cause the organization to collapse from information overload. On the other hand, too little information communicated may affect other variables, such as morale, attitude, production, and turnover. Somewhere there is a formula for determining the appropriate number of messages for effectively maintaining the organization's existence without overloading it. One purpose of this book is to provide answers to this dilemma.

Relationship

The fifth key concept inherent in our definition of organizational communication is relationship. Exactly what relationships are important for study in an organization? Since an organization is an open, living, social system, its connecting parts function in the hands of people. In other words, the network through which messages travel in an organization is connected by people. Thus, one of our interests is to study the human relationships within the organization by focusing on the communication behavior of the people involved in a relationship. We will study the effects of these behaviors upon specific relationships within the organization's subparts as they interact with each other. We will study employee attitudes, skills, and overall morale as they affect and are affected by organizational relationships.

One way to look at the various relationships possible within an organization is to examine the degree of aggregation of the individuals being studied, ranging from the simplest system, the dyad, to the most complex, the entire organization. Thayer lists three levels of communication within the organization: individual, group, and organizational. Pace and Boren use the term *interpersonal* to refer to situations in which communication occurs in a face-to-face relationship and go on to identify four specific face-to-face relationships according to the number of people involved: dyadic communication, serial communication, small group communication, and audience communication. All four exist within an organization. In a *dyad* two people interact. In *serial communication* (just discussed) the dyad is expanded, so a message is relayed from A to B to C to D to E by a series of interactions in which everyone interprets and transmits the message along the chain. In *small group communication* three to approximately twelve individuals are concerned in the interaction. Last, in *audience communication*, a gathering of thirteen to many more people is involved. Subsequent chapters examine ways to strengthen interpersonal relationships within the organization.

Environment

Duncan (1972) has defined the environment as "the totality of physical and social factors that are taken into account in the decision-making behaviors of individuals in the system." He further breaks down and analyzes the environment in terms of its internal and external components. The former refers to the personnel component, the functional and staff component, and the organizational level component (e.g., objectives/goals, products/services, integration). The external component refers to customers, suppliers, competitors, technology, etc.

In our paradigm of organizational communication, we are equally concerned with transactions occurring within the internal environment, comprised of an organization and its culture, and those between an organization and its external environment, often referred to as boundary-spanning activities. Recently, the study of an organization's culture has grown in both prominence and popularity. Schwartz and Davis (1981) have defined culture as the "pattern of beliefs and expectations shared by the organization's members—which produce



Organizational communication is the process of creating and exchanging messages within a network of interdependent relationships to cope with environmental uncertainty.

norms that shape the behavior of individuals and groups in the organization.” Culture typically refers to the beliefs, rituals, values, myths, mores, and stories that differentiate one organization from another. In short, by examining the symbols, language, and ideology of an organization’s culture, we can typically describe how it behaves. We will examine culture in more detail in chapter 3 and see how it contrasts with an organization’s climate.

An organization is defined as an open system because it interacts with its external environment. In the earlier example, we listed several environmental contingencies outside organization, such as technology, economy, law, and social factors. Present-day organizations must constantly monitor these and other factors, such as government regulations, stockholder concerns, community issues, political controversies, cultural differences, and even energy shortages. As the environment changes, new information demands are placed upon the organization. It must cope with these changes in environment by creating and exchanging messages both internally among relevant units and externally to important publics. Organizations that do will live and probably be effective. Those that do not will die. In a later chapter, we will examine in detail the various environmental contingencies affecting organizations and the kinds of communicative behaviors called for in coping with these contingencies.

Uncertainty

An organization creates and exchanges messages among its members to reduce the uncertainty they face from environmental factors. Some organizations, such as research and development organizations, faced with highly complex tasks, require a high degree of integration among members in order to cope with environmental uncertainty. Other organizations involved in more routine behaviors, such as producing automobiles by assembly line, may require more differentiation among their members, less integration, and thus, fewer message exchanges to confront uncertainty in the environment. We define *uncertainty* as the difference between information available and information needed. Members of an organization who need and have a lot of information—for example, about new government regulations affecting their product line—are more certain in their ability to manufacture products that conform to the regulations. If, however, the members do not have the information they need, they are more uncertain and may produce substandard products.

Uncertainty can also occur when members of an organization receive *too much* information or more than they really need to confront the demands of their environment. If he is given fourteen books to review, a staff attorney researching the impact of a new state regulation will be just as ineffective as an attorney who is given no books. One of the major concerns of organizational communication is to determine exactly how much information people need to reduce their uncertainty without being overloaded. Unfortunately, such decisions rarely include the input of the persons most directly affected by the decisions, namely, the employees themselves.

This view of uncertainty presumes that an organization *reacts* to its external environment by receiving and diffusing information from it to reduce uncertainty. Another view, promoted by Karl Weick (1969), argues that, while organizations are information-processing units that interact with their environments to remove as much uncertainty from their informational inputs as possible, the organizations will process *only* those information inputs relevant to them. They will attend to only those relevant inputs, thus creating and constituting the environment to which they react. According to Weick, they *enact* their own environment. Organizations interpret the information and assimilate it according to their own needs. Weick's position leads to a process view of the organization as it interacts with its external environment.

SUMMARY

We live in an age of organizations. We are all affected by organizations every day. Organizations as communication systems are in a state of crisis mainly due to archaic structure and faulty communication. Several authors and researchers have offered explanations and solutions to the organizational communication problems inherent in our systems. Common to many of their perceptions is the proposition that an organization operates as a complex, open social system through which energy flows to and from the environment via the interaction of people and messages within the system. Organizational communication is discussed

from a functionalist perspective as a dynamic process by which the organization interacts with the environment and by means of which the organization's subparts interact with each other. Thus, organizational communication can be seen as the *creation and exchange of messages within a network of interdependent relationships to cope with environmental uncertainty*.

Seven key concepts in organizational communication were reviewed: process, messages, network, interdependence, relationship, environment, and uncertainty. Process was emphasized since organizations exchange messages in a dynamic, continuous, ongoing manner. Message behavior was considered through examination of language modality (verbal and nonverbal), intended receivers (internal and external audiences), method of diffusion (oral and written software and hardware), and purpose of flow (task, maintenance, human, and innovative). In the discussion of message behavior, we emphasized verbal and nonverbal messages orally diffused to internal audiences for task, maintenance, human, and innovative purposes. Networks were discussed with focus on role relationships, direction of message flow, and the serial nature of message flow. We considered both formal and informal messages as they travel serially upward, downward, and horizontally through organizational networks. We defined the concept of interdependence, discussing its implications for human relationships in organizations. We also mentioned relationships, identifying four possible interpersonal relationships according to the number of people involved: dyadic, serial, small group, and audience communication relationships. Internal environmental transactions of an organization were shown to be linked to its culture, or way an organization behaves. The external environmental factors that directly impact on an organization were identified as economic, legal, technological, political, cultural, and social. Finally, uncertainty—the difference between the amount of information an organization has and the amount it needs—was shown to involve both message underload and overload.

EXERCISES

1. List all the organizations to which you belong (work, school, social, family, civic). Compare your list with those of your classmates. Discuss both the differences and the similarities of the lists.
2. Calculate the approximate amount of time you spend each day in organizational activity.
3. Think of an organization (which you may belong to) in terms of the separate roles and functions perceived (as defined by an organizational chart). For each role, develop a list of the types of information that need to be “processed” daily.
4. Ask three people what they perceive the words “organizational communication” to mean. Select the three people from the following categories: a friend in another class; an employee of an organization who is classified as a manager executive, staff member, or officer; and a communication expert from the fields of consulting, training, or teaching.
5. Based upon information in exercise 4, make up your own definition of organizational communication. How does it differ from that in the text?

6. Based upon the paradigm of organizational communication presented in the text, list those aspects of an organization's external social environment that must be considered for the organization to operate efficiently. Think in terms of an organization to which you currently belong or have belonged.
7. List three differences between verbal and nonverbal messages you have observed in an organization. Give specific examples.
8. Interview a communication director (or an employee relations, labor relations, or personnel director) in an organization. Ask that person to provide examples of both internal and external messages used in the organization. Also ask for examples of diffusion methods.
9. Construct a message (approximately one paragraph long). Assemble a group of five people. Place all but one of the people outside of hearing range. Read your message to the remaining person. Ask the person to repeat the message as closely as possible to one of the other people while the rest remain out of hearing. Repeat this process until all five people have had a chance to say aloud the message they heard. Tape record this process and listen to the tape afterward. Look for changes in the message due to additions, omissions, modifications, and highlights. Discuss these changes among the group.
10. Design a message to be presented orally face-to-face to 2, 11, and 85 people at three separate times. Discuss the changes in the message for each presentation. Did you change the method of diffusion? the content of the message? the direction of the network?
11. List all technological "improvements" that have become part of the organizational structure and have fostered a climate of impersonal communicative behavior.
12. Share Wiio's Laws with someone you know in an organization. Does this person agree with them? Can he or she provide you with situations in which some or all of the laws applied to the organization?
13. Consider the seven concepts that make up organizational communication. Can you develop (in one to three pages) a short description of an organization or an outline that includes these seven concepts?

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