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## Organizational Communication – Concepts and importance

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### **Abstract:**

There are varying views about Organizational Communication. Contingency approach assumes that organizational communication effects can be explained only in the context of the constraints of different contingencies But most thinkers opine that through communication, everyone knows his /her role place, and task within the organization and the different parts of that organization are adequately coordinated. When communication stops, organized activity ceases to exist, individual, uncoordinated activity returns. Communication is effective when members of an organization share information with each other and all parties involved are relatively clear about what this information means. Communication is not an end in itself but a means to an end. Proper communication lays the foundation of a sound organizational culture, builds high employee morale to the extent that in some cases listening the actual problem of the employees itself can give them the impression that proper action will be taken. Management has to ensure that it leaves the impression that communication efforts guarantee results.

### **1. Introduction:**

Peter Drucker (1973) provides an easily understood and simple approach to communication:

“Communication is defined as the exchange of information and understanding between two or more persons or groups. Note the emphasis on exchange and understanding. Without understanding between sender and receiver concerning the message, there is no communication unless sender gets feedback that receiver understands the message, no communication takes place.”

Wiio (1975;1978.) and Goldhaber, Dennis, Richetto and Wiio (1979) suggested the “contingency approach” to organizational communication explains the interaction of organizational and communication effects in different situations. According to them organizational communication effects can be explained only in the context of the constraints of different contingencies.

Wiio elevates the status of communication from other behavioral variables such as motivation, leadership, job satisfaction. Then he suggests that communication cannot be compared with other organizational variables: it makes all the other variables possible. From all the other variables organizational communication is an interfacing variable: the process of matching of two systems so that they are able to function in a coordinated way.

Wiio (1978) defines communication as follows:

“Organizational communication is such an interchange of information of information between systems or parts of systems where: [1] output information from one or several control systems causes work processes in one or several control systems, and [2] the communication process interfaces organizational systems in different contingencies, so that they are able to function as a social system in a compatible and coordinated fashion to achieve organizational and individual goals. ”

Cock, Witte and Nieuwkerke (1998) define communication as the sending and receiving of messages by means of symbols.

In 1938 Barnard stated that: “In any exhaustive theory of organization, communication should occupy a central place because the structure, extensiveness and scope of organizations are almost entirely determined by communication techniques”. The other theorists following the communication-based view of organization were Simon (1957) DeCock (1967a). The functions communication plays is most important, as an organization cannot exist without communication. They conjure up the gestalt approach by defining an organization as a “Whole of interdependent parts, in which each part has its own function geared to the objective of the whole, situated in a broader environment”. The objective of the whole must be clear to all the interdependent parts. These mutually independent parts must be coordinated in such a way that the objective of the whole can be achieved. Through communication, everyone knows his role place, and task within the organization and the different parts of that organization are adequately coordinated. To use the words of Hicks (1972). “When communication stops, organized activity ceases to exist, individual, uncoordinated activity returns. ”

Rogers and Bhowmik (1972) state that communication within organizations is a bi-directional, transactional occurrence, rather than a unidirectional, act as the majority of oversimplified communication models would have us believe.

Communication is so central to organizations that theorists have proposed the communication model of organization. Spencer (1994) in her review of organizational models, suggests that organizations are first social arrangements, and thus by definition organizational culture is constructed the organizations members. Consequently, the life blood of an organization is the relationships that develop and exist for and among an organizations constituent membership .Dachler (1989) adds that these relationships are essentially "communication processes which include a content level as well as a relationship level, the latter informing how the content level is to be understood within the context of the relationship".

Chester Barnad (1966) claimed that “in the theory of organization, communication would occupy a central place, because the structure ,extensiveness ; and scope of the organization are almost entirely determined by communication techniques ”.The organization is like a communicating organism.

While scholars agree that communication must be considered in their theories about organizational functioning, they differ in the functions communication fulfils.

One of the defining features of communication is the “sharing of information with other people”. The second defining feature of communication is the “reaching of a common understanding”.

The sharing of information doesn't accomplish much in organizations unless people concur on what this information means. Reaching a common understanding doesn't mean that people have to agree with each other it does mean is that people must have a relatively accurately idea of what a person or group is trying to tell them.

Communication is effective when members of an organization share information with each other and all parties involved are relatively clear about what this information means.

Communication is ineffective when people either do not receive the information they need or are not quite sure what the information they do receive means.

Communication can be broken up into two aspects, (I) functions of communication (ii) process of communication.

## **2. Functions of communication:**

It means how communication impacts various aspects of organizational behavior. The important functions that communication serves in an organization are providing knowledge, motivating organizational members, controlling and coordinating individual efforts and expressing feelings and emotions.

(i) Providing knowledge about company goals, how to perform a job, standards for acceptable behavior, needed changes and so on. A basic function of communication is to provide knowledge to members of an organization so that they can perform their jobs effectively, and achieve their goals. It helps in socialization individuals starting a new job. They face considerable uncertainty about what they are supposed to do, (role) how they should go about doing it (norm and rules) and what the standards for acceptable behavior are. Communication from coworkers, supervisors, customers, clients, and others helps to reduce uncertainty and provides newcomers with the knowledge they need to perform their jobs effectively. It also helps in new teams in the formation stage.

The knowledge function is important to all organizational members even the most experienced members because things change. Any change in the environment organization the customer's desires leads to changes in the products organization services of the organization. The nature of a worker's job responsibility will change to ensure change in products and services of organization. Thus knowledge function ensures clear communication of new task, goals, responsibilities and policies helps to ensure that members of an organization will continue to understand what needs to be done to achieve organizational goals.

In the quality literature the concept of internal customers alludes to this. In an organization, each department receives work from or submits work from or submits work to its next unit and therefore can be viewed as a customer or supplier. The concept of an internal customer means, that everybody in an organization has a customer for their work. The knowledge function of

communication ensures understanding internal customer needs and establishes how well they are being met for TQM implementation.

(ii) Motivating organizational members – for example, by determining valences, raising expectancies and instrumentality, assigning specific and difficult goals, and giving feedback. Motivation is a key determinant of performance in organizations and communication plays a central role in motivating members of an organization to achieve their goals.

The expectancy theory for example propose that superiors need to determine the valence of subordinates job outcomes, to help subordinate perceive that instrumentality are high and expectancies are high. Another example is the *goal* setting theory. It suggests that subordinates will perform at a high level when they have specific and difficult goals and they are given feedback concerning how they are doing.

(iii) Controlling and coordinating individual efforts – for example, by reducing social loafing, communicating roles rules, and norms and avoiding duplication of effort. Communication helps to control members behavior so that they perform their job in an acceptable fashion. The function of control regulates acceptable form, acceptable level, quality and quantity of job performance. By communicating norms, rules, roles reduce social loafing, and acceptable levels of job performance.

Coordinating the efforts of individual members or groups is very essential in organizations. Coordination integrates interdependent jobs, as the output of one employee effects that of the recipient of the output. The idea is similar to the idea of the internal customer. The idea of quality of service and output to the internal customer, with in theories of quality management one built upon this function of communication.

So coordination ensures all efforts geared to group achievement of goals at organizational level. Communication coordinates to share information, to achieve common understanding, about rules, norms, procedure, task requirements and avoid duplication of job, regulate performance, and integrate interdependent jobs, towards organizational goal achievement.

(iv) Expressing feelings and emotions such positive and negative moods, excitement, and anger etc. This function of communication allows people to express their feelings and emotions. In organization it is important as work moods influence the individuals (or groups) perception and evaluations of people and situations as well as effects behavior, work moods influence on the job interactions and understanding and understanding conveying them helps reduce conflict and enhance performance.

Emotions are event generated at home or at work. They also influence day to day interactions conveying one's emotive states to others. Social support, empathy, sympathy etc are received by the group or colleagues at work.

#### **4: Communication process:**

The process of communication involves a number of distinct steps (Rogers & Agarwala, Rogers 1976). These steps ensure that communication provides knowledge, motivates organizational members, controls and coordinates their efforts and expresses feelings and emotions. Communications in organization are multifaceted reflecting complex norms values, climate, and goals of the organization environment of the organization (Mintzberg, 1973; Putnam, 1982; Heath

& Bryant 1992). Spenser (1994), in her review of organizational models, suggests that the life blood of an organization is the relationships that develop and exist for and among an organizations constituent membership. Dachler (1989, p.51) adds these relationships to be “communications processes which include a content level as well as a relationship level, the latter informing how the content level is to be understood within the context of the relationship.

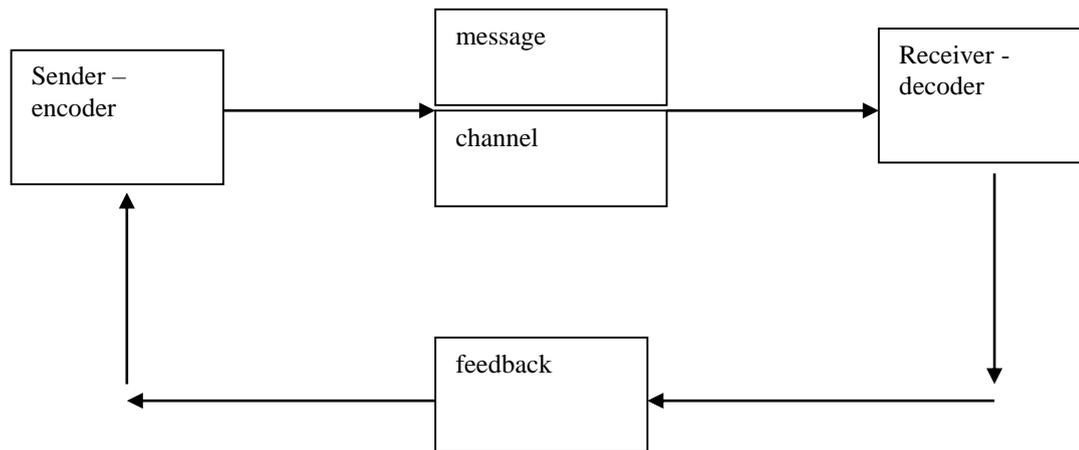


Figure 1. Katz and Kahn's Model of Communication Process.

The communication process has distinct steps. Katz and Kahn has identified them into a model of communication as shown in the figure 1.

The model is cyclical, the sender indicates the process so discussion will begin with the sender and the message.

Step -1 **Sender** The individual, group, or organization that needs / wants to share information with some other individual, group, or organization in order to accomplish one or more of the four functions of communication described earlier.

Step -2 **Receiver** The individual group, or organization for which information is intended, effective communication depends on messages which are as clear and as complete as possible. Once the sender has decided what the message is the next step is encoding.

Step -3 **Encoding** is translating a message into symbols or language that a receiver can understand. Once a message is encoded, it is transmitted to the receiver through some medium.

Step -4 **Medium** The pathway through which an encoded message is transmitted to a receiver. The medium could be verbal, or non verbal in accordance of the requirements. Receivers then have to make sense of the message they received.

Step –5 **The receiver:** decoding and the feedback loop. Decoding is interpreting or trying to make sense of the senders message.

However only about half of the communication process has occurred up to this point – the initial transmission half. Recall that communication is the sharing of information to reach a common understanding. Up until and including the point at which the receiver decodes the message , the communication process has largely been concerned with the sharing of information. Members of an organization know that they have reached a common understanding and have communicated effectively by completing the feedback loop, the second half of the process as postulated by Katz and Kahn ( 1978 ).

After decoding the message the receiver has to respond to it and start the feedback loop. The receiver must first decide what message to pass on to the original sender. Once the receiver decides on a response, he or she encodes the message and transmits it, using a medium that the original sender monitors. The original sender decodes the response. If the original sender is confident that the receiver properly understood initial message and a common understanding has been reached, the communication process is complete.

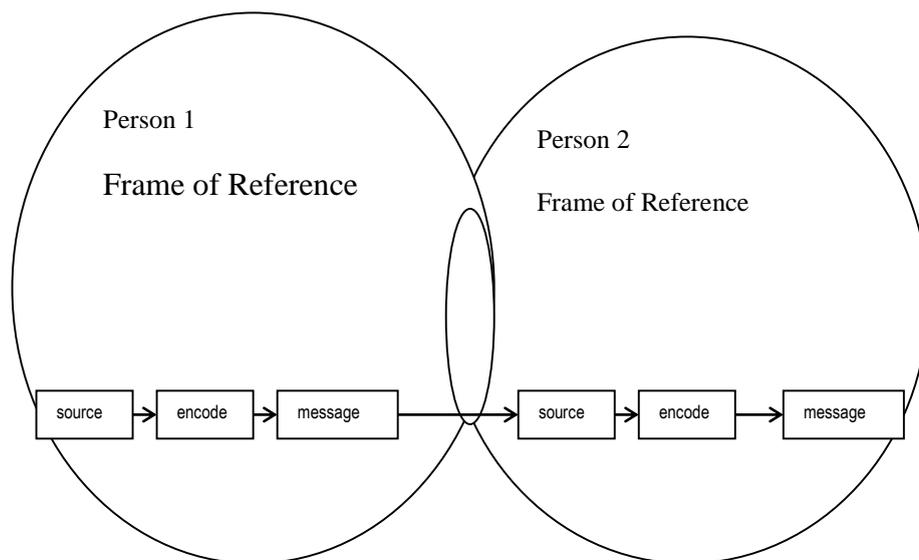
Communication process permits a communication based evolution of organizational systems with organizational transformation in this case it is TQM helps companies strive to survive to competition.

At the organizational level the various models of Total Quality Management (TQM) can be conceived of as a communication process.

### **The Superior-Subordinate Communication Model**

Although the general communication model is helpful for understanding how the complete communication process operates in an abstract sense, a model that explicitly considers superior-subordinate relationships will give greater insight into the nature and importance of communications in organizations. The organizational model of communication is helpful if it accomplishes the following:

1. Differentiates between superiors and subordinates.
2. Deals with whether communication between the two is accepted or rejected.
3. Deals with behavior which results from the acceptance or rejection of the communication.



**FIGURE 2. The Field of Experience in interpersonal Communications**

The model illustrated in Figure 2 is an attempt to satisfy these requirements. The model is expanded somewhat, and the general terms of the earlier model are replaced with specific organizational ones.

In the normal course of fulfilling their responsibilities, managers (sources) must communicate with subordinates (receivers). Although managers possess formal organizational authority which allows them to force employees' compliance with orders, managerial effectiveness is more readily achieved if employees agree with and support what is being communicated.

The channel through which the message is transmitted depends upon whether the message is oral or written. If oral, the transmission takes place whenever the manager speaks to subordinates, If written, the message will be carried through the formal organizational communication system (which, of course, closely parallels the lines of authority). From an organizational behavior point of view, some of the more interesting outcomes of the communication process occur when the subordinate receives a message.

As indicated in Figure 3 the decoding of the message is done by the receiver (subordinate); this decoding may or may not imply a proper understanding of the message, and understanding is a prerequisite for employee acceptance of the message. The breakdown of the decoding-understanding-acceptance chain is the point at which many problems or conflicts arise in organizations. If the communication from the manager is misinterpreted or not properly understood, the resulting *behavior* is unpredictable. While the behavior may coincidentally be in line with what the manager desires, the probability is much higher that actual behavior will deviate from desired behavior if the message is not understood. The situation is worsened when the manager reprimands or criticizes employees for behavior the employees see as consistent with the manager's communication. The observation by management of employee behavior is the feedback the manager requires to evaluate the appropriateness of employee behavior in light of the communication. On the basis of feedback received, approval or disapproval of employee behavior is communicated, and the process begins anew.

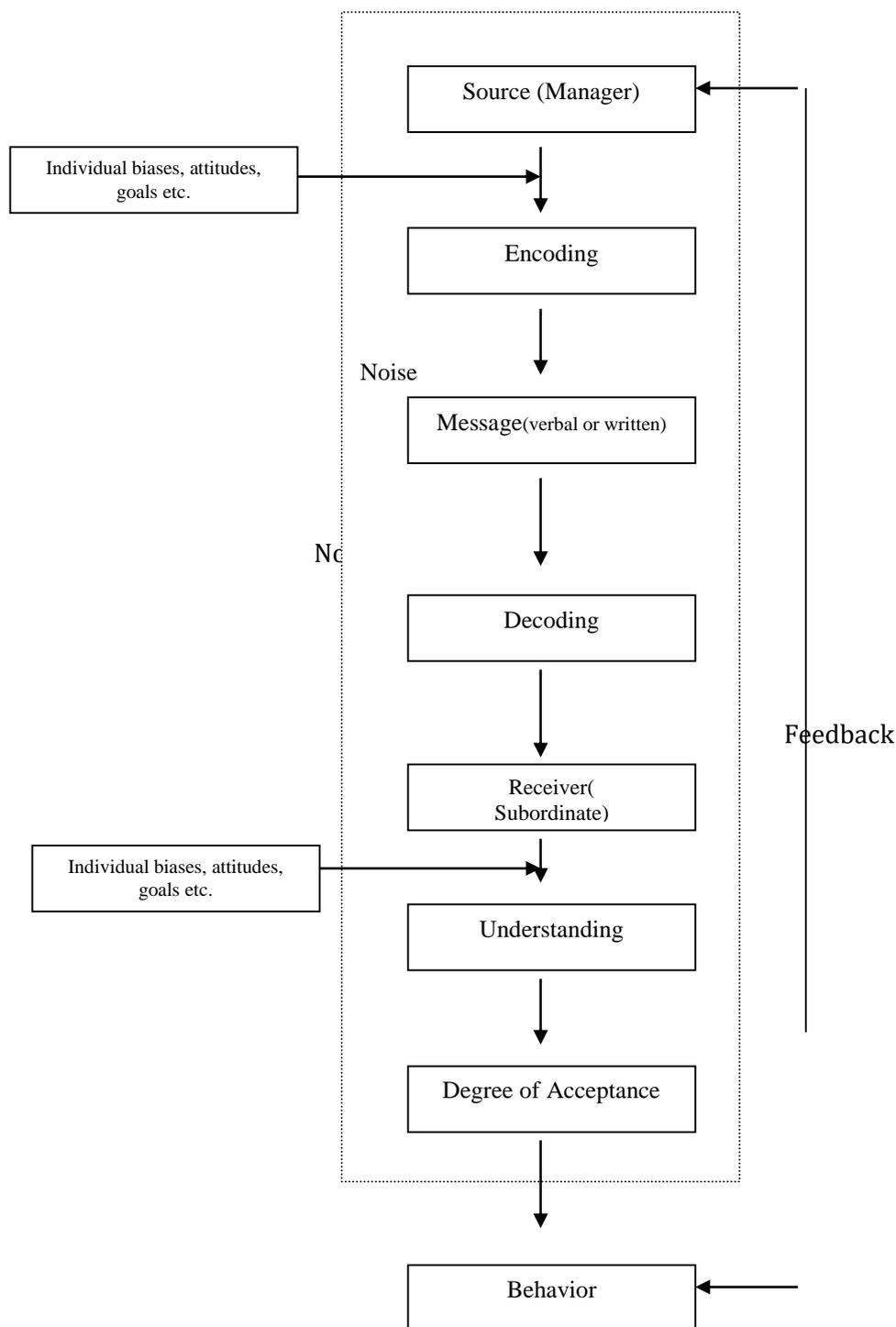


Figure 3 . The Manager-Subordinate Communication Model for Downward communication

Although Figure 3 emphasizes downward communication, the feedback that occurs indicates that upward communication is also part of the process. In addition, communication can originate at lower levels of the organization and proceed upward. To describe this process we need only reverse the positions of the sender and the receiver in Figure 3 and realize that the same processes and principles operate in upward communication. When subordinates communicate upward, they also receive feedback regarding the effectiveness of their message. Since the two directions of communication operate more or less simultaneously, over time a certain amount of learning occurs in terms of what inhibits and enhances

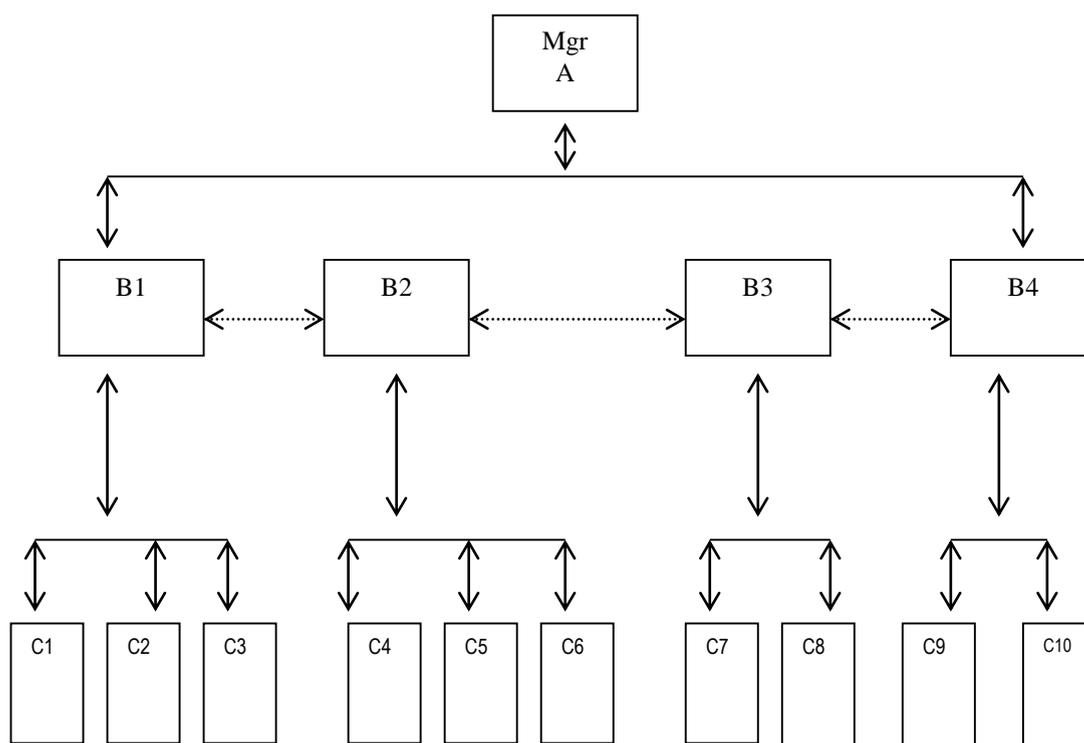
effective communication. This learning process tends to make organizational communication more efficient.

In terms of improving organizational communication, the model tells us that managers should be on guard for the unintentional interjection of biases-either in content or media-that “might cause subordinates to misunderstand the message being transmitted. Also, management must be aware of the factors beyond their control that can affect understanding”. For example, management may follow the correct procedures and principles of effective communication, but understanding is lost because the receiver is not in the proper frame of mind to understand management's intent. Consequently, the feedback function is important since it tells managers how the communication was received and also gives some clues as to how they might redirect their efforts to achieve greater understanding.

The value of feedback, of course, varies from situation to situation, depending upon the individual's sensitivity. Some feedback is quite obvious it does not take an overly sensitive person to judge the reaction of an employee who storms out of the office and slams the door. Most feedback, however, is more subtle, and managers must be sensitive to the “real” meaning behind a subordinate's, behavior.

**Communication Flows**

Within organizations there are three directions in which communications flow: downward, upward, and laterally. These flows are illustrated in Figure 4



**FIGURE 4. Downward, Upward: and Horizontal Communication Flows in an Organization.**

**Downward Flow**

The downward flow of communication generally corresponds to the formal organizational communications system, which is usually synonymous with the chain of command or line of authority. This system has received a great deal of attention from both managers and behavioral scientists since it is crucial to organizational functioning. For example, the study of communication models tells us that there is an inverse relationship between communication clarity and the number of levels in the organization (i.e., the more levels in the organization, the more difficult it is to insure that employees

down the chain of command have a clear understanding of, for example, corporate objectives.) This lack of understanding can occur because each level requires additional encoding and decoding, and this increases the probability that error will creep into the communication. These difficulties have led some to conclude that the “top-down” communication system should be replaced with some other type (e.g., the “bottom-up” system discussed below). However, despite its limitation, the top-down system is an important part of the organization because much of the information needed to manage an organization originates at the upper levels and must be transmitted to the appropriate lower levels. While employees may disregard or misinterpret what does come down from the top, they would undoubtedly be worse off if no information were forthcoming. So, while the top-down method may not match other methods for speed, at least it forms the basis for consistent action on a wide variety of organizational issues and problems. The equity achieved by this system-or at least perceived by employees-is also an important factor in operating an effective organization.

### ***Upward Flow***

The upward flow of communication involves two distinct manager-subordinate activities in addition to feedback: the participation by employees in formal organizational decisions and employee appeals against formal organization decisions. The exact forms these types of communication take vary with the situation. Generally, employee participation is a means of increasing upward communication and can be either formal or informal. Examples of formal upwards flows are management by objectives, participative management, regular meetings between managers and their employees, or joint policy-making bodies designed into the organization structure. Informally, upward flows occur in conversations between managers and subordinates or from the feedback a manager receives through observation of employees.

The emphasis on upward communication in many organizations is partly, the result of the Theory Y approach to management. The increasingly common assumption by managers that employees have a desire to grow psychologically and to contribute to the organization's goals is consistent with Theory Y assumptions. Similarly, the techniques of participative management and management by objectives, both of which stimulate upward communications, are based on Theory Y assumptions. In fact, virtually all behavioral theories of organization are based on the need for some kind of upward communication.

### ***Stimulating Upward Communication***

Although most managers agree on the need for upward communication, it is often not clear what actions can be taken to stimulate it. Often, the upward channels are designed only for formal, job-related information; other types of communications about feelings and attitudes are ignored. The problem is even more serious if we recognize that downward communication tends to be the natural order of things, thus placing an unusually heavy burden on the employees to communicate upward. Given this situation, it is important to develop ways to stimulate upward communication. This might be accomplished by satisfying the following criteria.

1. Coverage must be systematic and balanced. While spontaneous communication is often useful, efforts at stimulating upward communication must be planned, systematic, and balanced. The planning requirement assures that communication is not left to chance, while the balance requirement attempts to prevent upward communication originating from only a few sources. Many times only the most vocal organizational members are heard, whereas the less vocal may have important things to say as well. In following these principles, management obtains information from a wider variety of sources, and

communication is not limited to crisis situations. The old adage "no news is good news" does not hold for upward organizational communication.

2. The flow of communication must be directed. Communication that is not directed to the proper receivers becomes rumor and finds its way through the organization according to who will listen. Properly directed communication, however, reaches those individuals who are in a position to take action. Employees who are dissatisfied and wish to communicate with management must be directed to the correct channels, and these channels should be known to everyone.

3. Listening must *be* sensitive. Because of the fundamental nature of hierarchical systems, employees may be conditioned to tell management what they think management wants to hear rather than what they actually feel. Complaints are often disguised in ways that prevent them from being obvious to the listener. Consequently, management must attempt to respond not only to the spoken word, but to the meaning of the words. To a large degree, the sensitivity of the manager determines the amount and type of communication that is directed upward from subordinates.

4. Listening must *be objective*. Upward communication will be selective and infrequent if employees think their communications are not being perceived in an objective fashion. It is easy for managers to show more interest in favorable communication than unfavorable or to seek out those employees who will agree with them and ignore those who do not. Objectivity in upward communication means that management must make a conscious effort to avoid these biases.

## **5. Conclusion:**

As commented by Barnard in any exhaustive theory of organization, communication should occupy a central place because the structure, extensiveness and scope of organizations are almost entirely determined by communication techniques. Communication is not an end in itself but a means to an end. While listening to employees is certainly important, unless some kind of action is forthcoming, the listening function loses its value. In some cases, listening itself can give the employee the impression that action will be taken, and management must be cautious not to leave the impression that communication efforts guarantee results.

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