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ABSTRACT

A study identified and categorized different types of internal communication systems and developed an applied model of internal communication in adaptive organizational systems. Twenty-one large organizations were selected for their varied missions and diverse approaches to managing internal communication. Individual face-to-face or telephone interviews were conducted with middle- or senior-level managers who were knowledgeable about internal communication in the organization. Results indicated that there was a varying degree of leadership asserted in the development and management of internal communication. Four types of internal communication systems were identified: impoverished, imaginary, disjunct, and adaptive. A model describing the diverse elements of internal communication was developed based on a compilation of the organizational analyses and research conducted as part of the study. The inner portion of the model represents the product of the organization, and the outer circle represents the internal communication process which facilitates the accomplishment of organizational key result areas. Arrows connect the product and processes and indicate their reciprocal nature. The ultimate focus of the model is the product, but the communication process must be managed and stressed if the key results are to be achieved. Organizational effectiveness depends upon balancing these product and process factors. (A figure presenting the types of internal communication systems and a figure presenting the model are included; 58 references, a list of the organizations and titles of interviewees, and upward, downward, and horizontal internal communication activities, practices, and programs are attached.) (RS)

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A MODEL OF INTERNAL COMMUNICATION IN ADAPTIVE COMMUNICATION SYSTEMS

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A MODEL OF INTERNAL COMMUNICATION IN ADAPTIVE COMMUNICATION SYSTEMS

Abstract

Internal communication in 21 large organizations was analyzed to determine how communication is managed. Four types of organizational communication systems are identified followed by an applied model of internal communication. The model describes the diverse elements included in the process. In addition, the model provides a framework for managing change by effectively managing internal communication in complex organizations.

A MODEL OF INTERNAL COMMUNICATION IN ADAPTIVE COMMUNICATION SYSTEMS

Introduction

Organizations today must compete in rapidly changing, unstable, and often volatile environments. Survival depends on establishing effective communication with the external environment as well as instituting an internal communication system which links organizational subsystems and individuals. Leaders of innovative and quality-oriented organizations recognize the need for effective internal communication among employees, and they are asserting greater influence to improve these communication systems (Downs, 1988; Hackman & Johnson, 1991; Mara, 1982).

The nature of internal communication is much more complicated than the traditional downward communication emphasized in classical, more authoritarian structures of the past. Today, leaders are much more concerned with upward communication from employees, two-way interaction with feedback, horizontal and cross-functional communication across the organization, and informal discussions or meetings (Peters, 1987). The hope is that more effective communication will not only reduce uncertainty about job responsibilities, organizational policies, and personal concerns, but that it will also produce innovative improvements as well as satisfied employees who like their work and are motivated to accomplish high performance goals (Lawler, 1986; Pace & Faules, 1989).

While small businesses experience communication problems, the communication climate in these businesses is relatively simple to understand and manage. Large, bureaucratic organizations are qualitatively different due to their size, structure, segregation of tasks, and diversity of employees. In this more complex setting, sub-sets of employees can interact and thus create different realities. Misperception, misunderstanding, and internal conflict are constant sources of problems. Filtering and distortion of information occur due to additional links in the communication chain, and fragmentation can occur if there is insufficient planning and coordination. In addition, the large volume of available information is a constant problem. The challenge for most large organizations is to find a balance between giving employees too little information and saturating them with so much information that they are overloaded and therefore unable to process it (Goldhaber, 1990).

Purpose and Method

Internal communication in large, complex organizations is the focus of study in this investigation. More specifically, the purpose was:

(1) to identify and categorize different types of internal communication systems
(2) to develop an applied model of internal communication in adaptive organizational systems.

A total of 21 organizations were selected for analysis. These organizations were selected because they are large, have varied missions, and have diverse approaches to managing internal communication. Many of these organizations have been recognized for their excellence, since approximately one-fourth of them have received or been a finalist for the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award. A variety of types of organizations are represented, including banks, hotels, oil companies, electronics companies, computer companies, manufacturing organizations, governmental agencies, an insurance company, a telephone company, and a grocery chain. Appendix A presents a list of the organizations investigated and the titles of individuals interviewed.

Individual face-to-face interviews were scheduled with middle and senior level managers who managed or were knowledgeable about internal communication in the organization. Occasionally telephone interviews were scheduled if a face-to-face meeting could not be arranged. A standard set of questions was asked. Interviews ranged from 1 hour to a full day, with most interviews lasting approximately 2 hours. In addition to interviews, internal documents, video tapes, survey questionnaires, newsletters, manuals, and other written documents were collected for analysis. The objective of this analysis was to gather as much information as possible about the internal communication system in the organization, both formal and informal, oral and written, as well as upward, downward, and horizontal.

In addition to the interviews, articles and books on managing internal communication were reviewed. This produced a large number of sources from academic, professional, and trade journals. This information from articles and books was considered to be a useful body of knowledge which could be compared and contrasted with the organizations being investigated.

Types of Internal Communication Systems in Organizations

One of the primary findings of this investigation is that varying degrees of leadership are asserted in the development and management of internal communication. In some systems

considerable leadership is employed in the organization and delivery of programs, and in others there is much more of a laissez-faire attitude. This section begins with a general discussion of leadership. It is followed by a categorization of four types of internal communication systems which is based on the type and degree of leadership utilized.

Two of the dominant themes in books and articles on leadership are: (1) a call for greater vision from top and middle management in conceiving what the organization can become, and (2) a need to implement that vision in an effort to change and transform the organization (Adams, 1986; Bennis & Nanus, 1985; Hitt, 1988). While managers coordinate and control programs, leaders are distinguished by their insight into the future, innovativeness, and personal growth gained from mastering painful conflict (Kotter, 1990; Zaleznick, 1990). Leaders challenge the status quo and are "possibility thinkers" instead of "probability thinkers" (Kouzes & Posner, 1987). They inspire a shared vision and empower others to act (Block, 1987; Conger & Kanungo, 1988). A vision may be as vague as a dream or as precise as a goal or mission statement, but it provides the organization with a sense of purpose and focus to work as a unit instead of a fragmented collection of activities (Bennis & Nanus, 1985). Once an organization has a clear vision of what it can become, leaders must then change organizational practices and procedures as well as implement programs to achieve that vision. This process of transforming a corporate culture has been the topic of numerous research efforts (Davis, 1984; Deal & Kennedy, 1982; Dyer, 1984; Kanter, 1983; Schein, 1985; Tichy & Devanna, 1986; Wilkins, 1989).

The two themes of vision and the implementation of that vision into reality represent the essence of effective leaders. These themes can also be used to categorize different types of communication systems and the degree of leadership being exhibited.

Two distinctive dimensions of communication in organizations can be identified. The first dimension is "Envisioning a Communication Plan and Process" with the extremes of high and low. The high end of the scale represents a communication system which has a clear vision of its goals and objectives, contains methods to achieve those goals, is strategically planned, and includes written documentation as well as communication policy to legitimize and formalize its function in the organization. At the low end of the scale there is little to no plan of how communication is to be developed or managed.

The second dimension is "Implementing Communication Activities and Programs" with the extremes of high and low. High implementation of communication is characterized by a system which includes many communication activities and programs which may be either formal or informal as well as structured or unstructured. At the low end of the implementation scale there are very few communication activities.

If we join the dimension of "Envisioning a Communication Plan and Process" with the dimension of "Implementing Communication Activities and Programs," the result is a matrix which

illustrates the four possible types of communication systems. Figure 1 presents these four different communication systems which can be labeled as: (1) Impoverished, (2) Imaginary, (3) Disjunct, and (4) Adaptive.

Impoverished Communication System

An Impoverished Communication System is least desirable since it is characterized by a lack of planning and a minimum amount of communication or programs. Levels of information uncertainty will be high, and employees will find it difficult to satisfy their need for task, personal, or policy information. This can result in high levels of frustration and stress, possibly leading to low satisfaction, high turnover, or poor performance. It is most probable that the management philosophy in this system is very task oriented. Coercive, legitimate, and reward power are used much more than expert or referent power. This centralized decision-making system adheres to the belief that "what employees don't know won't hurt them." Even though information related to doing the job might be available, human concerns such as how employees are being evaluated, promotion/advancement opportunities, and recognition for their work are virtually nonexistent. Since this system does not satisfy basic information needs, it is viewed as very undesirable by most individuals in the work force today.

Imaginary Communication System

An Imaginary Communication System exists in an organization which has envisioned a communication plan but has very little implementation. A grand scheme has been designed and a plan of action has been conceived, but it is merely a paper tiger. This organization has good intentions but is motivated more by the planning process than the desire to implement. Policies and procedures are of greater interest than action. The organization is driven by an infatuation with creating a model program but lacks the will to exercise movement. It is much like a military general who is more concerned with creating the ideal battle plan and best trained army, but refuses to go into combat unless everything is in place. An imaginary system might also occur if an organization is concerned about public relations with its employees but will not allocate the fiscal and personnel resources to actualize the dream. Employees are told that a plan exists and are promised action, but it never comes. This violation of expectations can lead to cynicism and skepticism by employees, making it even harder for a future effort to succeed. While lip service is given, a communication program never materializes. Sometimes a plan is devised and implemented; however, the

Figure 1

Types of Internal Communication Systems

Implementing Communication Activities and Programs	Envisioning a Communication Plan and Process: High	Envisioning a Communication Plan and Process: Low
High	Adaptive Communication System	Disjunct Communication System
Low	Imaginary Communication System	Impoverished Communication System

communication plan fails because it is ill-conceived, a product of misanalysis, poorly implemented, or lacks support from top management. The end result is an illusion of good communication.

Disjunct Communication System

A Disjunct Communication System lacks a plan but includes many communication activities and programs. Unlike imaginary systems, a disjunct communication system is driven by a need for action more than thought and planning. It is characterized by ad hoc programs which are fragmented, partially conceived, and often inefficient. Because these programs are reactions to problems as they occur, the programs lack focus. Programs are created with little analysis or assessment of needs; therefore, there is more fire fighting than resolving of communication problems. A disjunct system can also create a very political environment, where the discovery of a network of informed individuals is the primary means of reducing uncertainty. In this system there are pockets of understanding, but the initiative to managing communication and reducing uncertainty comes more from the bottom or middle of the organization rather than from the top. Corporate priorities and the role of communication are not clear. Successful communication is viewed as something which happens in spite of, and not due to, the efforts of top management.

Adaptive Communication System

An Adaptive Communication System not only has the vision of a communication plan but it also contains communication practices and activities which emanate from that vision. This system operates from a blueprint which has been developed following introspection and reflection. Communication in the organization is first analyzed. Employees are surveyed for their perceptions and level of understanding, various methods of communication are analyzed for effectiveness and efficiency, existent communication activities are evaluated, and long-term communication objectives are determined. Mission statements, philosophy statements, communication policies, and corporate goals are created, and each include as well as emphasize the importance of communication in the organization.

Communication is viewed as a top priority, and the communication process is directly linked to the mission and philosophy of the organization. These written documents provide the rationale and "deep structure" for communication activities. In this way, top management legitimizes communication and sanctions its role as vital instead of peripheral. Management leads from the top down and allows for bottom-up feedback. This results in a system which is adaptive

instead of static, organismic instead of mechanistic, and focused instead of entropic. Communication is viewed as an on-going "process" and not a collection of "programs" with a beginning and an end. Management uses information from employees to re-evaluate and continuously improve by changing communication practices and programs as needed. While many organizations say communication is important, an adaptive system views communication as a commodity which must be chartered, nurtured, and managed if it is to succeed. Resources are dedicated to analyzing and monitoring communication in the organization. Individuals with titles such as "Director of Employee Communication" or "Coordinator of Employee Relations and Development" are charged with the task of creating an interactive culture and facilitating upward, downward, and horizontal communication. Top management in an adaptive system knows that a laissez-faire attitude toward communication inevitably results in a confirmation of "Murphy's Law." Unattended and unmanaged, communication will fail.

A Model of Internal Communication

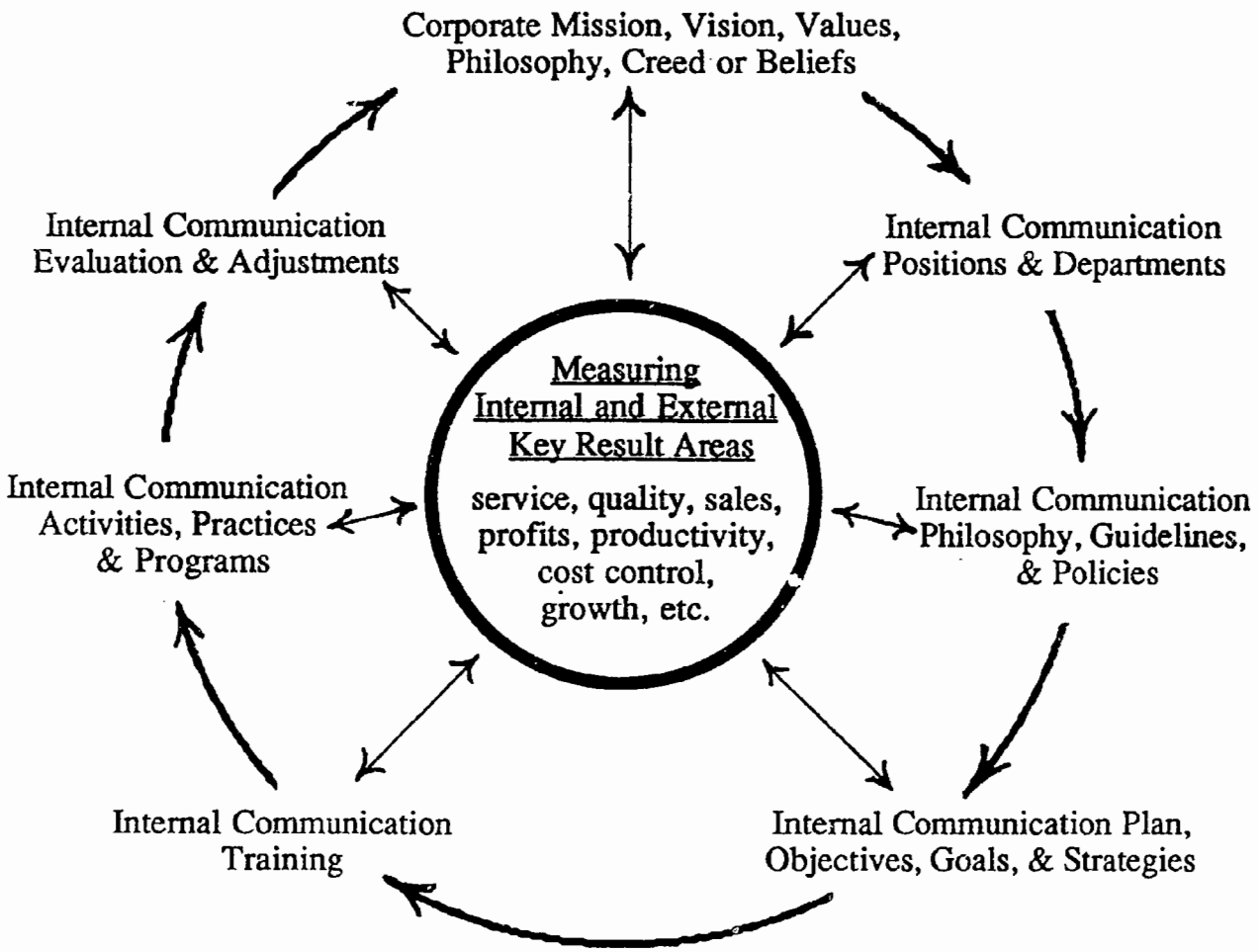
The model of internal communication presented in this section clarifies how an adaptive organizational system becomes successful. It identifies the elements which interact to produce effective communication and change in large, bureaucratic organizations. The model is based on a grounded theory approach and follows the qualitative analytical procedures employed by Strauss (1987) and Strauss and Corbin (1991). According to this process, complex social behavior such as communication in organizations must be systematically identified and coded, analyzed, compared to data from other organizations, organized around core categories, and related to the experiential data of the researcher. The end product of this process is an integrative diagram or model which displays the elements and interactions between elements.

Figure 2 presents the model of a comprehensive, adaptive internal communication system and is a compilation of the organizational analyses and research conducted during this project. The model identifies the elements typically found in effective communication systems.

The inner portion of the model represents the "product" of the organization, and the outer circle represents the internal communication "process" which facilitates the accomplishment of organizational key result areas. The arrows connecting the product and internal communication process indicate the reciprocal nature of these elements. Internal communication processes should be centered around and support the key result areas, and in like manner, the key result areas should impact and guide the internal communication process. The ultimate focus of the model is the product, but the communication process must be managed and stressed if the key results are to be

Figure 2

Model of Internal Communication



achieved. Organizational effectiveness depends on balancing these product and process factors. What follows is a more detailed discussion of the elements included in the model.

Measuring Internal and External Key Result Areas

The key focus and centering point of the model is the key result areas, also known as the "bottom line" of the organization. This inner circle represents the "product" which the company is seeking to generate. An organization does not have one key result area but many, and the selection of these key result areas is extremely important. Depending on the selection of these key result areas, an organization might achieve these results but fail as an organization. If short-term, efficiency oriented areas are selected, more long-term factors such as customer satisfaction and quality of work life might be neglected. Organizations pursue goals centered around quantity, efficiency, innovativeness, quality, and morale (Hage, 1980). Often contradictory goals emerge, and overall effectiveness depends on managing the paradox of these differing objectives (Quinn, 1988).

There is currently a trend for organizations to emphasize customer service and quality improvement. Organizations such as Halliburton, USAA, Xerox, and Amoco place a high priority on the "quality improvement process" and have as their key objective the satisfying of external and internal customers. These organizations are seeking to identify and satisfy the needs of their customers. A variety of other key result areas have been identified as well, including sales, profit, productivity, cost control, growth, and market share. From a systems perspective, these are the ultimate outcomes of the organization.

Organizations indicate considerable interest in developing and using quantitative measures to assess their effectiveness and to track these measures over time. Quantification provides accountability and a means to determine success. This concern for quantification is greatly influenced by the criteria established by the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award. All of these seven criteria stress the importance of objective measurement, and to achieve the highest score on each criterion an applicant must provide objective, sustained results instead of isolated, anecdotal information. Measurement accuracy, reliability, and timeliness are stressed. Areas of measurement called for in the Baldrige Award include: employee performance measurement for individuals and groups, quality assurance including audits and reviews, customer satisfaction surveys, employee morale and development, and business operational processes such as error rate, defect rate, cycle time, utilization rate, and waste.

Closely related to the issue of measurement is "benchmarking." The best performing organizations seek to compare themselves against the products, services, and practices of their

toughest competitors. Independent testing and evaluation is used to compare themselves to organizations within and outside their industry. Many different types of organizations might be used for benchmarking, and a corporation might encourage different functional areas to seek out the best organization they can find for that particular functional area for comparison (Kearns, 1990).

In addition to the measurement of external key result areas, organizations are placing considerable emphasis on tracking internal key indicators. Quality gurus such as Edwards Deming, Joseph Juran, and Philip Crosby are frequently cited, as they call for a new concern for quality, change in management practices, and internal measures of performance. While each of these individuals is very process oriented, they also place considerable emphasis on measurement. In an effort to establish quality, "statistical evidence and control" are key mechanisms necessary in making work outcomes visible and providing evidence of improved performance.

Corporate Mission, Vision, Values, Philosophy, Creed or Beliefs

The establishment of a written corporate mission is an important first step in providing organizational leadership and identifying the corporate culture. A variety of related terms such as "vision," "values," "philosophy," "creed," "beliefs," and "priorities" are also used. These statements are often brief, abstract statements which define the fundamental, unique purpose that sets a business apart from other firms of its type, and they identify the scope of its operations (McGinnis, 1981). Of course, these written documents must be more than mere rhetoric. They must provide the foundation on which all corporate behavior is built and are the articulation of a corporate way of life. They must represent the underlying deep structure and conscience of senior management.

Numerous benefits are gained from a well-conceived corporate mission or philosophy. The mission creates a perceived common purpose and identifies the organization's self-concept for employees as well as external publics. It is a means by which senior management can establish key operating principles. These principles serve as an umbrella under which strategic planning and decentralized decision-making can proceed. The corporate mission and priorities can provide internal motivations for actions and thus reduce the need for strict policies, procedures, and control by authority. They also provide a basic set of beliefs a corporation can fall back on in a time of crisis or uncertainty.

Recent research has demonstrated the value of corporate mission statements. Falsey (1989) provides an excellent review of corporate philosophy and mission statements, how they are created, and their value to an organization. Cochran and David (1986) provide an analysis of how

mission statements are worded and their ability to inspire, while Pearce and David (1987) compare the characteristics of mission statements produced by high and low performing companies.

Some mission statements articulate the corporation's philosophy toward communication and make explicit statements about the importance of communication in the organization. A recent study investigated a sample of organizations from *Fortune* magazine's most- and least-admired companies, best and worst performers, and America's best-managed factories (Pettegrew & Ruddell, 1989; Ruddell & Pettegrew, 1988). Results indicated that corporate doctrine statements (e.g., mission, goals, creed, code of ethics statements) are closely tied to general performance and have become key issues in many of America' most esteemed companies. More importantly, this study provided strong empirical evidence that the importance the corporate places on communication is related to the bottom line of corporate performance. Companies large and small that performed well paid a lot more attention to the elements of doctrine and to the importance of a strong communication function than those which did not. Even though this study is correlational in nature, it helps clarify the role of communication in successful organizations.

Internal Communication Positions and Departments

Senior managers in almost every organization tell their employees that communication is important. Many companies, however, do not have top level positions responsible for managing corporate communication. There is a troubling contradiction here. Are we to assume that communication is important and will succeed without direction or resources to support this process? What other important function in the organization is assumed to "happen" without management or explicit goals? Unfortunately, communication has received a great deal of lip service but not many resources to guide the process. Even though "communication" is a buzz word in organizations, more corporations are recognizing how crucial it is to effective operations. As CEOs take a more active role in internal and external communication, they are more aware of its importance.

A variety of positions at the corporate or middle management level are focused specifically on communication. Some carry titles such as "Director of Employee Communication" or "Director of Internal Communication." While some organizations have one primary position focused on internal communication, other corporations have many titles and positions in a variety of different departments which are partially or completely dedicated to managing communication. Most of the time, these internal communication positions are located in the following areas: (1) public relations, (2) human resources, (3) corporate quality, or (4) training and development.

The character of the corporate communication is greatly influenced by the department or departments which manage internal communication. As a rule, communication which is directed by public relations departments tends to focus more on downward, one-way communication and is oriented toward print, electronic, and mass media. Often message campaigns are designed to impact a specific target audience of employees. Top management frequently uses these resources to project an image of the company to employees and create a persuasive appeal. Conversely, communication which is directed by a human resources, quality, or training department tends to focus more on two-way, face-to-face oral communication. There is a tendency to use messages to create understanding more than persuasion, and there is a greater interest in developing upward communication processes and programs. Attention is placed on employee development, with the ultimate goal of greater organizational development.

If the communication function is to be viewed as legitimate, there must be individuals in the organization with positions, titles, and job responsibilities which clearly identify their internal communication management responsibilities. Departments must be established which focus on the communication process, and these departments must be given a sufficiently large budget to do their job well. Some organizations view communication as a "soft" area, and attach the communication responsibility to the job description of an already overworked individual. This is unfortunate since it relegates communication to a minor role and establishes it as a low priority. To be effective, the communication function must be consolidated under a few clearly titled positions and not subsumed within a large number of functional areas. The best of all circumstances would be an individual at the corporate level with a title such as "Director of Internal Communication" who coordinates and provides leadership for the various forms of internal communication throughout the organization.

Internal Communication Philosophy, Guidelines, and Policies

Just as an organization needs a corporate mission and vision statement to define and guide its activities, it also needs a clear, written statement about communication to direct the internal communication process. Such a statement serves to "charter" the communication function and provides the principles on which all communication is centered. In the same sense that a government legitimizes itself with a constitution, a clear communication philosophy becomes the preamble which reflects the distinctive character of communication in the organization (Ruddell, 1985). By providing these communication guidelines, management gives its blessing to communication departments to perform within a certain framework.

Communication guidelines can range from a short paragraph articulating a general communication philosophy to a more detailed set of communication policies which are stated in the personnel manual. For example, Amoco oil company has developed a philosophy statement which reflects its commitment to communication:

> To effectively achieve our goals, we are committed to communicating in an open, honest, timely and involving manner. We believe in the value of two-way communication. To that end, we will use formal and informal methods that support the exchange of information and ideas. We will provide information and feedback in ways that demonstrate our respect for individuals and their contributions to the success of the company.

A more detailed set of communication policies have been developed by Texas Instruments which is included in the corporate personnel manual under the heading "Employee Communications." These policies are viewed as guidelines for the conduct of employee communications programs and activities carried out on a corporate-wide basis or carried out within sites, plants, or individual operational units of the company. In this document the responsibilities of various communication job positions are clarified, with emphasis on written, electronic, and face-to-face communication. Sections on "Management Communication" and "Two-Way Communication" stress the importance of clear downward communication as well as the need for formal and informal upward flow of information. Some contend that if a company does not have a communication philosophy, that organization will be characterized by fear of open communication with superiors, perfunctory and merely evaluative employee appraisals, meetings which are informational and decision "giving" sessions rather than interactive, and publications presenting safe topics but avoiding controversial issues (Sigband, 1969). An effective philosophy of communication typically would indicate management's desire to keep employees informed, explain sensitive and controversial issues, encourage open communication so as to facilitate problem solving and feedback, and establish a climate where risk taking is accepted.

The establishment of a clear communication philosophy can become a point of reference for the later development of more explicit communication policies. To be effective, these policies should be written, brief, well-organized, and be presented as general guidelines and standards for communication instead of rigid rules to follow (Pace, 1989). These policies should be an extension of and relate directly to the company goals and mission articulated by top management (Foltz, 1985). Communication policies should help identify why an organization should communicate, what should be communicated, who should communicate with whom, and how management should communicate with its employees (Burhans, 1971). Most written communication policy statements include a need for regular, open, two-way communication; list some subjects that

should and should not be covered; and state who is responsible for carrying out the program--either a corporate communication director or individual managers and supervisors (Ruch, 1984).

It is important to clarify that there is a difference between communication "policy" and communication "procedures." Policies are high-level, inclusive statements which clarify an organization's communication values. They serve as an authoritative source which eliminates misunderstands, reduces uncertainties, and serves as a basis for directing the efforts of employees toward the achievement of company goals (Bloom & Dold, 1981). Procedures, on-the other hand, are lower level, more concrete statements which tell others how to perform activities or tasks. A procedure serves to implement a policy by explicitly telling us who does what, and when (Level & Galle, 1988). The present discussion centers around the development and use of high-level communication policies, not procedures. This distinction is quite important, since many would advocate the use of communication "policies" but few would recommend the use of communication "procedures" in organizations. Policies provide a framework but allow a certain latitude for interpretation; however, procedures tend to restrict and regiment prescribed behaviors.

Several studies indicate that many organizations do not have written communication policies. In a survey of Fortune 500 companies, Ruch (1984) found that only half of them had any written communication policy. In another survey of Fortune 500 companies, Hellweg and Phillips (1983) discovered that 53% had an established corporate communication policy. Gilsdorf (1987) conducted an analysis of written communication policy in organizations in the Phoenix, Arizona metropolitan area. She investigated twelve areas of communication to determine if written policy was used. Included in these areas were: public relations policy, employee communication policy, security of information policy, electronic mail policy, and routine communications policy. Results indicated that 54% of the organizations had written employee communication policies, with the largest percentage of organizations (74%) having a crisis communication plan or policy. These studies indicate that approximately one-half of organizations have some form of employee communication policy, but the nature and coverage of these policies are less clear.

While many promote the benefits of written communication policy, others contend that they are of less value. Some feel they are a way to create meaningless manuals which are not read or followed. Some confuse policies with procedures and view them as rigid, lockstep mandates. Others view them as too idealistic and unnecessary if top management shows employees that communication is valued highly. Some feel that communication departments are understaffed and overworked, and the cost and effort to create communication policies outweigh the minimal benefits to be gained. Still others think that a strong corporate culture or improved hiring practices can replace policies. Indeed, the development of communication policy is an empty exercise if top management is not yet interested or cannot be persuaded that communication is important. In like manner, if policy is drafted and then forgotten, the work is equally futile (Gilsdorf, 1987).

Clearly, there is no one best way of starting or writing communication policy, but it does appear to have considerable value in large, diverse, complex organizations. Gilsdorf (1987) contends that the two most frequently offered substitutes for communication policy are corporate culture and communication training. She maintains that both are needed and neither one can substitute for the other. She argues:

> The right communication policy for a firm can be a powerful carrier and shaper of culture. Similarly, communication policy spells out the skills and values that identify training needs....If a firm exhibits a strong corporate culture, policy can embody the culture and help the firm's members live it. If a firm is up to its elbows in outdated procedures manuals, policy can help that firm simplify. To foster excellent communication, then, a firm should scrutinize its communications, do some communications planning, and set policies and guidelines to show all its members the high value it places on excellent communication, and the way effective communicators proceed in that firm....Having a policy is much better than having nothing. The right policy, general enough to integrate communication without inhibiting it, and specific enough to give real guidance, will help, not harm, the bottom line (p. 52).

Internal Communication Plan, Objectives, and Goals

Following the creation of an internal communication philosophy, guidelines, and policies, a communication plan must be created which contains specific goals or objectives and an action plan to actualize the plan. Both short-term (i.e., one year or less) and long-term communication planning (i.e., two to five years) must be be developed. Many communication departments are ineffective due to their reactive instead of proactive nature. Communication planning helps reduce the "firefighting" since it creates a more focused structure and prioritizes the work to be done. This planning should be centered around the accomplishment of key objectives so as to avoid the "activity trap" which often is random and not productive. An additional, crucial element in the planning process is the budget available and the allocation of funds to certain programs or processes.

It is a common practice for individuals in communication departments to schedule one or two days at an off-site location once a year to develop a communication plan. In this setting they can be freed of distractions and discuss ideas openly in an informal environment. Successes and failures of the past year or a communication SWOT analysis (i.e., Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) can be undertaken to evaluate the communication role in the organization, relate it to the corporate mission and vision, and develop future programs.

One organization which has developed a very comprehensive communication plan is USAA in San Antonio, Texas. Specializing in a wide variety of insurance for military officers, USAA has

a five year strategic planning guidance document which is updated and published every year. Different segments of the organization meet separately to discuss their short- and long-term plans, and the results are presented in this document. In the communication division of the organization the first step is to reflect on the organizational mission, creed, basic precepts, and key result areas at USAA. Internal and external audiences are considered, and key assumptions and issues are articulated. An employee communication plan is then developed which includes new as well as revised communication objectives for the next year. Goals are set for the upcoming year, programs designed to achieve each goal are identified, strategies are discussed, and key performance indicators are developed. Finally, resources are considered. For each goal and program there are discussions and decisions made regarding staffing, facilities to be used, organizational support and structure needed, and budget allocation. This comprehensive planning allows the communication department to link the communication function to the broader corporate mission and environment, to prioritize the most important communication activities, to set specific target goals and methods of measuring effectiveness, and to reflect on the programs and resources necessary to accomplish those goals.

Even though many organizations might not employ the same detail in developing a communication plan as USAA, it is important that an organization establish some specific objectives. Here are some typical examples of specific communication objectives which Foltz (1985) lists:

1. Encourage supervisors to meet regularly with employees to discuss issues, problems and opportunities. (Ideally, specific communication responsibilities should be written into supervisory position descriptions.)
2. Install methods and procedures that encourage employees to ask questions, such as telephone hotlines and "speak-up" programs.
3. Hold regular meetings between management and employees. Encourage questions from and discussions with employees on problems, and opportunities, and explanations of how employees fit into the big picture.
4. Conduct surveys every other year to evaluate the effectiveness of the communication program and to determine audience needs and interests.
5. Establish one regular channel of downward printed communication to all employees to inform them about all aspects of issues pertinent to the company and industry. Distribute this at least once a week.
6. Issue a publication that will permit more in-depth coverage of internal and external issues. Distribute to all employees and other appropriate audiences on a bimonthly or quarterly basis.
7. Issue a special management publication that will address the special needs of managers.
8. Emphasize subjects that relate to corporate objectives. The subjects will include competition, government regulation, marketing plans, productivity, pay and benefits.
9. Reevaluate these objectives annually to be sure they are in line with organizational objectives (pp. 7-8).

Internal Communication Training

Training is utilized in organizations to improve knowledge and skills in a variety of technical, job-related areas. The focus of this discussion, however, is centered around "communication training" where an employees' communication behavior, knowledge, and attitudes are of primary concern. While this training provides new information for trainees, the emphasis in most programs is on developing specific communications skills which can be used on the job.

A variety of training models have been developed (Goldhaber, 1990; Pace & Faules, 1989). The following are elements typically included in these models:

1. Pretraining communication analysis. Frequently needs assessment interviews or scales are used to determine communication deficiencies in the work force. This audience analysis seeks to determine who needs what kind of training so as to maximize time and cost efficiency.
2. Writing communication training objectives. The trainer determines the desired behavior of the trainee after undergoing training. Certain informational and behavioral objectives are selected in an effort to provide focus and clarity for the training.
3. Planning training techniques. A variety of training methods can be employed including experiential activities, simulations, role playing, lecturettes, use of media, and case studies.
4. Posttraining evaluation and assessment. Following training, it is important to determine if trainees were satisfied, if they gained additional information, and if they acquired the desired skills. In addition, later assessment might seek to determine if they use these skills on the job and if the organization experiences a long-term positive effect.

Organizations develop different communication training opportunities for employees depending on their job requirements and position in the organization. Specialized communication training courses are frequently established for non-supervisory employees, first level management, and middle/top level management. Customer relations training, handling hostile customers, general interpersonal communication skills training, developing a supportive communication climate, and listening are typical topics included in non-supervisory communication training. Conversely, communication training for managers often includes topics such as meeting management, interviewing, handling grievances, and motivating people. Training in presentational speaking, leadership style, and communication dissemination strategies are topics of special concern to top management.

A survey of Fortune 500 organizations provides insight into how communication training is utilized in top American corporations (Hellweg & Phillips, 1983). The large majority view communication training as an important tool of the corporation, and approximately one half provide systematic communication training programs for their employees. Problem solving and decision making skills are included most frequently, closely followed by training in performance appraisal

interviewing, selection interviewing, and interpersonal communication. In addition, public speaking, listening skills, and persuasive communication are often included in the communication training.

The best designed programs and activities cannot succeed without the necessary communication skills to deliver these programs. Increasingly, organizations are recognizing the necessity of implementing communication training in an effort to develop more efficient and effective understanding among employees. The large majority of the organizations investigated in this analysis -- especially Motorola, IBM, Xerox, USAA, and Federal Express -- place considerable emphasis on communication training and view it as a vital element to their success.

Internal Communication Activities, Practices, and Programs

Following the establishment of a communication plan and development of communication training, the next step is the implementation and execution of specific internal communication activities, practices, and programs. To be effective, communication systems must use a variety of methods and channels of communication to achieve upward, downward, and horizontal communication. Appendices B, C, and D provide a list of various forms of written, oral (face-to-face), and electronic communication which are typically used to communicate internally. These matrices are a collection of possible choices, and they are not intended to suggest that all should be used. Effective communication systems must have a certain amount of redundancy; however, information overload is a major hazard of over communication or the use of too many communication channels. The objective is to find the right combination of upward, downward, and horizontal communication using various forms of written, oral, and electronic communication which reduce information uncertainty. The aim is to create understanding, not to generate the largest number of messages possible, so critical decisions must be made in the use of these communication activities and programs.

Some communication activities are informal and need unobtrusive coaching by managers, while others are more formal and require hands-on management. Organizational communicators must determine which activities are more formal than informal and balance their use in the communication system. Another key factor to consider is the preference employees express for sources of information. Consistently, research has indicated that most employees prefer getting information from their immediate supervisor, small group meetings, and top management (Friedman, 1981; Morgan & Schiemann, 1983) . The least preferred source is the grapevine. Discrepancies between the "preferred" and "actual" sources of information should be determined in

an effort to select communication activities and programs which best fit the needs of the organization.

Internal Communication Evaluation and Adjustments

One of the most important functions of a communication department is to measure and monitor the effectiveness of the communication system. In recent years, communication audits have become more widely used (Barkow, 1980; Downs, 1988; Emanuel, 1985; Holliday, 1986; Mara, 1982). Communication audits typically employ questionnaire surveys to measure and assess employees' perceptions of communication in the organization. These audits seek to determine communication problems in areas such as information adequacy on certain topics, the channels and sources of information, the direction of communication (i.e., upward, downward, or horizontal), the communication style of management, and the timeliness or usefulness of information. In addition to survey questionnaires, some communication audits use face-to-face interviews with selected employees to sample their reactions in more detail.

Most organizations using a communication audit administer the questionnaire to everyone in the organization, with all responses being anonymous. The norm is for the audit to be administered every other year, with the data analysis being done by outside consultants. Organizations vary in the way they use the final results, but most try to make the information available to employees and use the findings to identify problems or establish goals. Typically each unit or department is given the results per item for their unit, and comparative results are provided for the organization overall or possibly to a data bank of results from a collection of other organizations. Comparisons can also be made to the best and poorest performing units in the organization, even though these units are not identified by name. If the communication audit has been used previously, a baseline can be established so that the current results per item can be compared to the prior administration of the audit two years earlier. This "baselining" is very valuable since it allows an organization the opportunity to see progress on prior problems as well as monitor areas where they have been performing well.

Another method of evaluating internal communication which has received recent attention is the use of focus groups (Krueger, 1988; Morgan, 1988). This more qualitative procedure selects representatives from various work units in the organization. They are brought together and organized into groups. A facilitator guides group discussions in an effort to identify communication weaknesses or problems in the organization. Subsequent discussion from this sample of employees provides insight into problems and possible solutions. Frequently these

group sessions are characterized by stimulating discussion and are viewed as an efficient means of getting employee input.

Progressive, adaptive organizations are process oriented and know that change is the norm. In addition to communication audits and focus groups they employ a variety of other feedback methods such as readership surveys of publications and informal discussions between managers and employees to evaluate their internal communication. Soliciting and reacting to feedback is the key to becoming adaptive, and more and more it is the key to survival for many organizations. The information gained from evaluating internal communication is the basis for reconceiving the organizational mission or vision, its goals, and the methods employed to conduct business.

Conclusion

It is difficult to achieve effective internal communication in large, complex organizations, and efficiency in this setting is a goal which is rarely realized. If an organization hopes to survive in a competitive, fast changing work environment, it must understand the vital role played by communication. Organizational leaders need to develop a clear vision of internal communication and then provide the resources to implement and manage that communication vision. The model of internal communication presented here provides a framework for adaptive organizations to follow. By emphasizing communication, this framework increases the level of understanding in the organization, provides a means of persuasion, and establishes a mechanism for managing organizational change.

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Appendix A

List of Organizations and Titles of Interviewees

IBM, Austin, TX
- Manager of Communications and Community Relations
- Site Market Driven Quality Coordinator
- Site Administrative Services Manager

Xerox, Dallas, TX
- Manager of Business Process and Quality

Motorola (Semiconductor Products Sector), Austin, TX
- Manager of Human Resources & Training & Development
- Corporate Director of Employee Communication (Schaumburg, IL)
- Personnel Manager
- Training and Development Specialist
- Staff Development Specialist

Texas Instruments, Dallas, TX
- Manager of Corporate Internal Communication
- Manager of Quality and Reliability Assurance

Federal Express, Memphis, TN
- Managing Director of Employee Communications

Halliburton, Houston, TX
- Vice President of Human Resources (in Energy Services Group)
- Director of Quality (in Dallas)

Amoco, Houston, TX
- Manager of Human Resources
- Manager of Employee Involvement (in Chicago)

Wallace Company, Houston, TX
- Education and Training Coordinator

USAA (United Services Automobile Associates), San Antonio, TX
- Associate Vice President of Corporate Quality
- Executive Director of Communications & Administration
- Director Employee Communications
- Manager Administrative Services Employee/Placement
- Manager Corporate and Subsidiary Counseling

Texas Rehabilitation Commission, Austin, TX
- Executive Deputy Commissioner

Internal Revenue Service (IRS), Austin, TX
- Program Manager, Chief Quality Assurance Branch

Victoria Bank and Trust, Victoria, TX
- Executive Vice President
- President and Chief Operating Officer
- Director of Human Resources
- Director of Retail Banking
- Director of Marketing Services

NCNB Texas, Dallas, TX
- Assistant Vice President
- Manager of Service Quality

First Interstate Bank, Houston, TX
- Internal Communications Coordinator

Harvey Hotels, Dallas, TX
- President
- Regional Vice President
- National Sales/Travel Industry Manager

Marriott (Rivercenter), San Antonio, TX
- Quality Coordinator

GTE Southwest, San Angelo, TX
- Coordinator of Employee Relations and Organizational Development
- Corporate Director of Communications (in Dallas)

HEB, San Antonio, TX
- Director of Corporate Human Resources
- Manager of Human Resources Training & Development

Kinetic Concepts Inc. (KCI), San Antonio, TX
- Director of Human Resources
- Senior Manager of Public Relations

Emerson Electric, St. Louis, MO
- Corporate Director of Training

TRW, Cleveland, OH
- Director of Internal Communication

Appendix B

Internal Communication Activities, Practices, and Programs (Upward)

Written	Employee Opinion Survey Communication Audit Suggestion Box Program Speak Up Program Needs Analysis for Training Subordinate Evaluation of Superior
Oral (Face-to-Face)	Management by Wandering Around (MBWA) Open Door Policy Participative Decision Making (Employee Involvement, Quality Circles, Involvement Teams) Scheduled Group Meetings with Top Management Focus Groups Brown Bag Lunches Boss Talk (Questions & Answers) Ombudsman Performance Appraisal Exit Interview Grapevine
Electronic	Rumor Control Program "Open Line" Program E-Mail Voice Mail Telephone

Appendix C

Internal Communication Activities, Practices, and Programs (Downward)

Written	Statement of Corporate Mission, Values, Visions, or Philosophy Job Descriptions Newsletters Magazines Handbooks (Benefit, Recognition & Awards, Employee Information) Organization Policies Manuals Manuals Bulletin Boards Award and Recognition Publications Managers' Newsletter Management Feedback Program Memos & Reports Brochures Inserts, Enclosures, & Flyers Internal Comm Campaign Materials Daily/Weekly News Annual Report Posters
Oral (Face-to-Face)	Training New Employee Orientation Performance Appráisal Employee Recognition & Awards Monthly or Annual Mass Meetings Scheduled Superior-Subordinate Meetings for Development or Coordination Career Path/Advancement Counseling Mentoring Program Management or Employee Briefings Grapevine
Electronic	E-Mail Voice Mail Video & Audio Information/News Electronic Bulletin Board Telephone Help/Info Telephone Hotline Intercom System FAX

Appendix D

Internal Communication Activities, Practices, and Programs (Horizontal)

Written	Memos & Reports Letters Directory of Employees and Departments Kudos Program Peer Evaluation Program
Oral (Face-to-Face)	Scheduled Meetings with Peers (Departmental Committee Meetings) Scheduled Meetings with Other Managers Scheduled Meetings/Visits with Other Work Groups Mass Meetings Task Forces Focus Groups Family Day/Picnic Grapevine
Electronic	Teleconferencing E-Mail Voice Mail Telephone FAX