## Position Articles

Although the term management communication is frequently used, it has not been defined and the discipline has no focus. As a result, a problem in professional identity and reputation exists. Identity problems exist because the discipline consists of professionals with disparate backgrounds who approach management communication from different perspectives. Academic reputation problems occur because management communication emphasizes skills development. Because of identity and reputation problems, it is important to look at the purpose of management communication. The discipline can best distinguish itself by conducting research within the managerial context, which is difficult for professors to understand because managers and academics operate in such different environments. Also, serious obstacles exist to conducting valuable management communication research. The challenge remains to conduct rigorous, valid communication research within the managerial context that results in relevant implementation guidelines. These research results will develop a focus and definition for management communication.

# COMMUNICATION
# WITHIN THE MANAGER'S CONTEXT

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If we have books and courses with the title of "management communication," it would seem that a clear scope or focus would exist for the discipline. This seemingly simple assumption may easily be questioned. Various attempts with mixed results have been made to define and develop a focus for management communication. These have been done by publishing course descriptions (Argenti, 1986; Smeltzer, Glab, Golen, & Gilsdorf, 1986), textbooks (Level & Galle, 1988; Micheli, Cespedes, Byker, & Raymond, 1984; Raspberry & Lemoine, 1986; Smeltzer & Leonard, 1994; Timm, 1980), and presenting conceptual or theoretical discussions on the topic (Feingold, 1987; Smeltzer, Glab & Golen, 1983; Munter, 1989, 1990; Porterfield, 1980; Shelby, 1993;

Smeltzer, 1993; Shubert, 1989). But no solid definition nor focus for management communication has emerged. As a result, problems in professional identity and reputation continue.

## IDENTITY AND REPUTATION OF
## MANAGEMENT COMMUNICATION

The following discussion briefly reviews the identity and reputation of management communication. The literature indicates that the discipline lacks a solid sense of identity. In addition, the reputation of management communication faculty and courses is perceived as weak among other academics.

### IDENTITY

Identity is the set of personal constructs individuals use to describe what is central, distinctive, and enduring about their profession (Albert & Whetten, 1985). Professors involved with management communication may well share the same identity problem as those in business communication or organizational communication. It may be said that they do not know what is central, distinctive, and enduring about their discipline. The lack of identity was explained by Shelby (1993) when she maintained that course content in management communication and business communication may be similar or dissimilar, depending on course objectives, course level, and number or simply the instructor's academic background. In other words, management communication has no distinctive content. An interesting note here is that Professor Shelby is a professor of management communication with an academic background in speech communication.

A special edition of the *Journal of Business Communication* in 1993 analyzed the focus of various domains of communication. The editor of this special issue, Professor Rentz (1993), wrote an introductory editorial in which she stated, "For me, the desire to know who I was as an academic professional had become sharp. . . . We do not have an institutionalized, ready-made identity." Professor

Rentz has an academic background in English, but it appears that professors Rentz and Shelby both question their professional identity. This comment by Rentz, however, is only one of the many comments in that special issue indicating that communication disciplines are suffering from a lack of identity. In that same issue, Shaw (1993) maintained that the academic communication community has deep divisions in its perspectives on important skills and knowledge, classroom strategies, research methods, and theoretical underpinnings.

But this lack of identity did not suddenly emerge in the 1990s. Early in the 1980s, Daniel (1983) argued that business communication is only a method, not a subject matter. This statement created a strong response from communication professors indicating a lack of consensus on professional identity. At approximately the same time, Smeltzer, Glab, and Golen (1983) maintained that management communication was an integration of communication and organizational behavior. A few years later, Shelby (1988) argued that management communication drew from so many disciplines— rhetorical theory, linguistics, and social science research—that the discipline at best was a patchwork that picks and chooses on the basis of what is convenient, intuitive, or practical rather than on the basis of any well-articulated rationale. Feingold (1987) also found the discipline difficult to define because of its disparate backgrounds or interdisciplinarity.

This literature indicates that communication scholars who would like to identify themselves as specialists in management communication have an ambiguous professional self-construct. They do not know what is central, distinctive, and enduring about their profession. A central or distinctive characteristic does not exist because they tend to share characteristics with so many other disciplines, as suggested by Shelby (1988) and others. Accordingly, it is difficult to have any sense of enduring characteristics.

But an additional problem is that the label management communication is so recent that enduring characteristics have not had time to emerge. As recently as the early 1980s, scholars were comparing organizational and business communication with no reference to managerial communication. For instance, Porterfield (1980)

looked at the relationship of communication and management, but did not use the term management communication. Shortly thereafter, Leipzig and More (1982) compared organizational behavior, organizational communication, and business communication, but no mention was made of management communication. Indeed, as recently as 1991, Suchan (1991) stated that management communication is clearly "still a fledgling area" (p. 1).

## REPUTATION

For purposes of our discussion, image or reputation is a collection of the attributes outsiders ascribe to a profession. It is important to consider that one individual within the profession may have a reputation that is somewhat different from the profession as a whole. Also, reputations of both individuals and professions are dynamic; however, it is not known precisely what may alter an individual or group reputation (Fombrun & Shanley, 1990).

The reputation of management communication within the academic environment has been a concern ever since the term began to appear. To understand this concern and its cause, it is necessary to review briefly the history of business education. In 1959, two studies appeared that dramatically affected business education: Gordon and Howell's *Higher Education for Business*, sponsored by the Ford Foundation, and Pierson's *The Education of American Businessmen*, sponsored by the Carnegie Foundation. Both of these reports attacked business education by saying that it lacked academic value. Business education was simply composed of vocational skills courses. Business instructors were viewed as academically inferior and business students were seen as lacking the same level of motivation and qualifications as students in other disciplines.

Business schools agreed with the report, and efforts to remove the vocational image of the business school were quick and decisive. Curricula were redesigned and vocational majors often eliminated. Within 15 years, the culture and general image of the business school had dramatically changed. Published research became the measurement of academic quality. Doctorates in business, which were relatively scarce in the 1950s and 1960s, became much

more prevalent in the late 1970s and 1980s. Attention to theory superseded interests in application. Business skills were not fashionable topics within the business schools of the 1980s.

As the push toward theory and research developed, business schools became the envy of many other academic units. In the late 1980s, a major evaluation of business schools concluded: "By many standards business/management schools in recent years have been quite successful" (Porter & McKibben, 1988, p. 298). Adding to this success, business became the first-choice major among undergraduates during the 1980s (Green, 1992).

The emphasis on theory development and research within business schools causes a problem for management communication, however, because of the discipline's continuing emphasis on skill development. In many colleges of business, the communication curriculum is an interdisciplinary vestige of skills grounded in the vocational office curriculum. The vocational office curriculum has generally been eliminated, but the communication course remains because communication skills are seen as important in the business curriculum. For a business program to be accredited, the American Assembly of Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) requires communication at both the graduate and undergraduate levels. Note that the word "skills" is included in the AACSB standard.

> *C.1.3.C Standard*: Basic skills in written and oral communication, quantitative analysis, and computer usage should be achieved either by prior experience and education, or as part of the MBA curriculum. (AACSB, 1991, p. 20)

In addition, numerous studies have validated the importance of communication skills for the business student (Bennett, 1971; Penrose, 1976).

Smeltzer et al. (1986) suggested that the field's concentration on skills rather than knowledge, particularly at the undergraduate level, enforced a low academic status. Shaw (1993) maintained that although skill development efforts reinforce our utility, they do not depend on or provide the intellectual backbone to support a coherent subject matter or an academic discipline capable of conducting research.

Daniel (1984) made a crucial comment about communication in the college of business when he asks, "Are we a discipline or are we a 'How to Field'?" He continued: "[C]ommunication, is not a 'what' but a 'how to'—, a method of telling people about the 'what' subjects" (p. 32). Obviously, Daniel does not believe the field deserves a strong reputation because it only teaches the knowledge that other disciplines develop. To support Daniel's position, Goodman, Hill, and Greene (1991) found that communication in graduate management programs had a common emphasis on skill development. No mention was made of developing knowledge (research).

Research, or a lack of it, may be a major reason that management communication does not have the solid reputation accorded other disciplines. It was not until 1988 that a refereed research journal, *Management Communication Quarterly*, specifically dedicated to management communication, was published. Furthermore, research in the discipline does not appear to have a clear focus. Smeltzer (1993) noted that during the first 6 years of *Management Communication Quarterly*, 23 different topics were presented in articles contained in the journal. One possible reason for this disparity may be the academics who publish on management communication variables. A professor with academic training in management will logically pursue a different research question than will a professor with grounding in communication or English. This wide diversity could result in what Hagge (1986) termed "the orphan motif." Although Hagge was referring to business communication, the same may be said for management communication: Because the discipline originates from so many homes, it ends up homeless.

Thomas and Suchan (1995) summarized the status of managerial communication when they said:

Survival is threatened by the dominance of temporary or adjunct managerial communication positions, the corresponding lack of tenure track positions, and the reduction of managerial communication faculty in some departments. Furthermore, the perception of many that managerial communication courses have only a service function makes the area vulnerable to budget cuts and department reorganizations where faculty from other well established areas will

> defend their own areas possibly at the expense of the managerial
> communication area. (p. 6)

The evidence appears rather conclusive that management communication does not have a clear identity and its reputation is weak. The weak identity and poor reputation could occur because the professors involved in the discipline largely transferred from liberal arts disciplines to professional schools. As previously mentioned, most professors of management communication initially had their academic training and "homes" in such disciplines as English, rhetoric, communication, or linguistics. In these various disciplines, the allegiance is to the discipline and the customers are other academics. Such is not the case in the professional college. The customer is the profession for which the university is preparing the students. In other words, many of the professors involved in management communication may identify with their academic discipline rather than the management professional for which the college of business is aligned.

## THE PURPOSE OF MANAGEMENT COMMUNICATION

What is the purpose of management communication? Depending on who responds to this question, the question would most certainly have many different answers. However, if several parameters or assumptions are established, it is possible to provide a tentative question.

One assumption is that most management communication courses are offered in colleges of business at the MBA level. Conclusive evidence is not available; however, the information compiled by Munter (1989, 1990) indicated that at the top tier, private universities, such as Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Dartmouth, Harvard, and Stanford, management communication is offered in the college of business. In addition, many of the large state universities, such as Ohio State, Arizona State, and Michigan, and regional universities, including Eastern Michigan University and California State University–Long Beach, offer management communication within the college of business.

The academic base for a course is an important consideration when answering our question about the purpose of management communication because it significantly determines the discipline's customer base. It may be said that the student is the end customer when the liberal arts professor teaches; however, other academics become the customer when academics conduct research and publish. If the management communication course is taught in the college of business at the MBA level, the course is essentially following what Dulek (1993) called the horizontal model. With the horizontal model, the entire profession is the customer for the professional college. Included within this professional customer service model are MBA students preparing to enter the profession, managers who should benefit from management communication research, and organizations that hire the products (students).

A second parameter or assumption to evaluate when considering the purpose of management communication is that the goal of management communication is to both develop and disseminate relevant knowledge. The knowledge must relate to the communication of managers. To quote Shelby (1993), "management communication is intended to affect or effect a manager's decisions." This is a major assumption because it implies that the professors must understand what is required to make the managerial communication process more effective and efficient in contemporary organizations.

The academic research model frequently develops research questions based on the extant research literature. Also, academics tend to pursue questions in which they are interested and comfortable (Campbell, Daft, & Hulin, 1982). A professor with academic training in English, for instance, would be comfortable and interested in studying the number of nouns that can be strung together before an average undergraduate reader's understanding falters (Limaye & Pompian, 1991). Furthermore, academics determine what will be published by their peers so it is important to look at what academics deem interesting and valuable rather than what will provide prescriptions for managerial success. It can also be said that academics have a strong tendency to simply analyze what is expedient (Daft, 1984).

If we are to accept these two assumptions, it may be said that the goal of management communication is to develop and disseminate knowledge that increases the effectiveness and efficiency of managers. But to fully understand this goal, it is necessary to understand what will assist managers to become more effective and efficient.

## UNDERSTANDING THE MANAGERIAL CONTEXT

Academics are not managers. This seemingly simple statement is important because management communication professors are attempting to serve a population in which they are not members. Business professors in general differ from other professional school professors because they have not practiced the profession they teach. For instance, most law professors are attorneys who have had experience practicing law. Medical school professors are medical doctors who have practiced or are currently practicing medicine. In contrast, management communication professors are neither current practicing managers nor have extensive previous managerial experience. This means they must make concerted efforts to understand constantly changing management processes and paradigms.

The effort to understand management is not easy. As Mathias (1983) explained, managers often approach problems through analogous reasoning, whereas researchers are prone to specification, quantification, and model building. He asserted that managers believe and accept the test of the marketplace, whereas researchers are more concerned about the fit with literature and research.

Albert and Whetten (1985) presented an interesting discussion that related to the difficulty of business professors understanding the environment in which managers operate. They liken the university professor to the religious clergy in that both have assumed the role of "living in the world, but not of the world." This means that they both assume that they have been given the role of leading the world rather than being led by external forces. Members of both organizations view outsiders as heathens to be converted or educated. It is believed that this transformation will make vulgar men

virtuous. The value of this metamorphosis is supported in both institutions by an elaborate set of beliefs about the blessings of being knowledgeable. But the question I ask is: How can the university professor understand which knowledge is correct when they have not lived in that world?

In response to this question, many professors will quickly retort that they have worked in business at one time in their career or presently serve as consultants. My response is that business is changing so quickly that experience gained 15, 10, or even 5 years ago has limited utility. One only needs to look at the rapid change during the past 5 years to understand this statement: Organizations have become much flatter, autonomous work teams are more prevalent, E-mail which barely existed in 1990 is now *de rigueur*, and cultural diversity has changed the dynamics of the workforce. Concurrently, product life cycles have decreased with an increased emphasis on process integration rather than functionalization and managers must frequently interact with international customers and suppliers. In short, managerial experience is quickly outdated due to the rapid technological pace and complexity of the global marketplace.

The role of the consultant that an academic may play is different than that of the manager. The most obvious difference lies in the political relationship. As the saying goes, "Consultants may see the problems but they don't have to live them on a daily basis." The entire accountability structure is enormously different. This is especially true for academic consultants because their livelihood does not depend on their success with clients. They always have the university to fall back on for financial stability, so professors can be the expert without concern about outcomes.

So how are academic management communication professors to understand the management context? I believe that they will never totally understand the context, but they can provide prescriptions just the same. Just as a novelist of murder mysteries does not have to be either a criminal or a detective to be a good author, an academic can provide prescriptions. But to provide accurate and valuable prescriptions, relevant and rigorous research is required. Herein lies the strength of the academic: understanding how to design and conduct research. Academics have been trained to

conduct research—a skill that managers do not possess. It is through research that management communication professors can solidify their identity and strengthen their reputation by providing a service to their constituents.

## MANAGEMENT COMMUNICATION RESEARCH

How does management communication research differ from other academic research? It does not differ in terms of following the norms of rigorous research design. Both internal and external validity concerns must be met. However, it differs to a degree in two ways. First, it is conducted within the context of contemporary and future management concerns. Second, it offers understandable prescriptions for practicing managers.

Many valuable pieces of prescriptive research exist that have been conducted within the management context, but these research projects are limited. Consider that Smeltzer and Fann (1993) found that only 27 studies on managers as writers had been conducted within the context of management. Because so few studies have been conducted within the context, it is not possible to make many confident prescriptions.

Also, several studies offer definitive prescriptions, but they, too, are limited. Examples may be Suchan and Colucci (1989) when they look at differences among discourse communities, Rogers (1989) who also analyzed the culture of a community of writers, or Leonard and Gilsdorf (1990) who investigated academics' and executives' perceptions of writing errors. But a close look at these articles indicates that the prescriptions are more appropriate for educators than practicing managers. Do practicing managers read these articles? Probably not.

### OBSTACLES FACED IN MANAGEMENT COMMUNICATION RESEARCH

There are serious problems with conducting research within the management communication context and then offering relevant

prescriptions. First, the context may change so quickly that it is difficult to complete the research and publish it within a timely manner. A major initiative for manufacturing companies is to design, produce, and market a product before the competition. Intel can now design, produce, and put a new computer chip on the market within 2 years. But within the academic environment, it may take 3 months to receive approval to use human subjects in research; a year to conduct the research because limited support is available; and another year to have journal reviewers critique a manuscript, make appropriate revisions, and have the manuscript accepted. Then, it may possibly take still another year for the research to be published. By the time the research is published, management may have such momentum that any research findings would be ignored.

Interorganizational alliances provide an example. Currently, many companies are developing alliances across cultures that require specialized communication because team negotiations involving multiple companies and cultures are involved. By the time academics develop valid research-based prescriptions for cross-culture team negotiations, many organizations will have already developed their own models and styles through trial and error. Unfortunately, once communication patterns have been established, they may be difficult to change—even if they are relatively inefficient or ineffective.

## STUDY THE CONTEXT

Earlier, I said that it may be impossible for an academic to fully understand the managerial communication context. But research can provide keen insights. Even though they involve small sample sizes, Mintzberg's (1973) observation of five executives and Kotter's (1982) observations of 15 executives are valuable sources about the communication of managers. A more recent and comprehensive study is that of Luthans and Larsen (1986). Another study looked specifically at writing within a managerial context (Doheny-Farina, 1986).

Each of these studies provides insights to the managerial culture; however, as stated earlier, the management process is changing so rapidly that a continual need exists for new and innovative studies analyzing the management communication context. One only needs to review such books as *The New Rules* by Kotter (1995) to appreciate the extent to which the context is changing. Unfortunately, many popular press books only superficially identify the communication changes occurring.

### CONDUCT RESEARCH WITHIN THE CONTEXT

Many debates have analyzed the value of conducting research within the laboratory setting and the importance of internal validity (Cardy, 1991). According to Kilmann (1979), although both internal and external validity are often cited as equally important, an observation of the research that gets published in scholarly academic journals shows that internal validity is the primary objective. He went on to argue that internal validity is preferred because it fits the cognitive structure of social scientists and is generally rewarded within the academic setting. These comments add evidence to our earlier statements that academic researchers and managers have a difference in perspective as to what is useful knowledge.

In the case of management communication, it is difficult to support the notion that research can be conducted with college students on a university campus and lead to valid generalizations within the managerial context. The ethical and political environments can not be replicated and no artificial incentive can simulate the legal or career ramifications of faulty management communication.

The position of Thomas and Tymon (1982), when they listed the five properties of relevant research, supports the argument for research within the context. They listed five necessary properties of relevant research; the first of these is descriptive relevance. They describe descriptive relevance as the accuracy of research findings in capturing phenomena encountered by the practitioner in his or her organizational setting. A strong argument can be made that such relevance requires field research.

An example of management communication research conducted within the context of management is a study conducted by David and Baker (1994). This research analyzed memos written by managers to determine if compliance-gaining theory may be more appropriate than the traditional bad-news formula presented in many communication textbooks. Their examples confirmed that strategies and tactics are so closely allied to the context that a writer outside the organization would have difficulty making appropriate choices. This research clearly demonstrates the importance of considering the context when conducting management communication research.

### DEVELOP IMPLEMENTATION GUIDELINES

Thus far I have said that it is difficult to conduct management communication research because the context changes so rapidly. But it remains important to study the context and conduct research within this rubric. However, this research will have limited utility for managers if it does not result in guidelines or prescriptions for implementation.

Academic researchers and managers operate within two different environments or discourse communities. Accordingly, they use different vocabularies. The following is a paragraph drawn from an article written for what academics would probably consider a practitioner-oriented journal. The initial references have been changed.

> The compelling reason to develop better understanding of social controls is Jones' (1989) argument that moral behavior supported by the social context is likely to beget further moral behavior. The existence of trust gives reason to trust. Trust builds optimism about others' behavior which can lead to further gains based on mutual cooperation (Smith & Evan, 1990). Conversely, distrust begets distrust (Hanson, 1956; Nelson, 1989).

This excerpt was taken from a publication that many academics would consider an "A" for a practitioner journal. Would practicing managers likely read this passage? I guess not. To be implemented, the suggestions must be written in the language of management.

What if the passage read in the following manner:

Moral behavior that is supported is likely to be followed by further moral behavior. Also, trust leads to further trust but distrust leads to distrust.

I doubt that many managers would be inclined to read this passage either. Even though it is less academic and easier to read, it does not tell managers how to develop an atmosphere of moral behavior or a department where people trust each other. In short, it does not have guidelines for implementation.

What are guidelines for implementation? In my opinion, they are specific lessons that can be learned from the research. Hopefully, they can be supported by specific examples of success. Or, where appropriate, examples of failure could be cited to illustrate the consequences of implementation problems.

How can guidelines for implementation best be developed? Guidelines drawn from actual examples are most pertinent and easily understood. This is why the research must be conducted within the managerial context. Furthermore, it would be helpful to have managers who have "been fighting the battles" assist academics in writing the guidelines. This means that it will be necessary for managers and researchers to develop a common vocabulary to assure that the nuances of the research are fully understood by the practitioner.

Although suggesting that valuable management communication research should result in implementation guidelines, I am not suggesting that scholars conduct less rigorous or complex research. In fact, I am suggesting the opposite. A complex challenge is to assure that research is grounded in theory, that hypotheses are based on the extant literature, and that results can be implemented by managers.

**STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVING RESEARCH: MANAGERS' PERSPECTIVES**

What could be done to improve the relevance and timeliness of academic management communication research? To better under-

stand the type of research that would be relevant and timely for managers and to test the concept of research implementation discussed in the previous section, a group of high-level managers was brought together and asked this question. These nine managers were at the director or vice president level of multidivisional, manufacturing, and financial services organizations. Each manager had a minimum of 20 years managerial experience.

The discussion was directed by a vice president of a Fortune 500 manufacturing firm who had extensive experience in managing discussion groups. The belief was that because of the subject matter he would be better able to obtain candid responses from the executives than would an academic.

The group agreed on the following conclusions and recommendations.

1. Academic journals are not respected nor read by managers. Even such journals considered practitioners' journals by academics, such as *Harvard Business Review*, are seldom seen by practicing executives. Most of them read the *Wall Street Journal* and *Fortune*.
2. If academics expect managers to read the results of their research, articles must contain clearly stated managerial implications not to exceed one or two pages.
3. Research should contain points for executive actions as well as easily understood models.
4. Managers are not interested in a "data dump." They seem to trust that academics will monitor themselves so managers do not need to question the research design. Managers are only interested in the results.
5. Case studies demonstrating excellent practices are as valuable as, or more valuable than, studies containing large samples. An interesting comment was: "We know excellence when we see it." Examples of best-in-class would be valuable.
6. Benchmarking studies would be helpful. To quote one manager, "We see too many benchmarks for financial results but not enough for managerial practices."
7. Research should be conducted in partnership with managers.

The result of this discussion indicates that traditional academic research on management communication will have limited value

to practicing managers. Of particular interest is the idea of best-in-class research and benchmarking. Throughout the discussion, the managers returned to these concepts. However, few or no studies of this type occur in management communication.

Several factors probably explain why management communication scholars have not conducted benchmarking studies. First, management communication research to date has largely been conducted at the micro level, and little effort has been made to develop effectiveness as a dependent variable (Smeltzer, 1993). Best-in-class implies some kind of outcome variables. It may be argued that micro-level best-in-class studies are done when the communication styles and strategies of executives are analyzed. Consider, for instance, the extensive attention received by CEOs Jack Welsh of General Electric or Herb Kelleher of Southwest Airlines.

However, these journalistic case studies do not get published in academic, refereed journals. It would be difficult to argue that such articles should get published because they have no research rigor. But what if a comparative case study of management communication patterns was conducted on a number of executives? What if this study analyzed communication patterns or strategies in relation to outcome variables? It is quite possible that such research should be published in an academic journal. This could constitute rigorous, valid, and relevant management communication research.

Another reason that benchmarking or best-in-class research is not conducted by academics is money. Relating back to our discussion with the executives about research, one of these executives had earned a Ph.D. and had been the director of an organizational effectiveness group prior to moving into operations. During our discussion, he said three things are required for good organizational research: money, money, and money. This is precisely what academic researchers lack.

To overcome the financial constraints under which management communication researchers operate, it would seem that research centers or institutions are going to have to be established. Just as private sector organizations form consortiums to support research

in manufacturing, operations, and business ethics, a council or consortium could be established for management communication. But first it will have to be demonstrated that the research has implementation potential.

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This article argues that much has been done to develop a definition and focus for management communication, but efforts have been hindered by the lack of identification among academics of what is central, distinctive, and enduring about their profession. The lack of professional identity may also be the cause of a weak academic reputation. However, the same interdisciplinary environment attributed to creating tension and uncertainty within the discipline may also serve as a source of strength and resiliency; the tension between skills and theory within the discipline may be used to develop relevant research findings.

To develop a clear identity and strengthen the reputation of management communication, it is first necessary to define and understand the discipline's common goal. In attempting to define the discipline in terms of professional identity, management communication professors should not feel isolated. The perceived lack of professional identity endemic to management communication professors is generally characteristic of the academic community as a whole. The assumption may be made that few academic professionals in other disciplines have absolute and clearly defined identities. Most disciplines face identity issues at one time or another.

Management communication professors can be better understood by comparing them to the medical practitioner working in a field of specialists. Deep divisions in perspectives on diagnostic procedures, treatment strategies, and general methodology exist. Therefore, the conclusion is that regardless of the interdisciplinary orientation of individual practitioners in this multifaceted field, a unifying goal of management communication exists: to develop and disseminate knowledge that increases the effectiveness

and efficiency of managers functioning in contemporary business environments.

To develop the appropriate body of knowledge, research must be conducted that will help improve the effectiveness and efficiency of managerial communication. But first it is necessary to understand the context in which managers operate. Second, it is important to conduct externally and internally valid research. This research should analyze the communication patterns or strategies in relation to outcome variables relevant to both the academic and business communities. This research will then fit academically rigorous journals as well as be relevant to practicing managers.

Management communication can affirm its interdisciplinary focus, develop an identity, and improve its reputation by conducting appropriate research. This research must determine what is required to make the managerial communication process more effective and efficient. In turn, this body of research knowledge on the communication of managers will distinguish managerial communication from business, organizational, and corporate communication.

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