

The Conventional View Of Organizational Communication Sees The Organization As Communication.It's True

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Organizational communication is a fundamental aspect of how businesses and institutions operate and thrive. It encompasses the entire spectrum of interactions, information flows, and message exchanges that occur within an organization. The traditional perspective, often referred to as the "conventional view," posits that an organization itself can be understood as a form of communication. This concept emphasizes that the structure, culture, and functioning of an organization are deeply rooted in the patterns and channels of communication among its members. In this article, we explore this view comprehensively, examining its principles, implications, and relevance in contemporary organizational settings.

Understanding the Conventional View of Organizational Communication

The conventional view suggests that organizations are essentially communicative entities. This perspective has evolved over decades, influenced by communication theories and practical observations of organizational behavior. It views communication not just as a tool used within organizations but as the core fabric that holds organizational structures together.

Core Principles of the Conventional View

- Organizations as Communication Systems: Organizations are seen as complex systems where information flows continuously between different parts and levels.
- Communication Shapes Organizational Structure: The hierarchy, roles, and processes are outcomes of communication patterns.
- Communication Influences Culture: The shared values, beliefs, and norms are transmitted and reinforced through communication.
- Communication as a Strategic Asset: Effective communication is vital for decision-making, coordination, and achieving organizational goals.

Historical Foundations of the View

The idea that organizations are fundamentally about communication can be traced back to early theorists such as Shannon and Weaver, who developed models of information transfer. Over time, organizational theorists like Harold Lasswell and Wilbur Schramm expanded these ideas, emphasizing the importance of understanding communication processes within social systems.

In the mid-20th century, scholars such as James McGregor Burns and Chester Barnard recognized that communication was central to leadership, authority, and cooperation within organizations. The development of the "systems theory" further reinforced this view by portraying organizations as open systems that exchange information with their environment.

Key Components of the Communication-Centric View

Understanding the organization as communication involves analyzing specific components that facilitate this process.

1. Communication Channels

- Formal channels (reports, memos, meetings)
- Informal channels (grapevine, social interactions)

2. Communication Flows

- Downward communication (from management to employees)
- Upward communication (from employees to management)
- Horizontal communication (among peer groups)
- Diagonal communication (across departments and levels)

3. Symbols and Language

- Use of language, jargon, and symbols to convey meaning
- Organizational stories, rituals, and ceremonies

4. Feedback Mechanisms

- Ways in which messages are acknowledged and interpreted
- Ensuring mutual understanding

Implications of Viewing Organizations as Communication

This perspective has significant practical and theoretical implications:

Enhanced Understanding of Organizational Dynamics

- Recognizing that communication patterns influence organizational effectiveness.
- Identifying bottlenecks or breakdowns in communication that hinder performance.

Promotion of Open and Transparent Communication

- Encouraging feedback and dialogue.
- Fostering a culture of trust and inclusivity.

Leadership and Change Management

- Leaders as communicators who shape organizational culture.
- Managing change through effective messaging.

Development of Communication Policies

- Establishing clear channels and protocols.
- Training employees to communicate effectively.

Contemporary Perspectives and the Evolution of the View

While the conventional view remains influential, modern organizational communication theories have expanded upon it, integrating new insights:

1. Network Theory

- Emphasizes informal networks and social relationships.
- Recognizes that communication is often non-linear and dynamic.

2. Critical and Cultural Perspectives

- Focus on power dynamics and cultural influences.
- Highlight how communication can reinforce or challenge organizational hierarchies.

3. Technology and Digital Communication

- Impact of email, social media, and collaboration tools.
- Transforming how organizations communicate internally and externally.

The Organization as Communication in Practice

Understanding organizations as communication entities helps in practical applications:

Case Study: Effective Internal Communication Strategies

Organizations that prioritize transparent, consistent, and multi-directional communication tend to experience:

- Higher employee engagement
- Better alignment with organizational goals
- Improved adaptability to change

Best Practices for Organizational Communication

- Regular town hall meetings
- Transparent internal newsletters
- Open-door policies
- Utilization of collaborative platforms
- Encouraging informal interactions

Challenges in Organizational Communication

Despite its importance, several challenges can undermine effective communication:

- Information Overload: Excessive information can lead to confusion.
- Misinterpretation: Messages may be misunderstood across different cultures or contexts.
- Hierarchical Barriers: Rigid hierarchies can inhibit open dialogue.
- Technological Barriers: Lack of access or proficiency with digital tools.
- Resistance to Change: Employees may be hesitant to adopt new communication practices.

Conclusion: Why The Organization Is Truly

Communication

The conventional view that "the organization is communication" underscores the idea that the essence of any organization lies in its communication processes. From structuring roles and responsibilities to shaping culture and driving change, communication acts as the lifeblood of organizational success. Recognizing and harnessing this perspective allows leaders and members alike to foster healthier, more adaptive, and more effective organizations.

By viewing organizations through the lens of communication, organizations can:

- Better understand internal dynamics
- Develop strategies for more effective messaging
- Cultivate a culture rooted in transparency and dialogue
- Adapt swiftly to technological advancements and environmental changes

In sum, embracing the idea that the organization is fundamentally about communication is not just a theoretical stance but a practical necessity in today's interconnected and fast-paced world. It reminds us that at the heart of every successful organization is a web of meaningful, strategic, and ongoing communication.

References and Further Reading

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Final Thoughts

Understanding the organization as a communication entity provides invaluable insights into how organizations operate, evolve, and succeed. Whether in managing change, fostering innovation, or building a cohesive culture, effective communication remains at the core. Recognizing this fundamental truth enables organizations to harness their full potential and navigate the complexities of the modern business environment with confidence.

Frequently Asked Questions

What does the conventional view of organizational communication imply about the organization?

It suggests that the organization itself is essentially a communication system, meaning that communication is the core element that defines and sustains the organization.

Is it accurate to say that the organization can be understood solely as a communication process?

Yes, the conventional view posits that the organization is fundamentally a network of communication processes, emphasizing the importance of information flow and interactions.

How does viewing the organization as communication influence management practices?

It highlights the importance of effective communication channels, clarity in messaging, and understanding social interactions to ensure organizational success.

What are some criticisms of the view that the organization is primarily communication?

Critics argue that this perspective may overlook other factors like organizational structure, culture, and external influences that also shape organizational behavior.

How does this view relate to the concept of organizational culture?

Since the organization is seen as communication, organizational culture emerges through shared communication patterns, stories, and norms that develop over time.

Can this view help improve internal communication within organizations?

Yes, by understanding the organization as communication, it emphasizes the importance of transparent, consistent, and effective communication strategies to enhance organizational functioning.

In what ways does this perspective influence organizational change initiatives?

It suggests that successful change depends heavily on how communication is managed, interpreted, and reinforced throughout the organization.

Is the idea that 'the organization is communication' still relevant in modern organizational theories?

Absolutely, it remains a foundational concept, especially in contemporary approaches like communicative organization theory and networked communication models.

Additional Resources

Organizational Communication

Introduction: The Paradigm Shift in Understanding Organizations

In the realm of organizational studies and communication theory, a transformative perspective has gained significant traction: the view that the organization itself is a form of communication. This conceptual approach challenges traditional notions that treat organizations merely as structures or entities that communicate internally and externally. Instead, it posits that the very fabric of an organization—its culture, processes, norms, and routines—is fundamentally constituted through communication.

This perspective is not just academic fancy; it has profound implications for how organizations are managed, how change is implemented, and how cultures are cultivated. To understand this paradigm fully, we need to explore its roots, core principles, implications, and practical applications.

The Foundations of the Communication-as-Organization View

Theoretical Roots and Evolution

The idea that organizations are essentially communication is rooted in several seminal theories and schools of thought, notably:

- The Human Relations Movement: Emphasized the importance of informal communication, social relationships, and employee participation.
- Systems Theory: Views organizations as open systems where information flows are vital for functioning.
- Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs): The rise of digital communication tools has blurred the boundaries between organizational structure and communication channels.
- The Constitutive View: Emerging from sociological and communication disciplines, this

perspective argues that communication is not merely a tool but the very process that constitutes organizational reality.

Historically, organizations were viewed as mechanical or bureaucratic entities—hierarchical, rule-bound, and primarily focused on formal communication channels such as memos, reports, and meetings. The shift towards viewing organizations as communication underscores the importance of informal, emergent, and ongoing communicative processes that shape organizational life.

The Core Principle: Organization as Communication

At the heart of this perspective is the assertion that organization is a communicative process. This means:

- The organizational structures, roles, and relationships are created and maintained through communication.
- Organizational culture is transmitted via stories, rituals, language, and symbols.
- Decision-making processes are fundamentally communicative acts.
- Organizational identity and reputation are constructed through narratives and discourse.

Essentially, the organization exists because and insofar as communication occurs. Without ongoing exchanges—be they formal or informal—the organization as a social entity cannot sustain itself.

Core Concepts and Components of the Communication-Based View

Constitutive vs. Transmission Views of Communication

Understanding how communication is conceptualized within this framework is critical:

- **Transmission View:** Communication is seen as a one-way process of transmitting information from sender to receiver. This view aligns with traditional, linear models of communication.
- **Constitutive View:** Communication is viewed as a process that constitutes or creates social reality. This perspective emphasizes the ongoing, dynamic, and interactive nature of communication.

The constitutive view underpins the idea that organizations are defined and sustained through communicative acts—stories, language, symbols, and shared meanings.

Key Components of the Organizational Communication as Organization Perspective

1. Shared Meaning and Culture: Organizational culture is transmitted and reinforced through stories, rituals, symbols, and language.
2. Communication Networks: Informal and formal communication channels are the arteries that sustain organizational life.
3. Identity Construction: Organizational identity is a product of collective narratives and discourse.
4. Power and Politics: Communication processes reveal power dynamics, influence, and control within the organization.
5. Learning and Change: Organizational learning is rooted in communication—feedback loops, dialogue, and shared understanding facilitate adaptation.

Implications of Viewing Organization as Communication

Redefining Organizational Structures and Processes

Traditional organizational charts depict hierarchy and formal roles. However, from the communication perspective:

- Networks Matter More Than Hierarchies: Informal communication networks often influence decision-making and culture more than formal structures.
- Communication Shapes Processes: Processes such as innovation, conflict resolution, and change management are fundamentally communicative acts.
- Culture as a Communicative Construct: Organizational culture is not just "what" the organization is but "how" it communicates its values and norms.

Enhancing Organizational Effectiveness

Understanding that the organization is communication allows leaders to:

- Foster open, transparent dialogue.
- Recognize the importance of storytelling and shared narratives.
- Use symbols and rituals intentionally to reinforce desired culture.
- Facilitate effective feedback mechanisms.
- Cultivate a communicative environment conducive to learning and innovation.

In essence, effective communication becomes the backbone of organizational success.

Managing Change and Conflict

Change initiatives succeed or fail based on communication. The same applies to conflict management:

- Recognizing that conflicts are rooted in miscommunication or differing interpretations.
- Using dialogue and active listening to resolve disagreements.
- Framing change as a communicative process—storytelling, participation, and shared understanding are vital.

Practical Applications and Case Studies

Organizational Culture and Stories

Many organizations leverage stories and symbols to embed values and norms. For example:

- Google's "20% Time" Narrative: Conveys a culture of innovation.
- Pixar's Rituals: Reinforce creativity and collaboration.
- These stories are forms of communication that constitute the organizational culture.

Internal Communication Strategies

Effective internal communication strategies include:

- Regular town halls and open forums.
- Internal social media platforms.
- Transparent performance feedback.
- Use of storytelling in onboarding and training.

Digital Communication and Organizational Identity

In the digital age, social media and instant messaging have transformed organizational communication:

- Brand identity is shaped through public discourse.
- Employee engagement is fostered through online communities.
- The organization's online presence is a continuous, communicative act that constitutes its reputation.

Critiques and Limitations of the Communication-as-Organization View

While compelling, this perspective is not without critique:

- Overemphasis on Discourse: May underestimate the material and structural aspects of organizations.
- Neglect of Power Dynamics: Not all communication is free or equal; some voices dominate.
- Complexity of Measurement: Quantifying the impact of communication on organizational structure can be challenging.

Nevertheless, these critiques often lead to more nuanced understandings rather than dismissals of the communication-centric view.

Conclusion: Why It's True—The Organization as Communication

The assertion that the organization is communication is a profound recognition of the social, cultural, and dynamic nature of organizational life. It shifts the focus from static structures to ongoing processes of meaning-making.

By viewing organizations as communicative constructs, leaders and scholars gain a powerful lens to:

- Diagnose organizational issues.
- Foster a culture of openness and participation.
- Drive change through dialogue.
- Understand power, identity, and culture as emergent from communication.

In essence, the organization is not merely a container of communication but is fundamentally constituted through communication itself. This perspective is not just a theoretical stance but a practical guide—reminding us that how we communicate shapes what our organizations are and will become.

Final thoughts: Embracing the view that organization is communication equips us with the tools to build more adaptive, inclusive, and resilient organizations—because at their core, they are stories told, meanings shared, and relationships built through communication.

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