Of the four disciplines under discussion in this special edition of *Management Communication Quarterly*, corporate communication is both the newest and perhaps the least understood. It is also the only one of the four that is specifically related to a functional area within organizations. This position article will first define the field of corporate communication as a discipline, then look at how it relates to the other subdisciplines under consideration (management communication, business communication, and organizational communication). The article will also focus on how corporate communication research is evolving.

CORPORATE COMMUNICATION AS A DISCIPLINE
Toward a Definition

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Although the field of corporate communication may be new to those of us whose roots are from management or business communication, the field of study has been evolving throughout the 20th century in schools of communication and journalism (under the areas called public relations or public affairs) as well as in the real world under similarly named departments. In fact, most large corporations in the United States today have departments called corporate communication. This section of the article will describe the evolution of the field both in the academic and business worlds. It will then discuss the various subfunctions that make up the field of corporate communication.

THE ACADEMIC DEVELOPMENT OF THE DISCIPLINE

The debate over who will control the corporate communication discipline within the academy is a relatively new one. As business schools have become more interested in corporate communication over the last 20 years, both schools of communication (such as Annenberg and Boston University) and journalism schools (such

as Columbia and Missouri) have argued that the discipline is more logically connected to what they do rather than a part of management education. This is partly historical and partly political.

Historically, the field grew naturally as a subset of journalism. It was journalists, after all, who created the need for a field of study in the first place. In addition, for many years the people who worked in the area we now refer to as corporate communication came out of a journalism background. Most corporate executives believed that journalists were best equipped to deal with this area within the corporation because most of what practitioners did was related to media.

Similarly, schools of communication evolved to train practitioners for a career in public relations outside the boundaries of journalism. Their belief was that journalism training was too narrow in its focus and that the broader discipline of mass communication would be a better place both to study the development of the field and prepare its practitioners. Most schools of communication would still argue that they are the appropriate branch of the academy for the development of theory and practice in the field of corporate communication.

As business schools began to focus on corporate communication as a subset of management communication, however, the debate broadened to include this new entrant into the discussion over which branch of the academy is best equipped to handle its development. This article argues that business schools are the most appropriate home for the discipline because, like other functional areas within the corporation (such as marketing, finance, production, and human resource management), corporate communication exists as a real and important part of most organizations. As such, it should rightfully be housed within that branch of the academy that deals with business administration or graduate schools of business.

THE CORPORATE DEVELOPMENT
OF THE DISCIPLINE

Unlike its academic development, the field of corporate communication has evolved within the business world more quickly and

much more thoroughly. Although corporations had no specific strategy for dealing with communications as a functional area earlier this century, they often had to respond to external and internal constituencies whether they wanted to or not. As the environment for business became more hostile, laws also began to change, forcing companies to communicate in new and much more public ways.

Although close to three fourths of the population agreed in the late 1960s (according to three different polls) that business balanced profit and the public interest, only 15% would agree with the same statement by the mid-1970s. This radical shift in attitudes created a dramatic need for corporate communication to develop as a functional area in business.

The responses to constituencies became frequent enough because of the changing environment that someone who was not responsible for another function, such as marketing or administration, had to take control of certain aspects of communication.

This function, which was tactical in most companies, was almost always called either public relations (also known as PR) or public affairs. Typically, it included a component that would attempt to allow the organization to interact with the press. More often than not, however, the emerging function really existed to keep the press away from the inner workings of the corporation. The earlier PR department was supposed to prevent problems from coming in or out of the corporation. Thus the pejorative term "flak" came into existence as a way to describe what PR people were actually doing: shielding top managers from bullets thrown at them from outside the boundaries of the organization.

Because the press was used to this sort of relationship, and the general public was less interested in the inner workings of business than they are today, the flak era of public relations lasted for many years. As companies needed to add other communications activities to the list, public relations personnel were the obvious choice. For example, in the 1960s it was not unusual to find public relations officials handling speech writing, annual reports, and the ubiquitous house organ (or company newspaper).

Given that the majority of work in this area involved dealing with the press (television was not a factor until the early 1970s), former journalists were typically hired to handle this job. After all, they could write quickly and coherently, which were the most important skills necessary for a discipline revolving around the writing of press releases and speeches.

These journalists-turned-flak brought the first real expertise in the area of communication to the corporation. Until recently, most other managers in large companies came from very traditional business-oriented backgrounds, such as engineering, accounting, finance, production, or at best (in terms of sensitivity to communication issues) sales or marketing. Their understanding of how to communicate depended on abilities that they might have gained by chance or through excellent undergraduate or secondary school training rather than years of experience. Given their more quantitative orientations, these old-style managers welcomed a professional communicator who could take the heat for them and offer guidance based on something other than seat-of-the-pants reasoning.

At the same time these developments were taking place within corporations, another group of communications professionals was working independently to handle the growing need for communications advice. The legends of the public relations field like Edward Bernays, David Finn, Harold Burson, and more recently Robert Dillenschneider helped the profession develop away from its journalism roots into a more refined and respected field. They were the founders and leaders of the PR firms that were hired by corporations to deal with inadequacies in their own public relations or public affairs departments.

As a result, the schools of communication mentioned earlier sprang up to train the consultants who would work in these firms. Hill and Knowlton, Burson Marsteller, and Ruder and Finn, just to name a few, still exist today to service the needs of organizations in the area of public relations. Schools of communication still provide the natural resources for entrants into these firms.

For many years, those PR firms dominated the communications field. They essentially operated as outsourced communications departments for many organizations who could not afford their own

or who needed extra help for special situations, such as crises or promotional activities. Even today, these firms provide some of the best advice available on a number of issues related to corporate communication. But, for the most part, they are unable to handle the day-to-day activities required for the smooth flow of communications from organizations to constituents.

Thus, as problems in the 1970s developed outside of companies requiring more than the simple internal PR function supplemented by the outside consultant from a PR firm, the roots of the new corporate communication function started to take hold. In addition, this new functional area started to look more like other functional areas within the corporation.

This development created the need for business-school trained professionals who could understand and converse with other managers in their own language. It also created a much more complex functional area with many different subfunctions beyond just media relations.

FUNCTIONS WITHIN THE DISCIPLINE OF CORPORATE COMMUNICATION

Perhaps the best way to discuss the different subfunctions of the discipline is to look at the different parts of a modern corporate communication function. These also mirror the different areas of research considered later in the article. The areas under consideration are image and identity, corporate advertising, media relations, financial communications, employee relations, community relations and corporate philanthropy, government relations, and crisis communications. Although this is not an all-encompassing list of activities, it represents the most important subfunctions within a large corporation.

IMAGE AND IDENTITY

Image is a reflection of the organization's reality. It is the corporation as seen through the eyes of constituents. Thus an

organization can have different images with different constituencies. For example, forest products companies may have a very negative image among environmental activists, but a very positive image among employees and of firms engaged in this endeavor. Corporate communications departments conduct research (similar to marketing research for products and services) to understand different constituents' needs and attitudes. They then try to work on better communications with those constituents to enhance their image.

Identity, on the other hand, is the visual manifestation of the company's image as seen in the corporate logo, its stationery, its uniforms, its buildings, its brochures, and its advertising. Identity consulting firms work with organizations to create logos and other manifestations of identity. These firms increasingly rely on business schools to provide personnel for this growing field.

CORPORATE ADVERTISING AND ADVOCACY

Image and identity are often reflected in a company's corporate advertising. This subfunction of corporate communication differs from product advertising or marketing communication. Instead of trying to sell a company's product or service, corporate advertising tries to sell the company itself—usually to a completely different constituency than customers. For example, companies with a diverse product range might try to run "umbrella" ads that show potential shareholders what the company is all about; oil companies might try to influence public opinion about their environmental friendliness; and chemical companies might try to show themselves as good places to work for young people entering the job market.

Advocacy programs are a subset of corporate advertising and represent the organization's attempt to influence public opinion on an important issue related to the firm's business. The most famous examples are Mobil Oil's ads, which run on op-ed pages and cover a broad range of topics important to the corporation, and Philip Morris's advertising to defend itself against those who would attack the tobacco industry.

The professionals in a corporate communication department typically develop the strategy and shape the messages for these advertisements. They also act as a liaison with advertising agencies.

MEDIA RELATIONS

Unlike the paid advertising described above, the media relations subfunction allows an organization to shape its image through third parties. This is the last vestige of the old PR department and a mainstay of any corporate communication function. Most of the personnel for corporate communications will typically be found within this subfunction, and the person in charge of the department as a whole must also be capable of dealing with the media as a spokesperson for the firm.

Media relations specialists today go far beyond their predecessors in managing this subfunction. They must be more adept at conducting research on writers and producers, at training managers for interviews based on their best guess at what the story is all about, and at handling the actual relationships with reporters and editors themselves. Given the adversarial relationship between business and the media, this subfunction is often one of the most critical to senior managers hoping to present a positive image to shareholders and other critical constituents.

FINANCIAL COMMUNICATIONS

Also called investor or shareholder relations, this subfunction has emerged as one of the fastest growing subsets of the corporate communication function and an area of intense interest at all companies. Traditionally, this subfunction has been handled by the finance or treasury department, but the focus today has moved away from just the numbers to the way the numbers are actually communicated to various constituencies.

This subfunction deals with securities analysts on both the buy and sell side who are often also a direct source for the financial media, which this subfunction cultivates in conjunction with experts from the media relations area. Financial communications

also involve direct contact with investors, both large and small. In addition, every public firm must produce financial statements and annual reports, which are produced by financial communications professionals.

Financial communicators in particular must have a broad understanding of business in general and finance and accounting in particular. Training in these subjects is most easily found today within business schools.

EMPLOYEE RELATIONS

As companies become more focused on retaining a happy workforce with changing values and different demographics, they have necessarily had to think more seriously about how they communicate with employees through what is also often referred to as internal communications. Companies today must explain complicated health and benefit packages, changes in laws that affect employees, and changes in the marketplace that might affect the company in the future. Increasingly, they must boost the morale of employees after downsizing and reengineering.

Although many of these activities can be handled through personnel departments, the communication itself and the strategy for communicating these ideas must come from communications experts in the corporate communication function. Most of the Fortune 500 corporations now use corporate communication departments (rather than human resource departments) to deal with these issues. Like financial communications, this area is growing at a rapid rate in most organizations and requires a deeper understanding of the business as a whole than in the past.

COMMUNITY RELATIONS AND CORPORATE PHILANTHROPY

Many companies have a separate subfunction outside of the corporate communications area to deal with each of these areas. The former is often housed in the human resource department for historical reasons, whereas the latter is often set up as a separate foundation from the organization itself in larger companies. But the

need for a more strategic focus and the difficulties in dealing with growing concerns in communities about the role of the corporation create the need for corporate communication departments to handle both of these subfunctions.

In addition, given the limited resources available today in communities and not-for-profit organizations, most companies are much more strategic in their focus on philanthropy. Many try to balance the need to help people in need within the communities in which they do business with the demands of shareholders.

GOVERNMENT RELATIONS

This subfunction, often called by the more global name of public affairs, is more important in some industries than in others, but virtually every company can benefit by having ties to legislators on both a local and national level. Many companies have established offices in Washington, D.C., to find out what is going on in government that might affect the company and influence the discussion.

Because of its importance in heavily regulated industries, such as utilities, government relations are often dealt with at an industry level (as in the electric utilities and tobacco industries) in addition to the individual company effort. In these industries, companies and lobbying groups spend far more time trying to influence legislation that might have an effect on the industry or firm than one would find in less heavily regulated industries.

CRISIS COMMUNICATION

Although not specifically a separate function, responses to potential crises need to be planned for and coordinated by the corporate communication function. Usually, a broad group of managers from throughout the organization is included in all planning for crises, but the actual execution of a crisis communication plan is the purview of the corporate communication department.

Responsibilities for planning would include risk assessment, setting communication objectives for potential crises, assigning

teams to each crisis, planning for centralization, and deciding what to include in a formal plan. In terms of actual execution of a crisis communication plan, communicators are responsible for taking control, gathering information, creating a centralized crisis management center, doing the actual communication, and making plans to avoid other crises.

CORPORATE COMMUNICATION'S LINKS
TO OTHER DISCIPLINES

Because of its close connection to the functional area within corporations, corporate communication as an academic discipline has taken on many of the characteristics of the function itself. It tends to focus on the need for a strong function as a result of the negative environment for business mentioned earlier, suggests strategies based on earlier models of communication, and develops expertise in specific subfunctions. But the discipline is still very much related to the other disciplines under study in this journal. As such, we must take a closer look at the links between corporate communication and the related disciplines to understand the field more fully.

Corporate communication is most closely connected to management communication if one looks at the field of management communication as a hybrid or all-encompassing discipline (Shaw, 1993). It is probably most distant from business communication, which tends to focus almost exclusively on skills. Finally, although organizational communicators would probably see this as a subset of their field, their discipline is much more closely allied with management or organizational behavior rather than communication. Let us take a closer look at each of the subdisciplines to explore the similarities and differences in the field.

LINKS TO MANAGEMENT COMMUNICATION

If we look at the field of management communication in its role as a survey course for graduate students studying business, we see

the obvious connection between corporate and management communication. The best courses try to give students a look at how communications work in organizations. Thus management communication focuses on communication strategy; skills, including writing and speaking; process, including teamwork and interpersonal behavior; the global environment, which focuses on cross-cultural communication; and function, which gets us to the connection with corporate communication.

So, too, research in the field of management communication (including this journal) is a hybrid of all the areas discussed in the previous paragraph. Many other authors have discussed the fragmentation that results from all of this (Hagge, 1987; Shaw, 1993; Shelby, 1988). Still others (Daniel, 1983) have argued that the broad nature of the field gets us away from our original charter as a skills-oriented discipline.

In fact, like management communication, corporate communication suffers as a field from some of the same problems. For example, it does not spring from one or two easily defined fields. Instead, it comes from the integration of several different disciplines, as discussed above. This problem creates difficulties for corporate communication as an emerging academic discipline because those who enter the field (as with those entering the field of management communication) come from a variety of backgrounds.

Although integration is praised roundly by academics in high places, the fact is that a hybrid field does not carry the same weight in the academic community as one that springs naturally from one or two obvious disciplines. Particularly in the more research-oriented business schools where economics is king and organizational behavior is seen as an unfortunate but necessary evil, corporate communication is at best a weak sister to management communication or business communication. Both of these disciplines have their own difficulties with academic legitimacy given their focus on skills.

But why should not management communication in particular, with its focus on graduate education, see corporate communication as the key to its future success? Corporate communication provides the content the discipline has been looking for all along. Rather than

teach writing and speaking as part of other courses ("you grade the writing/speaking and we'll evaluate the content" goes the mantra), corporate communication, with its emphasis on content, finally provides the raw material for a good management communication course.

At last, those teaching management communication could crow about their own related functional area in business (just like marketing and finance!) while still emphasizing skills training. In fact, corporate communication may be critical to the development of management communication as a discipline going forward because the field has yet to develop in the way it should have by now and is still made up of academics from other disciplines who create the problems that Daniel outlined back in 1983, including a tendency to look at what is essentially skills training as a subject rather than a method.

In the meantime, corporate communication remains interesting to only a handful of faculty who teach management communication. Given that it does not spring naturally from any of the related disciplines for management communication (including English, organizational communication, speech, and business communication), it will probably continue to interest only a few, with perhaps others seeing the field as another possible way to teach skills, such as dealing with the media.

LINKS TO BUSINESS COMMUNICATION

Unlike management communication, the links between corporate and business communication are much weaker. First, business communication is geared primarily to undergraduates. Second, it focuses almost entirely on skills, especially writing. Third, business communication, even more than management communication, has tended to focus on the micro rather than the macro level of communication.

Although corporate communication, as defined earlier in this article, focuses on an entire function of management, business communication looks toward the communicator himself or herself for its focus. Although corporate communication as a field derives

all of its content from the functional area, business communication must derive its content by necessity from others as a result of its focus on skills. Although corporate communication is rather narrow in focus given its orientation around the function, business communication is much broader, whereas more fragmented and practical.

As recently as 2 years ago at an Association for Business Communication conference, colleagues rooted in business communication as a discipline were just discovering in a presentation that crisis communication might be an interesting thing to study given that good communication skills are necessary to carry out an effective program.

You can still count on one or two hands the number of academics in business communication who see any need to focus on corporate communication in their courses or research. Like speech before it and electronic communication today, corporate communication may someday be a part of this discipline, but certainly not yet.

LINKS TO ORGANIZATIONAL COMMUNICATION

Unlike management communication, which could find a home for corporate communication, and business communication, which up until now has only covered the discipline in passing, organizational communication may actually believe that it has ownership over the field. Like journalism and mass communication programs, organizational communication faculty may rightfully feel that corporate communication is nothing more than old wine in new bottles.

But the field of organizational communication grows out of the management or organizational behavior literature rather than communications. Indeed, the study of communication within organizations fits better as a subset of corporate communication as outlined earlier in this article under the subfunction of employee communication. This allows organizations to approach employees as one of many constituencies (both internal and external) rather than as a part of human resource management, which is a much narrower approach.

The organizational communication discipline has whatever claim that it does over the corporate communication discipline only because its development has been so painfully slow as a result of budget cuts at universities, lack of interest among graduate students looking to enter management education as a career, and the continued interest in the area in other schools outside of the business school environment.

WHAT LINKS ARE BEST?

Given the discussion above, perhaps the best place for the discipline as it develops in the short term is going to be management communication. This discipline needs the content, is aimed at the right audience for corporate communication, and has more of a macro orientation than the other two subdisciplines. Despite all of that, we also see nascent signs of the field developing within the broader world of business communication as evidenced by presentations at conferences and papers in mainline journals such as the *Journal of Business Communication.*

Ultimately, however, corporate communication should become its own discipline. To do that, it must develop a strong research base. In the next section, I will look at how research is evolving based on some earlier theoretical models.

THE EVOLUTION OF
CORPORATE COMMUNICATION RESEARCH

In this section, I will look at the current state of research in the discipline, discuss its theoretical roots, and describe the research opportunities available to those interested in the field.

CORPORATE COMMUNICATION RESEARCH TODAY

Research in corporate communication outside the realms of mass communications, journalism, and organizational communication is sparse. In fact, the first book with the title of *Corporate*

Communication was published in 1994 (Argenti, 1994), which clearly indicates that we are in the presence of a very new discipline. As the associate editor for *Management Communication Quarterly* who is loosely responsible for articles in this emerging discipline, this author can attest to the paucity of research in the field.

In addition, those of us working in the area have focused almost exclusively on developing pedagogical devices (such as cases and textbooks), consulting with needy corporations, and otherwise trying to figure out what the field should be instead of sticking to our research knitting. With few antecedents as reference points, authors trying to operate within the boundaries of normal academic rules are often at a loss as to how to publish an article on an emerging discipline in mainline academic journals that are increasingly quantitative, vigorously anti-integrative, and generally interested in narrow rather than broad-based, qualitative research.

This is not meant as a criticism to the mainline journals, which would like very much to publish articles if they were available, but rather to those few of us who spend all or most of our time thinking about corporate communication. One wonders if other emerging academic disciplines faced similar challenges in the past or if this is the result of our connection to management communication, which itself has only recently taken on a more research-oriented focus.

Take strategy, for example. This discipline was in a similar position to corporate communication 20 years ago. It grew out of the management and organizational behavior areas, which were in their adolescence when strategy emerged as a discipline. It was not until Michael Porter arrived on the scene that the field started to take off. Today, research in strategy is seen as a respectable and legitimate enterprise.

Carter Daniel chronicled the development of business communication as a wayward discipline in similar terms in his article *Remembering Our Charter: Business Communication at the Cross-roads* (Daniel, 1983) by looking at the development of much older disciplines such as education, English, and sociology. In each case, he discussed the rise and fall of these fields and we could imagine how exciting it would have been to be working in these areas when

they were in their infancy. His discussion of English is particularly interesting:

> Some classicists felt that anything already in English was just for recreation, not for study. English literature might deserve a place in the lower grades, but a proper university could regard it as no more than a mere adjunct to the study of the classics. Others not so hung up on language shared the same uneasiness: only ancient writers merit our study, they said, because those alone have stood the test of time. (Or if Tennyson is so good, why didn't he write 2000 years ago?) (p. 6)

Corporate communication is a discipline in that stage of development today in terms of research. Academics at most business schools must look on it as a curiosity, perhaps a flash-in-the-pan, bereft of good quantitative studies, too focused on practice rather than theory, and thus not really worthy of academic legitimacy. But that does not mean that the field has no theoretical roots. Indeed, like all of the related communication disciplines, corporate communication comes from the work of Aristotle.

THEORETICAL ROOTS

At its core, all corporate communication begins with notions of communication strategy (Munter, 1992). The tripartite system that Aristotle defined in terms of speech in his *Art of Rhetoric* included a discussion of "the speaker, the subject of which he treats, and the person to whom it is addressed." Munter discussed and embellished this same concept in terms of management communication as follows:

> Effective managerial communication—written or oral—is based on an effective strategy. Therefore, you should analyze the five strategic variables . . . before you start to speak: (1) communicator strategy . . . (2) audience strategy . . . (3) message strategy . . . (4) channel choice strategy, including when to write and when to speak; and (5) culture strategy, including how cultural variations affect your strategy. (p. xiii)

This same theory of management communication can easily be applied to corporate communication (Argenti, 1994). The communicator gets translated into the organization's strategy for a particular

communication; the audience equates to the many constituencies that organizations must deal with; the message remains essentially the same; and channel choices, although much more complex, also include either writing and speaking with the addition of symbols arising from an organization's identity.

SETTING AN EFFECTIVE ORGANIZATION STRATEGY FOR CORPORATE COMMUNICATION

To continue with the analogy, the first strategic variable for an organization contemplating a communication is itself. The steps it might take to analyze the organization's strategy include determining what its objectives are for the communication in question, deciding what resources are available for achieving those objectives, and determining the organization's image credibility in terms of this task.

As with communication for an individual, an organization must determine what it wants in response from a particular constituency before it decides to communicate. It must also determine what resources it will put forth to reach the desired response. Unfortunately, many organizations will put a minimum amount of resources up front in terms of time and money to reach their goals. Communication is still dealt with reactively rather than proactively in industries until negative environmental factors create the need for more resources. Thus the tobacco industry expends enormous resources trying to influence many different constituencies, whereas industries that have not been under attack spend as little as possible—until a crisis develops.

Once an organization has set objectives for communication and has decided what resources are available to accomplish that objective, it must determine what kind of credibility it has with the constituency in question. This image credibility is based on several factors, but stems primarily from the constituency's perception of the organization rather than the reality of the organization itself.

Let us look at two well-known corporate examples to understand the importance of image credibility. Johnson & Johnson's image credibility was quite high when it was faced with the Tylenol crisis in 1982. The company had a corporate credo that shaped its values,

and was generally seen as a responsible organization by most constituents. So when its Tylenol capsules were laced with cyanide and the company had to recall the product from shelves throughout the country, it went into the crisis with high image credibility. This allowed managers to deal with the situation from a position of strength. Many have since written that the product would not exist under the same brand name today if it had not been for the strong image credibility of the company going into the crisis.

Exxon, on the other hand, has never had high image credibility among the general public. Therefore, when the Valdez ran aground in Alaska back in 1989, the company was operating from a position of weakness in trying to communicate about the crisis. Oil companies, unlike Johnson & Johnson that make baby products, are not easy for people to either understand or like. Thus many have since written that any of the good works that Exxon may have done after the accident was unsuccessful because the company lacked image credibility among many different constituencies.

Analyzing Constituencies

Analyzing those constituencies for corporate communication is similar to audience analysis at the individual level. It involves determining who the constituency is, what their attitude is toward the organization, and what they already know about the communication in question.

Defining who the primary constituencies are for a corporate communication is often not very difficult, but trying to figure out how to reach the objective when dealing with constituencies with divergent views is one of the real challenges for both managers working in corporate communication and academics studying the field. For example, communicating something as simple as allocation of profit to shareholders and employees raises enormous questions for a corporation. Give too much to the employees and analysts will deride management for shirking its responsibilities to the shareholders; give too much to shareholders and the employees who were instrumental in bringing the profits to the shareholders

in the first place will complain that management is merely trying to increase the company's stock price.

Similarly, organizations must determine what each of the constituents involved in the communication think about them. If the organization has built up goodwill with the constituency in question, it will be much easier to reach the objective. The Tylenol case described above is a classic example of this. Convincing people to buy a product that could be laced with cyanide is not an easy proposition. But because the company had the trust of many different constituencies, it was able to achieve its objective, which was to bring the brand back. If people had not trusted the company, or they had questioned its behavior in any way, this would not have been possible.

Structuring Appropriate Messages

Like individuals trying to structure messages for themselves, organizations must decide whether they want to deliver the message directly or indirectly. Most communications researchers would argue that managers should generally try to communicate directly because business audiences are busy and bottom-line-oriented.

Similarly, organizations should generally communicate directly if possible. Indirect communication is confusing and harder for constituents to understand. Unfortunately, lawyers often advise senior executives to take a more indirect approach (or not to communicate at all) to avoid litigation, which ends up getting companies into more trouble in the long run.

Choosing the Right Channel

Determining the proper communication channel is much more difficult for organizations than for individuals. For an individual contemplating a communication, the choices of what channel to use might include writing (whether electronic or in hard copy) and speaking (whether in presentations, meetings, or voice mail). An

organization has those same choices plus the added problems of using third parties (such as the media) and timing messages for constituencies (shouldn't employees find out first?).

Choosing the right channel is critical to the success of a corporate communication. For example, should the organization buy advertising to enhance its image or would it be more believable (albeit much harder to control the end result) if a newspaper or television station reported on the same information?

In addition, the development of the Internet and the World Wide Web creates still more channels with increasing levels of complexity for corporate communicators.

RESEARCH OPPORTUNITIES IN CORPORATE COMMUNICATION

Just looking at the communication strategy model outlined above offers the interested researcher endless opportunities to define it anew within the boundaries of corporate communication. Imagine a research study that looked at communication strategies for different corporations and linked the development of such strategies to financial success or failure, or a study like Fielden and Dulek's (1984) analysis of indirect versus direct messages in memos on direct versus indirect messages in the initial stages of a crisis and the resulting success or failure of the communication.

In addition to the obvious possibilities for research in terms of communication strategy, we can find additional possibilities for research in each of the subfunctions described above. Let us take a closer look at each of these subfunctions to see what those opportunities might be.

Image and Identity

This area has never been studied as rigorously as it should despite the importance of such research in determining the success of the organization as a whole. Exciting possibilities for research on logos, design, corporate brochures, and name changes abound. Researchers at the Tuck School from corporate communication,

economics, and quantitative analysis, for example, studied what effect corporate name changes had on stock price for all companies involved over a period of 50 years (Argenti, Hansen, & Neslin, 1988). The study concluded that such changes had a positive effect on stock price in most cases.

Although such research is extremely beneficial to corporate communication consulting firms in the identity business, it is equally interesting to researchers studying the effects of specific corporate communication activities on performance.

Corporate Advertising and Advocacy

Corporate advertising and advocacy programs offer similarly attractive opportunities for researchers. What are the effects of environmentally oriented corporate advertising? Do Mobil Oil's advocacy ads actually have any effect on changing the public's perceptions about the issues in question? Do people really believe that Philip Morris is more interested in smokers' First Amendment rights above all else? Does corporate advertising make employees feel better about the organization and, more specifically, their jobs? Can corporate advertising actually influence stock price?

All of these questions could be answered by researchers taking an interest in corporate communication. Such answers would provide help for practitioners who are led to believe by consultants that results are not measurable in corporate communication. The research would also serve as the basis for theories for generations of other researchers to come.

Media Relations

This subfunction has actually been the focus of more research than any of the others because of its obvious connection to the other disciplines and its connection to both journalism and mass communication. But new avenues for research exist in this area as well.

Do press releases have any effect on reporters in terms of the development of stories? What are the actual statistics on how

negatively specific industries and companies are treated by the media? What can be done with the reams of research now taking place analyzing reporters' points of view, the nature of their stories, and their predisposition to write either positive or negative stories? Are newspapers operating as virtual monopolies more or less likely to write positive or negative stories about corporations based on rigorous quantitative analysis?

Financial Communications

Researchers interested in interdisciplinary work would do well to look into this subfunction of corporate communication. The connection to what is often the core of a business school faculty offers an opportunity to build credibility and conduct highly quantitative analysis. For example, researchers interested in this area could look at how the trade-off between employees and shareholders in terms of profit actually works in a number of large companies. Do companies that cater to shareholders do better or worse in terms of profit in the long run?

Employee Relations

Although the questions we have looked at so far represent fascinating challenges for potential researchers, no other corporate communication subfunction offers more of an opportunity for genuinely sought-after research than employee communication. Companies eagerly await research in this area, editors of journals in human resource management are desperate for new developments, and researchers conducting a literature review continue to turn up the same few articles over and over again.

One would think that our colleagues in organizational behavior, and even more logically organizational communication, would have jumped on the bandwagon by now, but the area remains a wasteland in terms of research. A Ph.D. student looking to make his or her mark in the field of communication could find few other areas offering richer opportunities than this one.

Community Relations and Corporate Philanthropy

Communities and not-for-profit organizations have a love/hate relationship with corporations. They increasingly rely on them for support (given the downsizing of government), but their views are often diametrically opposed. Researchers could study the effects of giving on community behavior toward the corporation. Does such giving really matter? Similarly, should corporations be more strategic in terms of giving? Does giving aimed at producing a result (tobacco companies' support of the First Amendment) have any effect on constituencies? Does Mobil's support of *Masterpiece Theater* or Texaco's support of opera affect consumers at all?

Government Relations

In this area, corporate communication researchers could study whether communication strategies aimed at legislators really have any effect on the legislation. Does the intimidation by large companies (e.g., such as General Motors) toward government agencies (such as the Department of Transportation) have any effect on the settlement of major cases?

Crisis Communication

Finally, researchers could study the effects of planning on the eventual outcome in a crisis. They could also study perceptions of organizations who communicated heavily versus those that did not during major crises. Another area to study would be how much initial credibility might affect perceptions of organizations in a crisis.

Those of us involved in corporate communication research can attest to the kid-in-a-candy store nature of the endeavor. Even in fields that are still relatively young, such as management communication and business communication, the big questions have all been asked and answered at least once by now.

But such is not the case in the emerging discipline of corporate communication, which has only begun to develop the questions in

the first place. Although one would think that this would send researchers into the discipline in droves, it actually has had the opposite effect. Most researchers want to build off of someone else's work, which in a sense has already been approved, rather than risk being completely wrong by coming up with a new concept.

Our hope is that in the years to come, we will see some of those risks being taken. The rewards for those who get involved will be enormous and the ultimate benefit to the organizations that can use the results will be greater still. This journal and a few others offer such opportunities to researchers interested in the field.

CONCLUSION

This series of position articles offers all of us an opportunity to pause and consider what some of the major forces are in our respective fields today. In this particular article, we have looked at a relatively new discipline, its relationship with the other disciplines under study, and the research opportunities available to academics.

One cannot help but wonder what our field, taken in its broadest sense, will look like 50 years from now. Will the notions described in this position article and the others in this journal come to pass? Will another new discipline, more compelling perhaps to researchers in communication, move the discussion forward in a totally different way?

No one can answer these questions today, but perhaps pauses in the research discussion such as this special edition offer all of us an opportunity to shape the field in ways we never really contemplated before.

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