The focus of this article is a macro theoretical paradigm for management communication, which clarifies relationships among the factors that influence persuasion. Specifically, the paper includes a strategic model for making choices among persuasive options. According to the model, choices about communication messages and media are a function of the relative force (effectiveness, efficiency, and quality) of the available options. A comparison of the strength of the given choices provides an assessment of relative force. The force of a specific option, in turn, arises from the message sender's persuasive goals and receiver's probable response.

A Macro Theory of Management Communication

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ONE MARK OF A MATURE discipline is the development of an integrated body of theory that new knowledge confirms, revises, or challenges. Neither business communication nor management communication has such a comprehensive theoretical grounding. Drawing from rhetorical theory, linguistics, and social science research, the field has at best developed a patchwork approach, picking and choosing on the basis of what is convenient, intuitive, or practical rather than on the basis of any well-articulated rationale. The journal literature suggests an increasing interest in theory, however (Locker, 1982).

Part of the problem of theory building in management communication arises because traditional approaches have tended to be micro-oriented; thus, they have provided only disconnected pieces of the puzzle. Though a number of theoretical positions have been articulated, the *linkages* between and among the premises are rarely identified. This paper seeks to address the problem by 1) setting out a macro-theoretical paradigm for management communication, and 2) clarifying the relationships among the constructs. Furthermore, the paper focuses on one element of the theory, the notion of strategic choice, and suggests an applied model for managers.

PROPOSITIONS

Three propositions underlie a macro theory of management communication:

1. Managerial communication behaviors include identifying rhetorical options, making choices among them, and implementing the options chosen. In the terminology of theory-building, this proposition is the generative construct, the *explanans* (McDermott, 1975; Smith, 1982).

2. These behaviors can be expected to result in an increased probability of communicating successfully. This second proposition is the effects construct, the *explanandum.*

3. Two conditions mediate effects—a realistic persuasive goal and a neutral or positive probable response. Put another way, the effects can be expected under the condition that the attempt at influence is realistic. This proposition is the linking construct, the *boundary condition.*

A THEORETICAL STATEMENT

The formal statement of theory resulting from the three propositions follows: If managers identify available rhetorical alternatives (options), make informed choices among them (strategy), and implement the options chosen (skill), they can be expected to increase the probability of communicating successfully, under the conditions that the persuasive goal is reasonable and the probable audience response rests within an acceptable latitude of behavioral response. Latitudes of behavioral response range from acceptance to noncommitment to rejection (McGuire, 1969).

DISCUSSION

The effects proposition, which implies the need to increase success in communication, is the central focus of most business communication texts. The generative and boundary constructs, on the other hand, are less clearly differentiated. The generative construct, in particular, is sketchily developed, with little emphasis placed on identifying options and making choices among them and most attention being given to the skills necessary for implementation. For example, even though texts typically cite the importance

of developing persuasive content, they focus on techniques for generating material, such as brainstorming, rather than on developing alternatives. Thus, they are neither systematic nor comprehensive in their discussions of such classical invention techniques as lines of argument, subject matter topoi, motivational alternatives, or means of developing credibility through content. These sources do tend, however, to be relatively precise about available alternatives relating to organization, style, and presentation of materials (Himstreet & Baty, 1987; Sigband & Bell, 1986; Wilkinson, Wilkinson & Vik, 1986).

The second generative behavior, making choices among options (strategy), has received little systematic treatment in the business communication literature beyond traditional good news, bad news, and persuasion models. Conversely, discussions of skill, the third generative construct, are usually comprehensive prescriptively, if not theoretically.

The boundary constructs, specifically the persuasive goal and the probable receiver response, are also examined within the framework of the good news/bad news/persuasion paradigms. Consequently, they fail to reflect relevant theoretical development in the persuasion literature (Shelby, 1986).

Theory and research in business communication need to address systematically both the generative and boundary constructs as they relate to effects. Areas of investigation should include: 1) identifying rhetorical alternatives or options; 2) making strategic choices among them; 3) relating skills and channels to those choices; and, 4) assessing realistic communication goals and effects (receiver response). The remainder of this paper focuses on one of these areas, strategic choice, a generative construct, and demonstrates its relationship to the boundary constructs identified in the theoretical statement.

A STRATEGIC CHOICE MODEL

Viewing communication as a management strategy focuses on choice-making among available message and channel options. Managers and professional communicators rarely have unlimited control over the messages they send and the communication channels they employ. Rather, they must select from among the options available at a given time within the particular organization. *Message options* include choices about content, organization, style, and presentation. Specific alternatives may range from gen-

erally accepted rhetorical strategems, such as organizing materials inductively or deductively, to those options that derive from the message purpose, research data, or audience and situation analysis. Depending on organizational norms and technology, moreover, *channel or format options* include written communication formats, speeches and other oral presentations, formal and informal interviews, and meetings.

Choices about messages and channels should be neither accidental nor habitual: they should be *strategic*. That is, managers need a clear reason for making communication decisions. The controlling criteria for any decision in an organization are necessarily risk minimization and goal maximization, with costs and benefits broadly defined. Beyond that constraint, however, managers need direction about choosing from among generally acceptable message and channel alternatives.

The first step in developing a strategic choice model is to determine what managerial objectives govern the production and transmission of organizational messages. A review of the management literature, as well as that in finance, marketing, and production-operations, yields three overriding managerial criteria: effectiveness, efficiency, and quality. (Juran & Gryan, 1980; Kotler, 1984; Sharpe, 1985; Szilagyi & Wallace, 1987). In short, the probable effectiveness, efficiency, and quality of messages, of their production, and of the channels through which they are to be disseminated should influence, if not determine, the communication choices managers make.

The three criteria correlate especially well with specific stages in the message-production process, as defined by composition theory (see Figure 1). According to writing-process theory, message production is a three-step, recursive process involving prewriting (determining content), drafting (making initial choices about structure and style), and editing (cleaning up the draft) (Emig, 1971; Flower, 1985; Flower & Hayes, 1981). Choices about message content are particularly relevant to communication effectiveness. Choices about structure and strategy, on the other hand, though also influencing effectiveness, relate primarily to the communication efficiency of both the sender and receiver. Choices about style and presentation, which build on effectiveness and efficiency strategies, are driven largely by product quality.

Likewise, the transmission process correlates to managerial goals of effectiveness, efficiency, and quality. Choices about which channel or channels to use to send messages are primarily made on

the basis of the relative effectiveness of the available channels. The actual sending or transmitting of messages relies on both effectiveness and efficiency criteria. Moreover, feedback allows for quality control, which insures that the message actually gets to the desired receiver and that it does so in a timely manner.

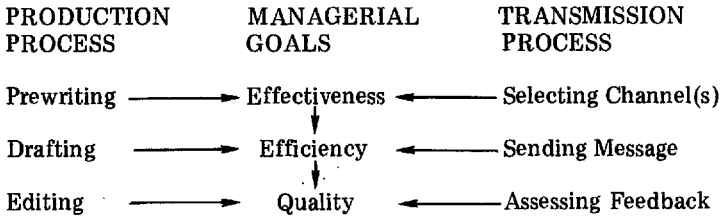

Figure 1
RELATION OF MANAGERIAL GUIDE TO MESSAGE PRODUCTION AND TRANSMISSION

Choices about whether to communicate, to whom, when, why, and how always *depend on the complex causalities* of the particular situation. Therefore, the second step in developing a strategic choice model is 1) to identify the rhetorical factors that influence choice and 2) to link them to the contingencies inherent in "the given case." The following premises include the rhetorical factors relevant to choice and specify their relationships to each other and to choice-making as a contingent enterprise.

1. Choice is *contingent on* determining the relative strength or force (effectiveness, efficiency, and quality) of the available options (RFAO).

2. Force of a given option is *contingent on* the communicator's goal or goals (CG) and the audience's probable response (PR).

3. Communication goals are *contingent on* task and social needs.

4. Probable response is *contingent on* receiver variables and situational factors.

The preceding premises provide the basis for the following theoretical model of strategic choice. According to the model, choices about communication messages and media are a function of or should be made on the basis of the relative force (effectiveness, efficiency and quality) of the available persuasive options. Assessment of relative force, moreover, results from a comparison of the strength of the given choices. The force of a specific option, in turn, arises from the message sender's persuasive goals and the receiver's probable response, the two factors exerting influence

both independently and in relation to each other. Goals may be task, social, or both, while probable response is determined by the receiver variables and situational factors in the given case. In short, choice is a function of communication goal and probable response. Mathematically, the model may be stated as:

$$C = f(g(CG, PR)).$$

The strategic choice model has practical implications for management communication. As Figure 2 shows, managers may follow four specific steps that will give them direction about the choices they make about messages and channels. To make informed choices about effective, efficient, and quality messages and channels, managers should first systematically analyze their communication goal or goals. Next, they should identify the available rhetorical options; that is, what choices they have about content, organization, style, presentation, and channels. In addition, managers should assess the message receiver's probable response to the various options. To that end, they should examine receiver variables and situational factors, including interpersonal climate, organizational culture, organizational structure and systems, technology, and external environmental issues, that affect management communication within the organization and externally. Ultimately, managers should determine the relative force of the options, that is, their relative effectiveness, efficiency, and quality.

1. Identify Communication Goal
   - Task
     - tell/understand
     - sell/buy
     - collaborate
   - Social
     - credibility
2. Identify Options
   - Content
   - Organization/Strategy
   - Style
   - Presentation
   - Channel
3. Assess Probable Response (+/-)
   - Relevant Receiver Variables
   - Relevant Situational Factors
4. Assess Relative Force
   - Effectiveness
   - Efficiency
   - Quality

Figure 2
APPLIED STRATEGIC CHOICE MODEL

BOUNDARY CONSTRUCT I
COMMUNICATION GOALS

Communication goals, which along with probable audience response determine the force of rhetorical options, derive from organizational and managerial concerns. The following example clarifies the interrelationships within the context of an uncertain and highly volatile organizational situation:

Organizational goal: Maintain productivity in the face of a proposed hostile takeover. (measurable)

Managerial goal: Stop rumors that are consuming substantial work time. (measurable)

Communication goals: task goal: provide accurate, up-to-date, complete information on the status of the takeover and its implications (tell): *social goal*: provide reassurance about future employment (*enhance organization's credibility*) (measurable correlation with organizational and managerial goal satisfaction).

As the preceding example suggests, both task and social goals influence the choices managers make about communication strategies (Blake & Mouton, 1964). Task goals are essential to ensuring managerial efficiency and product quality. Communication effectiveness, on the other hand, depends on responding to social or people-oriented concerns as well as on accomplishing necessary tasks.

Task Goals

Communication task goals, which have to do with getting the job done through messages and channels, include managing *information* (asking and telling; answering and understanding), *influence* (selling; buying), and/or *collaboration* (resolving). To do their job, managers need to get information from and to give understandable information to 1) those within the organization and 2) those external to it. Internal memoranda, reports, procedure manuals, company newsletters, and brochures are some of the channels typically used in organizations to transmit informational messages; feedback channels vary from suggestion boxes to required periodic reports. Letters, consulting reports, press releases, and PR packets are more likely used with external audiences. Even when message transmission occurs in oral settings such as telephone conversa-

tions, interviews, or meetings, written follow-up provides an important backup.

Managers also have reason and occasion to influence the behavior of others. Though memoranda may contain influence messages, managers also commonly use face-to-face communication including interviews or meetings to persuade internal audiences. With external message receivers, managers more likely rely on letters and sales brochures, personal selling, and print or electronic media advertising.

A third task goal, collaboration, is both a means to and an end of effective communication. Through collaboration, individuals in organizations make decisions, solve problems, and manage conflict. Collaboration, moreover, builds commitment to implementing organizational goals. It also facilitates interpersonal trust and a supportive organizational climate. Meetings and interviews provide useful forums for collaboration within the organization. Focus groups and public meetings are appropriate for collaborating with external message receivers.

Social Goals

Task goals focus on information, influence, and collaboration, but social goals have to do with managing *credibility*—the receiver's response to the message source and the organization (Applbaum & Anatol, 1974). Receivers' social goals usually differ from those of message senders, however, and include acceptance, inclusion, and liking.

Managers may demonstrate or minimize their own expertise or authority through their communication with internal and external audiences. Openness, honesty, and accuracy (or a lack thereof) in managerial messages influence the trust employees have in their managers and in the organization. Through communication, managers have the opportunity to reduce or to escalate threat and uncertainty, as well as to generate good will or to create ill will, personally and organizationally. In short, the messages that managers send and the communication channels they choose influence both their own credibility and the credibility of the organization they represent.

BOUNDARY CONSTRUCT II
PROBABLE AUDIENCE RESPONSE

According to the strategic choice model, two factors affect probable audience response: receiver variables and situational factors. The following sections describe those characteristics that research studies have confirmed to have particular relevance in persuasion or influence.

Receiver Variables

Research studies have confirmed a number of receiver variables that influence a receiver's probable response to messages, message sources, and the channels through which messages are sent. These receiver variables include knowledge level, personality characteristics, attitudes, beliefs, values, past behavior, and needs.

Knowledge Level

How much message receivers know about a subject affects their probable response to new messages; in general, the more knowledge individuals have, the more difficult they are to persuade (McCroskey, 1972). A receiver's knowledge level also gives message senders important cues about how much detail to include and what word choice is most appropriate for a given message. On the other hand, prior knowledge about a subject is generally less important to decisions about which message channels to use.

Personality Factors

At least six personality factors appear to relate to the relative ease or difficulty with which individuals will be persuaded. Individuals with high self-esteem, high ego involvement, high authoritarianism and high dogmatism tend to be more difficult to influence than those with low ratings on these personality variables (Sherif, Sherif & Nebergall, 1965; Sherif & Hovland, 1961). High authoritarians and persons with low self-esteem, however, are susceptible to change messages from high status sources (Sherif, *et al.*, 1965; Sherif & Hovland, 1961).

Apprehension is more difficult to correlate than the preceding four personality factors since both high and low apprehension levels affect persuasion negatively. Low apprehension levels result in apathy; high levels require use of sanctions. Moderate ap-

prehension, on the other hand, increases receiver receptivity to influence (Applbaum & Anatol, 1974).

Perceived locus of control, which refers to the degree to which receivers believe they have a choice about their behavior, is the final personality variable that affects probable response to messages. The major conclusion of the research is that individuals commonly referred to as internals, who think they control their own destinies, are typically more difficult to persuade than externals, who see others as in charge of their lives (Wheeless, Barraclough & Stewart, 1983).

Behavior and Mediating Cognitive Structures

Both past behavior and attitude, belief, and value structures influence or mediate probable response to messages (McGuire, 1976). Since individuals who have been conditioned by a linear Aristotelian system of logic tend to have a psychological need to be consistent, past behavior serves as a model for and therefore predictor of their future behavior. Past behavior also provides reasons or justifications for future behavior.

Cognitive-evaluative structures, on the other hand, including attitudes, beliefs, and values, determine how individuals perceive, understand, and judge new messages. By helping to satisfy needs and rationalize positions, these structures provide important cues to managers about how realistic their goals are and how appropriate their message and channel choices.

Needs

Needs influence how message receivers can be expected to respond to messages and channels. They also provide the theoretical motivational foundation for power-based managerial messages. Essentially, the theory holds that 1) people have different needs, 2) that unsatisfied needs motivate, and 3) that satisfied needs do not motivate. The various listings of needs in the literature, moreover, include both physiological and psychological motivators, both deficiency and abundancy needs (Krech, Crutchfield & Ballachey, 1962).

The most influential contemporary needs analysis, Maslow's hierarchy, not only identifies needs, but it suggests their relationship to each other and to the manager's task (Maslow, 1954). In short, Maslow arranges needs according to progressive satisfaction levels; that is, lower level needs must be addressed before higher level needs become motivational.

Both the strength and the weakness of Maslow's analysis is its linearity. By prescribing sequential levels, Maslow provides a theoretical model that is both intuitively logical and seductively applicable to practical problems of influence. On the other hand, the model fails to account for the fact that individuals have multiple needs, some of which may operate at the same time. Rules theory provides a window to minimizing the problem by insisting that *context* determines which needs are most salient in a given case (Reardon, 1981; Smith, 1984). Thus, the manager's responsibility is to assess both the receiver's physiological and psychological state and the particular situation's tendency to trigger or call attention to a given need within that hierarchy. Only then is the message sender in a position to target messages and channels to satisfy receiver needs.

By specifying the consequences of a given action, managers may use message content to link relevant needs to the persuasive goal. They may also choose message channels that clarify relationships and provide needs satisfaction. Inviting a previously excluded employee to a high-level meeting, for example, may help to satisfy that person's status and self-actualization needs.

Situational Factors

Situational factors also influence probable audience response to sources, messages, and communication channels. Specific factors that affect receiver response include interpersonal climate, organizational culture, organizational structure and systems, technology, and environmental constraints.

Interpersonal Climate

The relationships between a message sender and receiver have a great deal to do with the success or failure of the communication. Two factors are particularly relevant: the liking relationships between the two and the position or status relationships dictated by the organization. Research studies, moreover, identify two variables that affect liking: physical attractiveness and perceived similarity (Smith, 1982).

Whether a message sender and receiver have a positive or negative relationship will affect choices about the kinds of messages sent, the communication strategies employed, and whether formal or informal communication channels are used to transmit the message; those relationships will also influence the probable receiver

response. For example, no matter how important, useful, or relevant the message is perceived to be, it will likely be rejected, distorted, or distanced from the message source in the presence of a negative interpersonal relationship.

Organizational Culture

Almost everything that happens in an organization has an impact on the communication that occurs there. Some factors facilitate communication; others constrain information flow. Organizational culture, which incorporates both the *is*'s, how the organization defines itself, and the *oughts*, its controlling values and norms, is a particularly relevant influence on management communication. Whether the organization's philosophy emphasizes people, production, sales, or quarterly earnings, for example, will affect the extent and nature of the communication that occurs both internally and externally.

The *is*, set forth in the organization's statement of philosophy, is typically stated in corporate annual reports or nonprofit's brochures. The *oughts* of an organization are a little more difficult to identify. Rather than being explicitly stated in some public document, they tend to be buried in the organization's cultural network and in the myths, rituals, and rules that anchor it. Career paths and motivational structures and strategems, behavioral keys to identifying these norms, indicate the implicit and explicit reward systems and thus the role of power and control in the organization. Moreover, by defining political as well as social norms, the *oughts* mediate the content and strategy of formal as well as informal messages. They also restrict the availability of message channels, which influences who gets what messages and whether opportunities for feedback are available.

Deal and Kennedy (1982) have identified three communication levels that relate to organizational culture: technical communication, which is relatively easy to translate; formal communication, which is dictated by agreed-to organizational norms; and informal communication, which derives from hidden values, assumptions, and roles. This informal level, which they argue accounts for about 90 percent of communication in organizations, presents a particularly difficult challenge for managers. Not only are its underlying assumptions hard to identify but, as the following discussion suggests, messages carried through informal channels are almost impossible to control.

Organizational Structure and Systems

Typically, organizations have a formalized structure, hierarchical or matrix, that defines the relationships between and among functions and personnel. That structure prescribes, moreover, and relevant procedures and policies reinforce the formal channels through which internal communications should flow. In highly bureaucratic organizations, the formal structure tends to be rigidly followed; in less rules-driven organizations, adherence to the formal channels is less likely to be strictly enforced.

When formal channels are dysfunctional, that is, when they are inefficient or ineffective carriers of messages, informal channels such as the corporate grapevine take over—even for task-related messages. In such cases, communication systems based on social relationships preempt those that reflect organizational structure and formalized policies, and managers tend to lose influence over information flow in the organization.

Technology

Marshall McLuhan (1965), who coined the phrase, "the medium is the message," made popular the notion that the media through which messages are sent will necessarily affect the messages themselves. Messages and message channels are likewise interdependent in organizations, with technology mediating both the message and the choice of channel. Messages and channels, moreover, influence managerial choices about technology.

Environmental Issues

Systems theory, a popular and influential approach to organizational behavior, emphasizes the interdependency of organizations and their environments (Lewis, 1980). The key term is *interaction*. The theory holds, in short, that what happens in the environment will necessarily affect the organization, its personnel, and the options they have for meeting personal and organizational goals. Conversely, what goes on within the organization, development of a new product or revision of hiring goals, for example, will have an impact on the world outside that organization.

A number of environmental issues have particular relevance for probable receiver response to management communication messages, both within the organization (internal communication) and outside it (external communication). The issues are legal (corpor-

ate takeovers; product liability), sociopolitical (affirmative action; immigration policy), and economic (stock prices; interest rates). They reflect international concerns (rates of monetary exchange) as well as intercultural ones (quality control; productivity levels). They relate to change and the threat of change occasioned by technology, competition, regulation, and ethical concerns.

CONCLUSION

An integrated theoretical model of management communication provides the philosophical base from which substantive empirical studies may derive. It also gives credibility to the discipline as a serious academic enterprise. Theory is valuable, moreover, not only because it explains; it also predicts. Thus, theory is firm ground indeed on which to base our pedagogy.

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