



8-2011

# Effective Change Communication in the Workplace

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## Recommended Citation

Harp, Amy Lynn, "Effective Change Communication in the Workplace." Master's Thesis, University of Tennessee, 2011.  
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I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Amy Lynn Harp entitled "Effective Change Communication in the Workplace." I have examined the final electronic copy of this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science, with a major in Communication and Information.

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**Effective Change Communication in the Workplace**

**A Thesis  
Presented for the  
Master of Science Degree  
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville**

**Amy Lynn Harp**

**August 2011**

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## Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to the memory of my father, Gary Harp. Through his unyielding love and constant support for my education, he made a master's degree possible even after his death. Dad,

I miss you every day.

## Acknowledgements

Thank you, thank you, thank you John Haas. Your encouragement and support throughout the last six years during my undergraduate and graduate careers have been remarkable. Thank you for having faith in me when I did not, for providing opportunities for me to learn both in school and in life, and for affording me occasions where I could shine. You have truly made a difference in my life.

I would also like to thank Virginia Kupritz for her service on my committee. Your thoughtful insights, warm nature, and constant encouragement were life savers in the storm of my thesis. Joan Rentsch, thank you for truly completing my thesis committee. You pushed me to perform and to understand my work at the highest possible level.

Last, I would like to say thank you to my family and friends. Mom and Lloyd, you are amazing. I could not have accomplished this without you. Alison, I am blessed to have you as my sister. Chance, thank you for always listening and always telling me I could do it. To my other family and friends, thank you for constant vote of confidence and uplifting words throughout this process. I am truly blessed.

## Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate effective change communication in the workplace by utilizing goal setting theory. Due to potential validity issues with previous organizational communication audit research, a multi-methods study was devised to investigate and construct a new measure for effective change communication in the workplace. Preliminary interviews along with previous research were utilized to construct a survey questionnaire gauging effective change communication in the workplace. Over 1,000 employees at a large, health-services companies participated in the study. The results from the study yield a framework for evaluating effective change communication on individual (i.e. behavior, trait, and knowledge) and organizational (i.e. accuracy, clarity, and availability) levels. Also, the data was divided between males and females, communication sources, and the perceptions of effective supervisory communication. The study's practical implications, addition to goal setting theory, limitations, and future research are noted.

*Keywords:* change communication, goal setting theory, communication sources, supervisory communication, effective communication

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction

Communication is central to the success of most all organizations. And when change is occurring in an organization, communication is even more essential to implement that change effectively (Bennebroek-Gravenhorst, Elving, & Werkman, 2006; DiFonzo & Bordia, 1998; Elving, 2005; Elving & Hansma, 2008; Lewis, 1999; Schweiger & Denisi, 1991). However, one problem for many modern organizations is that change is not always communicated effectively (Burke, 2008; Cummings & Worley, 2009; Fernandez & Rainey, 2006; Hargie & Tourish, 2000). Ineffective communication during organizational change is reported to negatively impact the way an organization functions. For example, ineffective change communication can lead to resistance to the change, rumors, and promote exaggeration of the negative aspects associated with the change (DiFonzo, Bordia, & Rosnow, 1994; Smelzer & Zener, 1992) as well as to act as an overall negative influence on corporate culture (Keyton, 2005). The purpose of this study is to investigate effective change communication in the workplace.

Despite the importance of communication to successful organizational change, how scholars and practitioners conceptualize effective change communication has received limited attention in the literature. Moreover, since the communication process influences most all aspects of change ranging from the vision that is communicated to the communication practices associated with new job duties, previous attempts to deal with effective change communication have tended to focus on some aspect of change. For example, change communication has been described in regards to themes (Lewis, Stephens, Schmisser, & Weir, 2003), pervasiveness upon corporate culture (Keyton, 2005), expectations and competencies (Clampitt, 2001; Elving

& Hansma, 2008; Frahm & Brown, 2005; Heracleous, 2002), characteristics or dimensions of the change process (Bennebroek-Gravenhorst, Elving, & Werkman, 2006; Cushman & King, 1995; Dawson, 2003; Salem, 1999), and how to manage the change process (Elving, 2005; Fernandez & Rainey, 2006). Some would argue that effective change communication occurs when employees successfully adopt the proposed change or changes (Robertson, Roberts, & Porras, 1993). Others would be inclined to evaluate effective change communication as the level of readiness employees feel regarding the change (Elving, 2005). While competing conceptualizations of what constitutes effective change communication exist, the framework for this project is based on Locke's work regarding goal setting. The notion of goal setting suggests that organizations do not haphazardly operate (Locke, 1996; Locke & Latham, 2002; Locke & Latham, 2006). Rather, organizations have a multitude of goals both stated and unstated that navigate operations especially when undergoing change. The purpose of these goals is to direct action towards desired outcomes. If an organization strives to bring about identifiable changes and uses communication to that end, then effective change communication would be defined as the attainment of the desired outcomes. Communication is the vehicle that organizational members use to achieve the desired outcomes.

Exploring change communication has both applied value and theoretical significance in regards to our understanding of organizational communication. In regards to the practical application, this research seeks to create an instrument that organizations may employ to evaluate communication when change is occurring. This is important because of the pressure managers are under to provide concrete results in a climate of scarce resources (Garnett & Kouzmin, 2000). In a theoretical sense, three areas will be advanced. First, goal setting theory will be

extended beyond its traditional focus on the process of goal-setting as a method to enhance performance. Second, previous measures of effective communication in the workplace have some validity issues. This project's goal is to provide a measure that overcomes previous difficulties. Third, this project will aid in our understanding of how communication works during times of change in organizations. As suggested by Elving (2005), communication in the organizational change process has had limited empirical attention from communication researchers. A more detailed discussion of these issues follows. This paper is organized around a review of the relevant literature, a rationale for inquiry, the methods for the study, the results, and a discussion of the findings.

## Chapter 2

### Literature Review

#### *Goal Setting Theory*

The theoretical framework for this research, goal setting theory, was originally constructed to examine motivation through the relationship of conscious goals and level of task performance in primarily industrial and organizational settings. “A goal is the object or aim of an action, for example, to attain a specific standard of proficiency, usually within a specified time limit” (Locke & Latham, 2002, p. 705). The purpose of goal setting theory is to predict, explain, and manipulate performance on organizational tasks (Lock & Latham, 2002).

Goal setting and goal setting theory have been researched for more than 30 years, and goals and their relationship to performance have developed many theoretical constructs. These constructs include the core of the goal in terms of specificity and difficulty. For instance, the most difficult goals produce the highest levels of performance as long as the individual’s ability was not exceeded and commitment to the goal did not change. Also, specific and difficult goals lead to a higher level of performance than vague goals like “do your best” (Locke, 1996; Locke & Latham, 2002; Locke & Latham, 2006). More components of goal setting theory include moderators like the level of goal commitment (Hollenbeck & Klein, 1987; Klein, Wesson, Hollenbeck, & Alge, 1999), the assessment of self-efficacy (Podsakoft & Farh, 1989; Zimmerman, Bandura, & Martinez-Pons, 1992), the amount of feedback (Kim, 1984; Kim & Hamner, 1976; Vigoda-Gadot & Angert, 2007), the degree of task complexity (Wood, Mento, & Locke, 1987), the importance of the supervisor (Latham & Locke, 1979; Latham & Saari, 1979)

and mechanisms of goals like their directive function (Locke & Bryan, 1969; Rothkopf & Billington, 1979), energizing function (Bandura & Cervone, 1983; Bryan & Locke, 1967; Sales, 1970), and their relationship to selecting strategies for performance (Latham & Baldes, 1975; Locke, 1996).

Consistent with the work of Locke and his colleagues (see Locke, 1996; Locke & Latham, 2002; Locke & Latham, 2006) that examined goals and goal setting in organizational settings, this project proposes to explore how communication is used to support the goal of organizational change. Thus, this study seeks to extend our understanding of goals and goal setting to wider organizational outcomes. Goal setting theory has been explored utilizing various organizational samples including truck drivers, logging crews, office workers, garment workers, managers and supervisors, superior-subordinate pairs, professors, manufacturing work groups, and vending machine servicemen. Also with these various samples have been various researched goals including self rated performance improvement, goal attainment, output quantity, sales, productivity, superiors' ratings of subordinate performance, and absenteeism (Latham & Yukl, 1975).

Specific research examples utilizing goal setting theory in organizations abound. For instance, Barrick, Mount, and Strauss (1993) conducted research with 91 sales representatives at an appliance manufacturing organization. As conscientiousness was another factor examined in this study, those sales representatives who were high on conscientiousness were more likely to set goals and be more committed to those goals which yielded a greater sales volume and higher supervisory ratings. Latham and Kinne (1974) conducted a research experiment where they provided training in goal setting for one group of laborers, pulpwood-loggers, with a control group of loggers who received no training in goal setting. After 12-weeks of data collection, the



researchers found that goal setting lead to a decrease in absenteeism and an increase in production. Rodgers and Hunter (1991) examined top management of various companies who utilize a management strategy known as management by objectives or MBO. One of the findings from this research was when top management commitment was high to the MBO program, there was a 56% average gain in productivity versus when commitment was low and only a 6% gain in productivity. Another example of goal setting research is the work by Baum, Locke, and Smith (2001) which attempted to bridge multiple areas of research including goal setting in the light of venture growth of organizations. Three hundred and seven companies participated in this study, and it was found that a CEO's motivation or goal setting, summed up in the study as vision, growth goals, and self-efficacy, was a direct predictor of venture growth.

One important motivation for utilizing the theory of goal setting for this research is due to the generalizability of this particular theory. Support for the theory has stemmed from over 400 laboratory and field studies which utilized over 40,000 research participants ranging from children to research scientists in eight different countries. Multiple research designs including experimental, quasi-experimental, and correlational have been implemented to test the theory. Also, numerous tasks, levels of analysis (i.e. individual, group, organizational units, entire organizations), and time spans (i.e. one minute to 25 years) have supported goal setting theory (Locke, 1996; Locke & Latham, 2002; Locke & Latham, 2006). Although there have been failures of implementation of goal setting, Locke and Latham (2002) argue that is due to error on behalf of the implementer. That error could include issues like not gaining goal commitment, not providing feedback, or not incorporating enough variety in the goal difficulty level.

Another important factor of goal setting theory that makes it useful to this particular study is the propagation of this theory as an open theory, or one "that new elements are added as

new discoveries are made” (Locke & Latham, 2006, p. 266). This is important because of a gap in the research this study focusing on organizations in times of change is hoping to fill. The vast majority of goal setting literature looks at the goal, the outcome (or performance), and the factors of the goal or other influences that affect that performance. But how do individuals get from goals to performance? And more importantly for this study, how do organizations accomplish their desired outcomes (i.e. performance) especially in times of change? They do that through communication. Communication is the vehicle that organization members use to achieve those desired outcomes. This is an understandable oversight to this point as goal setting theory was developed in industrial and organizational psychology with the focus on motivation not communicative behavior (Locke & Latham, 2006). However, it is time for the important component of communication to be explored employing the theory to increase its generalizability and utility.

#### *Communication Audit*

Perhaps the most widely used method of assessing communication during times of change is the organizational communication audit. Auditing or gauging communication effectiveness in organizations can be traced back to the 1950's (Odiorne, 1954), but this methodology for examining communication grew quickly in the 1970s with the development of the organizational communication audit (e.g., Brooks, Callicot, & Siegerdt, 1979; Goldhaber & Krivonos, 1977; Goldhaber, Yates, Porter, & Lesniak, 1978; Greenbaum & White, 1976; Roberts & O'Reilly, 1974; Sincoff & Goyer, 1977). While there have been numerous studies involving the audit in various countries over the last 40 years, the results reported uniformly point to a desire for more information by organization members concerning most all organization issues including change (e.g., Brooks, Callicot, & Siegerdt, 1979; Goldhaber et al., 1978; Gray, 2000;

Hargie, Tourish, & Wilson, 2002; Hogard, Ellis, Ellis, & Barker, 2005; Opyt, Stewart, & Soy, 2001; Quinn & Hargie, 2004; Robson & Tourish, 2005; Scott, Connaughton, Diaz-Saenz, Maguire, Ramirez, Richardson, Shaw, & Morgan, 1999; Tourish & Mulholland 1997; Zimmerman, Sypher, & Haas, 1996).

The organizational communication audit was developed by the Organizational Communication Division of the International Communication Association (ICA) in 1971 to measure organizational communication using five measures: a questionnaire survey, interviews, network analysis, communication experiences, and communication diaries (Goldhaber & Krivonos, 1977). Throughout the years, the survey has become the foremost tool used out of the five for “its ease of development, administration, and interpretation—both for clients and research publication” (Goldhaber, 2002, p. 451). During the 1970’s, this measurement package was propagated by many scholars (e.g., Brooks, Callicot, & Siegerdt, 1979; Goldhaber et al., 1978; Goldhaber & Krivonos, 1977; Greenbaum & White, 1976; Roberts & O’Reilly, 1974; Sincoff & Goyer, 1977) to assess the “health” or the effectiveness of organizational communication along an array of dimensions including message sources, receivers, topics, channels, attitudes, behaviors, and more (Goldhaber & Krivonos, 1977).

#### *Communication Audit and Validity*

Many scholars (e.g. Clampitt, 2005; Downs & Adrian, 2004; Tourish & Hargie, 2009) continue to believe that the audit is a useful tool for capturing effective organizational communication. This tool has been available and has been utilized for close to 40 years. Yet, there is a vast body of research spanning many years and multiple countries (e.g., Brooks,

Callicot, & Seigerdt, 1979; Goldhaber et al., 1978; Gray, 2000; Hargie, Tourish, & Wilson 2002; Hogard et al., 2005; Opyt, Stewart, & Soy, 2001; Quinn & Hargie, 2004; Robson & Tourish, 2005; Scott, et al., 1999; Tourish & Mulholland 1997; Zimmerman, Sypher, & Haas, 1996) that purports organizational members nearly always want more information than they currently receive. The question raised from this research is that of the validity of the organizational communication audit. Is the audit really measuring effective organizational communication, or is it tapping into a consistent belief system regarding a communication “metamyth” in the organization?

Zimmerman, Sypher, and Haas (1996) first publicized the idea of a communication “metamyth” in “that more communication is better” in regards to an organizational context (p. 186). Moreover, this deep-seated metamyth is adopted without question by organizational members. This metamyth ideal is rooted in two related belief systems: the established notion of the importance of communication in organizations and the conduit or “pipeline” metaphor. The established notion of the importance of communication comes from an extended period of research (e.g. Barnard, 1938; Batemen & Miller, 1981; Blanchard, 1991; Bush & Frohman, 1991; Chen, Miller, Jiang, & Klein, 2005; Czarniawska-Joerges, 1992; Guetzkow, 1965; Katz & Kahn, 1978; Leonard, Graham, & Bonacum, 2004; March & Simon, 1958; McLaurin & Bell, 1991; Postmes, 2003; Scott, 1981; Stringham, 1992; Weick, 1987) that propagates the significance of communication for organizations in formation, progression, and the continued life of organizations. The second belief system, or the conduit metaphor, stresses that communication can be viewed as a pipeline that conveys information from the sender to receiver. There is a body of literature (e.g. Axley, 1984; Barnard, 1938; Costa, de Matos, & Cunha, 2003; Hargie & Tourish, 2004; Jenner, 1994; Katz & Kahn, 1978; Krovi, Chandra, & Rajagopalan,

2003; Smith & Grimm, 1991; Sy & Cote, 2004; Walsh & Birkin, 1980; Weick, 1987) that supports this notion (Haas, 2007).

### *Satisfaction versus Effectiveness*

Along with the idea of the communication metamyth, previous measures like the Organizational Communication Development (OCD) Audit Questionnaire or the ICA Organizational Communication Audit (Rubin, Palmgreen, & Sypher, 2004) tap into and measure satisfaction with communication. Being satisfied with communication within the organization is not the same as communication being effective within the organization. This research endeavor focuses solely on gauging effectiveness with change communication and does not attempt to gauge satisfaction with that communication. This is also an important distinction between satisfaction and effectiveness for practitioners to make when evaluating their company's communication.

### *Previous Research on Gender and Management Roles*

Regarding managers and non-managers in the workplace, there are studies that denote differences between those who occupy managerial positions and those who do not. For instance, the types of communication are different for superiors and subordinates. Superiors when communicating tend to discuss aspects like job instruction, organizational policy and procedures, and feedback directed to the subordinate. Subordinates tend to discuss features like information about coworkers and information about the task at hand (Katz & Kahn, 1966). But there are also differences between managers and non-managers in terms of conflict management styles (Felts & Jorgensen, 2008), perceptions of openness in superior-subordinate communication (Jablin, 1982), enactment of maintenance communication (Lee & Jablin, 1995), and constraints on

communication depending upon the structure of the organizational network in terms of direction (i.e. upward, downward, and horizontal) and formality (Zaremba, 2003).

In addition to explicit differences, it is also important to note subordinates' perceptions of supervisory communication. For instance, Berman and Hellweg (1989) found that supervisors who participated in quality circles were viewed as more competent communicators and garner more satisfaction from his or her employees. Porter, Wrench, and Hoskinson (2007) found a supervisor's temperament did affect a subordinate's perception of a supervisor's communicative behavior. For instance, there was a positive relationship between a supervisor's extraversion and a subordinate's perception of supervisor responsiveness. Also, Johnson (1992) found that supervisors were perceived as more competent communicators by subordinates when the utilization of a prosocial compliance-gaining tactic (liking) was used over an antisocial compliance-gaining tactic (negative altercasting). Furthermore, it is important to note the general importance of the role of a supervisor plays (Gilbreath & Benson, 2004; Hall, 2007; Hui, Chiu, Yu, Cheng, & Tse, 2007; Jablin, 1979; van Vuuren, de Jong, & Seydel, 2007).

In regards to gender and communication in the workplace, Wilkins and Andersen (1991) conducted a meta-analysis of twenty five studies conducted over a fifteen year period that all looked at gender differences and similarities in management communication. What was found was there were minimal differences between male and female managers and those few differences were of little social importance. But there are differences between males and females in regards to communication styles in informal conversation (Holmes, 1986; Spangler, 1995) and communication strategies in business (Edelsky, 1981; Holmes, 1992). There are also differences in business issues between males and females in regards to negotiations (Walters, Stuhlmacher, & Meyer, 1998), use and attitude towards email (Seeley & Hargreaves, 2003), and placement in

task and social organizational communication networks (Dallinger, 1987). With this varied information about biological sex and supervisory perceptions, it is worthwhile to investigate in the present study if there are differences between males and females and how if at all do perceptions of supervisors play a role in regards to effective change communication.

### *Change Communication*

Communication researchers (e.g., Cushman & King, 1995; Dawson, 2003; Salem, 1999) suggest that several dimensions or characteristics are associated with change communication. First, change involves differences in two or more points over time. Second, change is normative. Third, change has different orders in regards to importance and context. Fourth, there can be internal or external enablers or ‘triggers’ of change (Salem, 1999). External triggers include “government law and regulations, globalization of markets and the internationalization of business, major political and social events, advances in technology, organizational growth and expansion, and fluctuations in business cycles” (Dawson, 2003, p. 15). Internal triggers may involve advancement in internal technology, people, administrative structures, or shifts in a primary task (Dawson, 2003). Fifth, the configuration of the system is altered based on change. Sixth, change occurs in fluctuating phases between novelty and variety. Last, change has multiple levels including emergence, divergence, transformation, and convergence. Also, change communication can come from three dichotomous dimensions: Internal/External, Formal/Informal, and/or Verbal/Nonverbal (Salem, 1999).

In regards to change communication within an organization, one area is the role of supervisors or management in disseminating information concerning change. Elving and Hansma (2008) conducted interview research between management and employees during

organizational change. The most important conclusion from this work was that the success of the dissemination and adaptation of organization change significantly depended upon communicative and informative skills of managers at all levels. In addition, it is important that managers act as role models for the change (Heracleous, 2002). Although leaders seem to be aware of rapid change within his or her organization (Bolden & Gosling, 2006), communicating that change is significantly challenging (Lewis, 2000). Bennebroek-Gravenhorst, Elving, and Werkman (2006) found that not only did the role of management play a huge factor on the contribution of the workforce to the impending change but also the dissemination of information and authentic communication about the necessity of the change and the objectives and course of the change were vital.

In regards to the elements of change communication, Frahm and Brown (2005) found that organizational members have differing expectations and competencies regarding change communication. For instance, transformational or large scale change requires or expects a dialogic approach (i.e. increased, authentic communication) from a skilled communicator (competency). For change communication to be effective, these expectations and competencies need to be congruent. In addition, the change communication can come from three different sources: a management orientation, an employee orientation, or an integrative orientation. Last, change is on a continuum from routine to non-routine for both the receiver of the change and the initiator of the change. Preferably, management should attempt to view changes from a perceiver perspective and alter communication to that perspective (Clampitt, 2001).

Organizational change can also alter an organization's culture, and organizational culture can impinge on how well the organizational change is implemented or understood. Elements



like hierarchical structure, cohesiveness of the organization, and interaction of new members in regards to existing workers all can modify organizational change. As an example, a company hires new employees to staff a previously nonexistent third shift. These new employees have great potential to alter the organizational culture and acceptance of the organizational change (Keyton, 2005).

Lewis (2000) propagated the need for case studies to truly understand change communication. Four different types of companies (University Services, Outreach Education, VA hospital, and Messaging Technology) who were implementing quality improvement programs were studied through participant observation, archival data, formal interviews, and survey questionnaires.

Creating vision, maintaining buy-in to mission, sense-making and feedback, establishing legitimacy, and communicating goal achievement have been seen to be keys [themes] to maintaining commitment to these change programs. In some of the cases (University Services, Outreach Education) a lack of organization and planning appeared to contribute to difficulty in maintaining a clear picture, in the minds of employees, of the program goals and a belief that they were being achieved. At others (VA Hospital, Messaging Technology) extensive initial planning was present, but little was done to reinvigorate interest and value of the program as time went on. Failures in communication contributed to these stalled and/or failed programs of change. (p. 151)

Another case study was performed on a European based pharmaceutical company who had established a new self-managed team within its organizational structure. Before this new

team, the sales, marketing, and production departments handled all issues separately. During a climate of change for this company in the early 1980s, its products were being viewed as obsolete. To try to combat this, the pharmaceutical company decided to implement the self-managed team made up of middle level workers from all three departments to handle issues concerning their pharmaceuticals. This team was able to increase the effectiveness, the timeliness, and the appropriate handling of issues and changes internal and external of the company (Knowles, 1995).

Lewis, Stephens, Schmisser, and Weir (2003) performed a thematic content analysis on the top 100 best selling “organizational change” books indicated by Amazon.com. From this analysis, five major themes were garnered about organizational change. The first was a byproduct of modern life. This category synthesized that change occurs because of the nature of the world like globalization. Second, ubiquitous or inevitable was categorized to exemplify that change would always happen. Third, the theme of necessary survival mechanism flourished. This literally meant that change would have to happen for companies to endure. Fourth, the theme of mysterious or dangerous was cited to categorize organizational change as scary and intimidating. The last theme was decision or that companies purposely choose to change to ward off something happening to the company.

Elving (2005) proposed a conceptual framework to study communication in organizations undergoing change. Six propositions were developed that all simultaneously influence readiness for change. The level of readiness in this framework is the indicator of how effective the change will be. The first proposition stating that low levels of resistance to change or high levels of readiness for the change is an indicator for effective organizational change. The second

proposition states that communication needs to inform the organizational members about the change and how that change will alter the individual's work. The third proposition advocates that communication should be used to create a community which will increase commitment, trust, and identification with the organization and management. The fourth proposition looks at uncertainty in that high levels of uncertainty will have a negative effect on readiness to change. The fifth proposition focuses on the impact of downsizing in that the loss of jobs and the feelings of job insecurity will have a large effect on readiness to change. The last proposition which is related to the fourth and fifth propositions states that communication will have an effect on feelings of uncertainty and job insecurity. Fernandez and Rainey (2006) give a similar eight factor rubric on how to manage organizational change in the public sector including the following steps: ensure the need for change, provide a plan, build internal support for change and overcome resistance, ensure top-management supports and commitment, build external support (i.e. political overseers), provide resources, institutionalize the change, and pursue a comprehensive change to the entire organizational structure.

### *Rationale*

While much has been written about the importance of communication during organizational change, communicating change effectively remains an elusive goal and determining the best vantage point from which to understand and measure change communication has yet to be determined. This project is the first in a series of studies that tackles the issues of effective organizational communication focusing specifically on change in the workplace. This project also represents an attempt to take a research area that has been dominated by problem-driven research and establish a theoretical base of goal setting theory.

Last, it is a first effort to construct and to test a reliable and valid measure of effective change communication in the workplace. Based on this rationale and review of previous research, the following research questions are proposed:

1. How do organization members conceptualize effective change communication?
2. Are there differences between males and females in their evaluations of change communication?
3. Is there a relationship between the perception of effective supervisory communication and the overall perception of effective change communication?
4. Are there differences between males and females perceptions of change communication from communication sources?
5. Is there a relationship between the perception of effective supervisory communication and the overall perception of the effectiveness of change communication from communication sources?

## Chapter 3

### Methods

The purpose of this study is to investigate effective change communication in the workplace. Data collection involved two phases: interviews and a survey questionnaire. This study and data collection was part of a larger study that looks at effective communication in the workplace. The discussion of the study methodology is organized around a review of the study participants, a review of the preliminary participant interviews, a review of the survey questionnaire, a review of the procedures for data collection, and a review of the data analysis.

#### *Participants*

The participants for this study were employees at a large, not-for-profit health services company with approximately 4,000 employees who service over 2 million clients. The organization provides services state-wide and maintains a headquarters unit and branch offices throughout the state. This organization is facing internal change (i.e. layoffs, move to a new facility) and external change (i.e. government intervention). Organization members vary in several demographic respects including age, gender, educational background, and length of service with the company.

#### *Measures*

**Interviews.** Because of the validity issues of previous effective communication in the workplace research which is outlined in the literature review, it was important to engage in interviews with the study participants to see what he or she concluded to be effective

communication in the workplace. A randomized list of employees was provided to the researcher via the human resources department. The human resources department contacted the employees to alert them of the project and contact from the researcher. The participants were contacted by phone and/or email to set up a time to discuss this topic. All 19 interviews were held in conference rooms during business hours on the organization's campus. The interviews averaged approximately 20 minutes. The basic purpose of the interviews was to gather information and narratives from current employees about effective communication. Data redundancy for the interviews occurred around the twelfth interview. The interview guide is available as Appendix A. Along with information gleaned from the published literature, the interview data were used to construct the survey questionnaire for this study.

The results for this research question focus primarily on the responses from the preliminary participant interviews. The coding scheme for the free response data concerning RQ1 was based on previous research concerning cognitive representation of beliefs (see Cantor and Mischel, 1979; Pavitt, 1981; Pavitt and Haight, 1986). This line of research suggests that individuals structure their beliefs about others in particular ways. Specifically, the coding system distinguishes between what a person is, what a person does, and what a person knows. Consistent with the procedures outlined by Pavitt and Haight (1985, 1986), participant's responses were coded to reflect these categories at the individual level and organizational level. When using the average proportion of coding agreements to the total number of decisions, an average Scott's pi of .812 resulted.

**Survey Questionnaire.** The measure of change communication was included in a larger survey questionnaire that focused on effective communication in the workplace. The change communication measure was constructed for this project by themes that emerged in the preliminary participant interviews and from previous research centering on organizational change. The measure included 17 initial items addressing change communication and an additional item addressed how effective change communication is from six sources which were supervisors, fellow employees, intranet, unit to unit, top management, and the grapevine. Unit to unit denotes communication between departments (i.e. sales to marketing). The Cronbach's Alpha for the 18 items addressing change communication was .91. In addition, nine items addressing the effectiveness of supervisory communication were included in the measure. The Cronbach's Alpha for these items was .97. All items were rated on a seven-point scale from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." Also, a basic demographic question concerning the participant's sex was included. The total number of participants who took this questionnaire were 1,114. That is a response rate of approximately 35%. See Appendix B for a copy of the change communication measure.

### *Procedures*

Data collection occurred via electronic distribution. The organization distributed the entire survey questionnaire for the larger project to all employees. The distribution was handled by the organization's information technology department. Once the survey was sent out, the participants had over a week to complete the measure. Once the participation deadline lapsed, the information technology department forwarded a raw data file to the researcher for data analysis.

*Data Analysis*

A content analysis of the interview data revealed how organization members conceptualize effective change communication. Utilizing statistical software, basic descriptive statistics, independent samples t-tests, and bivariate correlations were utilized to analyze data from the survey questionnaire.



## Chapter 4

### Results

The purpose of this study is to investigate effective change communication in the workplace. The results of this study could assist researchers in understanding the modern employee's conceptualization of effective change communication, illuminate the relationship between supervisory communication and effective change communication, and clarify any differences between men and women in regards to effective change communication. These results can also be very beneficial to organizations in providing clear tools to assist in providing its employees with effective communication regarding change.

#### *Research Question One*

The first research question asks how employees conceptualize effective change communication. The results yielded two levels of analysis: an individual level and an organizational level.

**Individual Level of Analysis.** On the individual level, respondents conceptualized effective communication as a behavior, trait, or a level of knowledge. Consistent with the work of Pavitt and Haight (1986), a behavior was conceptualized as what a person was doing. Behaviors were observable and concrete. A trait was characterized as a long term and enduring characteristic; what a person "is." Knowledge focused on an individual who knows what to say. Those responses tended to make explicit use of the word knowledge or its root know.

Table 4.1 provides verbatim examples of interview responses when conceptualizing behavior of an individual as making an individual an effective communicator.

**Table 4.1 Examples of Responses Coded for Behavior**

Effective Communicator	Ineffective Communicator
He's visible	They get ahead of themselves
He's really willing to put himself out there as the head or the face of something. He's really willing for the feedback that comes as a result of that	He is not visible
Encourages people to ask questions	She never got all the details on anything
He's thing is tell them what you are going to tell them, get them told while they are listening, and then wrap it up	Communication is demanding
He makes it a point to communicate frequently and casually	You know they sound intelligent and um superior. But that really alienates others
First, she will call you on the phone and explain. And then as a follow up she will do a face to face meeting and ask, "Did you understand this? Did you understand that?"	Non response to emails or phone calls. Voicemails left and things like that; just typical non response
He is always present in the community	You call me into a meeting and all I hear is what is in your head. You don't want to hear what is in my head.

Table 4.2 provides verbatim examples of interview responses when conceptualizing a trait of an individual that makes him or her an effective communicator.

**Table 4.2 Examples of Responses Coded for Traits**

Effective Communicator	Ineffective Communicator
Good sense of humor	Irrational
Personable	He's sort of aloof
Easy to talk to	Very professional demeanor all the time
You just trusted him	Very pompous
They listen	Tend not to listen to people
Just be themselves	Not very friendly
Top notch personality	Very closed and guarded

Table 4.3 provides verbatim examples of interview responses when conceptualizing knowledge of an individual that makes him or her an effective communicator.

**Table 4.3 Examples of Responses Coded for Knowledge**

Effective Communicator	Ineffective Communicator
Because I know they (upper level management) know they are responsible for so much so there not going to just go talking to the wind and say whatever. You know they are going to think about it.	Like they were questioning what they were saying/questioning the answer they were giving me
You better make sure it's a technical audience because otherwise you're not going to keep them long	Definitely not complete
He knows the data	People not being sure of themselves
He can go answer their questions directly, right then	Lack of confidence
Because he knew your name. He knew who he was talking to	The research wasn't done/ it was obvious the research, the time that it really needed to be spent to present something or to share something was not put into that for whatever reason
She knew what she was talking about but made it to where it was understandable to listen to her	Just not I feel like not putting in the time investment to stop and formulate their thoughts about what it is they want to do in the direction they want to be heading.
Just her talking, there is this knowledge that oozes out of her	When I ask questions you say, "Ok I answer that later" and you never get to answer it. So you know things are not going to come out right because I didn't understand what you were saying, of what you needed from me.

**Organizational Level of Analysis.** On the organizational level of analysis, respondents conceptualized effective communication in terms of accuracy, availability, and clarity. Accuracy dealt with information that was correct. Availability dealt with information that was readily accessible. Clarity deals with information that is presented in an understandable form.

Table 4.4 provides verbatim examples of interview responses when conceptualizing accuracy as an organizational component of effective communication.

**Table 4.4 Examples of Responses Coded for Accuracy**

I like to see when things are factually stated	Just be honest with people
I know that I am not going to go out there and read something completely off the wall and completely bogus. I'm going to go out there and that is where I am going to get my most solid information of what is current and what is going on	We're on quality. So if I distribute the wrong answer to them (customers) or even say the wrong thing of course our conversations are recorded.
Everyone is getting the exact same information instead of broken pieces	When the job gets done and it gets done correctly.
When I feel like I can go out there and do the job they need done in the manner they want the job done.	"I think I know the answer to this but I just want to make sure." And then they (subordinates) give me the right answer, I know that I have communicated to them exactly what I needed to.

Table 4.5 provides verbatim examples of interview responses when conceptualizing availability as an organizational component of effective communication.

**Table 4.5 Examples of Responses Coded for Availability**

<p>We have our intranet, and we can go view information that way that's being shared to everyone in the whole company</p>	<p>Again, team meetings, one on one sessions. We have one on one sessions with our team lead just to touch base on where exactly we are standing or how far we are from our yearly goals. That's where I would say communication is really effective. And the frequency in which they organize those meetings.</p>
<p>Having them (facts) made visible</p>	<p>Whether it be via (our intranet) obviously there is certain things you don't want to do mass. You want to call folks in or tell each area of a company. But it needs to be passed on to the managers to go ahead to make sure they tell their employees.</p>
<p>If they (subordinates) have a question they come back to me for clarification.</p>	<p>I think having like the intranet we have that core place they also send out corporate emails that will be a full blanket to cover everyone so no one gets left out of the loop/ It keeps you completely informed as a whole rather than I've been stressing leaving people out.</p>
<p>I always leave the door open</p>	<p>"Hey, so and so probably interested in this. Let's bring them in, ask them if they want to bring anyone along, and involving other people in the company." So communication amongst other people who could have an interest in, who could be a stakeholder.</p>

Table 4.6 provides verbatim examples of interview responses when conceptualizing clarity as an organizational component of effective communication.

**Table 4.6 Examples of Responses Coded for Clarity**

Having things plainly stated.	Writing can be clearly understood.
“Do it this way, this way, this way.” Clarification, the person who is doing the communicating needs to be open for clarification.	Details. If the detailing is direct, then you know exactly what that person wants. You know what they expect from you. And they know what I need from them.
Um, like me dealing with customers if I feel like they’ve been answered everything that they needed to know. That they could actually walk away from the conversation with me with all their answers that they needed rather than one question leading to another where I feel like I’ve not answered their question completely.	They go into detail and tell you everything you need to know so there won’t be any mistake about.
You know if all my employees know what they are supposed to do, know how to do it, then I have less emails and less people coming tome saying, “What do I for this?”	I cannot do my job because they are not giving me the information that I need or they communicating the help that I need.

Table 4.7 provides a frequency count for all the interview responses coded on the individual and organizational levels.

**Table 4.7 Frequency Counts for Interview Data**

<b>Trait</b>		<b>Behavior</b>		<b>Knowledge</b>	
<i>Name</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Name</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Name</i>	<i>Number</i>
1. Personable	15	1. Skilled Delivery	25	1. Understanding the Situation	25
2. Nonverbal	12	2. Visible	18	2. Responsibility	12
3. Confidence	10	3. Preparedness	12	3. Appropriate Timing	9
4. Listening	8	4. Feedback	11		
5. Friendly	7	5. Rate	7		
6. Trust	5				
7. Being Laid-Back	5				
8. Humor	3				
9. Being Direct	2				
<b>Availability</b>		<b>Accuracy</b>		<b>Clarity</b>	
<i>Name</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Name</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Name</i>	<i>Number</i>
1. Accessible by All	13	1. Congruent Understanding	11	1. Full Explanation	9
2. Access to Specific People and Information	13	2. Facts	10	2. Plainly Stated	6
3. Open for Questions	6	3. End Result Correct	5	3. Clarification of Message	6

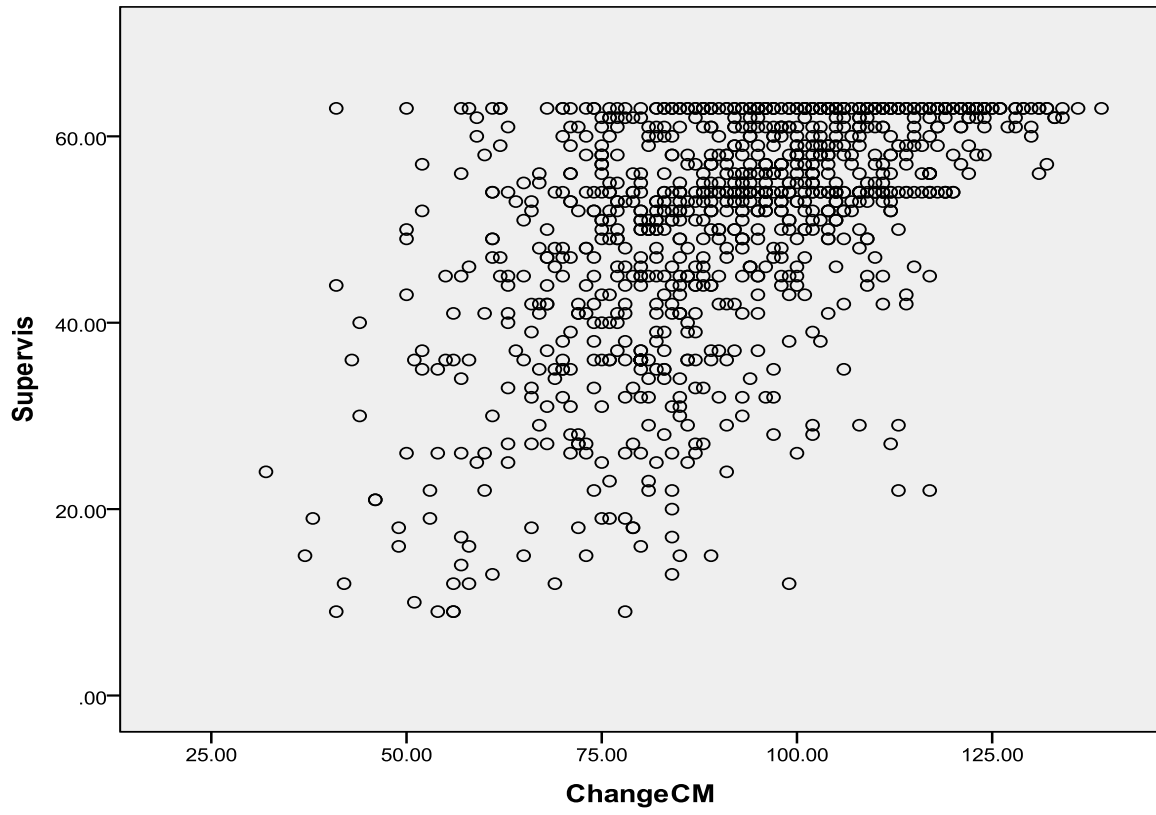


### *Research Question Two*

The second research question asks if there are any differences between males and females in their evaluations of change communication. An independent samples t-test was used to compute the components of this research question. From the t-test, it was concluded that there were no statistically significant differences between males and females in their evaluations of change communication ( $t = 1.829$ ,  $df = 316.711$ ,  $p < .05$ , two-tailed). Overall, evaluations of effective change communication for males (mean = 90.6) and females (mean = 93.4) show a slight agreement that change communication is effective. Although no statistically significant differences, both groups assign the investigated company a fair assessment regarding effective change communication.

### *Research Question Three*

The third research question asks if there is a relationship between the perception of effective supervisory communication and the overall perception of effective change communication. To view this relationship, a bivariate correlation was implemented between an overall score for the effectiveness of supervisory communication (items 19-27 on the survey questionnaire in Appendix B) and an overall score for the effectiveness of change communication (items 1-18 on the survey questionnaire in Appendix B). Figure 4.1 shows a scatter plot of the results and table 4.8 shows the results from the bivariate correlation.



**Figure 4.1 Scatter Plot for Supervisor and Change Communication**

**Table 4.8 Bivariate Correlation Results for Supervisor and Change Communication**

		<b>Correlations</b>	
		Supervisor	Change Comm
Supervisor	Pearson Correlation	1	.536 <sup>**</sup>
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	1074	995
Change Comm	Pearson Correlation	.536 <sup>**</sup>	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	995	1024

<sup>\*\*</sup>. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

From the bivariate correlation, the data suggests a moderate positive correlation between the evaluation of the effectiveness of supervisory communication and the evaluation of the overall effectiveness of change communication. That suggests that as the perception of effective supervisory communication increases so does the evaluation of effective change communication and vice versa. This result indicates a relationship between the variables.

#### *Research Question Four*

The fourth research question asks if there are any differences between males and females in their perceptions of change communication from different sources. Six sources (supervisors, fellow employees, the intranet, unit to unit, senior management, and the grapevine) were analyzed for this research question. A series of independent samples t-tests were utilized to

search for any differences between the sexes regarding these six sources. Table 4.9 provides a list of the results.

**Table 4.9 Independent Samples T-Test for Gender and Change Communication Sources**

	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Supervisor*	.795	969	.427
Fellow Employees*	.467	971	.641
Intranet*	1.542	971	.123
Unit to Unit*	1.712	965	.087
Senior Management*	2.353	969	.019
The Grapevine*	.466	971	.641

\* Equal variances assumed

From the series of t-tests, only the source of senior management held statistically significant differences for males (mean = 4.4) and females (mean = 4.7) in evaluations of change communication. Although statistically significant, both groups place the evaluation of change communication from senior management in the neutral or I Don't Know assessment of effectiveness. However, females are closer to agreeing that communication regarding change from senior management is effective. Table 4.10 provides the mean scores for each sources of change communication.

**Table 4.10 Mean Scores for Gender and Sources of Change Communication**

<b>Group Statistics</b>					
	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Supervisors	Females	754	5.1870	1.45797	.05310
	Males	217	5.0968	1.52899	.10379
Fellow Employees	Females	756	5.1151	1.26543	.04602
	Males	217	5.0691	1.32281	.08980
Intranet	Females	756	5.2844	1.20146	.04370
	Males	217	5.1382	1.32611	.09002
Unit to Unit	Females	752	4.3005	1.49124	.05438
	Males	215	4.1023	1.51588	.10338
Senior Management	Females	755	4.6675	1.53022	.05569
	Males	216	4.3843	1.66091	.11301
Grapevine	Females	756	4.6587	1.65099	.06005
	Males	217	4.5991	1.69438	.11502

Males and females slightly agreed that supervisors, fellow employees, and the intranet were effective at communicating change. Unit to unit, senior management, and the grapevine were placed in the neutral or I Don't Know evaluation of effective change communication. Overall, these results suggest that employees categorize some sources as undecided while others are seen as slightly effective.

#### *Research Question Five*

The fifth research question asks if there is a relationship between the perception of effective supervisory communication and the overall perception of the effectiveness of change communication from communication sources. A series of bivariate correlations were executed to see if any relationships did exist. Table 4.11 provides the results of the series of bivariate correlations.

**Table 4.11 Bivariate Correlations for Supervisory and Change Communication Sources**

		<b>Correlations</b>						
		Supervi	Superv	Fellow		Unit to	Senior	Grapevi
		sor	isor-	Employ	Intranet	Unit	Managem	ne
		Source	ees				ent	
Supervis or	Pearson	1	.751**	.240**	.417**	.352**	.452**	.014
	Correlation							
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.657
	N	1074	1067	1069	1069	1064	1067	1069
Supervis or - Source	Pearson	.751**	1	.338**	.509**	.429**	.554**	-.001
	Correlation							
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000	.000	.000	.000	.970
	N	1067	1105	1105	1105	1099	1102	1103
Fellow Employe es	Pearson	.240**	.338**	1	.354**	.439**	.264**	.464**
	Correlation							
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000		.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	1069	1105	1107	1107	1101	1104	1105
Intranet	Pearson	.417**	.509**	.354**	1	.551**	.658**	.041
	Correlation							
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000		.000	.000	.172
	N	1069	1105	1107	1107	1101	1104	1105
Unit to Unit	Pearson	.352**	.429**	.439**	.551**	1	.635**	.168**
	Correlation							
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000		.000	.000
	N	1064	1099	1101	1101	1101	1098	1099
Senior Manage ment	Pearson	.452**	.554**	.264**	.658**	.635**	1	-.039
	Correlation							
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000		.194
	N	1067	1102	1104	1104	1098	1105	1103
Grapevin e	Pearson	.014	-.001	.464**	.041	.168**	-.039	1
	Correlation							
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.657	.970	.000	.172	.000	.194	
	N	1069	1103	1105	1105	1099	1103	1107

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 4.11 highlights the relationship between the six sources of change communication (supervisors, fellow employees, intranet, unit to unit, senior management, and the grapevine) and the overall assessment of the effectiveness of supervisory communication. There is a very strong, positive relationship between the effectiveness of supervisory communication and the source of a supervisor for change communication ( $r = .751$ ). There is a moderate, positive relationship between the effectiveness of supervisory communication and the source of the intranet ( $r = .417$ ), unit to unit ( $r = .352$ ), and senior management ( $r = .452$ ) for change communication. There is a weak, positive relationship between the effectiveness of supervisory communication and the source of fellow employees ( $r = .240$ ) for change communication. There is virtually no correlation between the effectiveness of supervisory communication and the source of the grapevine ( $r = .014$ ) for change communication. These results suggest that there is a relationship between five of the communication sources and the overall assessment of effective supervisory communication. As the perception of the effectiveness of supervisory communication increases, then also does the perception of the effectiveness of change communication in congruence with the strength of the correlation.



## Chapter 5

### Discussion

The purpose of this study was to investigate effective change communication in the workplace. In total, the first research question was designed to provide an employee's conceptualization for what constitutes effective change communication. Research questions two through five were constructed to provide an additional metric of effective change communication. The discussion of the study results is organized around each research question including implications from the study and ideas for future research.

The first research question explored how employees conceptualize effective change communication. It was determined that employees evaluate on both an individual and organizational level. That is, employees use separate sets of criteria for individual and organizational assessments of effective change communication. On the individual level, employees evaluated effective change communication through a behavior, trait, and/or knowledge. On the organizational level, accuracy, availability, and clarity are how effective change communication is appraised.

This framework is significant in a variety of ways. First, this framework gives organizations a practical tool to evaluate and construct effective change communication messages. On an organizational level, messages can be checked for accuracy (Is all the information true?), availability (Is the message accessible in the appropriate venue(s) or through the appropriate person/people?), and clarity (Is the message written/spoken in the appropriate style and comprehension level for the employees?). Although availability will change given the

situation and organization, accuracy and clarity will be constant through all situations where effective change communication is the objective. Also, the individual level of analysis is important for organizations. For change communication distributors (i.e. direct supervisors), it will be important for them to be aware how their effectiveness will be evaluated. Although a trait is enduring and harder to alter for an individual, behavior and knowledge are two areas that organizations can provide additional assistance and training for those individuals who are responsible for the effectiveness of change communication messages.

The second aspect of significance from these findings is the further utilization of goal setting theory. If an organization strives to bring about identifiable changes and uses communication to that end, then effective change communication would be the attainment of the desired outcomes. Communication is the vehicle that organizational members use to achieve the desired outcomes. From this study, communication now has identifiable characteristics on both the individual and organizational levels that will assist in the realization of the desired outcomes. What's more, this study helps increase the generalizability and utility of goal setting theory. Being developed and mainly studied in the field of industrial and organizational psychology (Locke & Latham, 2006), this research endeavor highlights the component of communication that was overlooked or underestimated in previous studies.

The last aspect of significance that is associated with research question one's results is the conceptualization of a framework that eliminates previous validity issues. The organizational communication audit possibly was tapping into the idea that more communication is better or the communication "metamyth" propagated by Zimmerman, Sypher, and Haas (1996). This research endeavor intentionally excluded any investigation into amounts of information to ward

off the same issue. Also, the focus of this project was on effectiveness not satisfaction because a vast body of literature spanning multiple decades (Brooks, Callicot, & Seigerdt, 1979; Goldhaber et al., 1978; Gray, 2000; Hargie, Tourish, & Wilson 2002; Hogard et al., 2005; Opyt, Stewart, & Soy, 2001; Quinn & Hargie, 2004; Robson & Tourish, 2005; Scott, et al., 1999; Tourish & Mulholland 1997; Zimmerman, Sypher, & Haas, 1996) continuously supported the notion that employees were slightly dissatisfied with organizational communication. Rather than employing the measurement tool of satisfaction that seemed to be unchanging, it was important to develop a fresh measure of effectiveness to shed a new light on the current state of organizational communication. In addition, it was important to develop another measurement option for organizations that truly strived to measure communication effectiveness not satisfaction.

The second research question asked if there were any differences between males and females in their evaluations of effective change communication. It was found that there were no statistically significant differences between males and females in their overall assessment of effective change communication. Both groups slightly agreed that change communication was effective. This finding would be congruent with some previous research that finds no significant differences between the sexes. For instance, Wilkins and Andersen's (1991) meta-analysis of management communication and Rucker and Gendrin's (2007) evaluation of self-construals and direct communication style would both be examples of studies that found little to no significant differences between the sexes. Overall, both sexes (males = 90.6 and females = 93.4) slightly agreed that change communication is effective. This finding is encouraging for the company at hand but still leaves room for improvement. With the strategic implementation of the framework

from research question one, hopefully this evaluation can continue to increase and be seen as more effective from the employees.

The third research question asks if there is a relationship between the perception of effective supervisory communication and the overall perception of effective change communication. From the bivariate correlation between an overall assessment of the effectiveness of supervisory communication and change communication, a moderate, positive correlation ( $r = .536$ ) was detected. This suggests that the more positive the evaluation of effectiveness an employee has in regards to supervisory communication the more positive his or her evaluation of effectiveness for change communication and vice versa. This finding further illuminates and upholds previous notions of the importance of the supervisor relationship in general (Gilbreath & Benson, 2004; Hall, 2007; Hui, Chiu, Yu, Cheng, & Tse, 2007; Jablin, 1979; van Vuuren, de Jong, & Seydel, 2007), in goal setting theory (Latham & Locke, 1979; Latham & Saari, 1979), and in times of change (Bennebroek-Gravenhorst, Elving, & Werkman, 2006; Elving & Hansma, 2008; Fernandez & Rainey, 2006; Heracleous, 2002).

The fourth research question focuses on differences between males and females in their perceptions of effective change communication from six sources (supervisors, fellow employees, the intranet, unit to unit, senior management, and the grapevine). The category of senior management was the only category to be statistically significant ( $t = 2.353$ ,  $df = 969$ ,  $p < .05$ , two-tailed). Although significant, both groups placed senior management, unit to unit, and the grapevine in the neutral or I Don't Know category of effectiveness of communication. Supervisors, fellow employees, and the intranet were slightly agreed upon to be effective sources of change communication. All six source categories have room for improvement for the

investigated company. Through the implementation of the framework that was developed in research question one these sources have the potential to increase in effectiveness for both gender groups. Also, companies can implement aspects of change management plans to improve the effectiveness of these sources. For instance, Fernandez and Rainey's (2006) change management plan has a component of building internal support for change. This component that focuses on participation by all in the change process might allow for increased effectiveness in regards to unit to unit, the grapevine, supervisors, intranet, and fellow employees. This increased participation could lead to a higher level of knowledge (i.e. component for individual level of assessment for effectiveness) for employees to utilize when communicating about the change by the water cooler (i.e. the grapevine), when discussing the change at a meeting (i.e. fellow employees), posting questions and comments on the forum about the change online (i.e. the intranet), and when a supervisor is letting his or her team know about an update on the situation. Another concept of Fernandez and Rainey's (2006) change management plan is ensuring top-management support and commitment. This idea is congruent to the individual level assessment for effectiveness of behavior. This concept simply encourages senior management to adopt the change and make that adoption visible to employees. Additionally, Elving (2005) has a similar change management plan.

Research question five also focusing on these six sources for change communication but in conjunction with the perception of effective supervisory communication. A series of bivariate correlations showed a very strong, positive relationship between the effectiveness of supervisory communication and the source of a supervisor for change communication ( $r = .751$ ), a moderate, positive relationship between the effectiveness of supervisory communication and the sources of

the intranet ( $r = .417$ ), unit to unit ( $r = .352$ ), and senior management ( $r = .452$ ), and a weak, positive relationship between the effectiveness of supervisory communication and the source of fellow employees ( $r = .240$ ) for change communication. There is virtually no correlation between the effectiveness of supervisory communication and the source of the grapevine ( $r = .014$ ) for change communication. The strong, positive correlation between effective supervisory communication and the effectiveness of a supervisor as a source of change communication is not a surprising correlation. However, the other sources support the notion of a relationship between those individuals who perceive supervisory communication as effective also view other sources sans the grapevine as effective. This question further supports the notion of the importance of the role of the supervisor.

Research questions two through five strive to provide information to the researched company about their current standing in regards to effective change communication. With this knowledge, the organization can construct more accurate goals to assist in the prediction, explanation, and manipulation of performance on organizational tasks which is the purpose of goal setting theory (Lock & Latham, 2002). This information can also help in selecting specific and difficult goals which lead to a higher level of performance than vague goals (Locke, 1996; Locke & Latham, 2002; Locke & Latham, 2006). Now the company has concrete steps to implement (framework from research question one) and benchmarks garnered from research questions two through five to develop these specific and difficult goals versus “let’s communicate more effectively.” The information from research questions two through five can also help in establishing the degree of task complexity (Wood, Mento, & Locke, 1987) and assist in the directive function (Locke & Bryan, 1969; Rothkopf & Billington, 1979) and energizing

function (Bandura & Cervone, 1983; Bryan & Locke, 1967; Sales, 1970) that goals provide for an organization.

### *Limitations and Future Research*

A drawback to this research endeavor was its absorption in a much larger project focusing on the overarching concept of effective communication in the workplace. For instance, the preliminary participant interviews which drew the framework for the individual and organizational evaluations of effective change communication focused on the broader concept of effective organizational communication than effective change communication. Seeing that this was the first endeavor to conceptualize effective organizational communication outside of the realm of the organizational communication audit and the use of satisfaction as the measure, it was a judicious decision to utilize the same overarching framework for the smaller section of change communication. In addition, the company was undergoing major changes including layoffs, government intervention, and moving to a new facility. Nevertheless, it would be beneficial for future research to re-examine the framework specifically for effective change communication to ensure that the extrapolation holds true.

Another major drawback was a restriction that was placed by the researched company. Just as the data was split between males and females, it was also supposed to be split between managers (someone who supervised the activities of at least one person) and non-managers. However, the company did not adhere to this request. Therefore, the data was examined based on the perception of effective supervisory communication. Future research should include the breakdown of the data between managers and non-managers to see if any statistically significant

differences are present between these two groups. Previous research (Felts & Jorgensen, 2008; Jablin, 1979; Jablin, 1982; Katz & Kahn, 1966; Lee & Jablin, 1995; Zaremba, 2003) supports the notion that there would be differences between managers and non-managers in terms of effective change communication.

Being that this is the first attempt to gauge effective change communication with the current survey questionnaire, there are no validity scores to report at this time. Further research is needed to test and capture this component for the survey questionnaire.

### *Conclusions*

Overall, this study attempted to investigate effective change communication in the workplace. This attempt strived to provide organizations and researchers with a pragmatic and useful tool to evaluate effective change communication free of validity issues that have plagued audit research and utilizing theory based research (i.e. goal setting theory) in an otherwise atheoretical and problem-driven research area. Although not free of flaws and with many more questions left to answer, this project is the spring board into an area of research that has the potential to assist organizations in a very literal and measureable way.

As such, researchers, practitioners, and organizational members now have the ability to conceptualize this elusive “cloud-like” concept of effective change communication to further research and provide a service to the modern organization and its employees’ experiences with change communication.



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## Appendix A

### Communication Effectiveness in Organizations

#### Interview Guide

1. Describe your duties and responsibilities.
2. Tell me what it's like to work here.
3. Describe how communication takes place in your office.

Transition – I would like to talk with you for a few minutes about communication

4. What makes communication effective in your company?  
-What makes communication ineffective?
5. Tell me about the kinds of work situations people experience here that require communication.
6. I am not interested in names but I am interested in a time when you witnessed effective communication within your organization. Describe for me that situation in which communication worked well.
7. I am not interested in names but I am interested in a time when you witnessed ineffective communication within your organization. Describe for me that situation in which communication worked poorly.

Transition – I would like to talk with you for a few minutes about communication in particular situations

8. Describe how people communicate when in meetings or working in teams.  
What makes communication effective during meetings? – Ineffective?  
When people work in groups? – Ineffective?
9. Describe how supervisors communicate with subordinates.  
What makes communication effective between supervisors and subordinates?  
What makes communication ineffective between supervisors and subordinates?

Transition – I would like to talk with you for a few minutes about communication and individuals.

10. Are people born to be effective communicators or can effective communication skills be learned?

11. How people communicate with you when you started working here? How do they communicate with you now?

12. I am not interested in names but I am interested in you describing for me a person in your organization who is an effective communicator. What is it about this person that makes him/her an effective communicator?

13. I am not interested in names but I am interested in you describing for me a person in your organization who is an ineffective communicator. What is it about this person that makes him/her an ineffective communicator?

Transition -- I would like to talk with you for a few minutes about how you determine when communication is effective.

14. How can you tell when communication is effective in an organization?

15. Companies measure many things such as turnover or employee performance. How can a company measure the effectiveness of communication?

16. How does your company measure the effectiveness of communication?

Is there anything else that you would like to tell me about communication in your organization?



## Appendix B

### Communication Survey

Dear Employee:

This questionnaire is designed to find out how you feel about communication and related issues at X Organization. This study is being conducted by Dr. John Haas and Amy Harp from the University of Tennessee, in cooperation with XX. If our study is to be useful, it is important that you answer each question as thoughtfully and frankly as possible.

Your answers to these questions will be kept completely confidential. All questionnaires will be taken to the University of Tennessee for data analysis. No one from X Organization will have access to individual answers.

Please return the completed survey to the specially marked box\_\_\_\_\_


Thank you for your cooperation and assistance. We hope you find this questionnaire interesting and thought provoking.

#### General Instructions

Most of the questions ask you to circle a number on a scale that appears to the right of the item. Choose the answer that best matches how you feel about the statement. Then circle the number on the scale that best matches how you feel about the statement. For example, if you were asked how much you agree with the statement,

I enjoy the weather in this area

and you strongly agree, you would circle the number under "Strongly Agree" like this:

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Slightly Disagree	I Don't Know	Slightly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
12) I enjoy the weather in this areas	1	2	3	4	5	6	

Notice that the scale descriptions may be different in parts of the questionnaire. For example, we may ask whether you agree or disagree, whether you are satisfied or dissatisfied, or whether you think something is likely or not to happen, etc. So, be sure to read the special instructions that appear in italics at the beginning of each section. Also be sure to read the scale descriptions before choosing your answers.

### Communicating Change

Below are 17 items addressing communicating change at X Organization. Please tell us how much you agree or disagree with each of these statements as a description of how things are at X Organization.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Slightly Disagree	I Don't Know	Slightly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. Changes at X Org are communicated effectively.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2. When change occurs at X Org, I am the last to know about it.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3. Changes that are caused by internal forces (e.g., personnel changes) are communicated well.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4. I feel that information about change is purposefully kept from me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
5. Decisions about change are freely shared with all employees.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
6. Changes that are caused by external forces (e.g., the economy, government regulations, etc.) are communicated well.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
7. I would be best described as someone who tends to wait for information about change to reach me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8. I feel that information about change is shared with me at the appropriate time.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Slightly Disagree	I Don't Know	Slightly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
9. Policy or procedure changes that impact my job are communicated effectively.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
10. Communicating changes about policies or procedures is not done effectively.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
11. When there is a change to my duties and responsibilities, X Organization communicates that change well.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
12. People do not share information at X Organization.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
13. Change at X Org is not communicated effectively.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
14. Change is not communicated to me in a timely fashion.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
15. When there is a change to my duties and responsibilities, X Org does not communicate that change effectively.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
16. People share information at X Organization.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
17. I would be best described as someone who seeks out information about change at X Organization.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

### Sources of Information about Change

Below are seven potential sources of information about change at X Organization. Please tell us how much you agree or disagree with each of these statements as a description of how things are at X Organization.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Slightly Disagree	I Don't Know	Slightly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
18. Change is communicated effectively by:							
a. Supervisors	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
b. Fellow Employees	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
c. Intranet	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
d. Unit to Unit	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
e. Senior Management	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
f. The Grapevine	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

### Supervisory Communication

*Below are nine questions addressing supervisory communication at X Organization. Please tell us how much you agree or disagree with each of these statements as a description of how things are at X Organization.*

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Slightly Disagree	I Don't Know	Slightly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
19. My supervisor is a willing, receptive listener.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
20. My supervisor effectively communicates work expectations.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
21. My supervisor is skilled at negotiating conflicts with employees.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
22. My supervisor makes clear the goals of X Organization.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
23. My supervisor is willing to share information.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
24. My supervisor communicates effectively with upper management.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
25. My supervisor knows what he/she is talking about.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
26. My supervisor is skilled at building effective workplace relationships.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
27. My supervisor communicates that he/she is interested in my career development.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

*Background Information:* Finally, we should like to have some background information for statistical purposes. The questions are very general and the answers will not identify you. We do not want your name:

28. What is your sex?

Male

Female

## Vita

Amy Lynn Harp was born in Knoxville, Tennessee on September 18, 1986. She was raised in Jellico, Tennessee where she graduated from Jellico High School as valedictorian of the class of 2005. After completing high school, Amy attended the University of Tennessee, Knoxville and received a Bachelor of Arts degree in Communication in 2009. During her undergraduate career, Amy studied abroad in France and Belgium and participated as president of the Communication Studies Club among various other activities and affiliations.

After the completion of her bachelor's degree, Amy continued her education in the School of Communication Studies at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville to receive a Master's of Science in Communication and Information in August 2011. During her time in the graduate program, Amy was a teaching assistant who taught public speaking, facilitated the internship program for undergraduate students, and produced alumni publications.