

Communication: The Invisible Bridge to Global Synergies

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Abstract

Organizational behavior in practice is always confined to human behavior. National and international business environments ultimately rely on output from human capital-people-to function at optimal operational capacity. Management and leadership share the need and the responsibility to embrace organizational structures that encourage communication. This paper will discuss the role of communication in fostering seamless and synergistic behaviors in organizational practice. Everything begins with receiving and understanding the correct written or spoken message.

The primary goal of communication in organizations is to assist participants in identifying with visions, missions, goals, and objectives organizational culture is attempting to share. Although new participants are allowed to join the organization based on what their experiences and skill sets indicate they might add, the major foci is on creating a community of optimal performers. Optimal operations depend on well-informed, capable participants who are willing to communicate.

"If people feel part of the corporate community, if they feel safe and cared for, if they are passionate about the mission and values and believe that others are living by them, they will generally give good service to the whole" (Pinchot, 1996, p.27). Like any other community, the corporate community reflects people from many backgrounds and experiences. Specific to each member of the corporate community is a foundation of knowledge synthesized by practice to create new knowledge of outcomes.

Communication seeks to have the new knowledge shared to promote growth and optimal use of corporate resources. Leadership and management are necessary to provide the appropriate language. Language partners with communication to act as the invisible bridge between the phenomenon of community that occurs when free people, with some

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sense of equal worth, voluntarily join a common enterprise and the political struggle that often replaces community when people are separated by vast differences in power, wealth and conflict over resources and promotions (Pinchot, 1996). Seamless progressions and synergies in behavior require good communication.

I . Introduction

There is national and international agreement on the importance of communication. Like the air that everyone breathes, all over the world, communication has been available and accessible so long it has become invisible. No matter what the quality of the air, human beings cannot choose to breathe or not to breathe. Whether there is an awareness of the process or not, human beings communicate from their conception to their decease. It is not a matter of whether to communicate or not to communicate; it is the quality of the exchange between the sender and the responder. It is the message that counts. This simple observation is important because it defines the first commonality that all people in the global environments of the world share. We are all human and we all communicate. Diversity of cultures and languages do not affect communication. Within cultures where there does not appear to be a language

barrier, other barriers such as socioeconomic status, ethnic identities, philosophical differences, and historical interpretations, and this is only a partial list, can prohibit communication.

The approach that narrows communication between a present speaker and listener neglects the consideration that all potential speakers and listeners are born into an ongoing communication process. From the time each new potential participant in the world is born, he/she is dependent on communication from the antecedent community of communicators (parents, grandparents, teachers, etc.) to provide a foundational identity. That foundational identity, like the roots of a tree, provides the nourishment for growth and future participation.

Education is considered to be the first formal request of society to each new participant. National and international environments place a priority on educating the children as new participants because it is agreed that they represent the future

of any continuum. Broad approaches to education include the acquisition of empirical knowledge, tactical knowledge, and through the mixture of practice and experience, wisdom.

Social identity is learned from interaction with the antecedent community of communicators. Every new participant entering the ongoing communications process is taught to focus on the single communicator or message that is presently most important. For instance, a new participant is given a name that is chosen by the antecedent community. Progression is measured by how well the participant can communicate by responding to being called by his/her name, noticing other stimuli, like bright colors, and learning multiple activities of daily living. Historical perspective is taught in small doses to the new participant as the learning process unfolds i.e., beginning with members of the antecedent community and continuing to expand with growth and maturation. In the continued learning process, participants learn many aspects of fact and fiction taught by numerous teachers, former new participants, who have digested the lessons taught by their antecedent communities. Knowledge is added to the foundation of new participants through educa-

tion, social identity, historical perspective, practice, and experience.

Behavior is an illustration of the ability of participants to choose the appropriate mixture of their foundational knowledge and experience to effectively join focused communities of communicators sharing a specific vision, goal, mission, or destination. Organizations represent a collection of participants who have declared their ability and dedication to focusing on the most important communication-optimal operational outcomes. Participants are expected to bring their education, social identities, historical perspectives, and their emotional intelligence to add to the organizational culture.

Organizational cultures emerge as new communicators that join the organization to collaborate and contribute. The process for building organizational cultures in global environments begins with antecedent and new communicators as well. Global synergies can begin with new communication based on the contributions of global participants who collaborate and contribute based on their education, social identity, historical perspective, practice, experience, and wisdom. Emotional intelligence to listen and hear before responding and suggesting might produce the lan-

guage to assist in making the invisible bridge more visible.

Seamless progressions toward global synergies could begin with developing learning communities at every level of national and international interactions. Kleiner, Roberts, Ross, Senge and Smith (1994) outline considerations to transform organizations to learning communities. “It means seeing organizations as centers of meaning and larger purpose to which people can commit themselves as free citizens … it means developing new answers” (p.507).

The word community has Indo-European origins with a base word meaning change/exchange and an additional root word meaning with to produce the word *kommein* which means shared by all (Senge et al., 1994, p.509).

Recognizing the interdependency of humanity no matter where their global location happens to be proposes communication to “enhance capabilities that characterize learning organizations: aspiration, reflection and conversation, conceptualization” (p.28) in global learning environments. “Without theories, methods and tools, people cannot develop the new skills and capabilities required for deeper learning. The synergy between theories, me-

thods and tools lies at the heart of any field of human endeavor that truly builds knowledge” (Senge et al., 1994, pp.28, 36).

II. Origins of Corporate Communication

Thomas (2008) conducted research on the medieval origins of corporate communication. An interesting observation from her research was that all of the students of corporate communication were males who had been previously educated in Latin to participate in Christian religious practices. After completion of their studies, which were usually financed by wealthy sponsors, students were employed as clerks or secretaries. “Employed by large landowners, these clerks and secretaries held positions of far greater importance than we associate with such jobs today” (p.40).

The most valued business skill clerks/secretaries learned was their ability to compose and write business letters. As the only means of communication in medieval times (about 650 years ago) that could be sent for long distances and still maintain a tangible record, business letters

were the first form of global communication. Composing business letters required a level of sensitivity to the differences of rank and status in the potential audience representing social, political, religious, legal, and practical considerations. Personal letters from one individual to another were considered public documents (Thomas, 2008).

Business letters were considered to be sermons or orations because they were spoken during preparation and were often delivered orally as speeches even if recipients could read Latin. Since English had not been fully standardized, most business letters were written in Norman French and Latin. Higher education began with the church and university; at Oxford University, “celibacy was one of the requirements for faculty status at the time” (Thomas, 2008, p.4).

Huber Walter, the King’s Chancellor, during the reign of Richard the Lion-Heart (1189~1199), developed the first system for organizing and archiving written records. Walter insisted that a third copy of all records be kept permanently in the royal treasury. The demand for copies and original manuscripts was stimulated; oral or token agreements were no longer satisfactory as they had been in the past

(Thomas, 2008).

The curriculum of the Oxford business course included subjects modern students would recognize as accounting, management, operations, business law, and graphic communication, in addition to grammar and punctuation instruction in Latin and French. It is interesting to note that although Thomas Sampson’s curriculum was referred to as the Oxford Business Course, he was not considered part of the Oxford faculty because he did not have a baccalaureate degree, and he was a married man. Sampson had to submit to being under the supervision of Oxford University, pay an annual fee to the Oxford faculty of Arts, and his students were required to attend lectures in grammar and rhetoric at Oxford University as a result of a statute enacted in Oxford in 1432 to regulate independent educators and their students (Thomas, 2008).

The primary economic unit during the 14th century was landed estates and the primary business of England was agriculture. Surplus goods such as grains, wool, leathers, candles, soaps, and beer that were produced on estates were exported to a network of market towns. As a result of the Black Death of 1348-1351 the feudal system began to break down-the value of

land dropped and wages rose. Most of the old nobility passed away leaving their titles and lands.

Other powerful economic forces, like the Roman Catholic Church, were greatly affected by the breakdown in the feudal system. Clerks and scribes had provided the communicative and administrative infrastructure of the medieval church. The church had to compete with increasingly powerful lay landowners for clerks, who were essential members of the medieval corporate workforce. Clerks became: merchants, former workmen, employers and contractors, farm laborers and gentlemen farmers (Hobbs, 2000). The origin of corporate communication tells some of the stories of how communication and exchanges between people help to build the foundations of corporate interaction. Corporations continue to be affected by occurrences in their internal and external environments. Learning from the experiences of others is an opportunity to share the risk and find new answers. Two of the most critical needs of the 21st century are to develop world-class leaders and create international learning organizations that can communicate across physical and cultural borders to create seamless, synergistic approaches to all aspects of global-

lization.

III. The Effect of World-Class Leadership On Communication

The ability to communicate effectively has always been necessary for leadership. Historically good leaders have been identified as being able to work within the parameters of their visions, missions, and goals while attracting new resources to their organizations. A key administrative duty was to draw distinctions between the *insiders* and *outsiders* and to keep the outsiders at arm's length to defend corporate borders. "Leaders of the future can no longer afford to maintain insularity" (Kanter, 1995, p.90).

World-class leaders will expand communication beyond industries and boundaries because of their cosmopolitan approach to leadership. Cosmopolitan leaders are comfortable operating across borders to inspire action and empower others to use it to encourage people from diverse functions, disciplines, communities, countries and the world to expand the pie for everyone instead of wasting resources in

a scramble for shrinking slices of the pie (Kanter, 1995).

Their interest is in forming networks of communicators with the vision, skill, and resources to create a mutual benefit for all participants by collaborating with others.

Kouzes and Posner (1995) offered *Seven Lessons for Leading the Voyage to the Future*. Globalization of markets and communication will play a significant role in the future of organizational behavior. Crucial points of the seven lessons are: (1) Leaders don't wait; (2) Character counts; (3) Leaders have their heads in the clouds and their feet on the ground; (4) Shared values make a difference; (5) You can't do it alone; (6) The legacy you leave is the life you lead; (7) Leadership is everyone's business (pp.101-108). The leadership design of the future that adapts world-class communication will take people out of the boxes of the old hierarchy and move them into a more circular, flexible and fluid management system that will allow the liberation of human spirit and endeavor.

"The wise leader embraces all those concerned in a circle that surrounds the corporation, the organization, the people, the leadership and the community" (Hesselbein, 1996, p.121).

Bradwick (1996) used an interesting analogy to define strategies for future leadership and management that she refers to as *peacetime management* and *wartime leadership*. Peacetime management and wartime leadership refer to the contrast between strategizing in an environment where management feels that "there is neither crisis or chaos, so no major change is needed" (p.132). In peacetime people are in their comfort zones, and "do not have the opportunity to hone themselves on a hard stone that teaches them to be unafraid of change and of making the right, but difficult, choice" (p.133).

Wartime leadership is characterized by emotional neediness that results from the conditions of change, crisis, and urgency. The world is a scary place and the future is uncertain; people are experiencing fear, dread, foreboding, and exhaustion (pp. 133-134). The analogy continues to discuss the waste of energy and resources in internal strife. To summarize, "The world has changed, and the change is permanent. The comfort zone is increasingly being replaced by endless danger" (Bradwick, 1996, p.133).

The emphasis on the need for better internal communication in organizations who are attempting to compete globally is well

placed. The analogy concludes by offering suggested internal behaviors to create world-class communication processes that alleviate internal threats to growth. A partial list is: (1) Define the business of the business; (2) Create a winning strategy; (3) Communicate persuasively; (4) Behave with integrity; (5) Respect others. At the emotional level create an environment that generates: confidence, certainty, action, strength, expertise, courage, optimism, and conviction (pp.134-139).

Globalization requires that participants from diverse backgrounds create symbolic, if not actual, communities to accomplish shared goals. The foundational identities of all participants were established in their individual cultural realities. What that means to the process of establishing a new community is that personal identity, social identity, and historical perspectives of all participants will have to be blended into a community of performers who can share mutually comprehensive communication strategies.

Olufowote (2006) revisited an early 1970s study on Symbolic Convergence Theory (SCT), which was introduced as a framework for discovering, describing, and explaining the dynamic process by which humans share symbolic reality (p.2).

SCT studies the processes of sharing meaning and consciousness between groups defined as rhetorical communities. Foci are centered on how participants make sense of their shared reality. Uncertainty is the trigger to attempts to make sense of facing an unpredictable, unanticipated future. “The future is framed as if it has been achieved and is being understood retrospectively” (Weick, 1969, p.6).

Communication is grounded in shared narratives of how participants draw from the past to reach a collective understanding and organize their response. Olufowote (2006) argues that a weakness of SCT theory is the assumption that group boundaries are fixed and immutable structures upon which social context and group interaction depend. In a bona fide group, he suggests, boundaries should be permeable and fluid existing in interdependence with the group’s social context. Celebrating the diversity of community membership facilitates the development of shared social context and commitment to common-ground perspectives (p.8).

Effective communication, that allows equitable treatment of all members of the community, can lead to the formation of coalitions. Stevenson et al. (1985) posited, “coalitions are considered to consist of

members who communicate with one another about coalition issues and potential coalition action” (p.261).

Implicit in this description of coalitions is the notion the members coalesce around a shared understanding of the past and the visions they share for the future. Olufo-wote (2006) posited that a revised approach to SCT should acknowledge that members of a rhetorical community drawing on the diversity of identities for their larger social context may experience conflict between the commitments of the rhetorical community and those of outside organizations or society (p.10). These conflicts can shape the members’ commitment to the formation of a new rhetorical vision (Kuhn and Nelson, 2002).

Hunsinger (2006) questions the role of the implicit theories of culture and cultural identity in intercultural technical communication. He raises the argument that these implicit theories of culture and cultural identity structurally encourage teachers and researchers to overlook crucial aspects of cross-cultural communication (p.2). For example, cultures can be described as individualist, collectivist, masculine or feminine (Beamer, 2000). He asked why decisions about cross-cultural communication are based on these

limited representations.

Trompenaars and Turner (1997) emphasized the use of the heuristic approach to discussing the dimensions of culture in intercultural technical communication. Weiss (1998) noted that the heuristic approach “treats members of a group as instances of a profile,” an essentializing practice that displaces cultural identity from the concrete individual into a typical instance of the individuals who share a culture (p.260). Munshee and McKie (2001) argued that the heuristic approach is prone to misrepresent cultural identity to “the differences that matter,” and the approach flattens culture to the reduced dimensions of the heuristic (p.16).

The result of the heuristic approach to intercultural technical communication is that individuals are described in terms of the typified cultural profile (Weiss, 1998). “For example, Andrews’ (2001) textbook cited an expert who linked the cultural behaviors observed in Japanese, German, and French organizations to respective national cultures, which were then plotted on a ‘high-trust/low-trust’ continuum” (Hunsinger, 2006, pp.9-10). Burnett (2005) argued that assuming that all citizens are alike can lead to stereotyping extremely diverse national and organizational cul-

tures (p.53). The problem is that despite increased migration, cultural identity is commonly understood to be independent of economic, political, and technological influences. The heuristic approach neglects the links between cultural identity and global contexts that illustrate the way cultural identity functions in cross-cultural communication (Hunsinger, 2006).

The danger of the heuristic approach is its use in preparing textbooks and instructing future participants in globalization from a limited perspective.

Spivak (1998) argued that the limited theory of culture and cultural identity produces intercultural research and pedagogy with ‘scantioned ignorance’ that neglects features of the globalizing world and significantly influence cultural identity in communication (p.x). Appadurai (1996) proposed that models of culture should change because globalization has made it difficult to characterize cultures definitively in any useful way (p.7). Researchers should not expect cultures to exhibit boundaries or structures, but rather address specific dynamic problems that stem from cultural conflict or confusion (pp. 46-47).

The logical conclusion to the discussion of the effect of world-class leadership on

communication, and the ability to build synergies in global markets, is that approaches to training students to become world-class leaders need to be improved. Students should be taught that global communication is about talking with individual people from diverse backgrounds—not entire cultures of people. The notion of teaching students to be tolerant of people from different backgrounds assumes that there is some deficiency in different people that must be overlooked. The questions that should be asked are: Who are you to tolerate me? Who am I to tolerate you? Differences in color, style, use, design, and other attributes are readily accepted in everything purchased or given, but when the same differences define people, why is it necessary to teach people to tolerate or include people who are different? If a person is different to you, then you are also different to that person; why explain? Aronowitz (2000) argued that practical, instrumental pedagogies train skills, but ‘have failed to prepare students to face relatively new issues such as globalization, immigration, and cultural conflict; the best preparation for the work of the future might be to cultivate knowledge of the broadest possible kind to make learning a way of life” (p.161). Hunsinger

(2006) concludes culture must continue to be questioned critically so that those working in intercultural technical communication might interact more flexibly and effectively on the global scene (p.9). The key to building coalesced communities to develop synergies for optimal outcomes is learning from everyone. International learning organizations might be the key to sharing future knowledge.

IV. Anticipating a Role for Global Learning Organizations

Senge (1994) wrote in the foreword of the Chinese Edition of *The Fifth Discipline*—“We feel the Chinese translation is particularly significant because of the impact this emerging economy is likely to have on the rest of the world. Like emerging economies in Asia, Africa, South America, and elsewhere, the Chinese society will face the unique challenge of entering twenty-first century without destroying the knowledge and wisdom that has taken more than fifty centuries to develop. As they pursue economic growth, will they follow the same path thro-

ugh industrialization that Western nations did? Or will they develop a new form of capitalism with an innate sensitivity to the subtleties of process and interdependence, integrating industrial and traditional thinking (p.563)?

The concern Senge expressed for how the rising economies will make leadership and management decisions in a global economy prompted these questions: Could the economies of the world benefit from an opportunity to develop a global learning organization? There is not a suggestion that American textbooks be translated into different languages. What if contributions from Asian, African, South American, Japanese, Korean, Chinese, and other participants in globalization were written as textbooks to teach new participants? Could communities of global learners benefit? *The Fifth Discipline Fieldbook* begins with a section entitled, “I See You.” The section shares that in northern Natal in South Africa, a common greeting is the expression: *Sawu bona*, which literally means “I see you.” The expected response from a member of the tribe is *Sirhona*, literally means, “I am here.” The greeting is very important to tribal members because of its implied meaning—“until you see me, I do not exist” (Senge, 1994,

p.3).

This illustration of the need to be acknowledged is important to the mindset of increased globalization of world markets. Appropriate ways to manage the need to be impressive without competing to demean or destroy others will be a valuable asset to training future global leaders. It is important to note that inherent in the social identity of many potential leaders and followers are the past and present uses of differences in people to justify caste/class philosophies, as sources of laughter at the way English is spoken by non-English speaking people in television/radio entertainment, the way historical accounts of events have been taught, and especially classifying people as immigrants who have come begging instead of workers, who have come to contribute, need to be critically addressed in future training endeavors.

Bowler, Halbesleben, Little, Seavers, Stodnick (2009) conducted a study that integrated social network analysis (SNA) techniques with individual motive in the performance of interpersonal citizenship behavior (ICB). The study furthered the examination of an earlier study of organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) (Organ, 1988) and concluded that the recur-

ring theme of individual motive suggested that many behaviors previously defined as (OCB) were well disguised self promotion driven by impression management motives (Bolino, 1999; Bolino et al., 2006; Bowler et al., 2009; Rioux and Penner, 2001).

The foci were centered on interpersonal citizenship behaviors defined as helping other employees who are beyond the scope of one's job. A scale to reflect three motives for OCB: pro-social, organizational concern and impression management was developed. Bowler et al. (2009) posited "that an impression management motive interacts with one's position within organizational social networks while the organizational concern motive and prosocial motive do not" (p.3). "Individuals driven by impression management motives are concerned with how they are perceived and evaluated by others" (p.4).

A salient, concluding point made by the study is that "although an individual may have a tendency toward impression management behaviors, it is the situation that draws out such motives" (Bowler et al., 2009, p.9). Global learning opportunities that allow opportunities for employees to be empowered might alleviate the contagion of series of communicators in vari-

ous organizational locations who “further their personal agenda along with or in spite of organizational goal fulfillment” (p.11).

Industry watch: Governance (2008) offers an interesting perspective on a branch of communication theory that looks at the role of story-telling in how we share knowledge and experiences of the world. A memorable point is “we might think our knowledge is grounded in observation/analysis; much of our understanding takes the form of narratives … stories we internalize about companies/corporate leaders to enable us to reach a view can often have little grounding in reality” (p.2). Understanding we don’t always have all the information is important to maintaining effective communication within global communities to build synergies.

Leonard (2009) revisits Stafford Beer’s Viable System Model and commented on necessary changes, (after Beer’s career that spanned more than 50 years), to keep organizations viable whether an organization or a country. An important conclusion was the need to avoid the usual categories and organization charts and get down to the actual necessary functions to assure communication channels function no matter who is performing them (p.2).

Research conducted at Moravian College (2009) offers a complementary observation that “in the age of multiculturalism, global communication is rooted in cross-cultural understanding” (p.1).

An anonymous M2 Presswire (2008) shares that international student enrollment in US colleges and universities increased seven percent to a record high in 2007~2008. A total of 623,805 students were enrolled in US colleges and universities; a jump of 40, 821 students over the previous year. The report described US student participation in study abroad as up eight percent from the previous year to a new record of 241,791 students. A point was made that the number of Americans studying abroad had increased more than 150% during the past decade (pp. 1-2). The study concludes with the commitment of the US State Department to offer substantive international experiences that increase mutual understanding and provide direct knowledge and career relevant skills (p.2).

The question that is relevant to creating a global learning organization is what changes in pedagogy and research are being made to assure education is not primarily from a western perspective? Whitehurst (2008), who heads the research arm

of the US Department of Education, says “the quality of education research today is the rough equivalent of medical research in the 1920s.

Americans of that era enjoyed not much greater than a 50~50 chance of benefiting from an encounter with the medical system” (p.1). Whitehurst concludes, “We are trying to fill huge deficiencies in knowledge” (p.A10).

Most people will be shocked that all the information available in secondary and post-secondary education services leave us with any deficiencies of knowledge. One important observation of Mental Health Weekly, that asks why close associates sometimes have trouble communicating (2007) is “People are so used to talking with those with whom they already share a great deal of information, that when they have something really new to share, they often present it in a way that assumes the other person already knows it” (Keysar, 2007, p.1).

Ariyaratne (1994) a successful community organizer in Sri Lanka reminds us that it is easier to begin an initiative than to bring enduring changes to fruition—“When we try to bring about change in our societies, we are treated first with indifference, then with ridicule, then with

abuse and then with oppression. And finally, the greatest challenge is thrown at us. We are treated with respect. This is the most dangerous stage” (p.16).

A return to the words of Senge (1994) in the foreword of the Chinese translation of *The Fifth Discipline Fieldbook* shares observations that conclude the argument for a need to create a global learning organization. His comments continue—In the West, our primary social institutions are in a state of breakdown because of fragmentation. We have fragmented education into the banal transmission of disconnected facts and dry academic exercises, to the extent that school is increasingly detached from personal growth and genuine learning, and is increasingly ineffective (p.566).

Senge (1994) concludes his dedication with suggestions to Chinese decision makers that are equally appropriate for new decisions concerning creating seamless links to global synergies by making the communication bridge more visible. New decisions on what should be made available to new participants in global communities should include an attempt at creating a global learning organization. The message I share with Senge (1994) is—I believe the principles and tools described

(in *The Fifth Discipline Fieldbook*) provide an initial outline of a new path. It is a path based on reflecting on our deepest aspirations, honoring personal visions and conversation, being more intelligent together than we can ever be separately. It is a path based on the primacy of the whole, rather than the primacy of the parts.

It is a path fundamentally different from the path along which industrial development in the West has progressed. Ironically, it is now a path that many corporations, schools and other institutions in the West are attempting to discover (p. 566).

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