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*This research explored how employees perceived and articulated organizational "rules" in describing specific communication problem incidents. The research elicited and analyzed 560 short narratives from MBA students describing an actual on-the-job communication problem caused by another organization member's weak understanding of "how we communicate here." Respondents cited many more unwritten than written sources of guidance, naming 22 different means by which organizations conveyed guidance on "how we communicate here." Categorizing types of communication problems showed that about 20 percent could have been prevented or solved by communication policy guidelines; other kinds of managerial intervention are recommended for those owing more to bad individual judgment, poor managerial oversight, or dearth or inappropriateness of cues from corporate culture. Organizations with some written policy on communicating may have thought more about "how we communicate here" and how to convey that information to employees. Respondents' cost estimates suggest that communication problems are a drain on profitability and effectiveness. Most organizations should examine how employees learn the communication rules at present and should introduce measures that reduce uncertainty. If employees can make sense of their work environments sooner and more accurately, errors are likely to diminish.*

## **Organizational Rules on Communicating: How Employees Are – and Are Not – Learning the Ropes**

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**H**ow do employees of an organization know how the organization wants them to communicate on the job? How do organizations tell them? Do they tell them? Do organizations rely on corporate culture to inform employees? Do organizations rely on their ability to recruit observant people and to train them thoroughly? Do some rely on employees' peers and co-workers? Do some decline to think about the matter at all? A study based on 560 critical incidents narrated by MBA-level respondents permits some inferences.

Organizations, relying on human beings to create and deliver products and services, lose serious money and see productivity eroded when errors are made. Many, many errors trace back to a problem in communication. Human beings make decisions about what to do and say based on interpretation of a changing, moving mass of cues from others in their environment. Some organizations give employees excellent guidance on how they expect them to communicate; some organizations give little or none. As this study suggests, most organizations could do more to help employees reduce uncertainty and make better and more profitable communication decisions.

The study analyzed 560 questionnaires completed by students in MBA-level human resource management classes at 18 universities from across the United States. The questionnaire was administered at a point

in the term when students had already been introduced to the concept of corporate culture. Respondents were asked to narrate the problem incident, discuss what went wrong, and state what the originator of the problem should have known to avoid the problem. What someone "should have known" amounted to a rule for communicating in that situation in that organization.

### Research Questions

This study sought to draw inferences about how employees enrolled in MBA programs perceived and articulated organizational "rules" as they described specific communication problem incidents and commented on what their organizations expected. Earlier research has offered little firm information on where and how employees learn the organization's rules. Therefore, another important goal of the study was to try to infer the origin of the rules whose violation led to financial costs: *Were the rules written or unwritten? If unwritten, by what means should the individual have obtained knowledge of them?*

The literature (e.g., Schein, 1985) suggests that corporate culture is an important conduit of organizational expectations. Accordingly, this study also sought to learn whether the strength of corporate culture is related to the degree to which employees understand communication expectations. Also, following previous research (Gilsdorf, 1987, 1992), the study examined whether organizations with strong corporate cultures are likely to put more of their communication expectations in writing.

Another goal of the study was to try to infer how many of the problems cited by respondents could have been mitigated or solved if the organization had developed clearer rules. To be sure, rules cannot cover all eventualities, nor can they compensate for an individual employee's bad judgment or imperceptiveness, or an individual manager's inattention or incompetence. But *would having clear rules be important in enough cases that organizations should attend to them more?*

### Rules, Policies, and Culture

The term *rules* as used here denotes the assumptions organizational members make about the right way to communicate in given situations in their particular organization. Rules might be formal or informal; written or oral; implicit or explicit; general (an organization-wide policy, for instance) or particular (specific to a department or even to a task); positively stated or implied ("do this") or negatively stated or implied ("avoid this"; Gilsdorf, 1987).

A *policy* usually sets forth, at a high level, an organization's firm belief and/or course of action on a given important matter. Strategic planners create policy, but so also do lower-level staff or line people

responsible for departments. For instance, the corporate communication department might generate crisis communication policy, and human resources might formulate policy forbidding sexual harassment. One also sees the word *policy* attached to statements with narrower focus than the organization as a whole: Guidelines and procedures are often referred to as policies.

Some rules are expressed in policies, but many rules exist outside policies. A priori, these rule categories were of interest:

1. Written and acknowledged (e.g., cited, posted, provided to organization members). For example, a policy encountered fairly frequently in writing is “Your manager’s door is open. Ask questions or raise concerns as needed.” Or “Our customer is always first.”
2. Written but unacknowledged (e.g., outdated or not widely available).
3. Unwritten and explicitly stated/acknowledged. For example, a rule fairly common as an oral but explicit policy is “We work as a team here. Ask for help in solving problems.”
4. Unwritten, definitely present, but unacknowledged and unlikely to be viewed as policy. For example,
  - A rule such as “When you use someone else’s good idea, give the person credit and don’t try to hog the rewards” might be implicit and helpful to the organization’s goals.
  - A rule like “People can come in up to 20 minutes late in the morning without calling” might be implicit rather than explicit and might be very harmful to the organization’s goals.
  - An unwritten rule such as “CYA” (cover your ass) may or may not be congruent with many organizational goals. “CYOA” (cover your organization’s ass) is generally consistent with at least some organization goals.

Written rules are conveyed by familiar means such as policy statements, memos, or posters. In contrast, unwritten rules are not always easy to trace. Some are clear; some are “fuzzy.” The more they are understood rather than explicit, the more they blur into the area that is considered *culture* – that is, an organization’s shared vision, values, beliefs, goals, and practices. Rules are sometimes formulated deliberately but sometimes coalesce from practice. Whatever their origin, rules exist, and they guide the decisions of organizational actors.

To succeed in organizations, employees have to find out that the rules exist and what they are and decide whether it is in their interests to follow them. Though one might initially think it would always be in employees’ interests to follow the rules, this is not always so. For instance, in cases where employees hear conflicting rules from different sources or where rewards do not follow compliance, people might well decide to ignore rules. Furthermore, skilled communicators may make

communication decisions that promote organizational objectives better than those suggested by the "rules." In fact, rules often evolve for the better in exactly this way.

Managers in organizations think about "how we communicate here" only some of the time, and some managers do so infrequently or not at all. Since people assign meaning to experience, correctly or incorrectly, rules are formed in abundance. If an organization's management does not consider which communication behaviors it wishes to foster for its success, the signals it sends to employees may be inconsistent or counterproductive. Desirable behaviors may not be reinforced. Resulting patterns may be dysfunctional to the organization.

This article will argue that greater emphasis on deliberate, workable, and consistent messages about "how we communicate here" will increase an organization's chances of obtaining useful communication behavior more of the time and avoiding costly errors.

It is a given that "how we communicate here" can be an elusive set of concepts. Rules can exist in combinations, admit of many exceptions by their very nature, and depend on one's level in the organization. In clusters of rules, different organizational actors will sometimes perceive different ones as salient. Some rules have metarules. For example, in a department of one technical organization, employees understood that they were to listen politely to how the manager told them to do a task but then go and ask a long-term staffer how they should actually do it. The work group's rule about the manager was, in essence, "He's a manager, not a technical expert. He doesn't understand this function, doing it his way would create problems, and he doesn't know how to check on you anyway." This arrangement was functional, because the manager was out of his depth in this case. Clearly, however, this kind of "rule" setup is laden with peril. On the part of both the manager and the work group, there are too many unexamined assumptions.

### **Research on Communication Rules**

Learning the ropes in organizations is a challenge to newcomers but also a continuing process for longer-term organizational members. Employees move up or transfer; new managers make changes in "how we do things here"; organizational culture itself evolves over time. Many scholars (e.g., Daft & Weick, 1984) agree that organizations are complex systems that interpret events for their members and create meanings that guide actions. Numerous sources, including Van Maanen (1976), Jablin (1987), Miller and Jablin (1991), Mills and Murgatroyd (1991), and Teboul (1994) describe how newcomers to organizations become socialized. Louis (1980, pp. 231, 246) emphasizes that most newcomers have prior cultural assumptions and behaviors

to unlearn as well as new ones to perceive, interpret, and take on. Weick (1995) emphasizes the continuousness and complexity of sensemaking. Thomas, Clark, and Gioia (1993) explore the processes linking cognition (scanning, interpretation, etc.) to action and the effects on what the actors do in the organization.

Deal and Kennedy (1982) link strong corporate culture, effective communication, and cost savings: "By knowing what exactly is expected of them, employees will waste little time in deciding how to act in a given situation. In a weak culture, on the other hand, employees waste a good deal of time just trying to figure out what they should do and how they should do it. The impact of a strong culture on productivity is amazing. In the extreme, we estimate that a company can gain as much as one or two hours of productive work per employee per day" (p. 15).

Where employees understand management's expectations, they apparently contribute better to management's goals. Clampitt and Downs (1993), building on previous studies by Downs and Hain (1982) and Downs, Clampitt, and Pfeiffer (1988), demonstrated a close link between effective communication and productivity. Trombetta and Rogers (1988, p. 510) showed that information adequacy directly predicts commitment and job satisfaction. Guzley (1992) showed that employees' commitment to the organization correlates positively with organizational clarity and is maintained even when changes are occurring in the organization "if they sense some form of clarity or orderliness exists for work activities, goals, objectives, and the like" (p. 398). Ibarra and Andrews (1993) found that the more closely connected employees were to the firm's informal communication network, the more positively those employees viewed the organization's climate and the more likely they were to believe that that climate allowed employees to take risks, gain access to information, and hope for their decisions to be accepted.

Informal, nonhierarchical means of communication appear to fill in gaps between what employees want to know and what management has time, attention, or inclination to tell them. Katz and Kahn (1966) discuss the asymmetrical communication needs of superiors and subordinates. An individual in a direct-report relationship does not always want to send or receive the information desired or offered by the other. "The greater the conflict between the communication needs of these two hierarchically situated senders and recipients of information, the more likely is an increase in lateral communication. . . . Horizontal exchange can be an escape valve for frustration in communicating upward and downward; and sometimes it can operate to accomplish some of the essential business of the organization" (p. 247). Comer (1991) suggests that managers not merely allow but

actively encourage newcomers to rely on peers as sources of information. Louis (1980, p. 245) recommends that managers make knowledgeable insiders the primary associates of newcomers. Wilson (1992) explores non-peer information-seeking outside the chain of command. Individuals' cognitive styles, the uncertainty level, and the nature of the organization (organic or mechanistic) regulate what kinds of organizational linkages (vertical, horizontal, or diagonal) are relied on for information (Wilson & Malik, 1995).

Employees generally enter the organization intending to learn and fulfill the firm's expectations and prosper by doing so. They form schemata (see Harris, 1994) based on formal and informal information from supervisors, formal and informal guidance from co-workers, observation of results of their own and others' behavior, and the organization's own statements about itself and its expectations. To convey cultural values, which drive much communication behavior, informal channels are used even more than formal ones (Johnson, Donohue, Atkin, & Johnson, 1994, p. 119) and the channels are interrelated in complex ways (p. 120). Newcomers infer what alliances to build, and with whom, whose opinions are and are not influential, when and when not to communicate, whom to trust and under what circumstances, and many other subtleties of communication behavior. Southard (1990) lists numerous cues organizational newcomers use in learning official and unofficial corporate protocol. They process the information as it is salient – that is, as they perceive it to apply to problems they face.

Learning rules is a continuing process. Events occur and people interpret them. As Gray, Bougon, and Donnellon observe (1985), action-taking causes observers to amend meanings; leaders are powerful insofar as they can cause others to accept their interpretations of events; and some (not all) organizational meanings will be widely agreed upon and “crystallized as informal and formal structures” (p. 91). Schall (1983) examined an organization's communication “rules” using multiple methods, defining these rules as “tacit understandings (generally unwritten and unspoken) about appropriate ways to interact (communicate) with others in given roles and situations; they are choices, not laws (though they constrain choice through normative, practical, or logical force), and they allow interactors to interpret behavior in similar ways (to share meanings)” (p. 560). Goldhaber (1990) adds, “If these rules are followed extensively throughout an organization, we state that ‘communication policies’ are in effect, especially if they are put in writing” (p. 129).

A firm's rules on communicating are sometimes summed up as a firm's “communication climate,” here defined by Poole: “A communication climate is a molar description of communication practices and procedures in an organization or subunit. It consists of collective beliefs, expect-

tations, and values regarding communication, and is generated in interaction around organizational practices via a continuous process of structuration" (1985, p. 107). Czarniawska-Joerges and Joerges (1988) say that managers can and should construct linguistic artifacts that convey shared meaning about the organization's values and cultural assumptions. Such statements, they believe, reduce uncertainty and facilitate control. Stohl (1986) analyzed messages that employees found memorable and found that, first, organizational members do remember value statements from higher-status persons that seem to embody what an organization desires; and second, managers can formulate these statements deliberately and helpfully. But where individual managers' or whole organizations' communication signals are mixed and undeliberate, employees might never be sure what they are expected to do. Indeed, in a study by Harcourt, Richerson, and Watier (1991) a national sample of middle managers rated as poor the quality of the information they received on their job responsibilities, company policies and objectives, and other elements regarding expected behaviors. They also said that formal communication was less reliable than informal.

Some linguistic artifacts, such as value statements or organizational guidelines, are put in writing. Gilsdorf (1987, 1992) examined the nature and incidence of written organizational policy on selected aspects of communicating and found that it is not abundant. Her studies also suggest that formulating written policy on communicating could clarify organizational expectations to employees by revealing where expectations are uncertain or unshaped and by making explicit those expectations that are implicit and/or misunderstood. Francis and Woodcock (1990) recommend that organizations examine, write down, and exemplify their values. "It is what managers do – symbolic communication – that is vital. The actions of managers must reinforce their value statements. . . . Until a set of values is clear enough to be committed to paper, it will not have the authority to be a leadership statement" (p. 35). In Schein's (1985) opinion, however, formal written policy "will highlight only a small portion of the assumption set that operates in the group and, most likely, will highlight those aspects of the leader's philosophy or ideology that lend themselves to public articulation" (p. 242). Schein listed many other mechanisms for embedding and reinforcing values, including what leaders consistently view as important enough to measure; how leaders react to critical incidents and crises; leaders' deliberate role modeling and coaching; what things they reward; and what bases they use for recruiting, selecting, promoting, and terminating or isolating (pp. 224-225).

Employees look at an organization's reward system, as well as its messages, for signals about what the organization really values.



Vroom (1964) and Porter and Lawler (1968) say employees are more likely to perform desired behaviors if they are told what is expected, offered incentives toward those behaviors, shown they are feasible, and rewarded fairly for desired behaviors. Though it should be clear that an organization's reward system should reinforce the behaviors it desires, Kerr's famous article "On the Folly of Rewarding A, While Hoping for B" (1975, updated 1995) is, according to a survey taken by the editors of *Academy of Management Executive* (Dechant & Veiga, 1995), still descriptive of actuality. "Ninety percent of our respondents told us that Kerr's folly is still prevalent in corporate America today. Over half concluded that the folly is widespread in their companies" (p. 15).

If organizations reward the behaviors they say they reward, their messages are congruent and credible. If these messages are inconsistent, employees' responses will be at worst antagonistic (because contradictory and equivocal signals generate resentment) and at best unpredictable (because no clear signal is available to guide the well-intentioned). While it is true that an equivocal message can sometimes serve useful purposes (Eisenberg, 1984), the present study's findings suggest strongly that many mixed or nonexistent messages result from inadvertence – that is, from managerial inattention to the need for clear, consistent communication with employees – rather than from purpose.

Employees do not always feel free to ask what managers really want. In their article on individual feedback seeking, Ashford and Cummings (1985) refer to the risk employees take in exposing their ignorance and asserting their needs. They believe managers should reduce that risk by "communicating their positive interpretation of such an act" (p. 78) and should also "become more self-conscious about their own actions and how employees are interpreting them as feedback. . . . Managers need to be aware that through their behaviour they signal to employees those behaviours they most value, those employees they most esteem, and what strategies *really* lead to goal attainment in that setting" (p. 78).

To be sure, only some of the communication problems gathered in the present study trace to unclearly understood expectations. Many stem from the bad judgment of individual employees or some other unforeseeable element. Organizational "rules" on communicating cannot cover all eventualities. Where managers and organizations can avert waste or loss by providing helpful direction, however, it would seem that they err if they overlook the opportunity.

### Research Methods

Twenty-five instructors at 18 graduate business programs agreed to distribute a two-page instrument in their human resource man-

agement classes at the MBA level and allocate 20 minutes to its completion. Classes of this kind were chosen because these students could be assumed to be familiar with the concept of corporate culture and organizational norms, because many MBA-level students have professional work experience, and because MBA-program entrance requirements make it probable that respondents will in general be intelligent and perceptive observers.

Using a questionnaire, respondents were asked to think of an organization where they had worked and which they knew well – an organization where they knew the ropes – and then to think of a person who didn't know the ropes, a person who did not have a good feel for the culture of the organization. Respondents were then asked to recall and narrate an incident where this person made a mistake that had adverse consequences for the organization. (Respondents were asked about a third party's actions for two reasons: to get around individuals' tendency to self-justify when reporting problem situations, and to induce respondents to reflect on rules they perceive to be in effect.)

The purpose was to position the respondent as an observer in an organization where s/he felt s/he fit in; and next, to get the respondent to examine what there was to know about the organization's operating rules, how s/he learned what to do there, and how clearly the organization communicated its expectations to employees in general.

Respondents were asked to rate the strength of the organization's culture on a scale of 1 (very weak) to 10 (very strong). (An even number was used because previous pilot-testing of the instrument revealed no tendency for respondents to seek an exact middle point on the scale.)

After narrating the incident, respondents were asked

- To estimate the cost of the mistake in actual dollars, in soft terms, or both.
- To state what the erring individual should have known about the organization's communication expectations in order to avoid creating the problem.
- To attempt to explain why that person did not know.

The latter two questions aimed at getting the respondent to voice the "rule" in force on "how we communicate here."

Respondents were asked to indicate whether most employees of the organization know clearly how management wants them to communicate. If respondents believed employees received guidance from management in how to communicate, they were asked to state the ways in which management guided them. The last content question asked whether written policy on communicating exists in the organization and, if yes, where an employee finds it. The formal written policy did not have to address the specific "rule" violated. The question was

intended to discover whether the respondent was aware of *any* written organizational guidelines on communicating.

Last of all, to make sure the respondent was qualified to observe and comment on the incident, the instrument asked the observer's position in the organization, the core business of the organization, and the size of the organization. Since MBA programs tend to enroll students who are within the 25-40 age range and about 55 percent male and 45 percent female, the usual demographic items (e.g., age, salary) were not requested.

Returned questionnaires were entered into a database for tallying and analysis. The rules (what the individual "should have known") were recorded and studied in the context of their narratives. One of the study's research questions was to infer how often an explicit policy would have mitigated or prevented the communication error and, where policy would not have been applicable, what other sources of influence guided organizational actors. I anticipated that a clear policy would help in some cases, that individuals' communication skill and common sense would be more important in others, and that still other cases would be amenable to other kinds of cues, either from organizational culture or from managers. I also anticipated that some cases would be mixed or difficult to classify. I categorized the means by which respondents said their management typically conveyed communication expectations to employees in order to gain respondents' perceptions of which media their managers generally used and how frequently each medium was cited overall.

Four factors limit this study: The information gathered depended on respondents' reports of remembered incidents. The questions about managers' use of communication media and about the existence of written policy were not connected with the critical incident narrated. Some of the data (e.g., strength of corporate culture) depended on how respondents interpreted terms used and motives for others' behavior. Finally, the sample was not random and therefore cannot represent U.S. organizations as a whole.

Returned questionnaires with usable narratives numbered 560. *N* varied slightly for some items; though some respondents declined to answer one or more items, nonresponse to one item did not necessarily invalidate responses to others. Where nonresponse or unclear response was problematical, that questionnaire was disqualified.

### **Culture Strength, Employee Understanding, and the Rules**

The more than 500 organizations that respondents represented ranged in size from small proprietorships to some of the nation's largest firms, and cut across business, governmental, nonprofit, and

even military organizations. All but three of the respondents had at least some work experience; these three, however, also usefully narrated an incident they had observed. Categorizing responses by position of respondent, core business, and size of firm was not a goal of the study and did not permit useful inferences.

The "core business" question did not produce neat categories. In answering the "how big is the organization" question, some people clearly meant a whole organization of 1200 people while others meant their department of 30. The information was useful in that it indicated the size of the unit an individual was thinking about. Job title was useful because it showed what the person could observe but was not used in categorizing because organizations are wildly inconsistent in what it means to be a vice president or an executive assistant.

### **Culture and Employee Understanding of Communication Rules**

Most respondents viewed their organization's corporate culture as fairly strong and believed employees knew pretty clearly how the organization wanted them to communicate. Thus it seems clear that strong corporate culture is associated with effective transmission of communication rules in many organizations.

Early in the questionnaire, respondents were asked whether the organization they had in mind had a strong or weak culture and to mark a scale in answer to this question:

Along this continuum, please indicate how strong you believe this organization's culture is.									
very strong									very weak
10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1

The overall response on this item was 6.83 Mean, 7 Median, and 8 Mode.

Toward the end of the questionnaire, respondents were asked,

Do most employees of this organization know how management wants its people to communicate? or not? Please mark this continuum:									
most employees know clearly									most employees don't know clearly
10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1

Overall response on this item was 6.55 Mean, 7 Median, 8 Mode. A Pearson product moment correlation coefficient was calculated ( $r = .495$ ;  $p = .0001$ ). In the social sciences an  $r$  of .4 to .5 is considered good to strong. The  $p$  of .0001 suggests that this correlation coefficient of .495 is significant; strong corporate culture is associated with effective transmission of the rules in many organizations. The literature links strong

culture with understanding of "the way we do things around here" (Deal & Kennedy, 1982); this correlation indicates that *in organizations with strong cultures, employees are more likely to understand the organization's communication expectations.*

Respondents were not at all at a loss for problem incidents to narrate. (Some said, "What? Only one?") Based on the median responses, considerable numbers of employees are likely *not* to clearly understand their organization's communication expectations. It is important to examine the responses of those who did not assign high marks to strength of culture and employees' understanding. With 7 as a median response for both items, let us assume for the purposes of discussion that respondents who marked 5 or below on the culture statement felt that the culture was relatively weak and that those marking 5 or below on the "do most employees" item were not very willing to say that most employees understood the organization's communication expectations. A cross-tabulation using a 5 response as a cutoff yields these numbers:

Relationship Between Culture Strength  
and Understanding of Communication Expectations

	5 or under Most employees don't know	> 5 Most employees know
5 or under Culture relatively weak	91	46
> 5 Culture relatively strong	76	328

Of the 541 who answered both questions, the right-hand column shows that 374 felt positive (> 5) about employees' understanding of communication expectations. Of those, however, 46 responses (8.5 percent of 541) appear to indicate that employees' understanding came from something other than a strong culture. Adding the left-hand column shows 167 respondents who were *not* very willing (5 or under) to say that most employees understood communication expectations. Of those, 76 marked the strength of culture item higher than 5. These responses would seem to suggest that in these cases (14 percent of 541) strong culture did not work well in guiding employees' communication decisions. The following incident shows an example (this example and some others are abridged slightly, and respondents' minor haste errors have been silently corrected):

The company is a small but growing information service firm. We sell data that has had "value added." The company has been acquiring several prod-

ucts from other companies in the last four months and marketing kits need to be revised so clients understand everything we now offer.

One person from sales (call him Bob) is assigned to create new marketing pieces for new products. Bob carefully reviews the previous owner's marketing pieces and uses information from those to create new ones. These new pieces are sent to press and eventually to customers. The company gets lots of calls about new products and Bob is pretty happy. The problem, however, is that Bob did not have anyone on the operations side review the marketing pieces. First, major computer programming was required to get new products up and running, and several products would not be available for a couple of months. Meanwhile, sales had already sold them. Second, one of the marketing pieces that a previous owner had written contained some erroneous information and essentially promised a service that was impossible to deliver. (Again, several clients had already "bought" products for this specific service.) All of the operations managers were aware of the problems, but sales had not consulted any of them before marketing information went out to hundreds of clients. Products therefore could not be delivered although we had promised them. Several clients were very upset.

What should the employee have known? "All internal and external communications should be reviewed by the department head. . . . Even the president has someone review ALL his external communication to make sure it is the best that it can be." The policy (one-over-one review) was known to the respondent, yet no one had told Bob. The respondent said that "people get told when they screw up" and that, although there is some written policy on communicating, it is not distributed reliably. This incident cost the firm \$15,000, as well as client goodwill, when products bought could not be delivered.

This respondent rated strength of corporate culture at 7 but employees' understanding of communication expectations at 5. Seventy-five other respondents also marked corporate culture at 7 or higher and employees' understanding of communication expectations at 5 or lower. Thus it is tenable to infer that *strong corporate culture often helps guide employees' communication decisions but cannot always be relied on to do so.*

### **Identifying the Rules and Their Sources**

Analysis of the incidents and responses to the "What should the person have known?" question divided the incidents roughly into these categories:

- Cases where a clear, well supported policy would have helped.
- Cases where the culture should have shaped the behavior of the individual.
- Cases involving individual bad judgment or imperceptiveness.
- Cases due to management shortcomings.

From respondents' answers to the "what should the employee have known" question and from study of the incidents, the "rules" were

recorded. The rules were numerous and various; thus Table 1 shows *examples* of the kinds of rules that, in the context of their incident, fell into the four main categories.

**Table 1**  
**What to Know and Where to Learn It**

Respondents evaluated what the erring person should have known and where s/he should have learned it. Examples follow:

**Solution needed: *Refer to an existing oral or written policy***

- Obtain review/approval of external communications before sending.
- Preserve the organization's image.
- Make your best effort to keep customers satisfied.
- Guard confidential information.
- Observe regular communication channels.
- Don't obligate the organization.
- Obtain appropriate clearances.
- Convey information to need-to-know people.

**Solution needed: *Better understanding of cues from culture***

- Peers don't direct new employees; supervisors do.
- Don't withhold problems from the boss.
- Pitch in! It's all everybody's job.
- Join off-duty activities to help team effectiveness on the job.
- Ask questions and learn reasons.
- Don't ask a lot of questions; "just do it."
- Consult and collaborate, or don't expect any support.
- Individuals here are independent but no throat-cutting is tolerated.

**Solution needed: *Better individual judgment***

- Don't embarrass your manager.
- Adapt to the people around you.
- Keep your expectations reasonable.
- Seek job information proactively.
- Support a decision once it's made.
- Don't be too frank in public when you're new.
- Don't grab and make a decision you don't understand.
- Understand and respect "turf."

**Solution needed: *Management needs to send better cues***

- Don't set low performance examples.
- When you delegate, follow up.
- Manage, but don't micromanage.
- Inform people about work priorities and expectations.
- Never spread the blame undeservedly.
- Give constructive feedback.
- Don't blow up in front of people.
- When a department works well as a team, don't disrupt it.

To be sure, many of the incidents gathered in this study show mixed causes. Note that no category is absolute. The distinction of most interest to this study was the one between cases where an explicit rule would help and cases where an explicit rule would be largely irrelevant.

About 20 percent of the answers to “What should the person have known to avoid creating the problem” were matters where a *clear, well-supported policy would have helped greatly*. These communication problems sometimes happened because policy, whether oral or written, didn’t exist, as in the following example, where a work-flow diagram was sorely needed:

This individual did not communicate the changes made to a specific engineering drawing. She made the changes and continued with her work. She did not know the flow of information and who should be told about these changes. As a result, when the customer came in for a review, the changed drawings did not match the rest of the information. As a result many changes had to be made to other documents, technical manuals, teaching materials and requirements of the equipment.

In other cases a written policy existed but was not sufficiently reinforced, as in this instance:

I worked as a senior customer service specialist for [XYZ] Savings & Loan for approx. 1 and ½ years. The firm has a customer service credo. On Saturdays [XYZ] closes at 1 p.m. One Saturday right at 1 o'clock X had just closed the doors and was returning to her terminal. One of our long-time customers, a loyal customer for years, began to knock on the door showing a check she needed to cash. X screamed at the customer that we closed at 1 p.m. and she would have to come back on Monday. The customer again knocked on the door desperately as X began to shake her head

Just then our district manager, who frequently visits the branch, walked up to the door and told X to open the door. The district manager politely apologized to the customer, while I assisted her with her transaction. After the customer left, our D.M. pulled out our operations manual and showed us that we are required to help any demanding customer up to 15 minutes after we close. X soon after was placed on P.I.P. (Performance Improvement Program).

The bulk of the incidents – the 80 percent – were less easy to classify, as the next examples will illustrate. Many of the communication problems would *not* have been amenable to a stated policy but were instead matters where the *culture should have shaped the behavior of the individual*, as in this case:

A product that our group in quality control was testing gave results outside specifications, which was very unusual. It turned out that the person responsible for submitting it to our group failed to inform us about a problem with a different test – one that is repeated and that provides data that we base our testing on. This person did not inform us of this problem because it did not directly impact his immediate responsibilities. It caused our group to waste significant time and energy. The norm in our workplace is for everyone to be aware of as much as possible and to approach problems as a team, giving assistance whenever possible, even if it is something not “defined” in a person’s immediate duties.

As the last sentence implies, culture at this firm calls for attentiveness, proactive communication, and mutual assistance. The other employees evidently understood the norms well. A policy would prob-



ably not have helped; to have guided this individual in this instance, a statement would have needed to be so concrete and specific that, if offered as a policy, it would sound absurd and possibly insulting to the intelligence of other employees. Instead, cultural cues would convey that where B depends on A, we always make sure the people who work on B find out about A.

Some others had little to do with culture or policy but instead occurred owing mainly to *individual bad judgment or imperceptiveness*, as here:

“M” would at times yell at subordinates or fellow members of the executive team. He was bright, with an educational background well suited for the position he was in. However, his means of communication were totally unacceptable to the workings and inner culture of the organization. In one instance, this executive yelled at another executive with less seniority who simply wanted to pin down and identify particular problems that existed in his department. . . . This and other inconsistent behavior finally led to the elimination of his entire department and the subsequent layoff of approximately 30 employees and staff.

The “should have known” rule was to exercise self-control and treat others courteously, especially other executives. This basic, common-sense rule would hardly need to be set forth as policy. At lower organizational levels, disciplinary options are available for controlling outbursts. Here, the firm got rid of the executive-level offender, but only after many complications and at a high cost.

Still other problem incidents stemmed from *management shortcomings* that would probably not have been influenced either by explicit policy or strong organizational culture:

We were at the client’s office having a meeting. The manager presented a proposal which [had not been] taken up in the office. All of us in the meeting were lost. The manager [had] not consulted us about the new proposals. There were a lot of things wrong about the proposal. After the meeting, one of the client’s personnel approached me. He said they weren’t too happy about the proposal. I could not tell him that we were not informed.

Some cases had multiple causes: An individual was insufficiently acculturated, and both individual judgment and managerial oversight were at fault as well.

Another manager from a different functional group casually asked the employee in question to “look into” an issue. The request was very informal and vague, and was not documented. The employee failed to raise the issue with his manager. A week or two later, the issue took several sharp, negative turns, and the employee in question was accused of dropping the ball – although the request and the actual event that followed were not really one and the same.

The culture here dictates that employees take initiative to inform their managers of EVERYTHING and take every suggestion or comment from a superior as an order (request for action), [though] the communication chan-

nels and the nature of the information passed through them did not obviously match in formality, speed of response, and so on.

Metarules apply. The visible rule is "We are low-key and casual here," but the rule about the rule is that the casual term "look into" means "solve the problem," and a suggestion means an order. Policy statements rarely enter territory such as this. *Stating clear policy would have headed off about 20 percent of the problems narrated by this study's respondents.* For communication to be most effective, however, *all* the factors need to work well: The organization's expectations need to be clear, the culture needs to support them, individuals need good judgment, and managers need to be good at their jobs.

### **Ways Organizations Guide Employees in Communicating**

An organization has many means of shaping behavior: culture, training, cultivation of the grapevine, and many other media. As Table 2 shows, the most common ways that my respondents' organizations shared expectations were meetings; training, orientation, role-play; one-on-one conversations with supervisors; and memos, postings, and newsletters. (Note: The question "In what ways does management let employees know how it wants its people to communicate?" regarded usual practice at the respondent's organization, not merely the practices affecting the incident narrated.) Not all respondents answered; indeed, respondents who felt management at their firms did not give good guidance on communicating (based on their earlier response to "Do most employees know?") were less likely to respond to this item.

Table 2 further subclassifies numbers of responses with regard to whether the organization had any written guidelines on communicating that were known to the respondent.

Naturally enough, respondents in organizations with written communication guidelines answered "memos, postings, newsletter" and "manual, handbook, policies" in considerable numbers. Interestingly, however, respondents representing firms with written policy also referred to "meetings" and "training . . . role-play" at more than twice the rate of respondents in no-written-policy organizations. *This seems to suggest a deliberateness about some organizations with written policies: Many such appear not only to have considered "how we communicate here," but also to use multiple channels in conveying their guidance to employees.*

The first six categories would strike most managers as beneficial, reliable channels. "After-the-fact criticism" is at least reliable feedback that helps the next time a similar problem arises. "Frequent interaction," "open door," "evaluations and counseling sessions," and most other

categories can be considered helpful. The seventh category, however, suggests that the 37 respondents who marked it felt disappointed or angered over the organization's failure.

**Table 2**  
**How Management Lets Employees Know Communication Expectations**

Communication Medium <i>N</i> = 433, arranged in order of total frequency of mention	Does Organization Have Written Policy?				Total Mentions
	Yes <i>n</i> = 240	No <i>n</i> = 125	Don't know <i>n</i> = 66	No response <i>n</i> = 2	
Some respondents named more than one means.					
Meetings	35 (14.5%)	40 (32%)	14 (21%)	0	89
Training, orientation, role-play	30 (12.5%)	38 (30.4%)	7 (10.5%)	0	75
One-on-one with boss, "tells them directly," mbwa	37 (15.5%)	16 (12.8%)	14 (21%)	0	67
Memos, postings, newsletter	16 (6.6%)	34 (27.2%)	10 (15%)	2	62
Co. manual, handbook, written policies	4 (1.5%)	36 (28.8%)	2 (3%)	0	42
Management sets the example	26 (11%)	7 (5.6%)	7 (10.5%)	0	40
Not well; doesn't tell, "laissez- faire"; dysfunctionally, unhelpfully, "ha!"	28 (11.5%)	4 (3.2%)	5 (7.5%)	0	37
After-the-fact criticism	19 (8%)	7 (5.6%)	2 (3%)	0	28
You just watch; experience	18 (7.5%)	3 (2.4%)	6 (9%)	0	27
Frequent interaction	14 (5.8%)	7 (5.6%)	4 (6%)	0	25
Informal network, grapevine, word of mouth	15 (6.2%)	5 (4%)	5 (7.5%)	0	25
Open door	17 (7%)	6 (4.8%)	0 (0%)	1	24
Evaluations, counseling sessions	15 (6.2%)	7 (5.6%)	2 (3%)	0	24
Immediate praise/censure	14 (5.8%)	6 (4.8%)	3 (4.5%)	0	23
Senior peers tell or help; mentoring	13 (4%)	5 (4%)	3 (4.5%)	0	21
Teams	14 (5.8%)	3 (2.4%)	2 (3%)	0	19
Hierarchy/chain of command	6 (2.5%)	2 (1.6%)	1 (1.5%)	0	9
Culture	6 (2.5%)	1 (0.8%)	1 (1.5%)	0	8
Voice mail, e-mail	1 (0.4%)	3 (2.4%)	3 (4.5%)	0	7
Setting goals and objectives	2 (0.8%)	3 (2.4%)	1 (1.5%)	0	6
Figure it out or GET out	3 (1.2%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0	3
Peer pressure	2 (0.8%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0	2

Several other categories, such as "just watch," "peer pressure," and "informal network, grapevine," are reliable only if the behavior models or informal informants themselves know and follow behavior of which management approves. These can and often do convey salutary guidance. However, since they are less easily monitored, individuals with defensive agendas or grievances would select means like these

to promote rules that the organization would not countenance if it were aware of them. The “figure it out or GET out” category suggests a rather bitter view of the organization in the minds of those who answered that way.

As organizations become flatter, as more mid-level jobs are lost, and as more is expected of those who remain, it would seem that fewer individuals and organizations are likely to be ideally matched, and more proactive behavior will be needed. Managers desiring to shape employees’ behavior *and* employees wishing to meet the organization’s expectations could increase their success by using a greater variety of channels for information flow. Employees’ relying on peers or on persons outside the chain of command works only if the organization has ensured that clear information is available and persons possessing it are motivated to share it. Part of a manager’s job should be to place reliable guidance information in channels employees use. Another part is to ensure that public statements on “how we do things here” are borne out when individuals “reality-test” those statements.

### **Costs of Communication Problem Incidents**

As mentioned earlier, the questionnaire asked these MBA-level students, most of whom had professional work experience, to estimate hard costs if possible and, if not, to specify types of soft costs incurred owing to the incident narrated. This was done partly to make sure the incident they chose was not trivial. (Respondents were permitted to specify both hard and soft costs if appropriate.) Though respondents were only estimating and these data cannot be considered solid, their estimates are sobering. Of 560 respondents, 247 cited dollar estimates.

Estimated Costs of Not Knowing the Ropes	
<i>n</i> respondents	Cost in U.S. \$
11	< \$100
34	\$100-\$499
14	\$500-\$999
82	\$1,000-\$9,999
25	\$10,000-\$19,999
35	\$20,000-\$49,999
11	\$50,000-\$99,999
21	\$100,000-\$499,999
3	\$500,000-\$999,999
11	\$1,000,000-\$10,000,000

Even if approximate, the “costs” these respondents estimated suggest that ineffective communication is a serious drain on organizations’ finances. Few of the estimates fell below \$100. Less than a quarter of the 247 respondents citing hard costs placed those costs under \$1000. The largest share of the estimates fell between \$1,000 and \$9,999 –

82 respondents set the price of the mistake in this range. Eleven estimates exceeded \$1 million.

Most of the respondents (514 of 560) in this study referred to one or more soft costs, as follows.

Soft Costs of Not Knowing the Ropes

<i>n</i> respondents	Cost
124	Lost time
111	Lost employee(s)
101	Lowered productivity, efficiency, or quality
82	Bad image, word of mouth, publicity
80	Ill will
79	Grave erosion of individual's effectiveness
72	Damaged working environment or relationship
57	Lowered morale
56	Stupid risk or liability
51	Lowered team spirit
46	Lowered trust
46	Lost revenue
34	Waste of money
25	Lost customer(s)
18	Lost opportunity

"Soft costs" have heavy consequences. Managers are well aware of the expenses surrounding, for instance, voluntary or involuntary employee turnover. (Problems leading to the separation, waste of training costs for the lost employee, disarray during the time the position is vacant, and costs of recruiting, hiring, and training the replacement do not exhaust the reasons why an employee's quitting or being fired is so expensive.) Negative image or word of mouth is gravely injurious to an organization. Exposure of the firm to risk or liability is more dangerous every year, as the United States becomes increasingly litigious.

It would seem reasonable that where organizations can give well-considered and explicit guidance, more employees would do the right thing more of the time. Organizational life moves quickly, however, and the many competing demands on managers' time tend to distract their attention from the act of communicating guidance and expectations. Still, as suggested here, the costs of ignoring this task can be heavy.

### **A Taxonomy of Rules: Written? Acknowledged? Reinforced? Functional?**

A great variety of rules was invoked, some general, some particular, some commonsensical, some rather idiosyncratic. Many cases entailed combinations of causes and influences. Indeed, the categories of policy, individual judgment, culture, and management are interrelated in complex ways.

As we have seen, a given rule can be written or unwritten, acknowledged or unacknowledged, reinforced or not reinforced, functional or

dysfunctional, and complied with or not complied with. The branching tree diagram in Figure 1 shows these categories. It would seem that the more visible a rule is, the more confident the employees feel in following it and the clearer it is that management intends and supports what the rule says. *The uppermost branch on both trees is the configuration for a rule, whether written or unwritten, that is likely to be working well for both employee and organization.*

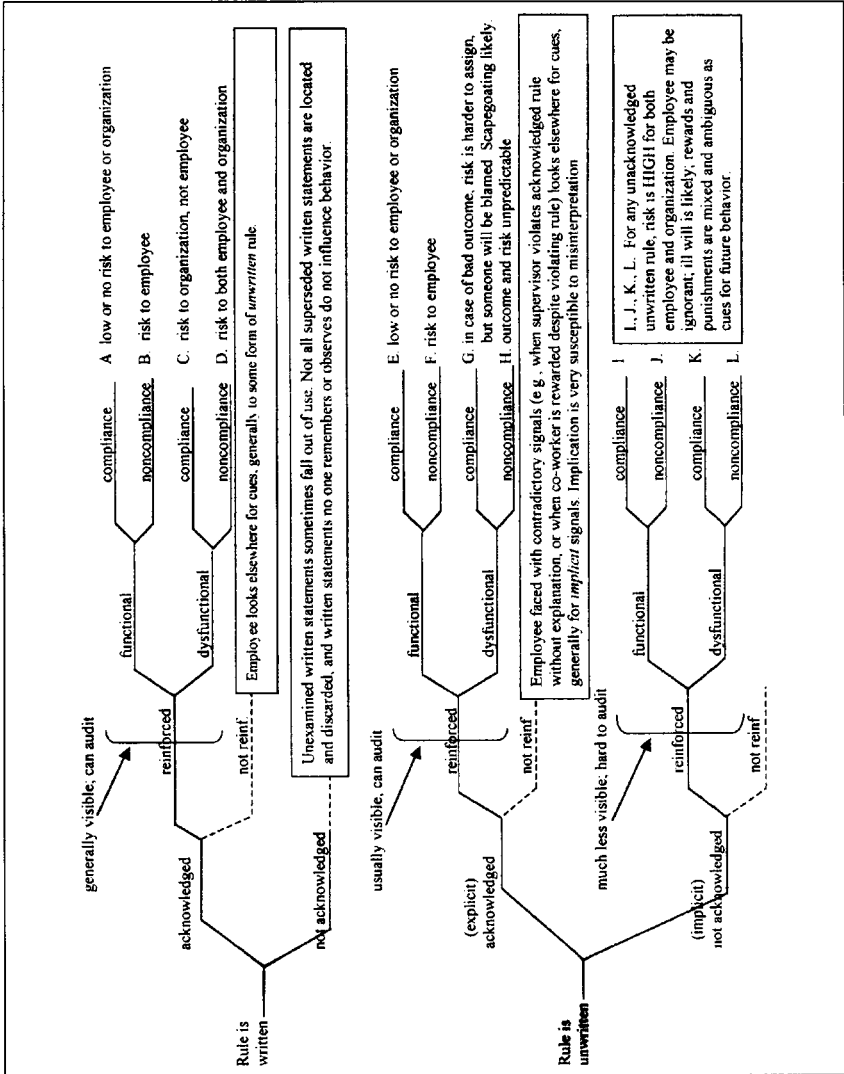


Figure 1. Possible Rule Configurations and Employee Response to Them

Of the critical incidents that related to unwritten rules, most fell into Figure 1's categories F (acknowledged [explicit] and functional) and J (not acknowledged [implicit] and functional). This makes intuitive sense; observers who knew the rules were asked to comment on organizational actors who either did not understand the rules or understood them but violated them anyway.

This incident illustrates the former; clearly the individual would have been told that his job was to clarify the customer's needs before implementing a solution:

In a data processing department for an insurance company, a programmer on my team was expected to deal with customers on a one-to-one basis. The instance I am thinking of was an error that could have been prevented in the implementation of a program enhancement. Due to his shyness and fear of appearing unintelligent, key questions were not asked. As a result, program errors existed that resulted in important financial information being lost. Resulting reruns of information, late fees, etc. amounted to \$25,000. This was the first step in a chain of events that resulted in his termination.

An implicit, functional rule was violated in this next incident: That people in this organization need to build relationships before trying to impose major changes.

A very bright woman broke the glass ceiling and moved into the lower executive level. Rather than doing some one-on-one groundwork before introducing a new performance appraisal system, she tried to demand acceptance of her new program by asserting her new authority. Resistance developed quickly and the program failed miserably.

An interesting example follows of an implicit, reinforced policy ("Mind your own business") that resulted in harm when people complied with it.

The accounting supervisor held communication to a minimum. The subordinates had no dialogue with him except the most minimal work instructions. After he was promoted, problems came to light in his former department and as a result, one person (not the supervisor) lost his job. It was discovered that many accounts were "fudged," and most employees were doing their jobs without realizing what was happening around them. The supervisor took advantage of the corporate culture, which was one of tacit trust, to discourage checking and controlling of this department. The wrong person took the fall and was fired. In this organization there is also little or no "backstabbing," so the whole incident was kept silent.

Many other incidents were so mixed that to attempt to assign them to categories with any kind of accuracy would have been unproductive. Especially where rules are implicit, unexplained, or dysfunctional, they might be at war with other rules linked to other schemata (from sources as varied as rumor mongers, union organizers, external pressure groups, or an individual's ego or conscience). Where rules compete, individuals have decisions to make, and they may have to defend

their decisions. "This doesn't fit what I know." "What will really work here?" "What does the company really want?" "What makes sense?" "How can I protect myself?" And, of course, where the rules themselves are not clear, the need for intelligent exceptions to the rules cannot even have a context.

This study elicited relatively few cases involving written guidelines, either functional or dysfunctional. (Recall that respondents were asked if they were aware of *any* written organizational policies on communicating, not if their organizations had written policy addressing the kind of incident they narrated.) Where written guidelines figured in the stories respondents narrated, they tended to be rules that would have been functional but were not well reinforced – in which case the erring person would turn to an unwritten rule for guidance. Written but unreinforced policies tend to enter the picture after the mistake is made, when someone unearths the policy either to instruct or to justify punishment.

The inference to be drawn is that *unwritten rules, whether explicit (acknowledged) or implicit (not acknowledged), tend to apply to more eventualities*. By their very nature, unwritten rules on communicating will be more numerous than written rules, because many aspects of communicating are particular. A spoken instruction exists in a situational context and thus can often be brief. A warning facial expression or some other type of symbolic guidance might not even be subject to articulation. Written guidelines are appropriate for more encompassing matters, where an immediate situation is less important (see Table 1), or for highly specific tasks – proposal preparation, for instance. Unwritten rules are also more adaptable to change as an organization's culture evolves.

Figure 1 shows a branch for a written, unacknowledged rule, although intuitively this may at first seem unlikely. Respondents in this study were asked (at the very end of the questionnaire) "Is there written policy on communicating?" Some who answered "yes" or "don't know" made comments such as, "We wrote one once – I think"; "If there is one, the secretary in administration has the only copy"; or "We might have one, but it would be way out of date." Although it would seem that a guideline important enough to put in writing would also be perceived as a living document and updated as needed, clearly not all organizations do so.

Where a written guideline is buried and unused, I would argue that a guidance-seeking employee will "default" to the informal and unwritten communication channels for information. Similar behavior will occur if a written guideline exists but is not reinforced: "We have a written policy, but that's not what we really *do* here." A written guideline could also be dysfunctional; for instance, it might be inflexible,



bureaucratic, or formulated so as to privilege some and disadvantage others. A well-intentioned but noncompliant employee might think, "We'd be crazy to follow that policy. What do people say to do?"

The point of the discussion of employees' choices among rules is that *organizations whose managers clarify what they really want employees to do lower the likelihood that employees will do something they do not desire.*

### Discussion

As we have seen, most respondents felt that their organization's culture was moderately strong (median of 7) and that "most employees know pretty well how management wants people to communicate" (median of 7). These facts suggest that corporate culture transmits communication rules in many organizations. But respondents who marked their organizations considerably lower on both questions suggest that culture does not operate universally in this way. Cues come from many sources.

*Stating clear policy would have helped head off 20 percent of the problems narrated by this study's respondents.* Analyzing their communication expectations and making them more explicit, then, is a good start for organizations with communication problems. If some of a firm's "rules" are misunderstood, or underground, or dysfunctional, or local, or contradictory, policy analysis – a communication audit, for instance – can make the rules more visible. In addition, if, in examining policy, management focuses more attention on "how we communicate here," that emphasis is likely to improve the other problem categories: Managers are likely to see improvements in individual employees' judgment and managers' oversight and are likely to increase salutary effects of the organizational culture.

*Respondents mentioned many more unwritten than written means by which communication expectations were conveyed in their organizations.* Meetings, training activities, and one-on-one interaction with supervisors were the most frequently named. Of written media, the category containing more ephemeral but more immediate means such as memos, postings, and newsletters was cited more often than the category containing company manuals and policy handbooks.

*Organizations with some written policy on communicating may have thought more, on the average, about "how we communicate here" and how to convey that information to employees,* as the data in Table 2 suggest. These data support findings by Rogers (1988) that, compared to companies without formal policies, companies having or considering written communication policies were more likely to believe in the importance of 15 of the 20 communication values on which he queried them. (On four other values, no difference appeared.)

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

Future research might address the extent to which the strength of organizational culture might be related to the kinds of rules people mentioned – or violated. It would be useful to study a limited number of specific organizations to see whether respondents within each organization had similar or different perceptions about the strength of the culture and the communication rules in effect, and whether differences of perception existed among top management, middle management, and professional support staff. Another direction might explore similarities and differences between perceptions of female and male respondents; or similarities and differences in perceptions of respondents based on age, ethnicity, type of organization, functional area of the respondent, or position of the respondent within the organization.

### **Implications for Managerial Practice**

Employees joining and succeeding in an organization have to figure out how to communicate effectively there. Learning the ropes takes time. While it is true that, because the questionnaire asked for examples, the narratives tended to exemplify people who had not learned the ropes, numerous incidents exemplified people who tried to act in the organization's best interests but could not be sure how to do so.

*Costs of the communication problem incidents were high* – high enough in a number of cases to make a serious difference in profit-and-loss statements. At the high end of the cost scale, the incident narrated led to one medium-sized company's having to cease doing business. One very large company saw an entire department collapse. *Especially where many policies are implicit, organizations should examine what norms are shaping employees' communication behaviors*, since organizations comprise many employees who are capable workers but not very intuitive or attentive to implicit messages.

The finding that explicit rules would probably have helped in about 20 percent of the problem incidents suggests a worthwhile opportunity: Managers can reduce problems substantially if they analyze their communication expectations and state them explicitly. In the other categories (poor individual judgment, poor management practice, unhelpful culture), *attention to what "rules" the offenders were using would often have shed light on how similar errors could be avoided in the future*. Based on this study and the literature that supports it, *organizations should study the messages they send employees about "how we communicate here," the means by which they send them, and the consistency or inconsistency of those messages*. Indeed, communication executives (Gilsdorf, 1992, pp. 336-341) indicated that the benefits of analysis would greatly outweigh the costs. Whether an

organization writes policy guidelines or not, the act of examining communication practices and expectations is likely to be instructive and beneficial.

Where weaknesses are revealed, organizations should clarify their expectations. Written guidelines may be appropriate for some situations, training for others, example for others, grapevine for still others, and so on through the many other options. Respondents named 18 positive means and several negative means of shaping communication behaviors; the literature and everyday experience show still others.

Based on the wide variety of incidents narrated by subjects, expensive communication problems are sometimes local, personal, or departmental, but sometimes pervasive in organizations. *Managers should consider the conveying of clear communication-behavior expectations as a fundamental element of strategy.*

Achieving this clarity may take, for different organizations, one or several of the following: *analysis of organizational culture*, especially where culture is weak or is idiosyncratic among departments; *analysis of existing strong corporate cultures for communication values*; and *communication audits*. Firms might also perform *ethnographic analyses, including observation and interviewing, to learn exactly what organizational communication policies are operating* (see Whitney, 1989). Firms should consider *communication training for managers, especially in giving performance feedback*. Organizations should examine how their *reward system* affects communication behaviors. Most employees are concerned for the organization's success but are also moved strongly by the "WIIFM factor": What's in it for me? It would be useful for organizations to *analyze managers' behaviors and words that send messages about communicating*.

One set of rules will not fit all organizations: For instance, service organizations generally will need to emphasize customer communications more, whereas product organizations' more crucial communications are likely to regard quality, schedule, and quantity goals. To be sure, organizations cannot foresee all information needs and should not attempt to formulate guidelines for all situations. Henderson's (1987) model of interpersonal managerial communication shows the range and complexity of influences on what managers say and do. This study suggests, however, that many organizations could be far more deliberate than they are at present about sending consistent, workable messages about communication expectations and could conserve time and money by doing so.

#### NOTES

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