*The New Jersey Journal of Communication, Volume 1, No. 2, Fall 1993, pages 84-102*

# Communication Satisfaction: A Useful Construct?

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*This research explores the usefulness of the communication satisfaction construct as operationalized by Downs and Hazen. A data base generated over the past five years from 18 communication audits was analyzed. This involved a wide variety of organizations and over 1400 individuals. The analyses suggested a number of observations. First, the findings of other researchers with respect to the areas of greatest and least communication satisfaction were confirmed. Second, the usefulness of the demographic variables in explaining communication satisfaction was limited. Third, the results reaffirmed the importance of viewing organizational communication within the contingency framework. Fourth, the communication satisfaction construct provided a useful tool for explaining end-product variables. Finally, the construct of communication satisfaction appeared to be more effective in explaining job satisfaction than job productivity. Indeed the discriminant analysis showed that those employees who were most satisfied could be distinguished from those with the least job satisfaction with 88% accuracy.*

Only a handful of instruments are widely used to audit the general communication practices of organizations (Greenbaum, Clampitt, & Willhnganz, 1988). The Downs and Hazen (1977) communication satisfaction questionnaire is one of these tools. This instrument is based on the concept that communication satisfaction is an employee's satisfaction with various communication practices of the organization. In fact, the instrument is the only one of all the major surveys used to assess organization-wide communication practices that utilizes the concept of "communication satisfaction" (Greenbaum, Clampitt, & Willhnganz, 1988). Hecht (1978) provides a theoretical justification for studying this concept:

> An understanding of communication outcomes such as satisfaction is a prerequisite to an integrative explanation of communication behavior. Not only are such outcomes influential in determining future communication behavior, they also provide a theoretical framework for grouping and assessing the importance of various process elements (p. 350).

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Downs and Hazen (1977) developed their instrument in order to refine the general concept of communication satisfaction and further explain how communication functions in organizations. The ultimate aim of their efforts was to assist in developing organizational communication theory. During the 1970's Downs and Hazen introduced their instrument which measured communication satisfaction on eight dimensions. Since then numerous researchers in fairly diverse settings have used the Downs and Hazen (1977) questionnaire (Avery, 1977; Duke, 1981; Gordon, 1979; Greenbaum, Clampitt, & Willhnganz, 1988; Jones 1981; Kio, 1979; Nicholson, 1980; Pincus, 1986; Thiry, 1977; Wippich, B. 1983; Wippich, M. L., 1983). After many years of investigation, it appears to be important to ask the following questions: Has the construct of communication satisfaction contributed to an understanding of organizational communication? (a) What has been learned? (b) Where do organizational communication scholars go from here? The purpose of this paper is to speculate on these issues using a data base generated from 18 communication audits involving a wide variety of organizations and including over 1400 individuals. Specifically, the objective was to use the data base to (a) examine organizational trends of communication satisfaction, (b) explore the relationship between communication satisfaction and demographic variables, and (c) determine the impact that communication satisfaction has on employee productivity and job satisfaction.

## Historical Development

Traditionally, communication satisfaction was thought of as a unidimensional construct. The work of Wiio (1976) as well as Downs and Hazen (1977) revealed the multidimensional nature of communication satisfaction. Specifically, Downs and Hazen developed a questionnaire with 88 items and administered it to 225 employees from diverse backgrounds. Factor analytic and item validity analysis techniques were used to refine the instrument. The revised questionnaire, structured along eight factors, was administered in four different organizations. A principal-component factor analysis with a varimax rotation confirmed the stability of the factors.

At the heart of the survey are 40 items on which subjects can indicate their degree of satisfaction with various types of communication. Five items for each of the eight dimensions were described as follows (Downs, 1977): (a) *Communication Climate* reflects communication on both the organizational and personal level. On one hand, it includes items such as the extent to which

communication in the organization motivates and stimulates workers to meet organizational goals and the extent to which it makes them identify with the organization. On the other, it includes estimates of whether or not people's attitudes toward communicating are healthy in this organization. (b) *Supervisory Communication* includes both upward and downward aspects of communicating with superiors. Three of the principal items include the extent to which a superior is open to ideas, the extent to which the supervisor listens and pays attention, and the extent to which guidance is offered in solving job-related problems. (c) *Organizational Integration* revolves around the degree to which individuals receive information about the immediate work environment. Items include the degree of satisfaction with information about departmental plans, the requirements of their job, and some personnel news. (d) *Media Quality* deals with the extent to which meetings are well organized, written directives are short and clear, and the degree to which the amount of communication is about right. (e) *Co-worker Communication* concerns the extent to which horizontal and informal communication is accurate and free flowing. This factor also includes satisfaction with the activeness of the grapevine. (f) *Corporate Information* deals with broadest kind of information about the organization as a whole. It includes items on notification about changes, information about the organization's financial standing, and information about the overall policies and goals of the organization. (g) *Personal Feedback* is concerned with the workers' need to know how they are being judged and how their performance is being appraised. (h) *Subordinate Communication* focuses on upward and downward communication with subordinates. Only workers in a supervisory capacity respond to these items, which include subordinate responsiveness to downward communication and the extent to which subordinates initiate upward communication.

The net result is a brief but comprehensive instrument with easy-to-understand questions corresponding to each factor, such as: (a) "the extent to which my supervisor trusts me" (Supervisor Communication) and (b) "satisfaction with personnel information" (Organizational Integration). In addition, four questions ask about levels of job satisfaction and productivity. There are also four demographic items.

Hecht (1978) reviewed a variety of measures of communication satisfaction and found that the "thoroughness of the construction of this satisfaction measure is apparent" (p. 363). He did note some concerns about internal reliability. Crino and White (1981) further investigated the instrument and noted some other concerns but demonstrated that the eight-factor solution was reasonable. In short, while there are some difficulties with the instrument that will have to be worked out in later versions, the basic usefulness of the questionnaire as a research tool has been demonstrated (Clampitt & Girard, 1987).





## *Past Research*

A number of theses and dissertations have been written that used the Downs & Hazen (1977) communication satisfaction instrument as the principal research tool (see Table 1).

**Table 1**

Communication Satisfaction Research

| Researcher | Organizations | Subjects | N | Country |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Avery (1977) | Government Agency | Government Employees | 135 | U.S.A. |
| Thiry (1977) | Hospitals and Clinics | Registered Nurses | 1069 | U.S.A. |
| Gordon (1979) | University | Administrators | 41 | U.S.A. |
| Kio (1979) | Government and Business | Administrators and Line Workers | 134 | Nigeria |
| Nicholson (1980) | Urban School and Teachers | Administrators | 290 | U.S.A. |
| Jones (1981) | Rural School System | Administrators and Teachers | 142 | U.S.A. |
| Duke (1981) | Urban School System | Business Education Teachers | 309 | U.S.A. |
| Alum (1982) | Social Service | Managers and Line Workers | 274 | Mexico |
| Wippich, B.J. (1983) and Wippich, M.L. (1983) | School District | Teachers | 150 | U.S.A. |
| Clampitt (1983) | Savings & Loan & Manufacturers | Employees Managers | 181 | U.S.A. |

As seen in Table 1, the questionnaire has been used in a wide variety of settings and in various countries (Downs, 1988; Downs, 1991). Reviewing the findings of these studies is beyond the scope this paper. A more thorough review of these

research projects has been presented elsewhere (Downs, 1988; Downs 1991). Nevertheless, a number of consistent themes have emerged from these studies that are noteworthy.

First, job satisfaction tended to be highly related to the communication satisfaction factors (Pincus, 1986; Avery, 1977; Nicholson, 1980). Personal Feedback, Communication Climate, and Supervisory Communication were the dimensions that tended to have the strongest correlations. Second, most employees were inclined to express the greatest satisfaction with the Supervisory Communication and Subordinate Communication factors and least satisfaction with Personal Feedback. Third, all the dimensions were perceived as having an "above average" impact on employee productivity (Clampitt & Downs, in press). The Personal Feedback factor was perceived as having the most significant impact on employee productivity while the Co-worker Communication, Media Quality, and Corporate Information factors had relatively lower impacts. Finally, the communication satisfaction instrument has proven useful in a wide variety of different organizations and with many types of workers (Downs, Clampitt, & Pfeiffer, 1988).

Variances in reporting styles make the task of ascertaining other useful generalizations difficult. For instance, analyses based on demographic variables are unevenly recorded. Determining the differences among various types of organizations is equally problematic. These issues can be more easily explored with a fairly large data base.

*Data Bank*

Over the past five years 18 communication audits have been conducted that have used the communication satisfaction questionnaire as the principal investigative tool. Table 2 shows the various organizations contained in the data bank. The firms ranged in survey size from a small independent television station of 24 people to a large local newspaper of 239 individuals. Great care was taken to insure a high return rate of questionnaires. The result was an average rate of return of 84.5%.

The sample size for the entire data bank is 1411. The sample contains more females (58.2%) than males (41.8%). The vast majority of the respondents were in the 21-29 age bracket (41%) or the 30-39 (30%) bracket. Approximately 25% had completed a college or graduate degree, with 40.2% reporting having completed only high school. The majority (33.7%) of the employees had worked for their respective organizations for 1 to 4 years, although many (22%) had been employees 5 to 8 years or 9 years plus (26.3%). The data mirrors fairly closely the typical employee profile of small businesses in the community.





Table 2

Data Bank Composition

| Organization | Type | Survey Date | N | Response Rate |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Auto Dealer | Service | Fall 1982 | 44 | 100.0 % |
| TV Station | Media | Spring 1983 | 79 | 75.0 |
| Laundry | Service | Spring 1983 | 62 | 94.0 |
| Packaging Plant | Manufac. | Spring 1983 | 43 | 77.0 |
| Hotel | Service | Spring 1982 | 81 | 87.0 |
| Insurance Firm | Service | Spring 1982 | 44 | 90.0 |
| Health Agency | Service | Summer 1983 | 28 | 77.7 |
| Savings & Loan | Financial | Spring 1982 | 78 | 92.8 |
| TV Station | Media | Spring 1983 | 24 | 66.7 |
| Savings & Loan | Financial | Fall 1981 | 65 | 100.0 |
| Chair Manufac. | Manufac. | Fall 1981 | 116 | 98.0 |
| Nuts/Bolts Dist. | Service | Fall 1983 | 97 | 88.0 |
| Custom Manufac. | Manufac. | Spring 1984 | 57 | 90.0 |
| Savings & Loan | Financial | Spring 1984 | 90 | 92.0 |
| Bank | Financial | Spring 1984 | 63 | 61.0 |
| Motel | Service | Spring 1984 | 63 | 65.0 |
| Newspaper | Media | Spring 1985 | 239 | 75.0 |
| TV Station | Media | Spring 1985 | 79 | 92.0 |

## Methods

In order explore more fully the usefulness of the Downs and Hazen communication satisfaction factors, several statistical techniques have been employed. It is possible, for instance, that these factors may vary in their usefulness as a function of the type of organization to which they are applied.

To test for such an effect the organizations in the data bank were divided into four broadly defined categories: financial institutions, service-related organizations, manufacturing concerns, and media-related industries. The mean scores not only for factors but also for the demographic variables were compared across the "organizational type" variable using analysis of variance techniques. When the ANOVAs were significant ($p < .01$), individual means were compared using Fisher's protected LSD method.

Tests for association between various demographic variables and either job satisfaction or productivity were done using X2 analysis of the contingency tables formed by pairing each of the demographic variables with these latter measures. When the tables formed had very low numbers of observations in certain cells, adjacent rows or columns were collapsed to assure adequately sized expected values. If the initial analysis was statistically significant, further analysis of the table was done by partitioning it to ascertain the strength and direction of the association. A significance level of .01 was again used.

Most organizations, in assessing the satisfaction of their employees with communication either within or among various levels of the organization, will find that a certain portion of the people are reasonably satisfied. Of particular interest and concern, however, are the extremes of the distribution. Why are certain employees either highly satisfied or very much disatisfied with communication? Why might they be highly productive or relatively unproductive? Is there a connection? To address these questions, two groups were defined by taking those cases in the data bank at the extremes of the distribution of the job satisfaction scores. In order to determine whether the communication satisfaction factors can be used to delineate between the extremes of the job satisfaction range, the method of two-group discriminant analysis was then used. The same method was also used with productivity as the grouping variable.

All discriminant analyses between the nominal upper and lower quartiles (see Note) of the grouping variables were done with a forward stepwise algorithm using an F-to-enter criterion (Kleinbaum and Kupper, 1978). The classification tables, overall F values and associated significance levels reported are those obtained when the stepping procedure was terminated. The overall F value reported is the approximation to Wilk's lambda (Jennrich, 1977). No forcing of the variables-to-enter was done.

## Results

The results are divided into three sections: (a) communication satisfaction, (b) job satisfaction and productivity, and (c) end-product relationships.





### *Communication Satisfaction*

Table 3 shows that the Supervisor Communication and Subordinate Communication factors were the areas of greatest satisfaction, while the least satisfying area was the Personal Feedback dimension. These findings mirror the results of past research (Downs, Clampitt, & Pfeiffer, 1988).

**Table 3**

Factor Descriptive Statistics

| Rank | Dimension | N | Mean | SD |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Supervisor Communication | 1370 | 34.18 | 10.52 |
| 2 | Subordinate Communication * | 323 | 33.43 | 8.62 |
| 3 | Co-worker Communication | 1345 | 31.81 | 7.84 |
| 4 | Organizational Integration | 1371 | 29.62 | 9.54 |
| 5 | Media Quality | 1344 | 29.17 | 9.14 |
| 6 | Communication Climate | 1358 | 26.56 | 10.23 |
| 7 | Corporate Information | 1360 | 26.35 | 11.12 |
| 8 | Personal Feedback | 1366 | 23.99 | 10.68 |

* Only supervisors completed items for this factor.

Analysis of variance revealed that age had an impact on each of the communication satisfaction dimensions with the exception of Supervisory Communication and Horizontal Communication (see Table 4). The results on the Subordinate Communication dimension were particularly noteworthy. Further tests showed that younger supervisors were less satisfied with their communication with subordinates than their more experienced counterparts. Perhaps younger supervisors have higher expectations and may be more aware of their communication difficulties.

One of the more interesting findings was that there were no significant differences based on sex. For each of the dimensions, males and females tended to report similar levels of communication satisfaction. These results parallel Wiio's findings with his LTT audit (Wiio, Goldhaber, & Yates, 1981).

The analysis of the education variable revealed a significant difference among mean Corporate Information factor scores showing that those individuals who had graduate training were more satisfied with corporate communication than others. Perhaps by virtue of their training these employees occupied higher positions in their respective organizations and consequently had more access to corporate information.

**Table 4**

Significant ANOVAS for Factors

| Dimension | F Value | df | Signif. Level |
|---|---|---|---|
| *Age* | | | |
| Organizational Integration | 3.59 | 5,1272 | .0032 |
| Media Quality | 3.73 | 5,1272 | .0023 |
| Communication Climate | 3.56 | 5,1272 | .0033 |
| Corporate Information | 4.06 | 5,1272 | .0012 |
| Personal Feedback | 2.97 | 5,1272 | .0013 |
| *Education* | | | |
| Corporate Information | 3.60 | 5,1274 | .0031 |
| *Time in Position* | | | |
| Supervisor Communication | 4.34 | 3,1274 | .0047 |
| Subordinate Communication | 6.08 | 3,318 | .0005 |
| Communication Climate | 4.63 | 3,1274 | .0032 |
| *Organizational Tenure* | | | |
| Communication Climate | 3.82 | 3,1275 | .0096 |
| Corporate Information | 9.18 | 3,1275 | .0001 |
| *Organizational Type* | | | |
| Supervisor Communication | 8.06 | 3,1208 | .0001 |
| Co-worker Communication | 5.43 | 3,1208 | .001 |
| Organizational Integration | 11.15 | 3,1208 | .0001 |
| Media Quality | 21.05 | 3,1208 | .0001 |
| Communication Climate | 14.38 | 3,1208 | .0001 |
| Corporate Information | 55.01 | 3,1208 | .0001 |
| Personal Feedback | 3.08 | 3,1208 | .0270 |

The time employees had been in their work positions was significantly linked to the Supervisory Communication, Communication Climate, and Subordinate Communication factors. In the case of Supervisory Communication and Communication Climate, employees with the least experience showed the most satisfaction in comparison to their colleagues who had worked longer than one year in their current positions. Further tests on the Subordinate Communication factor showed that the most experienced employees were more satisfied with





their communication with subordinates than those who occupied their positions for one to four years.

In terms of length of organizational tenure, the data revealed significant differences in two factors. There was a corresponding rise in satisfaction with Corporate Information as length of organizational tenure increased. No doubt, establishing more extensive personal networks through time can help satisfy informational needs about the company. Employees who had been with the organization less than one year appeared most satisfied with the Communication Climate factor when compared to those who had tenures from one to eight years. Yet, the t-tests did not reveal any differences between those with the shortest tenure and the longest tenure.

One of the highlights of the data analysis was that the employees in the financial institutions seemed the most satisfied with communication when compared to the service, manufacturing, and media types of organizations (see Table 4). On every factor with only one exception, Subordinate Communication, the financial institutions stood alone in terms of degree of communication satisfaction. The analysis of variance revealed no statistically significant differences for the Subordinate Communication factor. On the Corporate Information dimension the media organizations were significantly different from the service and manufacturing organizations. Yet even here the financial organizations had a significantly higher level of communication satisfaction. Perhaps financial institutions select personnel who are more adept at communicating and care more about effective communication than those in other types of organizations. Moreover, since so many people in a financial institutions have direct customer contact it may be more important to communicate effectively in this type of organization. As will be discussed below, this finding cannot be attributed to the financial institution employees having a higher level of job satisfaction.

### *Job Satisfaction and Productivity*

Job satisfaction was rated from "no satisfaction" to "maximum satisfaction" on a scale from 0 to 10, with a score of 5 indicating an "average" satisfaction level. The mean score for the entire sample was 6.78, which is clearly above the conceptual midpoint of the scale, and the standard deviation was 2.06. The majority of the employees (38.5%) reported that their job satisfaction level had remained the same over the past six months. An approximately equivalent number of employees felt their job satisfaction had gone down (29.8%) or gone up (31.5%).

Self-assessment of productivity was rated from "very low" to "very high" on a scale of 1 to 7, with a score of 4 indicating "average." The mean for this

measure was 5.44, with a standard deviation of 1.02. In contrast to the satisfaction scale, most employees (51.5%) felt their productivity had gone up during the last six months. Only 10% reported their productivity had decreased, while 38.4% felt their productivity had remained the same.

A contingency table analysis of job satisfaction and productivity each crossed with the demographic characteristics of age, sex, time in current position, and time with the organization produced some interesting results. There appear to be larger numbers of unsatisfied people among the younger age groups ($X2 = 139.1$; 30 df; $P<.0001$), and the ratio of males to females in the two lowest levels of satisfaction is higher than in the other satisfaction levels ($X2 = 25.6$; 6 df; $P<.0003$). These results correspond to other researchers' findings (Megginson, 1981; Keaveny, Jackson, & Fossum, 1978). Also, satisfaction increases as both time in position and time with the organization increase; both are significant with $P<.0001$. Finally, the proportion of disatisfied employees was higher among the group of people who had neither a baccalaureate nor graduate degree ($X2 = 73.5$; 30 df; $P<.0001$).

In contrast, no discernible pattern relates either age or educational level to productivity. Male employees are also more likely than females to place their self-assessment of productivity at the extremes of the scale rather than in the midrange ($X2 = 21.4$; 7 df; $P<.0032$) and people who have been either in their current position or with their current organization for less than one year seem much more likely to rate their productivity at lower levels than people who have been in longer-tenured positions; both results are significant with $P<.008$.

A final analysis showed significant differences among the mean job satisfaction scores when scores were classified by organization type (ANOVA, $F= 3.94$; 3,1284 df; $P<.001$). The average level of job satisfaction for employees in service organizations was significantly lower than satisfaction levels in the other organizational types. Again, in contrast, there appear to be no significant differences among the productivity means as a function of organization type.

### *Relationship between Communication and End Products*

A stepwise discriminant analysis showed that the Downs-Hazen communication factors were reasonably successful in discriminating between the lowest and highest job satisfaction scores. The analysis was done first for all respondents (eliminating the factor Subordinate Communication) and then separately for only those responses from supervisory personnel. This scheme was then repeated using productivity as the grouping variable. It should be noted that productivity as used here is a self-assessment measure.





In all analyses the Co-worker Communication factor emerged as the most significant variable in classifying job satisfaction. Among all respondents, communication with supervisors ranked second, while in contrast, communication with subordinates ranked second among supervisory personnel. In all cases except in the analysis of productivity for supervisory personnel, Communication Climate was the third most important classification variable. In this case only the Co-worker Communication factor and the Subordinate Communication factor had significant F-to-enter values. Table 5 summarizes each of the four cases, and Table 6 gives the classification table for each analysis.

**Table 5**

Discriminant Analysis Summary

| Case | Wilk's Lambda | Approximate F | df | % Correct Classification |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Satisfaction, all responses | .145 | 350.13 | 6,355 | 88.0 |
| Satisfaction, supervisors | .237 | 68.92 | 5,107 | 94.7 |
| Productivity, all responses | .0915 | 654.99 | 6,396 | 61.8 |
| Productivity, supervisors | .185 | 175.99 | 2,800 | 62.7 |

It should be pointed out that the apparent percentages of correct classification can be misleading since they are based upon the sample rather than an entire population. Somewhat more realistic classification percentages can be obtained by using jackknifed estimates (Lachenbruch and Mickey, 1968). This technique gives for the estimates in Table 5, 86.5%, 92.0%, 60.0%, and 61.4%, for overall percentages of correct classification respectively.

**Table 6**

Classification Tables

| | | Satisfaction, all responses | | Satisfaction, supervisors | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Classification | | Classification | |
| | | Low | High | Low | High |
| Actual Group | Low | 116 | 12 | 16 | 1 |
| | High | 31 | 203 | 5 | 91 |

| | | Productivity, all responses | | Productivity, supervisors | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Classification | | Classification | |
| | | Low | High | Low | High |
| Actual Group | Low | 148 | 94 | 12 | 9 |
| | High | 60 | 101 | 22 | 40 |

## Limitations

All research projects have limitations and this one is no exception. One of the more important concerns is that both end-product variables, job satisfaction and productivity, are measured on single item scales. Instruments like the JDI use a multidimensional measure of job satisfaction (Smith, Kendall, & Hulin, 1969). Yet, these kinds of measures have been shown to be strongly correlated to a single item scale such as the one used in this research (Wanous & Lawler, 1972). The productivity measure is based on self-reports. Consequently, there may be a little self-deception blending with the self-perception. Indeed, it is hard to believe that over 50% of this sample actually increased their productivity in the last six months. Another concern is that all the data were generated using relatively small businesses in the central geographic location of one midwestern metropolitan area. The generalizability to other locales is somewhat problematic. Nevertheless, these companies represent the typical small organizations found in cities across the United States. In spite of these drawbacks a number of important observations can be made about the results.





## Discussion

The purpose of this paper was to explore the value of the communication satisfaction construct by analyzing the results from 18 communication audits. The results of this research show with abundant clarity that the communication satisfaction construct is a useful tool in further understanding the role of communication in organizations. More specifically, the findings of this study suggest a number of specific observations that should be useful to scholars in the field.

First, the analysis of this data bank confirmed the findings of other researchers with respect to the areas of greatest communication satisfaction and least satisfaction. As has been demonstrated in numerous studies with the Downs and Hazen (1977) instrument, the areas of greatest employee satisfaction tend to be on the Supervisory Communication and Subordinate Communication factors (Downs, 1991). Goldhaber, Yates, Porter, & Lesniak (1978), among others, have noted the importance of satisfaction with the supervisor-subordinate relationship in terms of predicting job satisfaction. Indeed, the generally "above average" (5) level of job satisfaction (mean = 6.78 on 0-10 scale) for this sample may in part be attributed to the relatively high rates of communication satisfaction with the Subordinate Communication and Supervisor Communication factors. Moreover, the discriminant analyses showed that relationship factors like Co-worker Communication, Supervisor Communication, and Subordinate Communication, contributed the most to distinguishing effectively between the employees highly satisfied with their jobs and those with the least satisfaction.

The area of least satisfaction, Personal Feedback, reflects the findings from the many theses and dissertations that have used the communication satisfaction instrument. Apparently, providing adequate personal feedback is an almost universal difficulty for most organizations. The proverbial call for more research seems particularly appropriate in this area. Moreover, consultants who are attempting to improve organizational communication practices might be well advised to focus their efforts on goal setting, appraisal interviews, daily feedback, discipline, and counseling interviews, all of which are intimately related to the feedback process.

Second, the usefulness of the demographic variables in explaining communication satisfaction was limited. The only way to describe the demographic based analyses of the communication satisfaction factors is as a mixed bag. For instance, there were no significant differences between males and females on any of the dimensions. Trends were found for some communication satisfaction factors when crossed with other demographic variables. As length of employee tenure increased there was a parallel rise in satisfaction with Corporate Information. Yet, other factors did not show clear-

cut linear or curvilinear trends. As Wiio et al.(1981) found, the best summary of the results was that the "relationships between the demographic and communication variables were highly contingent"(p.87).

These findings imply that researchers cannot accurately predict the level of communication satisfaction based solely on the demographic characteristics of the organizational population. Unlike, for instance, social science research, which demonstrates that the likelihood of committing a crime decreases with age, there are no such clear predictions for what happens to levels of communication satisfaction as age increases or for that matter any other demographic variable. Two important implications follow from this observation. First, satisfaction with communication is apparently highly contingent on variables other than those that can be easily assessed and quantified. These variables may include communicator style, communication networks, and the perceptual abilities of the communicator. Second, if these are the kinds of important variables that link to communication satisfaction, then presumably the degree of satisfaction with communication can be changed by altering the practices of the organization or by training employees. Unlike the crime rate, communication problems apparently do not have a tendency to decrease as employees grow older. Active measures are needed to increase communication effectiveness.

Third, the results reaffirm the importance of viewing organizational communication within the contingency framework. Different types of organizations have different communicational needs. The types of communication that are important in one organization may not be important in others. Moreover, different organizational types may experience different levels of communication satisfaction. Indeed, the results from this study show a rather dramatic difference in the average level of communication satisfaction between financial institutions and the media, service, and manufacturing types of organizations. The different contingencies under which these organizations operate may in part explain these results. Further investigation is needed to address this issue adequately.

Why did the financial institutions report higher levels of communication satisfaction? Job satisfaction can definitely be ruled out as a possible explanation. The data clearly show that the employees in the financial institutions did not experience more job satisfaction than their counterparts in other types of organizations. We can only speculate on other reasons. Perhaps the personnel who work in banks and savings and loans are more effective communicators. Maybe these organizations have a greater commitment to effective communication. At any rate, the results pinpoint a fruitful area of further research. A more in-depth examination of communication practices at





financial institutions may provide some useful guidelines and aids to improve the effectiveness of other types of organizations.

Fourth, the communication satisfaction construct provided a useful tool for explaining end-product variables. Likert (1967) developed his Causal Sequence Model in part to show the relationship between various organizational variables. He classified variables into three types: causal, intervening, and end results. Much to the chagrin of many communication scholars, the communication variable was relegated to the role of an intervening variable and not a causal variable. While this study cannot really contribute to that debate, it has demonstrated a relationship between communication and two of Likert's end-product variables, job satisfaction and productivity.

The discriminant analyses showed that the communication satisfaction factors provide an effective way to distinguish between employees who are in the upper and lower parts of the spectrum in terms of both job satisfaction and self-estimates of productivity. This data provides a fairly powerful argument for the importance of effective communication in an organization. In short, organizational communication has an impact on two very important "bottom lines," job satisfaction and productivity.

Fifth, the construct of communication satisfaction appeared to be more effective in explaining job satisfaction than job productivity. The discriminant analyses showed that communication factors could distinguish the most satisfied employees and the least satisfied employees with 88% accuracy. However, when a similar test was done with self-estimates of productivity the percentage dropped to 62%. Perhaps other or possibly more objective measures of productivity would prove more useful.

Nevertheless, job satisfaction is an important end product variable in its own right. Low levels of job satisfaction have been consistently linked to increased absenteeism and turnover, which in the long run cost the organization money (Vroom, 1964). Some research has even shown that dissatisfaction can affect physical health, life expectancy, and mental health (Locke,1976). In turn, satisfaction with communication practices has an impact on job satisfaction. Consequently, there are some very important, albeit negative, consequences if a significant number of employees experience dissatisfaction with communication.

## Conclusion

The research to date on communication satisfaction has revealed a wealth of important insights. Pinpointing areas of greatest and least communication satisfaction common in most organizations should provide communication consultants with a number of ideas about where to concentrate their training

efforts. Demonstrating that employees of financial institutions experience more communication satisfaction provides some important insights into the variances between organizational types. The communication satisfaction questionnaire has proved to be an effective predictor of job satisfaction, thus demonstrating its usefulness as a tool for organizational diagnosis. Moreover, the industry norms provide a useful benchmark for other similar organizations who wish to know "how they stack up."

Where do we go from here? Past researchers have suggested some revisions of the instrument (Clampitt & Girard, 1987; Crino & White, 1981; Hecht, 1978; Pincus, 1986). Indeed, future research using the data bank described here has been planned to make just such adjustments. A number of important follow-up questions are suggested by these findings. What communication practices of financial institutions, as opposed to service, manufacturing, and media organizational types, contribute to greater communication satisfaction? What is an effective organizational feedback system? Can communication practices be more completely linked to outcome variables like employee productivity or corporate profits? These are just a few of the questions that seem particularly pressing. In sum, the communication satisfaction construct as operationalized by Downs and Hazen (1977) has contributed much to the knowledge of organizational communication; but, as with all scientific endeavors, much remains to be done.

## Note

The discrete nature of the grouping variables job satisfaction (which takes on integer values from 0 to 10) and productivity (which takes on values from 1 to 7) makes it impossible to remove exactly the middle ranked 50% of the data. Using the integer values closest to the actual first and third quartiles produces two extreme groups that comprise about one third of the sample.

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*The New Jersey Journal of Communication, Volume 1, No. 2, Fall 1993, pages 103-116*

# College Students' Views of Marriage on Television

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*Content analyses indicate that television presents a consistent image of marriage as overwhelmingly traditional and happy. Conflicting reports about the beliefs about marriage of heavy television viewers, however, suggest that manifest and perceived television content might vary. We conducted this analysis to examine the congruence between the view of marriage identified in content analysis and that rated by an impressionable part of the audience. College students (N = 358) completed Fitzpatrick's (1988) Relational Dimensions Instrument to assess perceptions of married couples on television. Students rated 30 different marriages. Most marriages were seen as Traditional, and students rated Traditional marriages as the most realistic. Amount of television exposure, however, was unrelated to television marriage ratings. The discussion focuses on the implications of the findings for media effects research.*

Content analyses point out that television continues to present fictional marriages as mostly traditional and happy, even though U.S. society is seeing a decrease in the conventional nuclear family unit. The conflicting images of television and real-life marriages call into question the relative impact of television on adolescents' beliefs about marriage. Indeed, recent research found that heavy-viewing adolescents accept television's view of marital instability, but discount it for their own lives (Signorielli, 1991). Gunter and Svennevig (1987) suggest that studies that assume that media images are directly absorbed by viewers may not be valid. The authors point out that "descriptions of television portrayals may not be the ones perceived by the viewers" (p. 47). Discrepant

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