

Chapter 13

Becoming Who You Are Through Authentic Organizational Communication

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ABSTRACT

Business communication is comprised of standards designed for efficiency. Like commodities, official correspondences are often indistinguishable. Adherence to templates provides uniformity in arrangement if not also content. When this approach works well, it is both efficient and effective. However, the universal applicability of this paradigm is suspect. Such standardization stifles creativity. When one is responsible for communicating insights in business, a radical break with convention might be beneficial in terms of gaining attention and provoking thought. Deviating from established norms is risky. Further, while one learns key tenants of business communication at work and in college, one is seldom informed as to when to stop following the rules and forge a new communicative path forward. In this chapter, existential insights are combined with communication theory to illustrate how authentic organizational communication can assist in one becoming who one is while also communicating insights in a business in a way that the form and content are strategically aligned.

INTRODUCTION

Business communication is comprised of standards (Mechenbier, 2011). Internally, these stylistic choices are designed for operational improvements since homogenization is often associated with efficiency (Church & Naugler, 2019; Davis, 2016). Externally, communication design choices are influenced by considerations of organizational branding (Abecassis-Moedas & Benghozi, 2012). Like commodities on a production line, official correspondences are often indistinguishable from one another. This is by design. Once generated, standardized templates allow workers to *fill in the blanks*, and be assured that the document is consistent with general expectations. Adherence to templates provides uniformity in

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arrangement if not also content. Benefits of this approach exist for supervisors and subordinates alike. Workers have the confidence of clear expectations. Managers have the ability to scan documents quickly and locate the desired information. Given these positive attributes, why would anybody think of deviating from the operational norm? As the adage asserts, there is no sense in reinventing the wheel.

When this approach works well, it is both efficient and effective. However, the universal applicability of this paradigm is suspect. There are occasions for which organizational templates become barriers to effective communication. Through standardization it is possible that internal consumers of information are only passively reading the document, as errors frequently increase with routine procedures (Byrne & Davis, 2006). This could adversely affect organizational decision making. Additionally, standardization, by design, stifles creativity. This limits authenticity and could eventually erode one's confidence as one perpetually subordinates self to organization. When one is simply communicating transactional information within an organization these limitations are perhaps of only minor significance. When the information being conveyed is sufficiently novel, these limitations could be consequential if not also detrimental. This suggests there is a need for those in organizations to distinguish when, where and how insights in business are to be effectively communicated.

When one is responsible for communicating insights in business, a radical break with convention might be beneficial in terms of gaining attention and provoking thought; however, deviating from established norms is perceived as risky even though there isn't an apparent relationship between career advancement and compliance (Carmeli, Shalom & Weisberg, 2007). Further, while one learns key tenants of business communication at work and in college, one is seldom informed as to when to stop following the rules and forge a new communicative path forward. Stated somewhat differently, people are enculturated for compliance and obedience but not for deviation and disobedience. Each approach offers something to organizations and individuals. Value can be derived through an exploration of the tension which exists organizationally and individually between these diametrically opposed forms of being and communicating.

In this chapter, existential insights are combined with communication theory to illustrate how authentic organizational communication can assist in one becoming who one is while also more effectively communicating business insights in a way that form and content are strategically aligned. To do this, an interpretative qualitative research approach was used. The methodological approach is presented in the following section entitled, *making sense of what others have talked about*. After the methodology is presented, four areas are developed. The first conceptual area (i.e., *coloring inside the lines*) focuses on the notions of obedience and compliance. The second theme (i.e., *deviating from the path*) explores the notion of disobedience and noncompliance. The third thematic area (i.e., *authenticity and performance*) examines the existential aspects associated with owning one's decisions to either comply or deviate from organizational expectations as one communicates insights in business. The last section (i.e., *communicating insights*) is presented to explore how one might decide to navigate the terrain between compliance and noncompliance in respect to organizational templates.

MAKING SENSE OF WHAT OTHERS HAVE TALKED ABOUT

Interpretative qualitative research forms the core of this study. The empirical material of analysis was derived from a semi-structured literature review with an interpretative frame informed by Critical Management Studies (CMS) perspectives. Since this research was based on a synthesis of previous research, one might say that the focus of this study is on *making sense of what others have talked about*. Making

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