

Writing for Business

Lecture 2: Nature of Organization; Types and Flow of Communication

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Learning Objectives

By the end of this lesson, you should be able to:

- a) Describe the theories or approaches on the nature of organization
- b) Distinguish between formal and informal communication and explain the flow of organizational communication

1.0 Introduction

Welcome to our second lecture. Last week, we were introduced to the course and learned about communication in general, business communication, writing for business, and the communication process. We learned that we must first understand the broader terms to help us understand writing for business. We still need to continue laying the foundation before we can start writing for business. Hence, today we will focus on the nature of organization, which is anchored in certain management theoretical perspectives. These include the classical approach, the bureaucratic approach, scientific management theory, and the human relations approach. Other scholars have labeled these theories differently. For example, natural vs rational approach; open vs closed systems. We will also study formal and informal communication which includes the flow of communication in an organization.

However, before we begin, last week I gave you homework requiring you to watch a video and make notes. I hope your notes are similar to mine below:

1.1 What is Business Writing?

- Business writing is a tool that businesses use to communicate concepts and ideas through the written work
- Business writing serves multiple purposes including informing, persuading, and promoting goodwill
- Examples of business writing include mails, memos, letters, reports, and marketing material
- Effective business writing is clear, compelling and error-free
- Business writing is categorized into instructional eg user guides/manuals; informational eg report writing; transactional eg letters, memos, emails, contracts; and persuasive writing eg grant proposal, product brochure
- Benefits of effective business writing include revenue growth, increased sales, faster time to market, customer retention, cost reduction, improved productivity, reduced customer support costs, reduced employee turnover, reduced mitigation, reduced accidents, reduced risk of lawsuits, etc.

- Principles of effective business writing include clarity of purpose, clarity of thought, identifying target audience, using an appropriate tone, using active voice, sharing accurate and relevant information, avoiding jargon, practicing with passion, avoiding grammatical mistakes and incorrect structures, and paying attention to proofreading,

Let us now turn our attention to today's class. Before we describe, explain, and apply the theories mentioned at the beginning, let's undertake a small activity. I want you to think of a company. You probably work in this company as an intern or even a full-time employee. If you are not working, you can think of a company where your parent or guardian is engaged. At the end of this session, please tell us which theoretical approach you think your company follows.

1.2 Management Theories: The Organization

1.2.1 The Classical Approach

According to **classical** writers, the organization functions at the level of purpose and formal structure (Pearson, n.d). These writers emphasized four things that create successful organizations: Planning the work; the organization's technical requirements; management principles; and the assumption of logical and rational behavior. The authors or scholars associated with this school of thought include Francis Taylor, Henri Fayol, Lyndall Urwick, James Mooney, Allan Reiley, and Edward Brech (Pearson, n.d.).

Some of the classical approach principles proposed by *Mooney and Reiley* include:

- **The principle of co-ordination** – the need for people to act together with unity of action, the exercise of authority and the need for discipline
- **The scalar principle** – the hierarchy of organization, the grading of duties and the process of delegation; and
- **The functional principle** – specialization and the distinction between different kinds of duties (Pearson, n.d)

In the classical approach, organizational leaders focus on efficiency and performance. Such organizations are highly structured, highly formalized, and function through a system that prioritizes coordination, a hierarchy, and specialization. I believe the university uses the classical approach among other approaches since activities are meticulously planned. For example, before the semester starts, the concerned department will create a timetable complete with modes of instruction (regular, virtual, weekend, etc) and venues. There are technical requirements to be considered such as software for producing the timetable, the apps for conducting virtual classes, availability of projectors, the learning management system, etc. By the time classes begin on the first day of the semester, the university has employed certain principles of management, such as delegation of duties. For instance, although the head of the academic arm in a university is the Deputy Vice Chancellor Academics, he/she does not draft the timetable. Instead, that task is delegated to the Head of Department. There is a high level of coordination that takes place for the students to complete their classes in a given semester and unless all the stakeholders (faculty, administrators, management, Senate, Council, etc) act in unity, operations may be jeopardized.

Lastly, organizations under this approach leverage on specialization. For example, faculty are expected to be experts in their fields.

1.2.2 Scientific Management Theory

The theorists who came up with scientific management theory saw management as a function for increasing productivity (Pearson, n.d). They emphasized that technically structuring the work organization and offering monetary incentives had the ability to highly motivate workers to produce greater outputs. The father of the scientific management theory is Francis W. Taylor (1856-1917) who theorized that there is one best way to perform each task by analyzing all work processes and breaking them down into discrete component parts. He proposed the following principles to guide management:

- The development of a true science for each person's work;
- The scientific selection, training, and development of the workers;
- Co-operation with the workers to ensure work is carried out in the prescribed way;
- The division of work and responsibility between management and the workers (Pearson, n.d.).

Let us try and grasp each of the four principles above using a bank setting. A bank comprises the various managers (section, department, branch, entire bank), tellers, customer care personnel, communication officers, legal officers, accountants, loan officers, sales and marketing people, investment officers, security officers, etc. Each of these workers performs according to their specialization to ensure that money gets into your pocket, your money is secure, you can obtain loans, invest, etc. An organization using the scientific management theory will ensure that the true science of each bank worker has been developed. Before these workers came to work for the bank, there was a rigorous recruitment process to ensure the right fit for each person and that these new employees will be trained as well as undergo professional development. In the course of work, this worker will be supervised or will interact with management for increased output. In the scientific management theory, there is division of work where a clear distinction is made between the worker's and manager's responsibility.

1.2.3 Bureaucracy

Max Weber, a German sociologist, defined Bureaucracy as, "an organizational structure characterized by many laws, standardized procedures, procedures and requirements, number of desks, the meticulous division of labor and responsibility, clear hierarchies and professional interactions between employees that are almost impersonal." (Vedantu, 2024).

Bureaucracy is a subdivision of the classical approach and is found in many large-scale industries/organizations (Pearson, n.d.). Bureaucracy proponents are more theoretical in their stance than classical writers. Weber argues that bureaucracy boasts more technical superiority than other organizational forms and that tasks and responsibilities are defined within management's structure, leading to standardization of work procedures. Under this theory, it does not matter who holds an office since all positions are standardized (Pearson, n.d.).

Stewart (2016) summarizes bureaucracy features as:

- **Specialization**, which applies more to the job than to the person undertaking the job, making for continuity because the job usually continues if the present job-holder leaves.
- **Hierarchy of authority** makes for a sharp distinction between administrators and the administered. Within the management ranks, there are clearly defined levels of authority.
- **System of rules** aims to provide for an efficient and impersonal operation. The system of rules is generally stable, although some rules may be changed or modified with time.
- **Impersonality** means that allocation of privileges and the exercise of authority should not be arbitrary, but in accordance with the laid-down system of rules. (Cited in Pearson, n.d.)

Think of the military and the nature of a bureaucratic organization. Indeed, we have specialization in the military, with each job specified. For instance, other than the soldiers who engage in combat, there are soldiers whose specialization is in medicine or aviation. The one flying the military chopper is specialized in aviation matters and should he/she leave, their replacement will be another pilot with the same if not better flying skills. We have a clear hierarchy of authority in the military and the work relationship among the different ranks is clearly defined. Only a junior can salute the senior, for example. It's only the person occupying the highest rank who can authorize a war, and not the one below him. The military runs through an elaborate system of rules. For instance, in a war, soldiers are forbidden from attacking civilians, and should limit death and destruction where women and children are concerned. Even the allocation of privileges and the exercise of authority is conducted according to the laid-down laws. For example, if there's an officer's lounge or mess, it is known who exactly should go there.

1.2.4 Human Relations Theory- The Hawthorne Experiments

Elton Mayo (1880-1949), regarded as the father of human resources, became known when he shared his research findings in 1922 (during the Great Depression period) on the relationship between the managers and the workers (Schiavo, 2024). He went on to observe workers at textile mills in Pennsylvania in 1923 where he noticed that workers increased production when they were granted breaks throughout the day. Mayo introduced organizations to the relationship between work and the social aspect, that is human relations. While classical theorists emphasized the structure and formal organization, human relations (sometimes known as 'behavioral' or 'informal') focused on social factors among workers as well as their behavior while at work (Schiavo, 2024).

The Hawthorne Experiments

While he was a research professor at the Harvard Business School, Mayo started on his most famous research initiative (1924-32), the Hawthorne Studies. Together with colleagues at Harvard, Fritz Roethlisberger and William Dickson, Mayo examined the various changes at the Western Electric Company in Illinois and wanted to know how these changes impacted productivity (Schiavo, 2024). These researchers then published their findings indicating that people are motivated more than just the satisfaction of economic needs; that human beings are essentially

social in nature and are far from merely being labelled economic beings (Pearson, n.d.). Additionally, people belong to groups, so management should consider group psychology and attitudes for increased productivity.

The Hawthorne experiments were done in four phases:

Phase 1: The illumination experiments with the finding that illumination had no effect on productivity but that there were other factors involved that increased productivity.

Phase 2: The relay assembly test room. The authors noted that productivity increased because of attitude change and not due to positive changes in physical factors

Phase 3: The interviewing program where the researchers discovered that the workers' behavior was influenced by group behavior

Phase 4: The bank wiring observation room (Pearson, n.d.)

The following main conclusions were drawn from the Hawthorne Experiments:

Social unit: A factory is not only a techno-economic unit, but also a social unit and it should be noted that men are social beings. This social characteristic at work plays an important role in motivating people. The output increased in the Relay Room due to a social group that functioned effectively and workers shared a warm relationship with their supervisors.

Group influence: The workers in a group developed a common psychological bond uniting them as a group in the form of informal organization. The researchers noted that workers' behavior is influenced by these groups. Thus, management should note that their demands may not influence productivity; but pressure from the group can.

Group behavior: Management must understand that a typical group behavior can dominate or even supersede individual propensities.

Motivation: Human and social motivation can play a greater role than monetary incentives when it comes to managing groups.

Supervision: Productivity is affected by the supervisor's style. Friendly supervisors who take a keen interest in their worker's social problems are likely to obtain better results since the worker's attitude undergoes a positive influence.

Working conditions: When conditions at work improve, productivity increases.

Employee morale: Mayo pointed out employee morale (both individual and in groups) can have profound effects on productivity.

Communication: When managers explain the logic behind certain decisions to workers and allow them to participate in decision making, the output increases.

Balanced approach: The authors found out that productivity increased when all factors were considered to improve the whole, rather than a part of an aspect (Pearson, n.d.)

Thus, you will find human resource departments or employees in almost every organization around the globe. HR people play a significant role in ensuring the needs of employees are well taken care of. For instance, it is the HR department that is concerned with negotiating the best medical cover for employees. Should an employee encounter a situation in the course of treatment, the first person they call is in the HR department to assist resolve the quagmire arising from the insurer's end.

In conclusion, I did mention that various scholars have described similar concepts as expressed above using various terms. For example, the natural vs rational system. The rational system fits the description of the classical approach, scientific management theory, and bureaucracy because it is mainly concerned with rigid procedures, standardization using regulation, expected behavior and is guided by many policies. The focus is on performance and efficiency which should be attained by the personnel. Rational systems are also hierarchical and management often exercises control to achieve organizational objectives. The natural system corresponds to the human relations approach.

1.3 Formal and Informal Communication

The following ideas are drawn from Podar College (n.d.) and Chhatrapati Shahu Ji Maharaj University (n.d.). I have endeavored to explain the points as far as possible. Organizations experience both formal and informal communication. This is what is also known as the flow of communication in an organization. Formal communication includes downwards, upwards, and horizontal communication, while informal communication occurs through diagonal/grapevine communication.

1.3.1 The Flow of Organizational Communication

1. The downward flow of communication

In downward communication, information is formally transferred from people in authority or higher levels to those at the lower level. Employees receive information through a chain of command, for example, the head of department in a university formally communicating to a lecturer through email. Information communicated downwards includes policies, strategies, new information, and procedures and these messages can be relayed through memos, reports, word-of-mouth, meetings, etc. However, while downward communication helps in the running of the organization through passing information and motivating the employees, it also has its limitations. These include message distortion, information overflow, delays in passing information, and incomplete communication.

2. The upward flow of communication

Upward communication refers to information traveling from the subordinates to management within the organization. Employees might want to ask their supervisors questions, make requests, submit proposals, issue complaints, etc. Upward communication is equally important because management gets to receive information, obtain views, develop a sense of participation, etc. However, limitations may include delays in passing messages, distortions, fear by employees to approach management, etc.

3. Horizontal/Lateral communication

Horizontal or lateral communication refers to the exchange of information between people who occupy the same level in the organization. For example, one bank teller requesting information from another teller via email. This type of communication helps to socialize people, strengthen departments, coordinate inter-departmental activities, etc. However, employees can form groupings with a negative agenda, misunderstandings can occur, it can promote negativity, and so on.

4. Diagonal/Grapevine communication

It is the type of communication where employees from different levels and departments share information. For example, members in multidisciplinary jobs. The advantages of diagonal communication include that it is faster, has less workload, and is useful in digital communication. However, wrong messages and rumors can be circulated and in the process, harm the organization. Since there is no one person responsible, no one takes responsibility if anything should go wrong.

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