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The Juice Is Loose?: A Qualitative Study of Employees' Perceptions of Informal and Formal Communication Channels

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ABSTRACT

An abstract of the thesis of Warren Jerome Brown for the Master of Science in Speech Communication presented November 3, 1997.

Title: The Juice Is Loose? A Qualitative Study Of Employees' Perceptions of Informal and Formal Communication Channels.

The purpose of this study was to determine how employees perceive formal and informal communication channels within their organizational experiences. This study sought to answer two questions: One, what are employees' perceptions of formal and informal communication channels? Two, what similar or dissimilar perceptions of formal and informal communication channels emerge from interview and observational data?

I selected eight respondents from the greater Olympia, Washington and Seattle, Washington areas. Each respondent was purposely selected based upon their rich experiences across different sizes of and public/private structures of organizations. Additionally, I conducted seven observations within a medium-sized (50 - 75 employee) public employer. I analyzed data through a qualitative approach. Upon my review of the data, six themes, or categories, common to informal and formal channels emerged.

These emergent categories are **personal gain**, **organizational culture**, **costs of using the communication channel**, **characteristics**, **organizational structure**, and **personal behaviors**.

Four findings were unanticipated. One, the respondents did not report any meaningful distinctions between public and private organizations. Most respondents suggested that the size of the organization created a need for either formal or informal communication channels. Two, respondents noted that personal behaviors of other co-workers and supervisors affected how they perceived the exchange of information through formal and informal communication channels. Three, respondents perceived certain employees as informational leaders within the organization; this suggests that formal and informal leadership is a valuable approach to understanding organizational experiences. Four, both personal power and organizational power are perceived to affect the exchange of information through communication channels.

I suggest further research in order to clarify the relationships between the emergent themes and the varied types of organizations; to understand how power affects perception of communication channels; and to analyze which emergent category has the most significance in the exchange of information through formal and informal communication channels.

THE JUICE IS LOOSE? A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF EMPLOYEES' PERCEPTIONS OF INFORMAL AND FORMAL COMMUNICATION CHANNELS

by

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

UNDERSTANDING EMPLOYEES' PERCEPTIONS OF INFORMAL AND FORMAL COMMUNICATION CHANNELS

"An organization can be described as an activity system that is goal-directed and boundary-maintaining" (Turow, 1997, p. 22).

Turow's definition implies that organizations are both enabling and constraining in many ways. Organizations enable employees by providing access to resources that will help them achieve their goals. On the other hand, organizations constrain employees by controlling, restricting, and directing employees, away from various resources within the organization.

Turow's (1997) quote implies that providing access to and withholding access from employees are ways of exercising power within an organization. Part of organizational power is based upon providing and restricting information as a resource. As the cliché pronounces -- information is power. Therefore, one of the most important resources in organizations is information. In fact, Simon (1973) argues that organizations should be viewed as information processing systems.

Certainly, information is an important resource in organizations. The exchange of information corresponds to higher productivity, higher commitment, increased morale, lower burnout, and lower absenteeism (Frone & Major, 1988; Huff et al., 1989; Nelson, 1989).

Within an organization, information is exchanged through various channels and tends to be regulated in these channels. The description of channels include upward, downward, lateral, internal, and external (Kreps, 1986). The exchange of information occurs in both formal and informal channels (March & Simon, 1958). Formal channels include formal meetings, office memoranda, and policies. Informal channels include gossip, secrets, and friendships as sources of the information. Employee discourse practices, or how we communicate to others within an organization, is important in the exchange of information.

> The organization has no objective reality, but rather is created daily by the linguistic enactments of its members in the course of the everyday communications between each other, that is, by the way in which members talk, hold discourse, share meanings (Mumby, 1988, p. 96).

Mumby implies that through discourse, we frame and illustrate our organizational experiences. Therefore, as we frame and illustrate our organizational experiences, we are constructing a perception of our organizational experiences. I am interested in studying the perceptions of employees in order to better understand their organizational experiences.

Therefore, information, an organizational resource, is important to this process of perception and power. After all, 80 percent of the workday is related to gathering, disseminating, and monitoring information (Frone & Major, 1988).

Prior research on communication channels is not explicit about how power is used within the exchange of information. However, research implies power exists because employees attempt to gain access to resources. Interestingly, we can identify the issue of power through the different channels of communication. From our own experiences, we can identify when important information was not available to us and what we did to obtain the information.

Additionally, the literature on power deals with actual organizational resources and the way the organization frames those resources as available or not available. However, for the most part the literature on power does not explicitly deal with individual perceptions of the constraints upon and the empowerment of information. Also, the literature on communication channels does not address perceptions of how information, as a controlled organizational resource, is exchanged.

With these gaps in the literature, it is important to understand how individuals' perceptions of communication channels could be placed in the larger context of power and organizational communication. Understanding employees' perceptions of the exchange of information through formal and informal communication channels is a good way to ground this inquiry.

Specifically, I will ask, "How do employees perceive formal and informal communication channels and the exchange of information as a resource through the channels?" Also, "Do employees perceive similarities or differences in these formal and informal communication channels?"

JUSTIFICATION OF STUDY

The significance of this study is three-fold. One, there is a void in the literature that addresses the interrelationships between formal and informal communication channels. Currently, the majority of research analyzes formal and informal communication channels as containing separate and distinctive attributes (Johnson et al., 1994).

Two, this study contributes to the small but growing field of qualitative organizational communication research. Gradually, organizational communication studies are moving away from quantitative approaches and are attempting to gain understanding about what organizational members believe and why (Rosen, 1991). This study will add credence to qualitative research measures in organizational communication.

Three, this project tests and extends the theoretical body on communication channels. Currently, the body of organizational studies utilizes both case-study approaches and functional business studies that concentrate on managing the use of communication channels (Zaremba, 1989). This study, by taking a interpretive approach, or understanding other's perceptions, will extend the body of literature. The following chapter describes the use of relevant terms that appear in later discussions.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

DEFINITION OF TERMS

This study draws upon literature from multiple, interrelated fields. Specifically, this study draws from the fields of Speech Communication, Business Communication, and Sociology. Within these fields, both academics and organizational practitioners use a variety of organizational communication terms. For those reasons, the following terms and definitions are most applicable to this study. The following terms will assist the reader in grasping concepts in the ensuing literature review.

1. **Gatekeepers** -- This term refers to employees who control the flow of access to, or control information from, other employees. Occasionally, this control of access or information occurs as part of the employee's position (Bowditch, 1990). For example, if an employee in personnel withholds information about an imminent pay-freeze, that individual is acting as a gatekeeper.
2. **Opinion Leaders** -- In an organization there are varying levels of influence between employees. This variation in influence occurs regardless of the employee's position. In this circumstance, opinion leaders emerge due to their access to information and their interaction with others (Bowditch, 1990; Terry, 1993). For example, some employees are sought for their special

knowledge on an issue that may be incompatible from their organizational title or positional expertise.

3. **Isolates** -- Mishra (1990, p. 221) tells us that isolates "are not privy to any information, do not hear the information and thus cannot pass it along."
4. **Liaisons** -- Miller (1995, p. 103) defines liaisons as an "individual who links two or more groups together but is not a member of any group." For example, if "A" tells a story about his/her organization to "B", "B", who is not a member of the organization, passes the information on to a competing organization ("C").
5. **Bridgers or Key Communicators** -- An individual within the communication network who sends information to someone outside the network (Miller, 1995; Mishra, 1990). "These people are the ones primarily responsible for the success of the grapevine" (Mishra, 1990, p. 221).
6. **Dead-enders or Baggers** -- An individual who hears information but does not, or fails to, pass the information to others (Miller, 1995).
7. **Grapevine** -- The informal transmission of information through an organization. This information flows through social groups and other informal relationships that develop due to interpersonal and social interactions (Allport and Postman, 1947; Davis, 1953; Kreps, 1986). For example, "A" hears through his/her friend ("B") that the organization will begin to lay off employees.

8. **Rumor-mill** -- Rumors are informational accountings that are based on falsity. The rumor and the rumor mill occur under an environment of stress and uncertainty (Davis & O'Connor, 1977; Mishra, 1990). For example, "A" hears through his/her friend ("B") that "A" will be laid off. However, this story was not based upon any existing data.
9. **Gossip** -- Gossip is the act of an individual who hears a rumor. Subsequently, the individual then advances stories or implications if the rumor becomes the truth. Therefore, gossip is not characterized as being false (Mishra, 1990). For example, if "A" hears from his/her friend ("B") that the organization will lay off employees, "B" then adds that if the lay off occurs, the employees will sue the organization.
10. **Hierarchy** -- This term refers to an employee's position within an organization scale. Generally, this terms notes a chain of command. For example, nonsupervisory workers are positioned at the lower end of the scale, whereas presidents and chief executive officers are at the highest position of the scale.
11. **Communication Channel(s)** -- Within an organization, information is sent and received. The means of sending and receiving information is through communication channels. Communication channels can be both inside the organization or outside the organization. For example, internal channels

are means to send information to and from employees, whereas external channels may link the organization to customers.

12. **Formal Communication Channels** -- This term describes organizationally sanctioned information (March & Simon, 1958). These channels are organizationally planned and supported (Johnson, 1992). Formal communication is typified by communication that follows the organizational chart. For example formal channels include, but are not limited to, hierarchical oral communication, formal memoranda, policies, and face-to-face meetings.

13. **Informal Communication Channels** -- Informal communication channels are seen and understood as being unplanned and formed by the social environment within the organization (Davis, 1953). Informal communication channels include, but are not limited to, grapevine, rumor mill, or talking to friends in another work unit to help solve a work problem.

14. **Organization** -- The term's definition includes a group of individuals -- at least three or more individuals -- who are arranged for the purpose of achieving a specific goal (DeVito, 1988); often there are multiple compatible and incompatible goals in an organization. By definition, attending church is acting in an organization. However, in this study respondents use "organization" specifically to describe their perceptions of business environments.

THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

The purpose of this literature review is two-fold: One, to establish the foundation of this study by grounding the study in the context of power; two, to clarify and illustrate the relevant theories of organizational communication channels.

The ensuing literature review provides four discussions that support understanding employees' perceptions of formal and informal communication channels. First, in order to create a context for the study, I will explore theories of *power*. Second, I will summarize *formal and informal communication channel* research. Third, I will discuss and describe theories of *communication networks* and how they are positioned in the communication channel literature. Fourth, I will discuss pertinent theories of *network communication roles*. In the final section, I will summarize apparent gaps in the literature and suggest directions for this study. But first, it is necessary to understand how power frames the exchange of information as an organizational resource.

A Review on Power

> What makes an up an up and a down a down? An up can do more to a down than a down can do to an up. That's what keeps an up up and a down down. Ups tend to talk to each other and study the downs, asking the downs what's up, or what's coming down, for that matter (Terry, 1993, p. 194).

The purpose of this study is to understand employees' perceptions of informal and formal communication channels. In order to understand employees' perceptions, power inevitably needs to be addressed; this is either because power is the issue, power is related to an issue, or the exercise of power directs or constrains the exchange of information.

The quote from Terry (1993) implies that the metaphors of "ups" and "downs" embody the vested interests of groups of individuals. Being either an "up" or a "down" illustrates operating in an organization. Within an organization, Mumby (1988) argues that the exercise of power occurs when one group frames the interests of another group. By framing interests, organizations constrain or enable the exchange of information to or from employees.

Therefore, power through the exchange of information is "largely delimited by the communication process" (Mumby, 1988, p. 3). In this context, the "up/down" metaphor indicates how a powerful group uses the exchange of information as an enabling or constraining resource in an organization.

In the literature, organizational hierarchy represents power. Also, personal roles and authority across individuals illustrate power. In these contexts, it is important to understand power as directing various resources, including the exchange of information. Therefore, further analysis of three perspectives of power is useful. These three perspectives include the critical approach, the traditional approach, and the symbolic approach.

First, the critical approach to power appears in Marx (1967) and Frankfurt school theories (Habermas, 1971). These critical theories explore the maintenance of organizational power through social, economic, and communicative relationships, or what is called base-superstructure relationships (Littlejohn, 1996). Generally, the critical paradigm identifies three components of organizational power: One, that organizational structures benefit some groups over others; two, communication within an organization is a means of social control; three, the purpose of analyzing organizational structures is for social transformation, not just understanding.

Mumby (1988, 1993) and Deetz (1982, 1983) furthered critical research by explaining power within organizational discourse and practices. Mumby and Deetz identified two approaches to critical study. The first approach is the descriptive hermeneutic approach. The hermeneutic approach utilizes the interpreting of texts, understanding the context of communication, and analyzing symbolic practices within an organization (Mumby, 1988). The second approach is the hermeneutics of suspicion (Mumby, 1988). This principle uses a descriptive approach but critically sees organizations as material sites of power and domination.

Second, the traditional approach to power appears in Taylor's (1911), Weber's (1946, 1947), and Fayol's (1949) theories. The traditional approach describes power as being constantly used and possessed by certain managerial groups. The traditional approach studies power and its impact on job satisfaction, productivity, and morale (Walton, 1959; Townsend, 1965; Huff et al., 1989).

Although sharing the same perspective on power, Taylor (1911) and Weber (1946, 1947) held different ideas on studying organizational power. Taylor (1911) favored a prescriptive approach, whereas Weber (1946, 1947), identified an "ideal type" for organizational studies. Also, Weber (1946, 1947) argues that bureaucracies personify being closed from the outside world, having hierarchical control, and centralized power.

According to Weber (1946, 1947), legitimate authority within an organization is a base of power. This legitimate authority occurs along the traditional lines of hierarchy. "The most common form of authority stems from the organization's rules and regulations" (Littlejohn, 1996, p. 307). Therefore, the constructed rules of the organization perpetuate the role of managers as holding authority over workers.

Most traditional power theories identify a clearly-defined hierarchy, a centralization of decision making, and a division of labor from management (Littlejohn, 1996). Communication, in the traditional view of power, complies with rules of the hierarchy and vertical communication. Vertical communication indicates that the "ups" direct the exchange of information to the "downs".

Third, the symbolic approach appears in Pacanowsky & O'Donnell-Trujillo (1983), amongst others. The symbolic approach sees power as "a product of communicative interactions and relationships" (Miller, 1995, p. 130). The foundation to the symbolic approach is organizational culture. Culture indicates that "each organization has its own way of doing what it does" (Pacanowsky & O'Donnell-Trujillo, 1983, p. 128). Therefore, within each organization, power becomes a product of the culture.

Although the traditional, critical, and symbolic approaches have dissimilar models of power, they share a definition that includes concepts of authority, control of resources, centralized control, and control of communication. Morgan (1986), drawing from literature on power, describes fourteen sources of power. Of the fourteen sources of power, four sources directly are relevant to this study. Relevant sources include: Control of scarce resources; control of decision-making processes; control of knowledge and information; interpersonal alliances, networks, and the control of the informal organization (Morgan, 1986, p. 159). Therefore, an illustration of power in organizational communication is the "ups", who are information rich, controlling information over the "downs", who are the information poor (Terry, 1993; Kreps, 1986).

Consequently, the exchange of information produces and reproduces relationships of power. However, the literature on power does not explicitly deal with individual perceptions of the exchange of information. Additionally, the literature on communication channels does not address perceptions of how information, as a resource, is exchanged.

Clearly, a gap in the literature dealing with perception exists. However, the literature review on power indicates a link between information, as an organizational resource, and the use of power to control organizational resources. For that reason, this study adds a missing link between organizational power and the perception of the exchange of information through communication channels. The following sections discuss the relevant literature that supports the study of employees' perceptions of formal and informal communication channels.

Informal and Formal Communication Channels

The purpose of this study is to understand employees' perceptions of informal and formal communication channels. Therefore, it is essential to review the literature on formal and informal channels. Although power helps to frame how individuals perceive information as a resource, the literature on formal and informal channels provides grounded principles for the exchange of information inside the organization.

All organizations present their members with a variety of communication channels. These communication channels are theoretically separated into formal and informal systems. Both formal and informal communication channels are important systems that operate mutually within an organization's communication network (Kreps, 1986). This study analyzes perceptions of the interrelationships between formal and informal communication channels.

Research history indicates that formal and informal channels contain six generally shared but variable attributes (Johnson et al., 1994). The first attribute of formal and informal communication channels is the "personal salience" of the information (Johnson et al., 1994). "Personal salience" refers to employees seeking recognition through the use of a communication channel. Specifically, Allen (1977) asserts that high achievers in the work-force tend to use multiple channels to communicate to people at many levels within the organization. Additionally, successful employees tend to use communicative feedback in order to obtain positive performance reviews (Ashford & Cummings, 1985).

Conversely, research history indicates that individuals use communication channels in order to satisfy undefinable subjective needs (Mishra, 1990). Generally, these needs can include obtaining attention, manipulating situations, or can relate to power (Mishra, 1990; Koenig, 1985).

The second attribute of formal and informal communication channels is "effect salience" (Johnson, et. al, 1994). "If an individual believes there are costs (for example, loss of self-esteem) associated with a particular channel, this will reduce his or her level of channel usage" (Johnson et al., 1994, p.113).

The literature includes physical locations and distractions as other attributes of "effect salience" (Allen, 1970).

The third attribute is "cultural salience" (Johnson et al., 1994). "Strong cultures can also severely restrict the content and the communication patterns available to individuals" (Johnson et al., 1994, p.113). Generally, "cultural salience" embodies communicative practices that assist in the performance of organizational goals and missions.

Research indicates that informal communication channels are highly effective in motivating employees, creating corporate cultures, and supplementing the corporate identity (Townsend, 1965; Davis, 1973; Training & Development, 1994). However, others argue that formal communication channels are responsible for introducing and sustaining organizational values through the telling of stories (Wilkins, 1984; Mumby, 1988).

The fourth attribute is "characteristics of the communication channel" (Johnson et al., 1994, p. 115). This attribute embodies the internal traits of information. Specifically, Mishra (1990) identifies internal traits of information as credibility, speed, and trust.

Additional research supporting communication characteristics includes external traits. These external traits include proximity of employees, number of organizational levels, and number of sequential links in the communicative system (Weedman, 1992; Jablin, 1987).

The fifth attribute is the "utility of the communication channel" (Johnson et al., 1994, p. 115). This attribute refers to sending and receiving relevant information. Glauser (1984) analyzed the issue of information overload as a central element that requires careful selection of the communication channel.

The sixth attribute relates to the "usage of the communication channel" (Johnson et al., 1994, p.116). Channel use is different between employee inquiry about company concerns versus employee inquiry about personal matters (Galpin, 1995; Mishra, 1990). Generally, employees rely on informal channels for information on personal matters over corporate concerns (Galpin, 1995; Mishra, 1990).

Additionally, research suggests that formal communication channels rarely satisfy the informational needs of employees (Davis, 1953; Davis & O'Connor, 1977; Kreps, 1986; Johnson, 1992; Training & Development, 1994). Organizational members are continuously trying to minimize uncertainty within the organization. In their effort to minimize uncertainty, better understand organizational life, and direct their own activities, informal channels become more frequently used (Kreps and Thornton, 1984).

Generally, researchers disagree as to the importance of informal channels, like the grapevine. Some suggest that the concept of grapevine should be eradicated due to the negative associations with formal communication (Davis and O'Connor, 1977; Townsend, 1965). Other researchers argue that informal communication channels are useful for the exchange of personal and organizational information (Davis, 1973; Taylor and Farace, 1976; Training & Development, 1994). Some assert that informal communication channels are more trustworthy than formal communication channels (Walton, 1959; Rogers and Agarwala-Rogers, 1976).

In an attempt to link the literature on power with the literature on formal and informal channels, Kreps (1986) and Goldhaber (1978) argue that power leads to the selection of certain communication channels over other channels.

Individuals who lack formal power within the organization may use informal communication channels to exert power. These same individuals are "seldom recognized by the formal power structure of the organization as being either legitimate or powerful" (Kreps, 1986, p. 203). These types of individuals have no formal positions of power in the organization, but seek to gather information to create perceived power and the ability to influence the behavior of other employees.

On the other hand, formal communication channels that follow the organizational hierarchy consist of power and centralized control (Goldhaber et al., 1978). Additionally, Weber (1947) characterizes a bureaucracy as an organization that depends on formal channels and order as means of control.

As seen through the literature, both theories of communication channels and theories of power ground and give significance to understanding individuals' perceptions of channels. However, neither theoretical body indicates how perception affects the use of formal and informal channels. Also, neither theoretical body addresses how individuals perceive their role in the exchange of information. The following section explores how communication network literature discusses the exchange of information.

Communication Networks

The literature on communication networks establishes a link between the perception of power, the use of communication channels, and how employees perceive their role in the exchange information.

A communication network is an "overall configuration of communication relationships" (Johnson, 1992, p. 103). Communication networks do not necessarily follow the organizational chart. A communication network is simply any arrangement of organizational members who link together through their communication, either formally or informally (Monge & Eisenberg, 1987; Davis & O'Connor, 1953).

This section reviews five attributes of communication networks. The first attribute is content of the network (Farace, et al, 1977). This attribute applies to the information that is passed through the network (Farace, et al, 1977). The second attribute is the network mode (Miller, 1995). The network mode describes the communication medium that creates links in the network (Weedman, 1992). For example, the use of computers to exchange information is a mode. The third attribute is the network density (Kreps, 1986). Network density refers to the ratio of current links to possible links (Monge & Eisenberg, 1987). For example, network density is how many individuals currently have information versus how many in the future may receive information. The fourth attribute is the network pattern (Mishra, 1990). These patterns include the circle, all-channel, wheel, chain, and 'Y' networks (Mishra, 1990). Network patterns illustrate the flow of information across individuals. The fifth attribute is network roles (Rogers & Agarwala-Rogers, 1976). Network roles will be further discussed in the following section.

The literature on communication networks indicates various effects on the organizational communication system: Communication networks affect the formation of organizational tasks and the empowerment of communication flow (Scharpf, 1977); organizational participation (Hartman et al., 1990); group and individual communicative roles (Weedman, 1992); and complexities of hierarchical communication patterns within a formalized organizational structure (Jacobson & Seashore, 1951).

"Communication networks" are one of four categories housed within the larger concept of "communication structure" (Johnson, 1992). The concept of "communication structure" includes four lower-order concepts: One, communication networks; two, formal organizational structure; three, communication gradients; and four, organizational culture (Jablin et al., 1987; Johnson, 1992).

Additionally, there are variations within the literature as to the meaning of "communication structure". Some researchers used "communication networks" in place of "communication structure" (Miller, 1995; Monge & Eisenberg, 1987; Kreps, 1986; Kreps & Thornton, 1984; Jacobson & Seashore, 1951). These researchers use the concept "communication network" to describe attributes of centralization, formality, decentralization, and informality in the network (Kreps, 1986). Therefore, researchers who focus only on the attributes of "communication networks" and do not discuss the larger term, "communication structure", fail to adequately note the importance of the larger term (Chaffee, 1991).

Clearly communication network research establishes that communication channels are not rigid hierarchies. Rather, organizational communication networks can be complex, given such issues as distance and size of the network. Communication network theory represents the general types of communication patterns within an organization.

The communication network literature does not address how individuals' perceptions of communication channels affect their roles within the exchange of information through formal and informal channels. Since the communication network literature does not make this link, I will introduce *network* *communication roles* literature to help establish perceptions of individuals' roles within the exchange of information.

Network Communicative Roles

Both formal and informal communication channels contain network patterns or communicative chains (Glauser, 1984). Within these patterns or chains, as information flows, organizational members take on one of three communicative roles. Generally, these roles include liaisons, isolates, and dead-enders (Davis & O'Connor, 1977).

In general, these three roles are not universally supported in the literature. Davis & O'Connor (1977) notes interchanging use of "key communicator" with "liaisons". Other theorists have used concepts like "bridgers, baggers, and beaners" to identify similar roles (Mishra, 1990, p. 332).

Additionally, some theories introduce two additional communication roles (Bowditch, 1990; Terry, 1993; Mishra, 1990; DeVito, 1988). The first role is the "the opinion leader" which characterizes an individual others seek for guidance or information (Bowditch, 1990). The second role is the "cosmopolite" that describes an individual who often communicates with many people throughout the organization (Mishra, 1990; DeVito, 1988).

Communication roles are an important construct in this study. By understanding communication roles, conceivably respondents' may discuss their own role in the exchange of information through communication channels. Therefore, communication roles, communication network, and formal and informal communication channel literature ground possible perceptions of information flow.

Literature Review Summary

The purpose of this literature review is to place this study in the context of the general body of knowledge in organizational communication. The purpose of this study is to understand individuals' perceptions of the exchange of information through communication channels.

The literature review indicates that the discussions of power, formal and informal communication channels, communication networks, and communication roles provide a context for understanding employees' perceptions of communication channels.

There are gaps within the literature: For the most part, the literature on power does not address perception; the literature on formal and informal communication channels does not address issues of individual roles in the exchange of information; finally, the literature on communication networks and roles does not provide insight into how networks operate in varied organizations and how individual roles in the exchange of information is perceived. Although these gaps in the literature exist, it is reasonable to suggest that when taken as a whole, each body of literature complements the other and supports the significance of this study of perceptions of communication channels.

The gaps in the literature seem to suggest that the following research questions may be a starting place to help ground research with an examination of individuals' perceptions of communication channels. Additionally, I wish to know whether ordinary employees would make observations consistent with this body of literature.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In this study, I will ask:

1) How do employees perceive formal and informal communication channels and the exchange of information as a resource through the channels?

2) Do employees perceive similarities or differences in these formal and informal communication channels?

CHAPTER III

METHOD

INTRODUCTION

> It [organizations] initiates members and, sometimes, expels them; it creates and passes along myths and stories, often about the organization's leaders and critical events; it creates information to sustain and orient its activities; and it deals with internal and external threats to its continuance (Lindlof, 1995, p. 12).

As implied in Lindlof's (1995) quote, organizations contain many dynamic processes for the researcher to understand. The purpose of this method chapter is to present a method that is useful in unearthing the dynamic processes of organizations. Specifically, this chapter reports the methods selected and used to interpret respondents' perceptions of formal and informal communication channels.

The selection of an appropriate method of inquiry is necessary in order to address the research questions and provide insight into the data collection process. Frey et al. (1992) argue that "it is insufficient, therefore, to learn simply what a researcher has found. That finding is influenced by how the research was conducted" (p. 2).

This chapter provides four discussions about the selection of research method. First, in order to create a context for the selection of the method, I will discuss varied traditions of selecting methodology for organizational communication studies. Specifically, this section will review the four traditions of the interpretive paradigm. Second, I will provide a justification for selecting qualitative research. Third, I will discuss issues of sampling, including the population of this study and the selection of respondents. Fourth, I will present information about the design of the research, including discussions about framing the interviews and observations.

Methodological Traditions to Studying Organizational Communication

Through qualitative interviewing, my goal was to tap into organizational members' stream of meanings about their organizational discourse (Rosen, 1991). Through qualitative interviewing researchers can understand the social world as the actor sees it (Deetz & Kersten, 1983; Tucker et al., 1995). In order to understand the selection of qualitative measures for this study, it is necessary to understand the four different traditions of the interpretive paradigm of qualitative methodology.

Understanding perceptions of employees leads to the analysis of organizational systems, cultures, power, and roles (Deetz & Kersten, 1983). Researchers use the interpretive approach in order to understand the perceptions of individuals. The interpretive approach "is concerned with providing adequate descriptions of the social actor's process of sense-making. As such, primacy is given to the individual's own account of the world in which he or she lives" (Mumby, 1988, p. 147). Therefore, this study, by attempting to unearth respondents' perceptions of the exchange of information through formal and informal channels, takes an interpretive approach.

The interpretive approach is divided into four traditions. The first tradition is ethnomethodolgy. Ethnomethodolgy is the analysis of how people organize their everyday lives (Littlejohn, 1996). Within ethnomethodolgy, researchers study practices, activities, and conversations and ask how they create reality for the participants.

The second tradition is symbolic interactionism. Symbolic interactionism analyzes how individuals base their beliefs upon themselves, the environment, and what they perceive to occur in a situation (Frey et al., 1992). For example, employees might perceive information differently from management. Both perceptions are valid based upon how they interpret the situation.

The third tradition is ethnography. Ethnography infers individuals' viewpoints through their patterns of communication in social contexts (Frey et al., 1992). For example, in ethnography one might ask: what do pajama parties mean to teenage girls?

The fourth tradition is cultural studies. Littlejohn (1996) describes cultural studies as "the practices or the entire way of life of a group" (p. 234). Cultural studies typically, analyze issues of power, texts, practices, and institutions (Lindlof, 1995). For example, a manager tells a story to employees about an individual who worked long hours for years. After working long hours, management reached out to the individual and offered him/her a promotion. Cultural studies may interpret organizational success stories as based exclusively on management's belief of upward movement in the company (Mumby, 1988, p. 163).

The purpose of reviewing the four traditions of interpretive studies is to provide a foundation to support the idea of studying organizational communication channels through the perceptions of respondents. Generally, the cultural studies tradition within the interpretive paradigm offers some insight into this study. By following an interpretive approach we can understand how respondents perceive issues of organizational communication, culture, and power.

Implicit in interpretive studies is the use of qualitative research. Therefore, this study uses qualitative methods. In order to ensure a rigorous method, this project uses "methodological triangulation" (Tucker et al., 1995). Methodological triangulation technique uses theory, observation, and interviews to address the research questions.

JUSTIFICATION FOR QUALITATIVE APPROACH

As noted by Seidman (1991), "the adequacy of a research method depends on the purpose of the research and the questions being asked" (p. 5). Qualitative methods are appropriate for this study for the following three reasons.

One, the topic examines employees' perceptions of organizational communication. Participants' perceptions of communication are a direct reflection of their experience. "When people tell stories, they select details of their experience from their stream of consciousness" (Seidman, 1991, p. 1).

Recently, communication researchers have recommended using qualitative methods to understand the underlying perceptions of organizational communication. Smeltzer (1993) urges organizational researchers "to understand the context of the real world and problems people face in it" (p. 192). Qualitative organizational studies allow respondents to relive their experiences and share stories as a means of understanding their own perceptions.

Two, the focus of the study does not deal with testing hypotheses, manipulating variables, nor creating a controlled study. "If the interest is in what Schutz calls their 'subjective understanding'. . .interviewing, in most cases, may be the best avenue of inquiry" (Seidman, 1991, p. 5).

As suggested by Seidman (1991) the primary advantage of qualitative methods is its ability to adjust and refine research questions through the process of inquiry (Tucker et al., 1995). Some argue that quantitative research, by focusing on deductive models, fails to provide a holistic, well-grounded, rich description of data for employees' perceptions (Tucker et al., 1995).

Central to quantitative inquiry is the assumption that events and meanings are measurable and unambiguously defined. "Objectivist science depends on literal meanings of events and processes that can be mathematicized in nonlinguistic propositions about which there can be universal agreement" (Lindlof, 1995, p. 23).

On the other hand, qualitative inquiry supports the varied meanings created by social actors. Lindlof (1995) notes that "the actor in a communicative performance is capable of entertaining many meanings of an event because of the reflexive character of linguistic discourse" (p. 23). This quotation suggests that within interpretive inquiry, meaning itself is dynamic. Therefore, qualitative inquiry focuses on the words of the respondent in order to gain some insight into the subjective meaning or meanings created through the social environment.

Three, the basis for inquiry on this topic is by idiographic analysis. Idiographic analysis is the accumulation of knowledge from a few, in-depth cases. Therefore, the purpose of collecting respondent data is to generalize and thematically group the respondents' rich experiences. Such grouping can "allow the researcher to generalize to other cases of the same problem in the larger culture" (Lindlof, 1995, p. 57). The idiographic approach differs from a nomothetic approach, or use of universal predictions, that typifies quantitative study.

SAMPLING

Population

The population from which the sample is drawn is all private and public employees based within the greater Seattle, Washington and Olympia, Washington areas.

According to Taylor & Bogdan (1984), it is ideal to "gather information from every individual to whom the research applies" (p. 90). In this study, the affected population is everyone employed within an organization in the geographic area. However, it is not reasonable to gather data from this large population.

Therefore the study, taking a qualitative approach, creates a deep understanding from a few respondents' cumulative employment experiences. Lindlof (1995) notes, "the actor in a communicative performance is capable of entertaining many meanings of an event because of the reflexive character of linguistic discourse" (p. 23). Generally, a sample is the subset of the population used to make inferences about the nature of the total population (Babbie, 1995). In this study, the sample contained selective respondent interviews and observations.

Additionally, according to Seidman (1991), qualitative data methods preclude the ability to predetermine sample size. I interviewed respondents until the qualitative data began to stabilize into patterns (Halpern, 1988). As already noted, within an interpretive approach, meaning is dynamic. Therefore, once the rich perceptions stabilize, thematic grouping of data ultimately leads to inferences to other cases in the larger population.

<u>*Selection of Subjects*</u>

A non-random, convenience sample was chosen for most interviews (Seidman, 1991). Subsequent interviews utilized "snowball sampling" or "chain-referral" from prior respondents (Lofland & Lofland, 1995, p. 38).

> Often, a researcher will interview persons only if their experience is central to the research problem in some way. They may be recruited for their expert insight, because they represent a certain status or category, or because of critical events in which they have participated (Lindlof, 1995, p. 167).

I purposely selected respondents based upon their rich experiences within different business organizations. However, in all instances the sample adhered to the following criteria. One, all respondents were over the age of eighteen years old. Two, all respondents were currently employed by either a public or private organization. Three, all respondents worked in more than four different organizations during their work history.

While collecting potential respondent names, I introduced myself and explained the purpose of the study (Lindlof, 1995). I scheduled appointments with interested individuals at their convenience in order to complete the Informed Consent Form (Appendix B) and secure times for the interview. The respondents were not paid for their participation.

RESEARCH DESIGN

Interviews

Qualitative interviewing assists in the understanding of the social world as the actor sees it (Deetz & Kersten, 1983). Specifically, respondents, as they retell stories from their organizational experiences, present the researcher with "a slice of life that exemplifies and animates some aspect of the culture in which the story is set" (Mumby, 1988, p. 121).

The collection of data occurred through one-shot, long interviews (McCracken, 1988; Fielding, 1993). I asked the respondents a series of open-ended questions about their organizational communication experiences (Goffman, 1981). All respondent interviews followed McCracken's (1988) and Howe & Eisenhart's (1990) five standards for qualitative inquiry.

The first standard is a complete literature review and identification of bases of research questions (McCracken, 1988; Howe & Eisenhart, 1990). The second standard is "a review of analytic categories and interview design" (McCracken, 1988, p. 29). Use of the second standard is to "identify cultural categories and relationships that have not been considered by the scholarly literature" (McCracken, 1988, p. 33). The third standard is the design of competent, technically correct data collection and analysis (Howe & Eisenhart, 1990). This standard includes non-directive questions, appropriate sampling, and correct data reduction. The fourth standard is the discovery of analytical categories (McCracken, 1988). The fifth standard is to assess the value of the research by asking external questions of "so what"; and internal questions of confidentiality and truth telling (Howe & Eisenhart, 1990).

Instrument

Prior to the in-depth interviews, I asked respondents to complete an organizational demographic information sheet (Appendix C). The organizational demographic information assists in grouping the data by more specific criteria.

This study utilized an interview guide (Appendix D; Appendix E) over an interview schedule (Lindlof, 1995).

> An interview guide simply organizes a menu of topics to be covered and leaves the task of determining their exact order and articulation to the interviewer in the field (Lindlof, 1995, p. 185).

The interview guide used a moderately structured procedure. As suggested by Lindlof (1995), the interview guide begins with a grand-tour question. In this study, the grand-tour question asked the respondent to retell their organizational communication experiences by drawing an organizational chart. Following the grand-tour question were general, moderately structured open-ended questions (Seidman, 1991; Goffman, 1981).

Only when needed, I used probes, or explorations, in order to structure and guide the conversation (Seidman, 1991). Utilizing the methodological triangulation approach, some probes introduced theoretical principles and my own observational experiences to help structure the interview (Tucker et al., 1995).

Observations

Organizational observation supports methodological triangulation through the analysis of artifacts, symbols, and behaviors that may exemplify issues of power, hierarchy, and the organizational culture (Mumby, 1988).

> It is no accident, that high-level managers surround themselves with the trappings of power such as large, well-furnished offices, numerous secretaries, thick carpets, and so on (p. 88).

Although the study explores employees' experiences, organizational observation can lead to a deeper understanding of employees' perceptions based upon organizational behaviors. For that reason, "observation alone is probably most fruitful when the question, topic, or situation in which you are interested is physically located somewhere" (Lofland & Lofland, 1995, p. 20).

Through observation, some of the data included organizational practices and performances including "utterances, gestures, and documents" (Lindlof, 1995, p. 15). Additionally, the organization's office chart (Appendix A[7]) assists further analysis and sense-making of formal and informal communication channel perceptions.

> The kinds of objects that make up a setting, and the relationships among them, usually indicate the social roles and activity patterns found there. To make sense as cultural artifacts, objects and spatial order should reveal something about the shared values, meaning systems, and histories of the scene's inhabitants. Combined with observational and interview data, maps help the analyst understand the social and cultural import of a physical setting (Lindlof, 1995, p. 118).

I asked respondents to describe stories of their cumulative employment experiences. Respondent experiences were not limited to their current employer; for that reason, there was no requirement for observational access to those organizations.

However, one frequent problem of observational data within organizations (a "closed setting") is obtaining access (Lofland & Lofland, 1995, p. 32). There are additional issues that complicate a study's organizational observation. They include, "gaining expertise in performing the tasks of the subjects" (Rosen, 1991, p. 16); and the ability to obtain "data on the sly" (Lofland & Lofland, 1995, p. 32). For those reasons, I relied upon a methodological triangulation and upon "interviews to gather genuine information about participants' perceptions, experiences, and attitudes" (Tucker et al., 1995, p. 385).

Given the opportunity to conduct observations within a bureaucratic organization, I followed Rosen's (1991) rules of organizational observations and practices of "organizational secrecy". As such, the observed organization is not mentioned by name in this study.

Site of Observations

All observations occurred in a medium-sized (50 - 75 employee) department within a municipal governmental organization. Under agreement, all notations of the municipal governmental organization's identity are and will remain confidential. All notations of the organization will be noted as *XYZ Organization* (Appendix F[1]).

The purpose of selecting *XYZ Organization* was that the organization currently employed most of the respondents for this study. Additionally, using observations at *XYZ Organization* creates an observation unit. As an observation unit, *XYZ Organization* observations assist in the collection of information about formal and informal channels. Also as an observation unit, I can use *XYZ Organization* to make inferences about organizations in the general geographic area (Babbie, 1995). Over the duration of the study, organizational observations continued until data from the triangulation began to stabilize (Seidman, 1991).

Data Collection and Recording - Observations

After receiving the first waiver of Portland State University Human Subject Review Committee (HSRRC), I notified HSRRC of modifications to the original application. The modifications include qualitative observations as an additional method of data collection. This modification also received a waiver of HSRRC review (Appendix F[3]).

The observational notes were formed utilizing Schatzman & Strauss (1973) model of "information control". This model provides an accurate means to classify, analyze, and retrieve information from the field-notes.

> The researcher organizes them [field-notes] in relatively distinct 'packages' of material according to whether they constitute 'Observational Notes' (ON), 'Theoretical Notes' (TN), or 'Methodological Notes' (MN) (Schatzman & Strauss, 1973, p. 99).

I collected organizational artifacts and documents throughout the seven observations (Appendix A). However, prior to data collection, I was mindful of Frey et al's. (1992) four elements for observational research. These four elements include: One, assessing "what justified observation as an appropriate method to use?" (p. 260). Two, "were the observations conducted on-site, where people are communicating naturally?" (p. 260). Three, "was the site observed a good example of its general type?" (p. 260). Four, "was sufficient time spent observing?" (p. 261).

Data Analysis - Observations

The observations occurred during in the same time period as the in-depth interviews. The purpose of the simultaneous methods was to enable either the observations or interview data to inform and ground the other method. Also, through the simultaneous observations and interviews, the categories rapidly emerged.

While coding, I was mindful of Frey et al's. (1992, p. 261) seven requirements for analyzing observational data. One, researchers use inductive and pre-established categories to establish comprehensive use of data. Two, researchers use precisely defined categories in order to reduce ambiguity of observational data. Three, researchers exhaustively record all communication behavior related to the research question. Four, researchers record the communication in sufficient detail. Five, researchers attempt to record the behavior of all the key players in the organization. Six, researchers record what occurred before and after the noted observations. Seven, researchers record communication behaviors as impartially as possible without personal assumptions.

Data Collection and Recording - Interviews

I completed an application to HSRRC prior to conducting this study. On December 9, 1996, this project received a waiver of HSRRC review (Appendix F^2).

Upon prior consent, each interview was audio-taped in the respondent's home – "comfortable conditions for letting a person talk" (Lindlof, 1995, p. 173). The approximate duration of the interviews were between one and three hours. Brief written notes were taken in order to aid transcription (Seidman, 1991). Identity in the signed confidentiality statements, audio-tapes, and transcriptions are and will remain confidential. Additionally, all notations of each respondent's employers are and will be kept confidential.

Data Analysis - Interviews

After the conclusion of the interviews, I interpreted the respondents' answers to identify emerging patterns of interrelationships (Lindlof, 1995; Lofland & Lofland, 1995). Subsequently, the study utilized Frey et al.'s (1992) five-step process to create categories: First, the categories must be "equivalent" (p. 196). In this case, each category must describe formal and informal channels and avoid mixing general and specific categories. Second, the classifications must be "exhaustive" (p. 197). For example, every informal and formal perception must fit into one of the categories. Third, the researcher must follow rules of "reliability and validity of the codings" (p. 198). Fourth, the data ideally should be "mutually exclusive" (p. 196). For example, if data appear to fit in multiple categories, the researcher must select the appropriate category or refine the categories. Fifth, the "units of analysis" must be consistent with the research question (p. 199). In this case, I asked about employees' perceptions of the exchange of information through formal and informal channels. The research question supports observations and interviews as units of analysis.

The analysis of data used the respondents' organizational characteristics to classify the data into sub-themes (McCracken, 1988). Specifically, the organizational characteristics included the size of the organization, type of organization, and identification of the organization as either a private of public employer. Additionally, the use of raw data included brief descriptive phrases of categories (Seidman, 1991; McCracken, 1988).

RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY

Reliability

Reliability generally refers to the matter of dependability and stability across time, place, and situation. "If you made the same measurement again and again, would you get the same result" (Babbie, 1995, p. 300).

Qualitative research requires that the process of interviews and observations be sequential and allow other researchers to come to the same conclusions (Rosen, 1991). In this process, it is important that the researcher explicate any preconceptions or biases about the data (LeCompte & Goetz, 1982).

I attempted to increase reliability by using the following strategies. One, I collected and transcribed interview and observational notes as soon as practicable. Two, through the use of triangulation, I was able to understand the categories as they emerged from the data. In order to confirm the categories, the data collection process continued until all of the information within the categories stabilized. Three, I recorded all qualitative data using "thick description" (Geertz, 1973; Lindlof, 1995).

In qualitative research, "thick description" is recognizing the actual meaning behind a performance that is shared with other individuals or within a culture (Lindlof, 1995). Through thick description, I am able to "reconstruct the other's life world" (Lindlof, 1995, p. 228). For example, "thick description" is noting the difference between a wink -- a conscious performance that may hold some cultural meaning, or a blink -- an unconscious act (Geertz, 1973). The following example represents the use of thick description in the interview data:

Respondent #8

Respondent: As far as information flowing from management, or above me, I think this is a pretty open organization. . .(**laughter**) and they tend to **openly share everything (laughter)**.

Interviewer: I hear your **laughter**. What do you mean "**openly share**?"

Respondent: Um.......

Respondent: I'm thinking about a funny occurrence. There's **a conflict** on how much we should involve the public in our projects. And, uh, I **openly communicated with him my frustrations**. And he as well, in turn, **openly communicated** that he had been **frustrated** as well, and has had the same issues with the same individuals (**laughter**).

In this example, the respondent's laughter was interpreted as giving meaning to the term "openly sharing". I conducted a probe into some of the possible organizational meanings behind "openly sharing". This probe led to my ability to interpret how the act of laughter was used to describe organizational use of communication channels to discuss issues of conflict.

My use of thick description, probes, and a moderately structured interview may relate to a reduction in reliability. However, as reliability is reduced, validity is increased because my interpretation of the respondents' perceptions are more precise (Lindlof, 1995).

Validity

Validity refers to whether the actually-measured item is accurately measured (Babbie, 1995). Validity contains both internal and external dimensions. Internal validity relates to the conclusions drawn from the data (Lindlof, 1995). External validity refers to how the findings are generalizable (Tucker et al., 1995).

The first concern of validity is whether the respondents are telling the truth (Seidman, 1991). "The researcher must remember that he or she can never be sure that what the informant says represents the full story" (Lindlof, 1995, p. 166).

In this manner, qualitative measures generally aspire to high face validity (Lindlof, 1995). However, quantitative and qualitative methods inherently have the same problems of validity. This is due to the fact that they are measuring self-reported human conditions. Both measures are susceptible to the same problems if people are simply not truthful or aware.

A second validity issue is "possible and probable effects of the observer's presence on the nature of the data gathered" (LeCompte & Goetz, 1982, p. 46). All qualitative data can be suspect because of the involvement of the researcher. Generally, problems of reliability and validity arise when the members of an observed group suppress portions of their behavior in order to render themselves more acceptable to an interviewer (LeCompte & Goetz, 1982).

To increase validity, the project utilized the three following methods. One, to address potential problems, I continued research until data saturation occurred. Data saturation occurs when no additional confirming or disconfirming data is observable (LeCompte & Goetz, 1982).

Two, to address problems, I used methodological triangulation. Through methodological triangulation, theoretical principles, qualitative observations, and interviews define the emergent categories. Triangulation also supported the use of probing questions in order to further develop respondents' perceptions.

Three, I followed Seidman's (1991) process of turn-taking and active listening in order to achieve validity (Seidman, 1991; Goffman, 1981; Lindlof, 1995; Lofland & Lofland, 1995).

PILOT-STUDY

Prior to organizing this study, I conducted a pilot-study with three respondents. The selection of respondents was by a convenience sampling method. The results of the pilot-study led to modifications of the interview guide. Specifically, I made two major revisions to the interview guide.

One, I modified general phrasing of the questions and selection of words in order to ease respondents' understanding. Previous versions of the interview guide used some technical or overly-broad language. Respondents noted the following unclear language:

- Section C (Appendix D, Appendix E) asks the respondent to tell a story about communication within their organization. The term "story" confused the respondents. Some associated "story" with truth, and some with a fable. One respondent refused to engage in a story, stating that stories are negative. To cure this problem, I asked two separate questions about telling me about a good communication experience/tell me about a bad communication experience.
- Section C, question 5 (Appendix D, Appendix E) asked respondents to report how much accuracy they place in information sent through channels. Respondents noted that there is varied accuracy based upon who sends the information and how information is sent to others. The current interview guide addressed this issue by forming two questions -- one on sending, one on receipt.

Pilot study respondents also indicated that no questions asked them about their perceptions of personal barriers to using certain channels. Taking the suggestion from the respondents, I added questions to allow respondents to discuss personal barriers.

- Section E (Appendix D, Appendix E): Respondents discussed difficulty or incapability of working with others due to personality problems or conflict. The respondents noted that this issue drove them to use varied communication channels. The current interview guide included a question about personality problems and personal power.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

The goal of this chapter is to report employees' perceptions of organizational communication practices and meanings. Specifically, this chapter describes and analyzes employees' perceptions of internal formal and informal communication channels. Also, this chapter analyzes the relationships between observations and respondents' reported experiences.

The first part of this chapter presents data indicating various organizational demographic characteristics of the respondents. In the second part, I analyze the data through a three-phase approach: The first phase of the analysis is categorizing the interview data with theory from the literature; the second phase of the analysis is categorizing the observational data using the literature; the third phase is categorizing the interview data with the observational data. The third phase includes emergent categories being compared across observational and interview data.

The examination and construction of the categories followed McCracken's (1988), Howe & Eisenhart's (1990), and Lofland & Lofland's (1995) standards for qualitative analysis.

Demographic Characteristics

The pre-interview sheet asked respondents to include information about their occupation, age, sex, size of organization, type of organization, and the number of employees supervised (Appendix C; TABLE I). The significant demographic characteristics for this study are the size of organization and the type of organization.

Based upon review of the pilot-study data, respondents reported perceptions of size as affecting communication channels. This response led to the creation of various categories for the size of the organization: "Small organization" categorizes 3 - 50 employees; "medium organization" categorizes 50 - 100 employees; "large organization" categorizes 100 + employees.

Theory suggested that whether the organization was public or private was relevant. According to Weber (1947), bureaucratic organizations tend to use more formal, written channels of communication. In the interview demographic form (Appendix C), employees identified their employers as private, non-profit, public, and/or military.

TABLE I

Organizational Demographic Characteristics

Respondent	Sex	Age	Occupation(s)	Size of Organization(s)	Types of Organization(s)
#1	M	54	Administrator Counselor	Small Medium Large	Military; Personnel-Non Profit; Personnel-Public; Personnel-Private; Consulting-Private
#2	F	35	Retail Professional/Technical	Medium Large	Retail-Private; Transportation-Private Transportation-Public
#3	F	42	Administrator Counselor	Small Medium Large	Non-profit; State-Public; County-Public; City-Public; Mental Health-Private
#4	M	52	Instructor Professor Administrator	Small Medium Large	Private Higher Education; Public Higher Education
#5	F	48	Administrator Counselor	Small Medium Large	Non-profit organization; State-Public Organization; County Organization; Banking-Private
#6	M	52	Professional/Technical Research	Small Medium Large	Construction-Private; City-Public; Military; Research-Private
#7	F	53	Teacher	Small Medium	Education-Non profit; Education-public; Education-private
#8	F	28	Retail Professional/Technical Research	Small Medium Large	Retail-Private; City-Public; State-Public; Education-Private; Research-Private

All eight respondents identified themselves as being currently employed. As noted, organizational types include public employer, private employer, and non-profit employer. The results do not include a cross tabulation of data with demographic information. The demographic information is meant to enlighten the reader about the basis of the respondents' perceptions.

Category Analysis

Construction of the categories occurred through a three-phase process. The three-phase process included using repeating and emergent patterns from respondents, literature, and observations to categorize the data. The three phases did not occur in chronological order. Occasionally, observational data indicated the need to conduct additional respondent interviews, or vice-versa. Ultimately, the categories identified data which reflected the respondents' perceptual categories of informal and formal communication channels. Occasionally during coding, some statements could support multiple categories.

Category Analysis: Phase 1

In *Phase 1*, I utilized theory from the literature and used the literature review to form the basis of the interview questions (TABLE II). As I collected interview data, the literature review, and most notably the work of Johnson et al. (1994), assisted in the categorization of data. I identified data that supported the literature. When emergent interview data supported the literature, I categorized the data as one of the six theoretical attributes of formal and informal communication channels. As identified in the literature review, these attributes are personal salience, effect salience, cultural salience, characteristics, utility, and usage.

As indicated by the data, I divided each category into appropriate subcategories. Such subcategories are descriptive of the range of respondent comments and observations. However, some interview data did not reflect what was present in the literature review. When the interview data did not fit into the definitions of one of the six attributes of formal and informal channels, these data were set aside for further review and placed into *Phase 3* for further analysis.

The following table indicates the consistencies and inconsistencies between the literature and the interview data. For ease of reading, each emergent category or sub-category is **boldfaced**.

TABLE II

Consistencies/Inconsistencies Between Literature and Interviews

Themes Suggested from Literature Review	Themes from Interviews	Comments: Consistent/Inconsistent
Personal Salience - Personal motives for using a particular channel.	Financial or personal rewards; trusting others and being trusted; assisting in job expertise; being active in the flow of information; a tool to get information; information or knowledge as leadership.	Consistent with the literature. Using respondents' own words, these characteristics are seen as what "I get out of communicating" or **personal gain.**
Effect Salience - Personal outcomes for using a communication channels.	Same as themes for the personal gain or personal salience theme. Additionally, respondents noted problems with other employees, barriers, and manipulation as issues.	Inconsistent with literature. Respondents regularly saw the outcome of using a channel the same as their motive for using a channel. Additionally, respondents reported personal problems as a cost. Set aside for Phase 3.
Cultural Salience - Organizational culture enhancing perception of channels.	Communication policies; organizational training; power; participating in decision making; building relationships; improving morale.	Consistent with the literature. Participation or non-participation in decision making seemed to be widely reported.
Channel Factors/Characteristics - Speed, credibility, flow, clear.	The speed of information; whether the information can be trusted; is the message clear? Is the message understood?	Consistent with the literature.
Channel Factors/Utility - Importance of the message through the communication channel.	Over - and under - communicating. Same message through different channels.	Inconsistent with literature. Respondents reported all information was important. Even with over communication occurs, it is still important information. Set aside for Phase 3.
Channel Factors/ Communication networks - formal or informal, number of participants, and number of messages.	The size of the organization; location of employees, field offices, etc.; number of managers symbolizing hierarchy; public or private	Somewhat consistent with literature. However, interview data suggested that this is more about the structure of the organization than the use of channels. Set aside for Phase 3.

Category Analysis: Phase 2

In *Phase 2*, I utilized literature to create a frame of what to observe while at *XYZ Organization* (TABLE III).

I analyzed and categorized the observational data in the same manner as the interview data from *Phase 1*. However, most observational data agreed with the emergent categories from the literature and the interview data. Like the interview data, the observational data indicated a need to divide the categories into subcategories.

Throughout the observational process some emergent categories did not support the literature review. Under these circumstances, the observational data were set aside for further review and placed into *Phase 3* for further analysis.

The following table indicates the consistencies and inconsistencies between the literature and the observational data.

TABLE III

Consistencies/Inconsistencies Between Literature and Observations

Themes Suggested from Literature Review	Themes from Observations	Comments: Consistent/Inconsistent
Personal Salience - Personal motives for using a particular channel.	Work plans are written as well as presented to co-workers about past completed work, current work, future projects. Used as a basis for soliciting help from others; performance review data; mobilizing support about an issue.	Consistent with the literature.
Effect Salience - Personal outcomes for using a communication channels.	Conflict with other employees. Misunderstandings about task instructions Respondents noted problems with other employees, barriers, and manipulation as issues.	Somewhat consistent with literature. As in Phase 1, it appeared that the visible outcome of using a channel was the same as a motive for using a channel. Set aside for Phase 3.
Cultural Salience - Organizational culture enhancing perception of channels.	Organizational policies, notes and memoranda; meetings, "team time"; leadership training; "buddy system".	Consistent with the literature.
Channel Factors/Characteristics - Speed, credibility, flow, clear.	Break-room talk & speed of information. Implying locations for communication channels and the speed of information.	Consistent with the literature. However, issues of credibility and the clearness of the message were not evident through observations. Also, physical locations seem to be a characteristic.
Channel Factors/Utility - Importance of the message through the communication channel.	Over and under communicating.. Employees receive memos, e-mail, and sometimes face to face meeting regarding same message.	Somewhat consistent with literature. The importance of the information could not be inferred when employees discarded memos in the garbage. Needed further analysis, set aside for Phase 3.
Channel Factors/ Communication networks - formal or informal, number of participants, and number of messages.	Observing the number of employees, where the employees are located, the different offices of the employees, the location of support staff to management, location of the break-room and smoking area. The observational data suggests issues of both organizational structure as well as communication networks.	Somewhat consistent with literature. However, could not identify all elements of a communication network. Perhaps this is due to the nature of observations. Observational data did yield consistent data regarding artifacts of the organization. However, there is need for further analysis. Set aside for Phase 3.

Category Analysis: Phase 3

Phase 3 describes emergent categories not addressed or inconsistent with the communication channel literature (TABLE IV). Phase 3 compares and contrasts the data from the observations and the interviews. In review of these data, I continued with interviews and observations in order to ensure that the emergent categories contained consistent data.

The six attributes of informal and formal communication channels -- personal salience, effect salience, cultural salience, characteristics, utility, and usage -- appear to be exclusive. However, observational and interview data suggested that some attributes should be combined and used as sub-categories. Specifically, the data suggested combining "utility" with "effect" and "usage" with "personal salience". Furthermore, observational and interview data suggested the creation of three new categories; these emergent categories are **costs of using communication channels**, **organizational structure**, and **personal behaviors**.

TABLE IV
Comparison of Theory and Emergent Categories

Themes from Interviews	Themes from Observations	Overall Results and Comments
Personal Gain - Financial or personal rewards; trusting others and being trusted; assisting in job expertise; being active flow of information; a tool to get information; information or knowledge as leadership.	***Personal Gain*** - Observed employees going to other employees as leaders of information. Work project notification used as a basis for soliciting help from others; performance review data; mobilizing support about an issue.	*"Personal Salience" becomes* ***Personal Gain***. This is due to respondents' regular use of the term "gain" to associate their perceptions of communication channels. Otherwise, the observational data, interview data, and literature are consistent. However, the observational and interview data raised the sub-category of leadership. This was unanticipated as will be addressed in the discussion.
Effect Salience - Respondents noted problems with other employees, barriers, and manipulation as issues. These were not anticipated from the literature.	*Effect Salience* - Observational data supported interview data. A noticeable effect of communication channels are seen as costs of communication channels. As noted in the interviews, cost of communication channels included personal behaviors that causes conflict.	*"Effect Salience" becomes* ***Costs of using communication channel*** *and* ***Personal Behaviors***. Observational and interview data were inconsistent with literature. The perceived effect of communication channels emerged in these distinct categories.
Cultural Salience - Respondents perceived that the organization uses communication policies, organizational training, power, and decision making models to improve morale, build relationships, and increase productivity.	*Cultural Salience* - Consistent with the interview data, I observed written organizational policies, notes and memoranda. Also, formal meetings including communication models called "team time" and "buddy system" were observed.	*"Cultural Salience" becomes* ***Organizational Culture***. Respondents regularly used the term culture or "the way we do things around here". Therefore, it seemed reasonable to use the term culture. Otherwise, literature, interview and observational data were consistent.
Channel Factors/Characteristics The speed of information (informal faster than formal); whether the information can be trusted ("what is really going on").	*Channel Factors/Characteristics* Informal communication occurring in the Break-room and on the smoking porch. Formal communication in meetings. Speed of information observed. Issues of trusting the information was observed.	*"Channel Factors/Characteristics" becomes* ***Characteristics***. This theme was consistent across literature, interview, and observation. However, observation data used in the interviews indicated that location should be included as a characteristic of communication channels.
Channel Factors/Utility - Respondents perceived that all information is useful in order to "develop an opinion" about their job tasks or the organization. A few respondents even noted that management should tell employees when and why an employee may be absent from work. As indicated by the respondents, all information is useful and needed even if it is over-communicated.	*Channel Factors/Utility* - Observations support interview data that all communication is useful. The prime issue was over - and under - communicating. Employees were observed throwing away memoranda because they already knew the information. This was also observed when the organization decided to over-communicate an issue of vacation policy.	*"Channel Factors/Utility" becomes part of* ***Costs of Using Communication Channel*** - The observational and interview data contradict literature, in suggesting that usefulness of information is not a valid theme. It appears that all information is useful even when it is redundant information. On the other hand, when respondents perceive that useful information is withheld, then employees perceive under communication. Under communication is one category of ***Costs of Using Communication Channel***.
Channel Factors/ Communication networks - Respondents reported that the number of employees, layout of the office, and technology are perceived to affect communication channels. Also, the existence of field offices and hierarchy is perceived to affect communication channels. Respondents perceptions of public and private organizations and communication channels were dissimilar.	*Channel Factors/ Communication networks* Observations supported interview data. However, most observations analyzed the perception of number of employees and other artifacts of the organization.	*"Channel Factors / Communication Networks" becomes* ***Organizational Structure***. The results indicate that perceptions about communication networks exist. However, additional data about the structure and artifacts of the organization help explain perceptions of communication channels. Generally, the literature addresses artifacts as an important theme but fails to categorize it as culture, power, communication network, or technology resources.

The following six categories emerged through the three phases of category development. While most of the category titles are descriptive of types of comments within each category, most subcategories require illustration. The introduction of each category illustrates their meaning. However, to understand each sub-category, examples of typical respondent comments and/or observational data provide illustration. In order to give some insight into my interpretative process and the coding of data, I use **boldface** to indicate relevant sections of the transcripts.

EMERGENT CATEGORIES

TABLE V

PERSONAL GAIN *The sub-categories*			
Reward/Benefit	Relationship Building	Job/Task Knowledge	Strategy/Tool
Trust	Inclusion/Active Participation	Leadership	

Personal gain refers to the use of formal or informal communication channels in order to accomplish some type of personal or professional goal. The data indicate that six sub-categories emerged from the study. These categories include **reward/benefit**, **relationship building**, **job/task knowledge**, **strategy/tool**, **trust**, **inclusion/active participation**, and **leadership**.

***Reward/Benefit**: Respondents reported that they selected formal or informal communication channels in order to receive a personal reward. The following data help distinguish this sub-category.*

Respondent #1

Respondent:	Uh, some communications require verbal communications as I operated as an extension of the CEO. In cases of policy, uh, requiring or practices requiring additional approval. Then that communication tends to be more formalized. As in writing. In all of my experiences, recent experiences, the management and I **have operated on an open door policy. Meaning I just walk in. This makes a good employee. . .by doing this you are an effective employee**."

***Relationship Building**: Respondents noted that having or creating friendships or relationships was a characteristic of both formal and informal channels.*

Respondent #2

Respondent:	Like I said it is different, as far as, well, like [Name] is my Director. So, she comes and talks to me directly. She comes right to my office and just talks to me. When I was hired in to [Company], she was my supervisor. So, the time that I have been with [Company] in five years, she became from my supervisor to my director.
Interviewer:	Hmm. Hmmm.
Respondent:	So, she has pretty much a **relationship with all of us, so if it is anything, she will come right to us and communicate it face to face**. We get everything beyond mail is our form of communicating within our office. **She might send me a memo, or something, a letter, but she knows us**.

***Strategy/Tool**: Respondents reflected upon their selection of formal or informal communication channels as a tactic to send or receive information.*

Respondent #4

Respondent: No. It was difficult being a minority. . .it was also quite discouraging. . . a lot of the **frustration that I felt was the inability to getting information**, what I could extract, or come to my own conclusions about policy and what was happening. **I frequently developed sources**.

Interviewer: You said you developed sources, uh, what does that mean?

Respondent: That means **I had identified people I could go and talk with and I get bits and pieces of information from**. So I sort of relied on informal sources to get information. And what I did. . .was get more and more information, and **take the information I got and formulate an opinion about policy**.

Respondent #5

Respondent: Take responsibility for what they do. **If there is nothing in writing then they can say "I did not say that" or "that is not what I meant". . .Or. . .I will say that managers that do not write, it is a tool, they have chosen that tool as a particular style**. . .it is not done. . .and I see that tool is used more in government than in the private sector. I do see that as a sympomology of government.

***Leadership**: Respondents reflected upon their practices of seeking out individuals within the organization for their formal or informal role in gaining and passing on information.*

Respondent #3

Respondent: Another thing that really works on our team is having a **lead person** that has a lot of experience with not just only social work, but county bureaucracy and county system, but also with the schools. She is somebody who very effectively can help people, if not present people with answers, but at least know where to find them. I mean, she's just, that it has been invaluable to have a **lead person on our team. She has been involved with the program from pretty much the first, so whereas, some of the communication and accountability of those kind of specific tasks were not very clearly outlined in the very beginning, they aren't, and she is aware of them and very capable of getting that information out to us if we need it**. And, she is always available, which is very nice. She responds most instantly to pages and those types of things, so that really works well.

***Job-Task Knowledge**: Respondents noted that both formal and informal channels are useful for obtaining information that will help them in their job.*

Respondent #8

Respondent: I work very closely with a designer on several projects at a time, which each have multiple tasks. And, the way we **communicate with each other is verbally, and we have a weekly task schedule that's written**. So we sit down together and we go over the previous weeks tasks and see the progress or, if we got them done or not. And then we determine the next tasks we have to do. **And then, I go and update the weekly task schedule list. And hand it out it him, as well as our project manager, so the project manager knows what we're doing. And, I do it this way with the designer because, the designer I currently have is a little disorganized, and prefers to have, not only the verbal direction, but also to have something in writing so he can have check off list to refer back to. Also, because, we do multiple projects, multiple tasks, it helps keep priorities straight**.

***Development of Trust**: Respondents perceived that messages exchanged through communication channels must exhibit trust. If the messages are not trusted then no one would trust the liaisons and key communicators. Establishing this trust is a personal benefit for the individual.*

Respondent #3

Respondent: What really works for me is that I feel like **I have the trust and support of the county in my position at school**. And, I also feel like **I have the support of the school in my position with the county, so that is a really nice working relationship**. It works really well that we have outstation **staff meetings** where the county presence comes to the school, **people get to meet the workers and the supervisor. I feel like that is really effective way to let both partners know that they are in communication and I feel like that is a very trusted relationship**. I think that maybe not exclusive to the site, but it is a very special relationship at my site.

***Inclusion/Active Participation**: Respondents reported issues of inclusion in and exclusion from the organization through formal and informal channels. The respondents perceived that their active participation or inclusion in the formal or informal channels was important in achieving a personal gain.*

Respondent #8

Respondent: Um, for the most part, **I feel included**. Um.....I think **a lot of the information that I get to feel included comes from relationships with my peer group** and the comfort level that we feel with each other. So, if there's **some information one of my peer group members knows, they'll come and share that with me openly**. **As far as information flowing from management, or above me, I think this is a pretty open organization. And they tend to openly share everything**.

TABLE VI

ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE *The sub-categories*		
Policy - Mission Statement, Goals,	Relationship Development	Organizational Power
Morale	Training	Decision Making

Organizational culture refers to the unique attributes and characteristics of the respondent's place of employment. The data indicate that six sub-categories emerged from the qualitative research across formal and informal communication channels. These categories include **policy**, **relationship development**, **organizational power/ego**, **morale**, **training**, and **decision making**.

***Policy** - Mission statement and organizational goals: Respondents reflected upon the organization's use of formal and informal channels as based upon satisfying an internal objective of the organization.*

Respondent #1

Respondent: Well, we have a **policy at [Organization] of communications with employees, as I was trying to explain, both formally and informally, written/unwritten, open door and structure**, which includes training; updating. Now, what has happened as a result of that? Well, you have to interpret that on a continuous progress model and since that is never done, never completed there is always a need for more communication for making responsible adults feel safe enough that they can share information. So, it's work in progress. Sometimes it works well, sometimes if fails miserably. **When it fails, 90 percent of the time it is based on controlling and/or protective behavior on the part of some person or another.** [This last portion of the quote suggests personal power and ego. Personal power and ego will be discussed as a sub-category in the **Personal Behaviors** category.]

Also, there was a clear relationship between respondents' perceptions and observational artifacts. This relationship suggests that organizations use policies in multiple ways. The policies may be formal or informal. Also, these policies may require that employees use either formal or informal communication channels. The following observational notes indicate a relationship between policy and communication channels.

OBSERVATIONS AND ARTIFACTS

- February 20, 1997: Observation #5

While conducting today's observation, I was particularly interested in noting examples of how the organizational culture can form rules on the use of formal and informal channels. Interview data indicated that it is perceived that an organization's use of policies can be both exchanged through formal and informal channels.

I stood at the employee mailboxes. I noted that in addition to a memo being distributed into employees mailboxes, an employee posted the same memo on the organization's message board. This memorandum outlined a new policy for the division. This new policy outlined something called "team time". The memo was explicit about employees needing to meet in their work teams and discuss how they can improve their communication and achieve the mission of the organization. Also the memorandum was explicit about not using "team time" for discussing regular project work.

Taking a theoretical note from my observation, I noticed that the "team time" policy/memorandum was communicated through formal channels. However, this formal "team time" memorandum was establishing a policy on using co-workers as an informal channel to discuss improving organizational communication (See Appendix A[3]).

- February 27, 1997: Observation #6

Having expressed my interest in observing an organizational meeting, the organization (Gatekeeper) consented. I was permitted to attend one of the monthly "Corporate Mission Workshops".

I entered the meeting room. The meeting room contains one table, shaped as a long rectangle and eight chairs placed around the table. There were three chairs positioned against the wall. I sat next to the wall, about mid-room. I was introduced to the group by (the Gatekeeper). The meeting started at 1:00.

The subject was "Organizational Responsibility". The Gatekeeper passed out the "Leadership in Envisioning sheet" and requested that everyone read through the "Responsibility" section. Subsequently, another employee was selected to continue with the meeting. Apparently, meeting rules require that a non-manager facilitate the meetings. Literature was distributed during the "Corporate Mission Workshop", the portion of the meeting I observed was called "Vision-a-Month".

"Vision-a-Month" included literature about the organization's vision statements and inspirational quotes to keep employees motivated to carry out the visions. From a theoretical principle, I noted policies, formal channel, about meeting procedures. Also, the use of mission statements, through formal channels in order to instill motivation employee and informal channel discussion of the "vision" (See Appendix [1 & 2]).

***Training and Education**: Data indicated that organizations use formal and informal communication for job training and teaching interpersonal skills to their employees.*

Respondent #8

Respondent: I would have to say my current organization has got to be the best one that **structures communication**. The first **big tool we're given, is called influencing skills**. It's a five week, or six week class that **everyone in the organization is required to attend and they teach us basically how to communicate**...with core dimensions they're called:

respect, empathy, genuineness, and specificity. And **everyone is given this tool in order to confront each other and communicate with each other**. Uh, you were talking about formal meetings and stuff. Um, any other examples. We have something called, kind of a **training issue, more of a global scale, everyone participates in, called team time**. Once a week we have these division meetings, I guess, which is a formal meeting where everyone is supposed to communicate to each other the status of their projects. But one of the division meetings once a month, is used for team time where we go, and we're supposed to meet with somebody, and they're supposed to **train us in something, or maybe tell us about their job, or you know, get some sort of practical experience. And that was all spelled out in a memo.** So that dictates how we communicate with each other, at least an hour a month. So, those are some examples.

***Morale**: Respondents and observations indicated that morale affects individuals' perceptions of exchanging information through either formal or informal messages. Additionally, respondents and observations indicated that the exchange of information through either formal or informal channels may affect morale.*

Respondent #5

Respondent: Normally in times of trouble, it seems that my input is rarely seen. I do not know if this is because of my job title. But it is often that decisions are made that directly affect my job. **And a lot of times they make the decision and then tell us when the decision is made**. As long as that attitude continues . . .then that is probably the foundation for all of the other stuff that goes on in the hierarchy. That is the example of the hierarchy. When you understand what is going to affect what, the crisis, and I know what will occur. Generally, nothing happens until the week before. I mean this is chronic, nothing happens until the week before. **You have deadlines and nothing happens until the mandate comes down. I know I was part of it and (sigh) it is just so frustrating**.

***Organizational Power/Ego**: Within the organization, data indicate perceptions of formal and informal communication channels being used to create a power distance within the hierarchy. Additionally, perceptions indicate that the existence of power affects the exchange of information through formal or informal channels.*

Respondent #1

Respondent: But, uh, that is a common problem in trying to match competent administrators with the right job. The **ego and power needs** exist in all organizations. When the individuals with those kinds of **behavioral concerns**, examine them and address them, will often times **move to work in environments where they can best use that**. A **hierarchical oriented** Chief Executive in our organization could not function long, because that person **requires the assistance of others** to accomplish the job. It is totally impossible for the Mayor or the Superintendent to know what the hell is going on down in the bowels of their organization. So, they **must delegate that responsibility** to someone else to provide them with that information, and to **train** people to be able to do those kinds of things. And, so, people that have **strong ego needs tend to operate best in smaller organizations where they can have control over every element.** [Also, this quote illustrates perceived organizational size as affecting formal and informal communications.]

***Performance Tool**: Data from the organizational artifacts and respondent perceptions indicate that supervisors use formal and informal communication channels to rate the performance of employees.*

OBSERVATIONS AND ARTIFACTS

- February 13, 1997: Observation #3

During observations, each section of the organization were re-developing their "performance standards". These "performance standards" outline duties with measurements for rating performance. [The boss] distributed a memo that outlines the schedule for each of the sections to review each other's performance standards. I asked some of the employees why this was being done. They said that some of the sections were having problems with other sections and that this was a way to force everyone to share one another's expectations (See Appendix A[4]).

***Relationship Development**: Organizations use or support both formal and informal communication to strengthen or establish productive relationships, which benefit the organization.*

Respondent #8

Respondent: Um, one thing I think is kind of humorous, my current organization is trying do, come up with a way, where we can **obtain skills from one another**. So if I'm weak in an area, I can get **paired up with someone** who is strong in that area and we're suppose to work together to improve my weakness. **This is affectionately called the buddy system**. And, um, our supervisor came up with this, and it was **all written out on a memo format, and, and outlining how our buddies would get picked, and it reminded me of like fourth grade**. **So, we get to pick a buddy, and our boss would go ask the person we picked if they were willing to be our buddy. And then, if they were, then we got a match.** But if they weren't, I would have to pick someone else to be my buddy. So, this, I thought was a very **formal policy on how to get people to communicate on issues**.

***Decision Making**: Respondents noted management terms like total quality management, open-door communication, and Steven Covey's work on leadership as part of the organization's use of formal and informal channels as a tool in organizational decision making.*

Respondent #7

Respondent: Well, the one place where I am working now, a lot of times the info **that we receive, sometimes it is explaining what is going to happen or what has happened already**. The **decision** has been made and I think, and I shouldn't say, upset individuals but most of the time employees do get a little upset about it. Because, the reason I am saying this is **that if someone is going to ask you for information or input regarding certain issues** and then you are trying to give them the information, they are saying, "answer these questions or whatever," and then **the next**

> **week you get a memo from the director and see that they really didn't use any of your information, they just put up a front making you think that your input is there** but it's not, they had already made their **decision**.

OBSERVATIONS & ARTIFACTS

- March 13, 1997: Observation #7

It was early morning in the organization, I began observations before at 7:45 a.m., before the 8:00 a.m. rush occurred. My objective is to see what occurs when employees first enter the worksite. I stood by the entry-way which is near the employee mailboxes.

The employees checked their mailboxes. One individual pulled out a memo from the mailbox and said "I knew we were going to get this stuff". The employee referred to a memorandum from management. The employee noted that there were some interpersonal issues within two work groups. Management was called in to assist the situation earlier in the week. However, management declined and insisted that the work team work out the problem. As reported by the employee, the memorandum that was in everyone's mailbox was an attempt to outline policy and encourage employees to work-out their problems. Specifically, the memorandum notified employees to use their group skills to resolve the issue (See Appendix A[10]).

The third category encompasses the emergent data that indicated **costs of using a communication channel.**

TABLE VII

COSTS OF USING COMMUNICATION CHANNEL *The sub-categories*			
Manipulation	Break-down	Barriers	Over/Under Communication

Respondents and observations noted that there were both personal costs and organizational costs of using either formal or informal communication channels. This category, **costs**, refers to various perceived problems associated with the use of formal or informal communication channels. Four sub-categories emerged from the qualitative data. These categories include **manipulation**, **break-down**, **barriers**, and **over/under communication**.

***Manipulation**: Respondents reported that an effect of using formal and informal channels is the feeling of being manipulated. Individuals choose formal or informal communication channels knowing that others may feel manipulated.*

<u>Respondent #1</u>

Respondent: Most recently, people that aren't current in the literature and still managing by the top-ten sellers are tempted to reorganize a Division of some 500 people. And they did all of those things that you normally do. You go out and **hire a consultant to reinforce a predecision that you already made and to lay off people to affect change in an organization**. Normally, lay off people. They spent some couple million dollars and had **communicated by memo and presentation what a small group of people were going to do and what their recommendations were in regards to the new organizational structure. Well, everyone obviously became involved both formally and informally. Formally there was only a small group of management in a room somewhere, and the rest of the organization out depending on grapevine information, and this was in a political organization. So, they came up with the reorganization as they wanted it to look. They sent an electronic memo to everyone involved to gather at a time-specific and place so that they could be informed of the decision and processes of which they use to arrive at the reorganization.** The anxieties were high, except for some people who had **inside information about the City Council and the Superintendent and did not get involved with the anxiety at the moment**. Well, what turned out was as they spent all that money they forgot to check with the City Council, so having made a decision without the involvement of the City Council, the City Council then set their decision aside. The result has been that those Managers who sought to do this without the City Council, and/or **counting their votes before they tried this, have now lost faith in themselves and lost the ability to manage the group which they were proposing the change to**. In this situation, the communication worked well. The informal communication worked better than the formal communication, because the folks involved in the **formal communication ended up talking to themselves, reinforcing themselves and simply failed to analyze what it was they wanted to do** and set out how they were going to do it. They became insular in their own design. They communicated well to themselves, but the informal communication knew the mistakes that they were making and it was the informal information that was most satisfying. The informal information said, "those fools don't know what they are doing, and we are going to let themselves kill themselves." They did. So, it wasn't good communication, it may have been other [unclear word], like preparation, not counting votes, and being so wrapped up in your own personal importance that **they didn't analyze the situation correctly, and so the outcome failed**.

***Break-down**: The data indicated that a cost of both formal and informal communication channels is the possibility that information fails or breaks down.*

Respondent #6

Respondent: Job function...keep in mind, that when I say **breakdown**, having served in Vietnam, ...having served in the military doing exactly what the military is supposed to do, I don't mean sending out troops to Lewis, and shuffling papers; I mean you finally hit it head on. **You can't afford a breakdown, the system has to work**. Cause when the system doesn't work, then you die. That seems to be the basic underlying philosophy that I experienced in the military, And it's still there. At some point the rubber has to hit the road. **We cannot afford a breakdown, it has to work**. Think of it in terms of the Space Shuttle. People's lives depend on it, it has to work. To me it is the difference between public and private. Private, you have have to make a profit, or you can't stay in business. Public, profit is not your driving factor......So when I say **breakdown, you can apply it to the military, you can apply it to private firms. You can't afford for the system to breakdown too much, or it will die. Public that it's....it takes a long time for that system to die, it dies a slow painful death. And so, it doesn't have to be as tight a ship.**

***Barriers**: Respondents noted that there are barriers or obstacles that are present within both formal and informal communication channels.*

Respondent # 3

Respondent: I think one of the things that I find to be a **barrier is the inconsistency of the way the communication is delivered in this Department. Sometimes it is a e-mail from somebody, sometimes it is a hard copy from the Director and it is really inconsistent with the way the information comes out to everyone; and that doesn't get evenly distributed to everyone either. I mean if you send something out in e-mail there are certain people that aren't going to get it, and then they put a note on the top, please distribute to those who have e-mail. Well, if people don't have e-mail then maybe that is not the best way to send out your communication, because there is no guarantee that everyone that doesn't have it is going to get it.** The same thing with hard copy because not everyone is day shift in this building. We wanted to send something out to the Department-wide and **it took quiet a bit of time** to determine who knew how many people were on each floor, or how they got distributed, or who they went to, or who is all in this Department, and who has that information. You would think that somebody, a central person, would have that. The name that I kept being given, that person didn't have it.

***Over-Under-Communication**: Respondents replied that a cost of using formal and informal channels is that the individual may be over-communicating or under-communicating.*

Respondent #8

Respondent: I just can't figure [Department] out. Just when I thought I knew how to deal with them, I do something that ticks somebody down there off. I'm just trying to do my job, and they make everything so difficult. All I was trying to do was. . .uh, um . . .outline some design options to solve a drainage problem their sidewalk project was going to cause. So, **I wrote a memo. I informed my manager I was writing the memo. . . and she didn't have problem. Didn't have a problem with it. . .at the time. Then the memo goes out, and [Division manager] freaks out accusing me of trying to change the project**

scope. Then my project manager tells me that I should of let her talk with [Division manager] informally one-on-one to cushion the blow."

Interviewer: Do you think there were . . .I mean what kind of processes exist?

Respondent: Not really any process. **Everything you consider is supposed to be documented**. The memo was supposed to just be documentation.

The fourth category encompasses the emergent data that indicated **characteristics of channels**.

TABLE VIII

CHARACTERISTICS *The sub-categories*			
Speed	Truth/Reliability	Location	Comprehension

Characteristics refers to various attributes of formal and informal communication channels. Four sub-categories emerged from the qualitative research. These sub-categories include **speed**, **truth/reliability**, **location**, and **comprehension**.

***Speed**: Respondent and observational data noted that speed of information is a key sub-category of both formal and informal communication channels.*

OBSERVATIONS AND ARTIFACTS

- February 18, 1997 (Observation #3)

During the break at lunch-time, I entered the break-room. After a few minutes of silence, probably due to my presence, a conversation arose between two employees.

A conversation arose between Bob and Jane. Bob said, "I want to be out at ["A Company"], do you know that they were doing testing today? No one told me that they were going out to ["A Company"]". Jane responded, "Yes, I heard that the Fire department was out there testing the water pressure." Bob responded, "I mean. . .I am pissed. I have been working on that test for weeks and the Fire department just shows up and does not tell anyone here." Jane said, "yes, it was kind of interesting that we were out of the loop. I wonder if this was some type of a secret test?"

Taking a theoretical note, it appears that what the conversation between Bob and Jane illustrates the speed and accuracy of informal channels. Apparently, Bob was responsible to do work at ["A Company"] on the following day. However, the Fire Department took over his job without notifying him. Although Bob did not receive any formal information, it was clear from Bob and Jane's conversation that this was informal, grapevine information.

***Truth/Reliability**: A shared characteristic of formal and informal communication is the perception of whether or not the information is trustworthy.*

<u>Respondent #1</u>

Respondent: That is the value of the **grapevine and the grapevine is to be read as something that has truth, probably as much truth what you going to hear filtered through a formal process** as in the case of a first line supervisor who takes information from a manager, who takes information from a Director, who takes information from a Deputy Superintendent or City Council. Each level there is a filter of information, whereas, the grapevine is the same process but tenants are different. **So, you are left, if you have both processes, you are able to weigh both against your expected or anticipated...**

Interviewer: Both processes?

Respondent: Both **formal and the grapevine; use both of them. In the military it was called troop indoctrination. So, if wanted a desired effect, I will link information vs. preinformation to so as shape my audience**. So, when the real information comes down, the informal information is already there. So, the key as an administrator is to learn how to use both of those. For my military experience that is called **prepping the audience**. It could be **pro information or misinformation, but it is programming the process**.

***Location**: Observational and interview data indicate that both formal and informal communication channels can be witnessed at different locations.*

OBSERVATIONS AND ARTIFACTS

- February 11, 1997 (Observation #1)

While observing, I noticed that management used formal communication channels to give employees "pats on the back" (See Appendix A[6]). However, I was able to notice that the "smoking porch" located just adjacent to the office typified informal channels (See Appendix A[7]).

While observing communication at the "smoking porch", I heard varied conversations about incompetent management, rumors about a new-hire, and the submission of the new departmental budget.

From a theoretical note, it appears that formal and informal channels can be witnessed in different locations from within the organization.

***Comprehension**: A perceived characteristic that is similar in formal and informal communication channels is the extent to which individuals understand or comprehend the information.*

Respondent #6

Respondent: Typically when I'm talking with workers, I ask them to repeat back what they think I said because I know that, I got it here, I know what I want, but if I don't **verbalize it clearly for them to understand, then I'm not going to get what I want**. And, again, depending on who I'm talking to, it's kind of the person's style of **listening, it's giving out information, and taking information forward**. **People assimilate information in different ways**, and once you learn how a person assimilates information, you can communicate with them a lot better. You can feed it to them so they can put it together in one package, however they package it once they get it.

Interviewer: Is this similar in across all your organizational experience, or dissimilar?

Respondent: Ya, it's similar. I would think, it would be nice if **we all thought the same. I do a lot better with pictures. Some people like verbal. Some people like a lot of details**, then they suck it in then put it all together. Some people like the framework then the details. Or they need the framework, a chance to think about it, then the details. That's been my experience. If you can figure out how person **assimilates information, either coming or going, the communication works a lot better.**

The fifth category encompasses the emergent data that indicated **organizational structure**.

TABLE VIIII

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE *the sub-categories*		
Hierarchy	Size of Organization	Furniture and Artifacts
Public/Private	Location of Employees	

The respondents noted that the structure of the organization plays a role in the use of formal and informal channels. **Organizational structure** refers to the number of employees and configurations of employees, management, and the organization. Respondents sensed that the structure of the organization may affect the use of informal and formal communication channels. The data indicated five emergent sub-categories from the qualitative research. These categories include **hierarchy**, **size**, **furniture/artifacts**, **public/private**, and **location of employees**.

***Hierarchy**: Respondents perceived that issues of hierarchy affect the exchange of information through informal and formal communication channels.*

Respondent #2

Respondent: In some ways when I worked at [large, private, company] it was **so many levels. I like [medium, private, company] because you have hands on**, you're **working with the end-user**. Like a lot of times, I go out in the factory because when we install something new, like a new system, I am out there for a week training the people who are actually working out there on the factory. . .on the line. So, I am working with those guys and then after we train them, but most of the time we cut stuff open on the weekend, so I am there that whole weekend and then the first week, I am **out there in the factory** with them so if they have questions I can answer. **At [large, private, company] that didn't happen. We had another layer of people in between and so a lot of times you would do stuff, but you would never really see your end product and see how people were using it, and you never communicated directly with the end-user and got their input. Basically, you sat at your desk and did your job.** You never got to go out to see anything. You were just there. You reported to your office, you know, your building and that was it. **As far as like work, you got it directly from your supervisor or manager**.

***Size of Organization**: A characteristic that is similar in formal and informal communication channels is the extent to which the perceived size of the organization affected the use of informal or formal communication channels.*

<u>Respondent #7</u>

Respondent: Well, they communicate change, they didn't have too much change cause it seemed like a **smaller organization, and we would get, like memos or something if something was going to change**. But, if I recall while working there, it wasn't that many changes that occurred.

Respondent: Well, during the time that I worked in [small organization], it seemed like it was easier **talk to the director**. As of now, **this is a much larger organization and how they, I should say how the program is designed...I would be the last person you would talk to.**

Interviewer: How do you feel about the difference between the two?

Respondent: **It seems like between the smaller organization and the larger organization, the smaller organization seemed closer that you could go and talk to that individual, which is the Director because they are there and willing to talk to you. Whereas a little larger organization, although people could take time if they really wanted to talk to you, but it seemed like they want to stay distant. Sometimes, I feel that people want to stay distant and that is the way I feel about the larger organization**.

***Furniture and Artifacts**: Observational and interview data reported that Informal and formal communication channels are dependent on the structure within the organization. Specifically, where employees sit, the use of E-mail, and the positioning of their offices are perceived to affect the exchange of information.*

OBSERVATIONS AND ARTIFACTS

- February 11, 1997 (Observation #1)

[The Gatekeeper] walks me through the two-story office area. I point to an area by the door with a partition and series of desks. "Who works in this part of the office?" He responded, "this is where our administrative assistants work." I was offered a copy of the floor chart. The floor chart describes the seating arrangement and notes the general titles of the seating areas (See Appendix A[7]).

I notice that the first floor contains mostly administrative assistant space (no doors) and a breakroom. I was lead upstairs and pointed to additional offices. The cubicles in the center of the room are for the design and technical staff. On the end, the supervisor sits in a large office. And on the back-wall the manager and department director sits (large offices with doors).

All desks are equipped with computers and telephones. The Gatekeeper noted that all computers are equipped with E-mail. I notice that the administrative assistants all sit together, near the door.

A theoretical note suggests that given the administrative assistants location, they may be more privilege to more information through informal channels. This is because they may not be noticed by other employees as they come and go. Also, it appears that the noisiest areas happen to be near the administrative assistants. Also, theory suggests that E-mail/technology in the organization can assist both formal and informal channels (See Appendix A[8 & 9]).

***Public/Private**: The respondents reported that the use of informal and formal communication channels may be subject to the organization being either public or private.*

Respondent #5

Respondent: **Within governmental units**, and I am going to be real general, sometimes people run for **public office** from a fairly **ego perspective**. It is something they want to do. I will never forget one Commissioner, he was appointed, he was a **private businessman**, very bright . . . sensitive man, and he was appointed....he would never run again. And we knew all about him. And he admitted, in a small group discussion, **that he knew very little about managing a public organization. It's just a different place to work. It's more harder, more challenging for government to set up communication channels that are clear. You are driven by the electorate -- you're driven by so many people**. Even in a natural disaster. . .I'm surprised **we [the government]** function as well as we do sometimes. But then I'm optimistic.

***Location of Employees**: Observations and interviews showed that some organizations place their employees in different locales. Due to these different locales, data show a perceived effect on the use of formal and informal channels.*

OBSERVATIONS AND ARTIFACTS

- March 13, 1997 (Observation #7)

Having been away from the organization for a few days, I noticed that the Survey Section is beginning their move to another building across the street. People said communication has already decreased dramatically between the two departments. "It used to be face to face. Now were lucky if we get a phone call."

From a theoretical standpoint, this observation seems to support that communication decreases proportionate to a square of the distance between the communicators. Therefore, both formal and informal channels may be affected by the distance.

- February 11, 1997 (Observation #1)

While conducting the observation, I noticed that in this division of approximately 75 employees -- scattered between two buildings, the supervisor when needing to convey information to the entire division, sends out formal memos (See Appendix A[4, 5 & 8]).

The sixth category encompasses the emergent data that indicated **personal behaviors**.

TABLE X

PERSONAL BEHAVIORS *the sub-categories*			
Personal Power/Ego	Conflict	Personal Styles	Competence

Personal behaviors refer to various personal characteristics and conduct associated with the use of formal or informal communication channels. Four sub-categories emerged from the qualitative research data. These categories include **personal power/ego**, **conflict**, **personal styles**, and **competence**.

Personal Power/Ego*: Different from organizational power, respondents and observations reported that co-workers may use personal power or ego over others employees. The co-workers attempting to use power affect the use of formal and informal communication channels. The perceived effect on informal and formal channels is the personal control of information or an attempt to minimize the perceived power of co-workers.*

Respondent #4

Respondent: In education, we are all **colleagues**. However, Oh, I had a bad experience in my first job. Uh, I was being talked to by a **departmental colleague**...the comment to me was, **these accusations have been made**..... **and I said, "I want a hearing"**. And the comment was, well you're asking for a hearing for due process, and **I don't believe in due process**. And I said, "you don't?" And he said, "I don't", and turned around and walked out. However, **[the colleague] failed to have any power over me**. Well I got my hearing anyway. The hearing results were favorable. . .If I had relied on my **colleagues** to resolve this issue, I would, uh, I would have lost confidence.

***Conflict**: Conflict was present either due to the selection of communication channels or, due to the conflict, individuals used other communication channels. The following observational note helps illustrate this category.*

OBSERVATIONS & ARTIFACTS

- February 18, 1997: Observation #3

Returning to the receptionist desk, I was instructed by the receptionist to "go upstairs. Something is about to happen that you might find interesting for your thesis." It was disturbing that the receptionist was able to identify an emerging communication issue and instruct me where to go to observe. But I was grateful that she was able to give me a direction to some observational data.

Having gone upstairs, I can hear a conflict between two employees. The first individual said, "Look, you have had three months with the project without making any substantial progress." The second individual said, "I just need more support. It is not right for you to just take the project away from me and not say anything to my face. I talked to [employees X & Y] and they said that they were given my project." The first individual responded, "yes, they are responsible for the project now. It is still your responsibility to work as a team to get this done. I will set up a team meeting for this afternoon. It is obvious that there are a lot of issues on the table."

***Personal Style**: Observations and respondent data indicated that employees' personal styles can affect the exchange of information through formal or informal channels.*

Respondent #2

Respondent: I have a fellow **co-worker that some people don't like working with her**, even though she is very knowledgeable, it is because **she is very blunt**. **If she don't like you, she don't like you, and it is like she won't volunteer any information**, but if she likes you, you know, she likes you. . .

Respondent: Later on in that evening we were just having a meeting with me, [Person A], and [Person B] about going to the plants for **training**, they wanted to go and **talk** to [the co-worker who "is very blunt"] about a project because they weren't sure who the contact person was in Chillicacki...at the time, it was like a madhouse because of the new truck that was being built there. **I told him that I don't think now is the time to go and talk to Barb because she just went off on me, and I know if she went off on me, I know what she will say to you guys**.

***Competence**: Respondents reported that understanding the competencies of other employees helps them determine how to send and receive information through formal and informal channels.*

Respondent #8

Respondent: I think most barriers to communication are **personality conflicts**, with various people. I guess, mostly, I find that, it's people that are trying to withhold information on purpose, or they're unwilling to share the information, **or unable to share the information . . .they are incompetent and do not know what is important information. . .because they do not have the skills to know the information is important**.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

In the previous chapter I introduced and analyzed the observational and interview data through a three-phase process. In *Phase 1*, I coded the interview data according to emergent themes present in the literature. In *Phase 2*, I began to code the emergent themes from the observational data and the literature. In *Phase 3*, I evaluated the consistency between the literature, observations, and interviews. Also in *Phase 3* I indicated areas of literature that did not address emergent categories from the observational and interview data.

In the following discussion, I will interpret the data and provide an overview of organizational members' perceptions of the exchange of information through formal and informal communication channels. In this chapter I will present three topics. One, I will interpret the data with concepts based in the literature, noting consistencies between this study and the literature and also the apparent gaps in the literature. Two, I will reflect upon my perceived biases in conducting this study. Three, I will discuss limitations of the study and implications for future study.

DATA INTERPRETATION

In order to provide a clear interpretation of the data, I will organize the data into three parts. First, I will introduce the findings from the observational and interview data. Second, I will note links between the observational data and the interview data. Third, I will discuss how the data is examined by the literature. To make the data more accessible to the reader, tables are used to introduce and summarize the study's emergent categories and compare them with theories from the literature.

Table XI

Discussion Summary - Personal Gain

Themes from Interview and Observational Data	Theorist's Views and Connection to Results
• Consistent: Respondents perceived that the use of informal and formal communication channels leads to some type of **personal gain**. Respondents noted terms such as "tool", benefit", "trust", "getting the whole story", "help", and "leadership". • Consistent: Observations were consistent with respondent perceptions. However, I had to observe a communicative incident and infer that the incident had some type of personal benefit or gain. Some examples of the observations included: Observing employees going to other employees as leaders of information; writing self evaluations for performance reviews; Sending notations of completed work through multiple channels. • Inconsistent: Observational and interview data raised the sub-category of gaining leadership through formal and informal channels. This was not fully discussed in the communication channel literature.	• Consistent: People engage in formal or informal communication channels for a variety of reasons; these reasons can be to be a successful employee, stay informed about their job, securing a promotion, or subjective personal reasons. • Inconsistent: Communication channel literature does not explain **leadership**. Some communication channel theorists use the term opinion leaders. However, the use of leadership is not consistent across theorists.

The study's findings indicate that respondents perceived that formal and informal communication channels can be used for **personal gain**. This same category was brought up repeatedly by all respondents. **Personal gain** included sub-categories of **personal reward/benefit**, **relationship building**,

job knowledge, a **personal tool** or **strategy**, **establishing trust**, **active participation**, and **leadership**.

One respondent noted that "I survived in the organization by doing extremely good work" (Respondent #6). When asked about how the respondent communicated about the status of his work, the respondent noted "to have your work trusted, I talk to others and send status memos" (Respondent #6). In all, this illustrates that formal memos or informal discussions with employees establish a **personal gain**. In the illustration, the **personal gain** was having his work trusted and having others know about his "good work". Other respondents used terms such as "tool", benefit", "trust", "getting the whole story", "help", and "leadership" to describe their perceived gain for using formal or informal channels.

Observational data were consistent with the emerging categories from the interviews. Due to the subjective nature of employees selecting channels for a **personal gain**, observational data were difficult to record. However, consistent with the interview data, **leadership** became a well supported sub-category in observations and interviews.

OBSERVATION AND ARTIFACTS

- March 13, 1997 (Observation #7)

As I sat near the main entrance, near the series of secretarial desks, I observed two employees within a thirty minute time asking the secretaries about policies. I talked to one secretary who noted:

"We talk a lot within our group. I think that you are probably aware of this. We talk a lot so that if we have a problem with something, we find out from somebody else if we can't get a hold of our supervisor right then. I mean, I don't know if it is good or bad, but like, we are the O.A.s [Office Assistants] in our system and everyone basically, in our system, comes to us if they have a question about stuff because we like have to know".

This observation illustrates and confirms the perception that employees who do not have hierarchical power use formal and informal channels to exert **leadership**. As one respondent reported, "secretaries are usually seen as people in the know" (Respondent #4). However, other respondents noted co-workers, friends, and managers as leaders of information.

The category of **personal gain**, including sub-categories of **personal reward/benefit**, **relationship building**, **job knowledge**, a **personal tool** or **strategy**, **establishing trust**, and **active participation**, were all confirmed through the observations and interviews.

Johnson et al. (1994) refers to **personal gain** or personal salience as containing a "variety of motives, including some intensely personal ones, such as securing information related to advancement and merit increases" (p. 112). Others see **personal gain** as "the perceived applicability of information to a problem that he or she faces" (Evans & Clarke, 1993, p. 239). Also, Allen (1977) and Ashford & Cummings (1985) acknowledge that individuals use formal and informal channels as a tool for being a successful employee within the organization. Therefore, the conclusions of those researchers are consistent with observational and interview data.

As illustrated above, leadership emerged as a sub-category of **personal gain** from observational and interview data. However, the communication channel literature is inconsistent in the way that it defines **leadership** and whether **leadership** is part of a communication network. For example, Bowditch (1990) maintains that within organizations some employees emerge as "opinion leaders". Glauser (1984) does not use "opinion leaders" but introduces a term called "informal leadership". "Informal leadership is a link or exchange between management and subordinates" (Glauser, 1984, p. 624). Within this exchange, management attempts to influence and understand employees' beliefs. However, Whitaker (1995) asserts that informational leadership has both a formal and informal role. Lastly, Davis & O'Connor (1977) and Kreps (1986) fail to discuss leadership or opinion leaders as part of a communication network.

This study suggests that both formal and informal channels of leadership are used as **personal tools** to exchange information about the organization. However, the communication network literature did not indicate that leadership would be a significant concept. For those reasons, I added **leadership** as a sub-category of **personal gain**.

In order to supplement the gap in communication networks literature, the following section reviews relevant approaches to formal and informal communication **leadership**.

Literature Review: Gap Related to Leadership

As discussed in the literature review, theories of formal and informal communication channels contain theories of communication networks. However, interview and observational data indicate that within communication networks, certain individuals are sought as leaders for their knowledge. This knowledge is either formal or informal within the organization. Furthermore, the exchange of information occurs through formal or informal channels (Glauser, 1984).

Following the interviews, I returned to the literature to review theories of formal and informal group leadership. Although the communication network literature fails to address leadership, both group theories and leadership theories discuss this concept. The literature addresses group leadership at multiple levels: One, the general explication of leadership; two, concepts of formal and informal group leadership.

First of all, any study of leadership must explicate the various meanings of the concept. Unfortunately, most leadership scholars superseded this step and implied that their meaning of leadership is superior to other scholars. "If a term is used casually to mean different things by people who cite one another frequently, there may be a need for continued explication" (Chaffee, 1991, p. 41).

For example, some scholars claim that leadership is an art that all can practice (De Pree, 1989); some say that leadership is an interaction across individuals with knowledge and those seeking knowledge (Terry, 1993); others say that leadership is positional, based upon one's formal title in the organization (Rosenbach & Taylor, 1993).

Once it is determined that leadership has multiple meanings, one must understand the various leadership approaches. These approaches are trait, situational or contingency, and functional/behavioral approaches. The functional/behavioral approaches seem to address organizational culture because both approaches discuss managerial style as affecting communication. Therefore, functional/behavioral approaches are most appropriate in discussing organizational culture. Through analysis of the various leadership approaches, categorizing respondents' perceptions of the exchange of information becomes clear.

Leadership - Trait Approach

Noted as an early approach to leadership, the trait approach focuses on the characteristics and attributes that make some leaders and others followers. Specifically, Plato and Machiavelli's theories are trait-based, indicating an innate set of leadership qualities (Terry, 1993, p. 17). House & Baetz (1979) argues that successful leadership embodies five common traits. These five traits include intelligence, dominance, self-confidence, high level of energy, and knowledge about a specific task (p. 178).

The trait approach is significant in understanding employees' perceptions of the exchange of information. For example, Maidique (1983) argues that those having the trait of leadership have behaviors of seeking organizational excellence, being strong, effective, clearly communicating the mission and goals of the organization to employees, and effectively using formal and informal communication channels.

Illustrating the significance of the trait approach, several respondents reported seeking information from supervisors who possess House & Baetz's (1979) leadership traits. On the other hand, some respondents also noted lower-level employees who possessed House & Baetz's (1979) traits of intelligence and knowledge of a specific task.

<u>Respondent #8</u>

Respondent: Useful information. I get useful information, with regard to projects, from the **people on my team**. So, the project engineer . . .designers. **There is a Designer [Name]**, that I also get useful information from. **She has been around for a long time and is well respected**. Um, I also get useful information from, in order to get direction, I get it from my supervisor. But the supervisor can be so removed from the problem . . . **so that is why I go to [Designer name].**

Terry (1993) notes that supervisors who have favorable leadership traits, including informational knowledge, may use the exchange of information as a management tool for punishment or reward. Under those circumstances, employees perceive management as being inauthentic leaders. When this perception occurs, employees seek other informal leaders, usually co-workers, for the exchange of information (Terry, 1993).

Therefore, the trait approach seems to illustrate respondents' perceptions of the exchange of information through informal and formal communication channels. The second approach, the contingency approach, also seems to provide a context for respondents' perceptions.

Leadership - Contingency Theories

The second approach to leadership, the contingency approach, provides an additional context for understanding employees' perceptions of the exchange of information. The contingency approach states that a situation fits the style of a leader (Rosenbach & Taylor, 1993). Therefore, some leadership skills will not fit all situations. I discovered that the contingency approach can be divided into situational leadership and Fiedler's theories.

Situational leadership is based on three factors: One, guidance and direction given by a leader; two, socioemotional support given by a leader; three, the readiness of followers to perform their task (Hambleton & Gumpert, 1982). Situational leadership can occur when there is trust of the followers and high concern for supportive behaviors and task behaviors.

Fiedler et al. (1976) argue that leadership occurs when there is a fit between a leader's style and the favorableness for leadership in a situation. Fiedler's model contains three variables that create a successful leader (1976, p. 65): One, leader/member relations -- leaders and followers must establish trust and respect; two, task structure -- the tasks for the group must be clear and enabling; three, leadership power and position -- the influence or authority a leader has over followers.

Although each theory has a different definition of leadership, situational and Fiedler's theories all agree that leadership emerges from individuals based on context and situation (Meindl & Ehrlich, 1987).

One respondent illustrated how she used formal and informal channels to emerge as a leader when their organization faced uncertainty and a need to exchange information.

<u>Respondent #5</u>

Respondent: As I felt that **we needed regular meetings**. It was a time of a lot of change and a lot of upheaval. **I felt strongly that that was a way to keep our group cohesive and connected to one another and communicating well and keeping things together when sharks were circling or when things were just getting unknown**. We had weekly meetings, we have done that for a four year period when things start to change. Now, because the merger just happened, and another group has come in to the department, we meet every other week. But we still meet on a regular basis. And **I think that is really important to morale, communication, and to trust**. The important part to all of us, is how does this information **affect me**. But sometimes you get information and sometimes you don't. In about a two year period, uh our manager came to one or two of them. But the manager knew we had them weekly and we gave him the agenda. I know because we gave him the agenda. Uh, we verbally asked the manager to be there. And for whatever reason the

> manager chose not to participate or was gone, I am not sure what. **Although I am a worker bee, I am a program developer, I think it is important to have these meetings. . .so I organized them and ran the meetings**.

In the above illustration, the respondent used both formal and informal channels. Formally, the respondent notified management of his/her role in the team meeting. Informally, fellow team members discussed organizational matters and how those matters might affect their interests.

As evidenced in the observational and interview data, leadership can emerge contingent on needs. The need to exchange information in a "time of upheaval" contexturalizes employees' perceptions of both informal and formal communication.

The third approach, the behavioral/functional approach is characterized by linking leadership or management duties to one's personal style (Rosenbach & Taylor, 1993). The observational and interview data suggest that the behavioral/functional approach best contexturalizes perceptions about **organizational culture** and its effect in the exchange of information. For that reason, the behavioral/functional approach is discussed in the following category.

Literature Review: Gap Related to Informal and Formal Group Leadership

While explicating leadership theory, I discovered a separate but consistent body of literature regarding informal and formal group leadership. The informal and formal group leadership literature helps us to understand how the group process might affect employees' perceptions about the exchange of information. The communication network literature did not address why certain groups, or networks, form. The informal and formal group leadership literature aids in our understanding of why employees exchange information in a certain manner.

> Informal groups are defined as a collection of individuals whose common work experiences result in the development of a system of interpersonal relations beyond those expected of them by values of their employment (Palazzolo, 1981, p. 304).

On the other hand, a formal group is "a planned system of cooperative effort in which each participant has a recognized role" (Katz, 1964, p. 207). In formal groups, individuals become leaders by being "appointed to leadership positions by others who already occupy even higher positions" (Hussein, 1989, p. 11).

Informal groups emerge when individuals have a common work experience that connects both "formal functions and personalized interactions" (Hussein, 1989, p. 10). Palazzolo (1981, p. 142) notes five elements that motivate followers to develop informal groups. These five elements include large system failure; consensus of formal system as an enemy; common work interests; physical proximity; and common work experiences. Additionally, Bales (1953) argues that informal leaders derive their influences from both instrumental and expressive means of behavior. Instrumental leaders use their skill in accomplishing group goals, whereas expressive leaders use their skill in maintaining positive social relations.

According to Bowers & Seashore (1967) "the conception of leadership is concerned with the behavior of persons insofar as it influences the behavior of others" (p. 46). Therefore, respondents perceive that someone's role using formal or informal channels may influence others to use the same channels. The following data illustrate how leadership and channel selection influence others.

Respondent #4

Respondent: **However, a task is ordering books. . .and that is done formally, from a memo**. And uh, you know, you just have to figure out how you're going to respond. **You respond to the secretary**. You respond, by giving the information to the secretary, who in turn gives it to the book store. **That is the departmental policy**. But, since **I'm an independent sort, I'll give my information directly to the book store. And that works out well for me. Now other professors are taking my lead** by circumventing the formal processes. . .the secretary. I am sure that is not the proper procedure, but since enough of us do that, it becomes an informal procedure.

As the observational and interview data suggest, leadership and the exchange of information are significant in respondents' perceptions of the use of formal and informal communication channels. Although the communication channel literature does not describe leadership concepts, the prior illustrations and discussions indicate that leadership theory is important and helps to ground the communication channel literature.

Table XII

Discussion Summary - Organizational Culture

Themes from Interview and Observational Data	Theorist's Views and Connection to Results
• Consistent: Respondents perceive "training", "policy", "mission statement", "work teams", "empowerment", "TQM", "Steven Covey", and "relationship development" as illustrating organizational culture through formal and informal channels. to construct decision making, and morale, organizational • Consistent: Consistent with the interview data, observations found: Written organizational policies, notes, memorandums, formal meetings, "team time", "PRIDE" and "buddy system". These illustrations help form the sub-categories of training, morale, policy-mission statement, relationship development, decision making, and organizational power.	• Consistent: **Organizational culture** is described as "assumptions", "stories", "myths", and "symbols". Which creates "understandings" and "interpretations" that a group uses to "learn to cope with its problems". Essentially, culture is "the way we do things around here". • Inconsistent: Communication network and communication channel literature does not address managerial communication style. Observational and interview data suggest that managerial style, or behavioral/functional approach contextualizes the sub-category of decision making.

The study's findings indicate that respondents perceived that the **organizational culture** manages the exchange of information through formal and informal communication channels. All respondent and observational data repeatedly led to several sub-categories of **organizational culture**. These sub-categories include **training**, **morale**, **policy-mission statement**, **relationship development**, **decision making**, and **organizational power**. The most widely reported sub-category was **decision making**.

Respondents perceived the exchange of information through **decision making** as being affected by both formal and informal communication channels. For example, respondents regularly said that "empowerment", "total quality management", and "team" had roles in both formal and informal communications. As illustrated by a respondent, organization culture effects respondents' perceptions of the exchange of information.

Respondent #8

> **Empowerment** was spoken, but when **employees actually tried to communicate formally to management,** the **information** was **changed** or **stopped**, and you didn't feel **empowered**. So we found **other ways to communicate**.

Observational data were consistent with the emerging categories from the interviews. For example, the organization distributes "PRIDE" leaflets to the employees (Appendix A^2). Based upon the "PRIDE" leaflets, it appears that the organization is establishing a culture of how to communicate and involve others in formal decision making. Also "PRIDE" implies that employees should use informal channels to instill deeper support for the organizational goals and mission.

The interviews and observations illustrate perceptions of **organizational culture**, but do not define organizational culture. Ajiferuke & Boddewyn (1970) argue that "the definition of culture is as vast as the amount of theorists using the term" (p. 154).

A representative definition of organizational culture includes a pattern of "assumptions" (Barley, 1983, p. 394); the identification of "stories", "myths", and "symbols" (Schein, 1985, p. 9); and a creation of "understandings" and "interpretations" that a group uses to "learn to cope with its problems"

(Sackmann, 1991, p. 295); culture then "stabilizes its view of itself and the environment around it" (Sackmann, 1991, p. 295).

Mumby (1988) argues that organizational communication is more than an exchange of information, but rather is a cultural practice that creates and re-creates differences in power between employees and management (p. 92). Taking Mumby's argument, respondents' perceptions of organizational uses of "empowerment", "total quality management", and PRIDE as a mandate to formally and informally communicate, are illustrations of power. "Managerial interest is powerful enough to control the ways in which other interests perceive what is good, possible, and so forth" (Mumby, 1988, p. 93).

Additionally, theorists argue that organizational culture enhances perceptions of the effectiveness of formal channels as well as minimizing the employees' use of informal channels (Townsend, 1965; Johnson et al., 1994; Glauser, 1984).

During the initial literature review, the *communication channel* and *communication network* literature did not determine that **organizational culture** would be a significant perception of respondents. The *communication channel* and *organizational network* literature takes a narrow functional approach to the exchange of information. Therefore, through the narrow *communication channel* and *organizational network* literature, **organizational culture** was not anticipated. However, **organizational culture** is central to the literature on organizational power. Through interview data, observations, and literature regarding organizational power, it is consistent to introduce and discuss **organizational culture** as a means to interpret respondents' perceptions.

The following literature review on **organizational culture**, management style and its effect on the exchange of information supplements the *communication channel* and *communication network* literature.

Literature Review Gap: Culture - Behavioral/Functional Approach

The behavioral/functional approach to **organizational culture** provides an additional context for understanding employees' perceptions of the exchange of information through formal and informal communication channels. Rosenbach & Taylor (1993) defines the behavioral/functional approach as a link between management duties and personal style.

Behavioral/functional research indicates three different management styles in communicating with employees, increasing production, enhancing the organizational structure, increasing performance, and increasing the satisfaction of employees (Rosenbach & Taylor, 1993). These three styles are autocratic, democratic, and laissez-faire (Lippitt & White, 1947; Fleishman et al., 1955; Katz & Kahn, 1978).

Theorists argue that democratic managerial communicative styles are significant in showing high concern for employees and high concern for production (Blake & Mouton, 1964); maintaining employee morale, satisfaction and performance (Fleishman & Harris, 1962); leading to the reduction of employee absenteeism and turnover (Ashford & Cummings, 1985); and helping employees mature in their job (Argyris, 1957).

The most significant behavioral/functional approach is the Likert's System 4 approach (Likert, 1961). Likert (1961) is similar to Total Quality Management (Deming, 1982), The Scanlon Plan (De Pree, 1986), and Theory Z (Ouchi, 1981). All approaches indicate that management should communicate participative and supportive management characteristics to employees. Participative management affects employees' perceptions of the exchange of information through communication channels. Specifically, employees feel more involved and informed about the organization when management uses participative communication approaches (De Pree, 1961).

Respondent #1

Respondent: My experience...**most communicative practices, formal communicative practices are intended for crowd control**. Give them what you want them to know, when you think they need to know it that is one approach, and that generally works for hierarchical fortune 500 kind of organizations. We are finding out with **Steven Covey** and the range of diversity in the organization and to the organization, and the need to be popular. We move more to a **TQM, Total Quality Management** theory of communication where we have broken the population down into smaller groups. . .cells. . .or cells, in terms of trying to find better answers, trying to **involve people** but anyone of those approaches and there are others--is **designed by the organization and is intended to control the populous, either by involving them in the process or not involving them in the process, or offering a pseudo involvement in the process** and that is in the process of final **decision making**.

Certainly, the observational and interview data suggest that **organizational culture** provides a framework for understanding employees' perceptions of the exchange of information. As noted in the discussion, sub-categories of **organizational power** and **decision making** were the most consistently reported sub-categories of **organizational culture**. Although the communication channel literature describes neither **power** nor **decision making**, this study indicates that each helps to ground the communication channel literature and employees' perceptions of communication channels.

Table XIII

Discussion Summary - Costs of Using Channel

Themes from Interview and Observational Data	Theorist's Views and Connection to Results
• Consistent: Respondents perceive that both formal and informal channels assist them in "developing an opinion" about their job tasks or the organization. The categorized data indicate sub-categories of manipulation, break-down, barriers, and over-communication. • Consistent: Observations yielded support that informal and formal channels are useful in exchanging information. Employees were observed throwing away memoranda because they already knew the information. This was also observed when the organization decided to over-communicate an issue of vacation policy.	• Consistent: If individuals perceive that the costs of using a channel are great, they will look to other channels. Descriptions of **over-and under-load** and **barriers** are consistent with data. • Inconsistent: Although data indicate that **over-and under-load** match theory, interview data contradict the literature by suggesting that information through formal or informal channels is useful even when it is redundant.

Respondents perceive that both informal and formal communication channels have **personal and organizational costs**. These costs include **manipulation**, **break-down**, **barriers**, and **over/under communication**.

For example, one respondent perceived that the cost of sending either formal or informal messages in an organization is that "no one would listen. It just made me so frustrated. . ." (Respondent #3).

Another consistently reported sub-category was information **overload and under-load**. This sub-category and the other sub-categories were consistent across observational and interview data.

For example, information **under-load** led employees to seek out messages from both formal and informal channels. Respondents could also identify information **overload**, but favored having a wealth of information from either formal or informal sources.

Respondent #3

Respondent: They set up a **special E-mail box** so you can send questions. They made that very clear. They tried, for a while, they were doing it in some **"brown bags" and team meetings** to try and **disseminate** some of that information. . .and even if it was to communicate we don't know anything yet and we are not going to know anything for a long time -- I think that was **done very well**.

Both observational and interview data indicated consistency of perceptions with the literature that discusses the problems or costs associated with formal and informal channels.

Specifically, the literature notes that "a belief that there is no procedure available for confronting their problems would impede channel usage" (Johnson et. al., 1994, p. 113). Implied from the data, the respondent who reported that "no one would listen" may perceive formal and/or informal channels to be useless.

According to Campbell (1958) "whenever human beings operate at near maximum capacity, selective information loss, undesirable reduction of message complexity. . .is apt to be involved" (p. 336). On the other hand, "information under-load may produce undesirable consequences" (Glauser, 1984, p. 616).

Consistent with Campbell (1958), the respondents frequently used words such as "burden", "ramming information", and "multiple messages" to describe their perceptions of the costs of exchanging information through formal and informal channels. Although it is difficult to observe and infer personal or organizational cost, I observed the discarding of both formal memos and informal notes in the recycling bin. Perhaps this illustrates information overload or some other personal or organizational costs of the exchange of information.

Costs of using both formal and informal communication channels emerged from the data and are consistent with the communication channel literature. Based on observations and interviews, perceptions of informal and formal channel costs may affect exchanges of information within the organization.

Table XIV

Discussion Category - Characteristics of Channel

Themes from Interview and Observational Data	**Theorist's Views and Connection to Results**
• Consistent: Respondents noted the speed of information (informal faster than formal); whether you can **trust** the information ("what is really going on")." Categories of **location, speed, reliability/truth, and comprehension reported**. • Consistent: Observations noted informal communication occurring in the Break-room, smoking porch, "Jack in the Box". Formal communication in meetings. **Speed** of information observed; issues of **trusting** the information; and **comprehension** or lack of comprehension observed through formal and informal channels.	• Consistent: This theme was consistent across literature, interview, and observation. All themes (**location, speed, reliability/truth, and comprehension**) are supported by literature. Observational data, more than interview data, indicated the inclusion of **locations** of formal and informal communication channels as a characteristic.

Consistent with the literature, **channel characteristics** is a similar category across informal and formal communication channels. Specifically, this category can be broken down into the unique shared characteristics of informal and formal communication channels. These characteristics include **location**, **speed**, **reliability/truth**, and **comprehension**.

The first notable sub-category that emerged was **location**. Respondent and observational data showed that informal communication occurred throughout the office but was more noticeable at "baby showers", "buses", "pats on the back", and "Jack-in-the-box" (Observation 3; Interview 3; Interview 4). Conversely, formal communication channels typically occurred during staff meetings, message boards, and official memoranda.

As noted in the literature, informal communication occurs "all day long down hallways, around corners, in meetings, and especially by the coffee machine" (Mishra, 1990, p. 214). Formal communication occurs anywhere direction is given or feedback is needed (Davis & O'Connor, 1977; Glauser, 1984).

The second sub-category was **speed**. Both observational and respondent data supported this sub-category. For example, respondents used the terms "old news", "pre-informing", and "quick response" to describe formal and informal communication speed (Observation #3; Interview #1).

Respondent and observational data regarding speed of formal and informal communication channels are consistent with the literature. The literature describes informal communication channels as "flexible and personal and can spread information faster than the formal communication channels" (Mishra, 1990, p. 215).

The third sub-category was **reliability/truth**. Respondents used words like "what is really going on", "full story", and "balanced information" to note the amount of trust they place in informal and formal communication channels (Respondent #1; Respondent #7; Respondent #4). Generally, respondents found informal communication channels to be as reliable as formal communication channels. Davis (1953) supports the respondent data, indicating that informal communication channels are between 75 to 95 percent correct compared to formal-channel accuracy of 90 percent.

Interestingly, one respondent reported that inaccuracies or partial information exchanged in formal channels, "is all right as long as the selective information is consistent with [the organization's] goals" (Respondent #6). Zaremba (1989) argues that even selective truth about organizational issues can instill employee trust in formal channels (Zaremba, 1989). Additionally, the literature suggests that managers who fail to pay attention to informal channels acquire 50 percent less reliable information than managers who do (Koenig, 1985). However, Koenig's (1985) argument was not supported by the observational or interview data.

The fourth sub-category is **comprehension**. Essentially, what respondents reported was that both formal and informal communications may be unclear in their content. The literature regarding formal communication is silent about comprehension. However, the informal communication channel literature shows that when information is word-of-mouth, it is likely that "leveling" and "sharpening" may occur (Allport & Postman, 1947). Leveling refers to some non-vital information becoming deleted in subsequent story-telling. Sharpening means that each time an individual repeats the story, some detail becomes exaggerated.

The links between the literature, observations, and interview data indicate that the emergent category of communication **channel characteristics** provides a stable context for understanding employees' perceptions of the exchange of information.

Table XV

Discussion Summary - Organizational Structure

Themes from Interview and Observational Data	Theorist's Views and Connection to Results
• Consistent: Respondents perceived that the number of employees, layout of the office, and artifacts/technology affects communication channels. Also, the existence of field offices and hierarchy is perceived to affect communication channels. Respondents' perceptions of public and private organizations and communication channels were dissimilar. • Consistent: Observations were consistent with interview data. Specifically, observations were helpful in assessing the **size of organization**, layout of the office, non-centralized offices, and **artifacts** as possible sub-categories of communication channels.	• Consistent: Communication network literature deals with issue of network size, distance between network members, network member roles, and the number of links within a network. • Inconsistent: Communication network literature does not address **organizational artifacts**, including technology, and the **public/private dichotomy** as sub-categories within organizational communication networks. Discussion on organizational artifacts is found in the organizational culture and organizational power literature. Discussion of organizational technologies is found in computer-mediated communication literature. Public/private dichotomies are found in applied business studies.

I recognize that arguments could be made for placing **organizational structure** within the category of **organizational culture**. However, the creation of these separate categories was the only way to meaningfully represent the sample of the observational and interview data. The data within **organizational structure** lead to some important interpretations that might be lost if placed within **organizational culture**. For example, within the sub-category of **furniture** and **artifacts**, respondents perceived technology to affect the exchange of information. Placing technology in **organizational culture** would confuse the issue of who controls technology with how is technology used and whether technology is available.

The emergent sub-categories within **organizational structure** include **hierarchy**, **location of employees**, **furniture/artifacts**, **public/private**

dichotomies, and **size of the organization**. The observational and respondent data consistently supported these sub-categories.

The first sub-category of **location of employees** was evident in the data. Respondents reported difficulty formally or informally communicating with other employees. Terms such as "out-stationed", "across the street", "over on the other side of the building", and "distanced staff" illustrate employees' perceptions of distance from others (Respondent #3; Respondent #4; Respondent #8; Respondent #2). Observations also noted that when a department moved to an adjacent building, employees complained of the distance and the inability to communicate (Observation #7).

Therefore, respondents reported that a great distance between sender and receiver hindered both formal and informal communication. "Research suggests that the likelihood of two persons communicating with each other decreases by the square of the distance between them" (Kreps, 1986, p. 113).

The second sub-category of **furniture/artifacts** was regularly evident within the observational and interview data. Specifically, within the sub-category of **furniture/artifacts**, respondents reported using various technologies for informal and formal communications, which was supported by observation. Respondents regularly reported the use of E-mail as an important artifacts in gathering and disseminating information. Data indicated that the use of E-mail included both formal and informal communications

(Appendix A[8 & 9]). However, as indicated through observations and interviews, technologies, like voice-mail and pagers, were also used to exchange information through formal and informal channels.

Respondent #5

Respondent: I don't chatter in the hallway. I am so busy, where you find me is in my cubicle. **I check my E-mail a lot, both of them**. And uh, **that is how I get information**.

Miller (1995) supports analyzing technology as one of several artifacts within organizational communication. According to Training & Development (1994), E-mail accounts for 30 percent of the information within informal communication channels. For formal communication channels, E-mail accounts for 43 percent of the information. Additionally, Huff et al. (1989), Frone & Major (1988), and Russ et al. (1990) argue that technology increases the amount of information exchanged. As a result of the increased information, employees' overall commitment and satisfaction of the organization increase.

The third, fourth, and fifth sub-categories of organizational structure are linked. It was my expectation that respondents might perceive that **public or private** organizations would be a sub-category of **organizational structure**. One respondent indicated that formal channels are a "symptomology of the government" (Respondent #5). However, most other respondents reported that the **size of the organization**, not the type of organization, dictates the use of formal and/or informal communication channels.

Likewise, Aryee (1992) argues that the informational needs of employees are similar in both public and private organizations. Additionally, Aryee (1992) argues that there is a blurring of the two sectors, "a lack of consensus on the public-private dichotomy" (p. 73).

Additionally, respondents perceived an "open-door" relation with supervisors as minimizing the hierarchy and the need for informal channels. The literature supports respondents' views by noting "rich, personal media to negotiate understanding is highly valued" (Russ et al., 1990, p. 153). Generally, larger organizations tend to rely on written documentation, thus increasing the uncertainty of the employees (Russ et al., 1990; Kimberly, 1976; Kasarda, 1974). Likewise, respondents report their frequent use of informal communication channels in larger organizations when there is uncertainty within the organization.

Observational data, interview data, and theory are consistent and help categorize employees' perceptions of the exchange of information through formal and informal channels. Although observational and interview data are consistent, Jablin (1987) argues that little research has been completed on "determining how formal structural attributes of organizations affect communication attitudes and behavior (p. 339). However, studies by Glauser (1984); Miller (1972); Allport & Postman (1947); and Rogers & Allbritton (1995) indicate that researchers are beginning to study functions of proximity, technology, and number of communication links as structures that affect the exchange of information.

Table XVI

Discussion Summary - Personal Behaviors

Themes from Interview and Observational Data	Theorist's Views and Connection to Results
• Consistent: Respondents noted problems with other employees, **barriers**, and **manipulation** as issues affecting communication channels. • Consistent: Observational data supported interview data. Of the three emergent categories (**personal styles, interpersonal conflict**, and **personal power**) **conflict** was the most clearly observed sub-category.	• Inconsistent: Observational and interview data were inconsistent with literature. Communication channel and communication network literature does not address **personal behaviors** as affecting the exchange of information. Literature on personal power and conflict supported the interview and observational data. Specifically, these bodies of literature note that job satisfaction is a outcome of personal styles and behaviors that exhibit praise, trust, and friendliness. These styles can be maintained or controlled through informal or formal communication channels.

This emergent category was a major finding. The communication channel literature did not suggest that interpersonal issues would emerge as a major category. However, taken as a whole, observational and interview data indicated four sub-categories of **personal behavior**. These sub-categories include **personal styles**, **competence**, **interpersonal conflict**, and **personal power**.

The first and second emergent sub-categories are **personal styles** and **competencies**. Observational data did not indicate these sub-categories. However, all respondents noted that differences in personal styles can create distrust in formal or informal communications. Furthermore, that distrust leads respondents to question whether individuals are competent in exchanging information (Respondent #6; Respondent #8). Some respondents perceive that knowing others' styles helps them understand the flow of information. Some respondents noted that dealing with others' styles in communicating can create additional problems.

Respondent #5

Respondent: It was a lack, non existent...I'm still caught up in the emotion of it. We would **ask for communication**, we would ask for **project input**, which is a form of communication, um, and we wouldn't get it. And I think **that was a style that the individual had adopted** for whatever unknown reason. I think it served that **individual very poorly**. It certainly served us in our work unit, **extremely poorly**. And it created a lot of **mistrust**. It created a lot of **animosity**, it created a lot of **unhappiness**.

Although respondents did not use the term "job satisfaction", it appears that understanding others' personal communicative styles yields greater predictability about their job. Goldhaber et al. (1978) argues that organizational communication relationships are a significant contributor to job satisfaction. Goldhaber et al. (1978) notes that personal styles that exhibit praise, understanding, trust, friendliness, honesty, and freedom to disagree create high job satisfaction.

The third sub-category is **conflict**. Observational and interview data illustrate occurrences of conflict in the exchange of information. One respondent reported that conflict occurred due to two employees hearing incomplete information about the other, through informal channels (Respondent #4). On the other hand, some individuals perceived that formal channels were exclusively used by management to control conflict between employees

(Respondent #7). Observations show that conflict occurs when an individual receives a job task through formal channels, then hears through informal channels that his/her job task has changed (Observation #3).

Tjosvold (1991) developed a framework to establish strong, cooperative organizational communication and minimize conflict. Tjosvold (1991) argues that organizational members are interdependent when six elements occur together.

> Cooperative interdependence can be developed by (a) a common direction and vision, (b) group tasks, (c) assessment of joint productivity, (d) bonuses, praise, and other rewards contingent upon joint success, (e) complementary roles that require collaboration, and (f) team identity and supportive culture (Tjosvold et al., 1991, p. 297).

Therefore, when employees are dependent upon the group and exchange information as a group, the likelihood of conflict minimizes. As implied by the data, perhaps the use of Tjosvold's (1991) strategy occurs when respondents report that a managerial response to conflict is to send formal memos about the shared mission of the organization (Appendix A[10]).

The fourth sub-category is **personal power**. In this category respondents perceive that other employees' power may affect the exchange of information through formal or informal channels. Prior to conducting this research, the communication channel literature did not suggest that this category would emerge. Additionally, the critical power literature treated power as part of the superior-subordinate role. Despite the literature review, respondents report that **personal power** between co-workers, and occasionally management, provides a framework for understanding employees' perceptions of the exchange of information.

Respondent and observational data are consistent in the category of power. For example, one respondent noted that co-workers sometimes become confrontational and attempt to exert power and influence over other co-workers.

Respondent #7

Respondent: We're going to meet in another room, this teacher's aide had already went in this particular room, and I am standing up in the hall way, and this assistant teacher **gonna tell me, "You go in there**." I said, "**look, you go in there. You don't tell me what to do, I am not a little child**." See, because she was getting into it, she didn't have any business, you know, saying anything -- **trying to direct me.** And it seemed like she had lost it.

In this illustration, co-workers often attempt to exert power differences to establish ego or increased importance over others. When this occurred, respondents reported using either formal or informal channels to "socialize the conflict" (Respondent #4). By socializing the conflict, respondents used formal channels, like management and formal complaints, to resolve the problem. Also, respondents socialized the conflict by using informal channels to warn others or attempt to have co-workers take a position.

Generally, respondents noted that when the organization uses formal channels to address power and ego needs between employees, the exchange of information improves.

The observations and interviews illustrate this power gap in the communication channel literature. Certainly power and the quality of the relationships between organizational members influence their perceptions of informal and formal communications. The following literature review addresses the gap in the communication channel literature and helps to explain and contexturalize the sub-category of **personal power**.

Literature Review Gap: Personal Power

The formal literature review focused primarily on power as being conferred by the organization's hierarchy. However, Hickson et al. (1971) and Steward & Anderson (1995) support analyzing power through interpersonal relationships, or co-worker power over another co-worker.

As seen in the literature review, power has multiple definitions. Weber (1947) argues that power is a coercive force. Terry (1993) argues that power is "the actual expenditure of energy" (p. 59). Littlejohn (1996) argues power is "a process of influence, usually by one person over another" (p. 305). In either event, power is either a formal element of an organization -- contractual -- or, informally supported through individuals -- consensual (Hickson et al., 1971).

Steward & Anderson (1995) categorize power as being based in personal relationships where authority is legitimated.

French & Raven (1959) conceptualized power as five distinct kinds: Reward -- the ability to grant material or favors to another; coercive -- the ability to cause harm by deprivation of resources; legitimate -- prerogatives that are part of recognized status in a hierarchy; referent -- one identifies with the other as a role model; and expert -- dependent on another for some special knowledge or expertise (Steward & Anderson, 1995, p. 52). These types of personal power are a matter of perception. For example, I do not have expert power unless you perceive me to be an expert.

Hickson et al. (1971, p. 220) argues that non-managerial individuals have power based upon four factors. The first factor is the ability to cope with uncertainty; the second factor is the substitutability for a particular group; the third factor is the centrality of person to the processes of an organization; the fourth factor is the role and interdependence the individual has with other followers.

Therefore, the organization does not always bestow co-workers with any formal power. Through communication with co-workers, other co-workers may or may not bestow another with power. As Steward & Anderson (1995) argue, in personal relationships, "the granting of power is a choice, not an imperative" (p. 54). The purpose of the explication of power is to view it as part of the dynamics of the exchange of information. For that reason, it becomes clear that certain co-workers may have referent or expert power ascribed to them due to valued information they may possess. Or, as previously illustrated, individuals use formal or informal channels to address power conflicts.

Interestingly, several respondents noted that in times of personal conflict, organizations restate their mission or policy in order to reduce personal conflict and issues of power. When organizations operate in that manner, it appears that organizations utilize Tjosvold's (1991) theory. In this event, the organization is framing what is acceptable and not acceptable communicative behavior. By organizations utilizing Tjosvold (1991) theories, certainly Mumby's (1988) argument that managerial ideology dominates employees' perceptions about communication practices supports the observation of narrow managerial interest which frames the organizational culture.

Therefore, a complete view of power should take into consideration the exchange of information as a cost or reward. Additionally, that view of power must include how employees, as well as management, use power relationships to guide and affect the flow of information through formal and informal channels.

IDENTIFICATION OF BIASES

Prior to my entry to the field, I faced at least four general biases and/or concerns as a qualitative researcher studying organizational communication.

The first bias is "the perception that you, the researcher, are deceiving the people you are studying" (Lofland & Lofland, 1995, p. 47). Observation within an organization can promote fear in the workplace. For example, if members of the organization experience fear within their working relationships with management, it is possible that inviting a researcher to observe may perpetuate problems. Additionally, qualitative interviewing may raise experiences and feelings that the respondent had long since set-aside. Under this circumstance, the researcher must be mindful of his/her role in the interaction (Lofland & Lofland, 1995).

Second, given that qualitative interviewing deals with understanding the world of the interviewee, I had concerns about whether the respondents would be telling the truth (Seidman, 1991). "The researcher must remember that he or she can never be sure that what the informant says represents the full story" (Lindlof, 1995, p. 166). However, this bias is best addressed through increasing validity and reliability.

Third, as a researcher, I expected dynamics in the "social power relations between interviewer and respondent" (Lindlof, 1995, p. 176). An encounter in one of the pilot interviews led to a respondent obstructing the value of the interview. Specifically, the respondent did not see any value in his input to a series of questions. Having learned from this experience, I modeled subsequent interviews as a contract where the respondent can gain a perception as a stakeholder in the process (Lindlof, 1995). Additionally, it helps to be mindful of Seidman's (1991) suggestion, "watch for an ebb and flow in interviews and try not to take it too personally" (p. 66).

Fourth, it was difficult to obtain entry to an organization for qualitative observation. Having a previous bad experience attempting to gain access into an organization created some trepidation for myself. That organization welcomed my observational research, but expected control over the research focus and method. I quickly learned, as Mumby (1988) suggests, that the act of organizational interpretation is itself a political act.

Unfortunately, organizational communication case-studies are problematic because of issues of entry and organizational secrecy. "By definition, bureaucratic organizations are based on secrecy" (Rosen, 1991, p. 16). As such, some material may be off limits to outsiders. Given the nature of organizational communication, being in a closed setting, the ability to obtain "data on the sly" (Lofland & Lofland, 1995, p. 32) and access to the communication network can be difficult. The design of this project addressed those prior research biases and difficulties.

Generally, conducting pilot interviews prior to the in-depth interviews assisted in dealing with these biases and clarifying the goals of the research. Additionally, pilot interviews assisted in increasing my technical skills of in-depth interviewing.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study is subject to the following limitations:

1. An introduction of researcher interpretive bias may exist in the analysis of data. In this study, I acted as the sole coder. According to Frey et al. (1992), intercoder reliability is needed to establish and "identify the units and classifying them into the categories" (p. 198). In an attempt to address this issue, I had to understand the emerging categories, be flexible with the data, and list all biases to avoid a pre-determined reflection of the categorized data (Lofland & Lofland, 1995, p. 122).
2. Within the moderately structured interview questions, employees' were open to discussing multiple perceptions of informal and formal communication channels. As such, the respondents told stories based upon their experiences. Under this circumstance, it is possible that respondents only selected memorable experiences that were either very positive or negative. The construction of the method addressed this limitation. Specifically, triangulating the method gave this study more varied, confirmable data.

3. The study method used selective qualitative interviews of employees' perceptions across different types of organizations. For this reason, theoretical generalization may be problematic. Therefore, this study used idiographic analyses. The purpose of idiographic analysis is to collect respondent data, obtain richness of meaning, and generalize upon the thematically grouped data. Such a grouping can "allow the researcher to generalize to other cases of the same problem in the larger culture" (Lindlof, 1995, p. 57).
4. For both the interviews and observations, I was unable to obtain continuous first-hand experience of how the organizations' informal and formal communication systems work. "Expertise in performing the tasks of the subjects presumably leads to a deeper understanding of their sociocultural existence (Rosen, 1991, p. 16).

IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE STUDY

In this study I interpreted employees' perceptions of communication channels based on one place in time. Although I gathered great understanding of the respondents' perceptions, it is inappropriate to assume that these perceptions and categories will endure over time.

For that reason, there is a need for additional research to explore informal and formal communication within organizations. The following five issues are for future consideration.

1. The first implication was that respondents perceived informal channels and formal channels as operating mutually and as important sources for the exchange of information. This perception is significant to business communication research that indicates that formal channels are more important than informal channels in supporting the organizational culture (Galpin, 1995). This implication should lead to additional research studying informal and formal communication channels in communicating cultural values and missions of the organization.
2. A quantitative approach could permit looking at a larger sample to establish theory. This study, utilizing qualitative methods, introduced emergent categories from the respondents' experiences. However, this study does not analyze the effect of each category on the use of formal and informal channels. A quantitative study, by increasing the sample size and testing which categories are significant variables in channel selection, could broaden the scope of this research.
3. As suggested by the data, respondents found difficulty in communicating to others in physically distant offices. Further research could explore the effects of physical distances on the communication process.
4. Respondents reported the use of E-mail, voice-mail, and other technologies for sending and receiving formal and informal messages. Given the increasing use of communication technologies in organizations, additional

research could address message content and individuals' perceptions of the exchange of information through technological channels.

5. In understanding employees' perceptions of the exchange of information, the issue of power was evident in interviews and observations. More significantly, respondents perceived power to be part of the hierarchy as well as part of personal interactions with co-workers. Critical organizational theorists have begun to analyze organizational power and how communicative practices can reproduce power. However, little research has been conducted on personal power and its effect on the exchange of information through communication channels. Future studies could analyze these important issues about power, perception, and the exchange of information.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

In this study I identified multiple characteristics shared by formal and informal communication channels. Certainly, the effective transmission and understanding of information is vital in all communications. The findings from this study, when integrated with organizational communication literature, suggest multiple approaches to understanding employees' perceptions of the exchange of information.

Furthermore, we must support the development of qualitative methods within our organizations. Too frequently, organizations dismiss qualitative interviewing as being unscientific and time-consuming. As evident in this study, qualitative methods best unearth the richness of organizational communication. It is my hope that as qualitative research measures gain credence for understanding organizational communication, then we will begin to better understand how we communicate.

Additionally, it is my hope that this study will expand researchers', practitioners', managers', and employees' knowledge of the complexities of organizational communication. Fortunately, operating in organizations is something we all share. Consequently, it is important that we share our organizational experiences with others. As we share our experiences, we begin to understand others' perceptions. As we gain insight into others' perceptions, we begin to arrange pieces of the organizational communication puzzle. When we complete the organizational communication puzzle, we will see that formal and informal communication channels, hierarchy, organizational culture, power, size of organization, technology, and personal styles are all interrelated pieces of the puzzle. As such, each piece shapes and is shaped by the other.

Hopefully by participating in this project, respondents who might have marginalized voices within their organizations had the opportunity to deeply understand their own organizational experiences. For myself, this has been an invaluable experience. Through respondents sharing their organizational stories, I became less of a scholar and more of a pupil. As such, I gained understanding through respondents' illustrations of how organizational and individual goals shape the exchange of information. This information will provide assistance as I share with other organizations and individuals the complex, yet interdependent roles that lead to effective organizational communication.

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APPENDIX A -- Document #1

[redacted]

It's A Matter Of Pride...

PERFORMANCE

RESPONSIBILITY

INVOLVEMENT

DEDICATION

EMPLOYEES

PERFORMANCE • RESPONSIBILITY • INVOLVEMENT • DEDICATION • EMPLOYEES •

Pride

To Have High Levels of Collaboration and Interdependence

We have to be able to count on each other doing what we have agreed to do.

–Philip Crosby

responsibility

To Have High Levels Of Collaboration and Interdependence

- To seek maximum input but not allow the process to inhibit people from making decisions and, once decisions are made, move forward without regret.
- To support the decisions/solutions where input was given.
- To have a culture where, if a decision/solution is not the best, the focus is on how to do it better rather than on who is to blame.
- To be an organization where anyone interested has a clear, systematic way to give input regarding major work, decisions, policy, plans, standards, and to have the input received with respect and given genuine consideration.
- To plan so that priorities are established across teams, divisions, departments.

oppor

solutions

- To have opportunities for volunteers to participate on appropriate projects.
- To have appropriate space to allow us to be organized so that efficiency, productivity, communication, customer service, team-work interdependence (cross-team problem solving), and collaboration are maximized.
- To work in a manner that is directed by the most effective way to do the task instead of by traditional roles and structure.
- To have all appropriate information easily accessible and accessed by all employees and customers.
- To have people who automatically and routinely think about and see the potential impact of their actions on others, and who allow themselves to be informed by those who would be adversely affected.

To Pursue The Ideals Of "Service First"

- To genuinely "own" every customer issue/inquiry at the point of contact.
- To treat every customer fairly and politely.
- To have an informed/educated public regarding our services.
- To have all services/products be of measurably high quality with customer participation.
- To have Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) fully integrated as a way of doing business so that every time we do something, it is better.
- To understand customer/employee needs/wants and to use our resources to provide for these in a prioritized manner.
- To balance individual customer needs with those of the larger community.

To Be Committed To Common Values And Principles

- To be an organization where all customers and employees are aware of and committed to our Mission, Vision, and common values and principles.
- To have high levels of accountability and performance, and keep commitments.
- To have a fear-free work environment.
- To be willing to live with the consequences of our actions.
- To have organizational Mission, Vision, Values, and Principles based on long-range community thinking and the ideal of sustainability.

[redacted]

Department

Leadership in Envisioning, Building, and Ensuring Today a Future for Tomorrow

To Be An Empowered Organization Driven By Principles

- To have all decisions and solutions aligned, consistent with Mission, Vision, Values, Goals, and Priorities.
- To have people involved in defining the problem and solution.
- To have people own all organizational problems as their own.
- To solve problems and resolve conflicts at the lowest possible level with the right people.
- To have a high degree of self-determination within work teams.
- To proactively involve community and employees in decisions.
- To have employees empowered to make decisions, solve problems, provide customer service, be innovative, and to take appropriate risks, without fear of reprisal.
- To have work teams that are highly self directed and aligned with the Mission, Vision, and Values
- To be proactive by working to anticipate problems rather than being caught in crisis situations.

To Have An Image Worthy Of Our Principles

- To be a model of innovative approaches to Public Works service delivery.
- To be admired as an organization.
- To be viewed by the Council and the public as responsive and responsible in providing Public Works' services.

involvement

To Be Strong Stewards Of Our Community's Resources

- To demonstrate our commitment to the sustainability of the community through all of our actions
- To ensure adequate levels of resources to support services and infrastructure and to minimize the use of resources.
- To seek regional solutions to regional and/or common issues
- To be innovative.
- To use appropriate technology to deliver services, i.e., cost effective, environmentally sensitive, etc.

To Value Individuals and People

- To understand and respect differences and to try to create "win/win" solutions.
- To deliver high levels of the Core Dimensions (Respect, Empathy, Genuineness, and Specificity) in all interactions.
- To strive to align personal growth needs with organizational objectives.
- To work toward an environment where all employees can achieve high morale.
- To be an organization where teamwork and customer service commitments are part of every job, every day.
- To promote and respect diversity in the workplace.
- To have the work force reflect the diversity of the local community.
- To eliminate all forms of discrimination and harassment.

APPENDIX A -- Document #3

MEMORANDUM

TO: [redacted]

FROM: [redacted]

DATE: 1/31/97

SUBJECT: "TEAM TIME"

"Team Time" is an idea that was developed by the Training Committee to further the division meeting goal of team building. On the second Wednesday of each month, instead of meeting at 11:00, the whole division will spend that hour in activities with each other such as sharing information. The goals of this activity are to promote teamwork, to provide an opportunity to build better working relationships, to spread knowledge, and to give people a break from their normal duties. Team time will be discussed at the February 12 division meeting, and the first team time will be on March 12. Guidelines for team time are listed below:

1. Team Time is to be used to get together with at least one other person to share something. You can teach something, learn something, ask questions, find out about someone's job, etc. Ideas of example topics are listed on the back.

2. You may meet with people inside or outside the division.

3. Activities are not limited to one-on-one. Groups of people can get together to share.

4. Shared topics should be work-related.

5. Be sure to arrange for Team Time early. Some activities might require preparation. If you need ideas for Team Time, talk to a training committee member [redacted]

6. Team Time is <u>not</u> to be used to do regular work (unless you are sharing with someone while you do it)! Team Time does not take away from your regular work time, because it replaces an existing division meeting. Remember, the goal is to share information and build better relationships, which can't be done alone.

7. At the division meeting the week following Team Time, everyone will share what they did for Team Time the previous week.

The schedule for division meetings may vary from month to month, but the normal order will be:

1st Wednesday:	Building meeting
2nd Wednesday:	Team time
3rd Wednesday:	Presentation (1/2 hour) and reporting on team time activities (1/2 hour)
4th Wednesday:	Team building activities

APPENDIX A – Document #4

MEMORANDUM

TO: [redacted]

FROM: [redacted]

DATE: 1/29/97

SUBJECT: PERFORMANCE STANDARDS

Below is additional information about the performance standards revision process:

1. I would like to have the opportunity to comment on your performance standards either while you are reviewing them, or right after. The new target for having the performance standards to me for review is February 7.
2. I will review all of the standards for about a week and then meet with each group to discuss my input. We will also discuss the next step in the process—what it means to review each other's standards. When we agree on your standards, I will pass them on to the first group that will be reviewing them (see schedule below).
3. As stated in the previous memo, each work group will have an opportunity to review and discuss the performance standards of the other groups. This will be accomplished by each group reviewing another group's standards for about two weeks. Then those two groups will have a mini-charge (probably a half-day) to discuss both of their standards. Each group of techs will exchange input with the other positions in their sub-section. The tentative schedule for the process is shown below:

	Start Date	End Date
Finish reviewing/revising and give t[redacted]for input		2/7/97
[redacted]reviews each group's standards	2/10/97	2/14/97
[redacted]eets with groups to give input, discuss next step	2/18/97	2/28/97
PMs/Engineers review each others'	3/3/97	3/14/97
PM/Engineer mini-charge	Around 3/14/97	
Designers/Inspectors review each others'	3/3/97	3/14/97
Designer/Inspector mini-charge	Around 3/14/97	
PMs/Inspectors review each others'	3/17/97	3/28/97
PM/Inspector mini-charge	Around 3/28/97	
Engineers/Designers review each others'	3/17/97	3/28/97
Engineer/Designer mini-charge	Around 3/28/97	
Engineers/Inspectors review each others'	3/31/97	4/11/97
Engineer/Inspector mini-charge	Around 4/11/97	
PMs/Designers review each others'	3/31/97	4/11/97
PM/Designer mini-charge	Around 4/11/97	
PMs/PM techs review each others' and meet	4/14/97	4/25/97
Inspectors/Inspector techs review each others' and meet	4/14/97	4/25/97
Engineers/Design techs review each others' and meet	4/14/97	4/25/97
Designers/Design techs review each other's and meet	4/28/97	5/9/97
All performance standards are finalized		5/16/97

Please see me, if you have any questions or comments on the process or proposed schedule.

APPENDIX A -- Document #5 (Page 1 of 3)

MEMORANDUM

TO: [redacted]

FROM: [redacted]

DATE: 2/28/97

SUBJECT: **Unscheduled Absence/Habitual Absence Policy**

I've attached a copy of the **Unscheduled Absence/Habitual Absence Policy** memo that we wrote last year. It stated that as a general rule of thumb, the following criteria may indicate a pattern of habitual absence:

1. Sick leave use of more than 50% of accrual over a one year period. Therefore, use of 48 hours or more of sick leave per year.
2. Sick leave use above the yearly average for [redacted]. For non-union employees, the average has been running from 45-55 hours per year. Engineering's average was 46.5 hours for 1996.
3. Unscheduled leave which indicates a pattern: in conjunction with regular days off, vacation, comp time, holidays, or work assignments. Frequent single day absences, or an "accrue it, use it" pattern.

I've also attached your individual "Annual Leave Usage" report. Please note that the 1997 available time was as of January and was not updated.

I'll schedule a meeting with you if I think we need to discuss your particular situation. If you have any questions, please come see me.

Thanks.

[redacted]

APPENDIX A -- Document #5 (Page 2 of 3)

MEMORANDUM

TO: [redacted]

FROM: [redacted]

DATE: 2/6/96

SUBJECT: **Unscheduled Absence/Habitual Absence Policy**

With all the new faces around the Division, we thought that it would be a good time to clarify our "Unscheduled or Habitual Absence" Policy. The following is quoted from th[redacted]Administrative Guidelines for Personnel Administration: "Good attendance is critical to our mission of serving the citizens o[redacted] When employees are absent, co-workers must work harder to take up the slack, the normal flow of work is interrupted and the level of service we provide to our customers declines. Employees are expected, as a condition of employment, to be at work as scheduled. Absence from work without approved leave of absence, misuses of sick leave, or excessive absenteeism, regardless of the reason, is contrary to [redacted]employment standards and may result in disciplinary action up to and including termination of employment". The terminology used in dealing with "excessive absenteeism, regardless of the reason" is referencing what is commonly referred to as "habitual absence". This language was included to provide a basis for dealing with an employee who has a problem with excessive, unscheduled absence. Unscheduled absences are usually taken as sick leave but may also include vacation leave, comp time and leave without pay (usually taken because the employee has used all his/her sick leave). Habitual absence refers to the employee who is excessively absent from work on an unscheduled basis regardless of the reason, legitimate or not.

As a general rule of thumb, the following criteria may indicate a pattern of habitual absence:

1. Sick leave use of more than 50% of accrual over a one year period. Therefore, use of 48 hours or more of sick leave per year.
2. Sick leave use above the yearly average for [redacted]employees. For non-union employees, the average has been running from 45-55 hours per year. Engineering's average was 60.3 hours for 1995.
3. Unscheduled leave which indicates a pattern: in conjunction with regular days off, vacation, comp time, holidays, or work assignments. Frequent single day absences, or an "accrue it, use it" pattern.

The following list of goals will be used as a guide for handling this type of leave. Please take a few minutes to review these goals. Robert and Grant will be discussing these goals with each of you individually.

Goals of the Habitual Absence Policy:

1. To enable all employees to have a bank of leave for emergency or unexpected needs.
2. Maintain as much flexibility as possible in approving leave.
3. Avoid rescheduling of meetings, training, presentations, etc..
4. Minimize disruption of planned work.
5. Observe leave usage and patterns and initiate action promptly to address problems before a problem becomes serious.
6. Take effective steps to change practices in use of leave that impact job performance
7. Discourage use of leave to avoid undesirable work assignments.
8. Minimize payment of overtime in covering for leave.

ANNUAL LEAVE USAGE

	1991		1992		1993		1994		1995		1996		1997 available	
STAFF	SICK	VACATION	SICK	VACATION	SICK	VACATION	SICK	VACATION	SICK	VACATION	SICK	VACATION	SICK	VACATION
[redacted]														
[redacted]											12	50	92	54.66
								DIVISION TOTALS	2078		1651.22			
								DIVISION AVERAGES	62.2		~~32.8~~			
											46.3			

NOTE: Standard sick leave usage is less than 50% of 96 hour accrual over one-year period ...Therefore 48 hours or more should be investigated.

APPENDIX A – Document #6

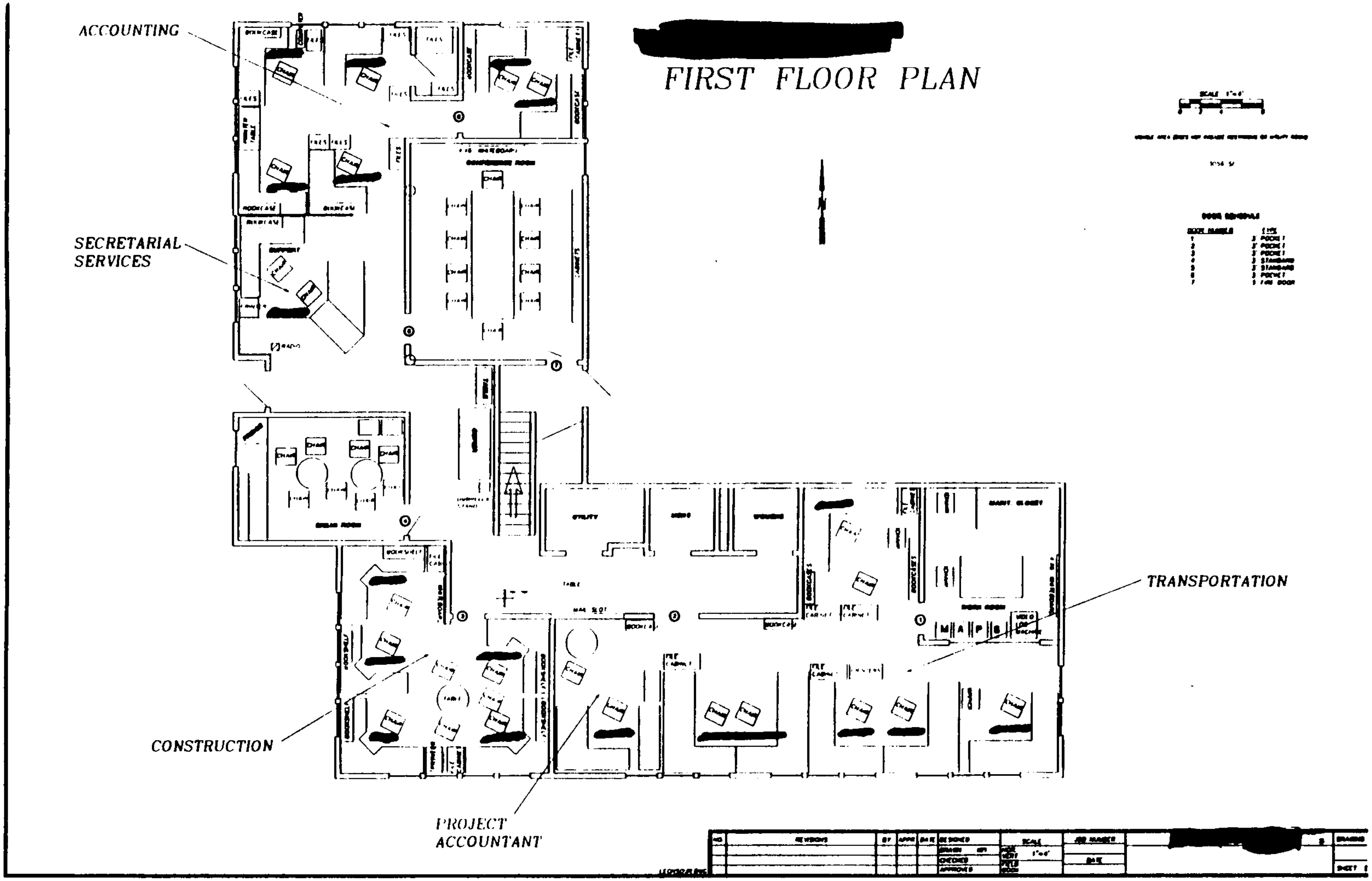
[redacted]

I'M VERY IMPRESSED WITH THE WAY YOU HANDLED THE PUBLIC MTG! YOU SHOWED THAT YOU WERE KNOWLEDGEABLE, UNDERSTOOD THE ISSUES, AND YET YOU WERE OPEN TO HEARING THE NEIGHBOURHOOD'S CONCERNS. I LIKED THE WAY YOU RESPONDED TO THE SPEED CONCERN WITH AN EXPLANATION OF THE "NARROWING EFFECT".

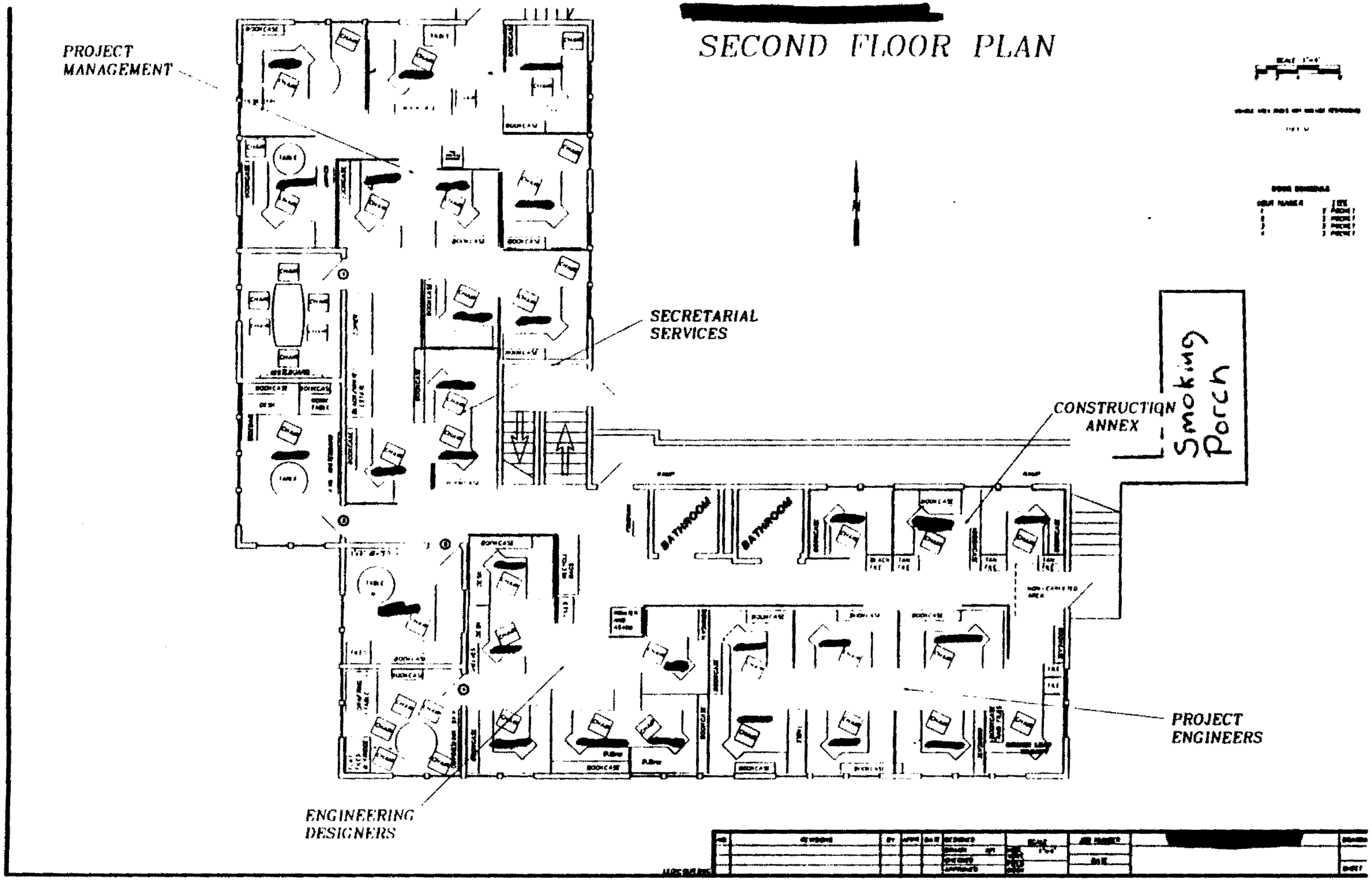
GREAT WORK!
GREAT PRESENTATION!
WELL DONE!!!

[redacted]

APPENDIX A – Document #7 (Page 1 of 2)



APPENDIX A – Document #7 (Page 2 of 2)



APPENDIX A – Document #8

[redacted] - PW, WATER RESOURCES SUPV

[redacted]

SUBJECT: Water Utility Team Meeting

The first meeting of the 'reconstituted' water team is scheduled for this Friday, [redacted] at the large conference room, 1st floor, Smith Bldg. We should be able to finish by 4 p.m. or earlier.

Agenda topics are:

1. Water Team purpose and functions.
2. Consulting contract for regulatory compliance review.
3. 1998 water utility budget and rates.
4. Updates on: well source protection [redacted]; McAllister wells [redacted]; CFP progress highlights [redacted]; conservation programs [redacted].

Hard copy agenda coming to you in mail.

I realize some of you may think you should not be included in this 'team', but for now I think it is good for you to participate until we settle out with a firm list of regular attendees.

APPENDIX A -- Document #9

FROM: [redacted] FW, SECRETARY

[redacted]

SUBJECT: More Golfing News!!!!!!

JUST WHEN YOU THOUGHT IT WAS OVER!!!!! As it turns out, we have a little extra money left from the golf tournament. So, what I've done is put EVERYBODYs names in an envelope and drawn 30 names from it. Those lucky 30 people will each receive a gift certificate to play 9 holes of golf at Scott Lake!!!!! Waaaahoooo!!!! I will be going sometime in the next week to pick them up and then I will deliver them to you. I believe that some of the people I will be listing as winners don't actually work for the City, so I will give those certificates to one of the "City" team members. AND THE LUCKY WINNERS ARE: [redacted]. Whew! In case any of you are wondering how on earth is there extra money, we started with a little left from last year which covered the deposit for golf and we didn't eat as much pizza as we thought we would.... So, have a great time with your 9 holes of golf!!!!! Thanks!!!! [redacted]

APPENDIX A -- Document #10

TEAM: An interdependent unit. Each team member is accountable for the overall success of the entire project, for team morale, and for maintaining constructive attitudes and working relationships with other team members. Team members are willing to make time to help each other out to meet project goals and deadlines. Teams set their own goals.

WORK GROUP: people placed together who work independently, approach their job from a task specific perspective, are not accountable for the overall project, and do not necessarily participate in setting goals.

Qualities of High Performing Teams

High Energy	Open Communication	Galvanizing Purpose
Appreciation of Diversity	Commitment to Team	Growth-Oriented Members
Flexibility	Encourages Creativity	Resolves Conflicts
Effective Meetings	Self-regulating	Constructive Climate

Effective Workflow and Update Methods   Celebrates & Rewards Accomplishment

Five Stages of Team Development:
The stages are cyclical and consists of an issue or challenge that must be resolved before moving on the next stage. Stages are either task oriented (getting the work done) or relationship oriented (keeping team together and working effectively).

1. Form   awareness & orientation
2. Storm   conflict & resistance
3. Norm   cooperation and communication
4. Perform   productivity & problem solving
5. Reform/Adjourn   celebration

APPENDIX B

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

I, ________________________, (please print your name) hereby agree to serve as a respondent in the research project about public and private employees' perceptions of informal and formal organizational communication channels. The project will be conducted by Warren J. Brown under the supervision of Leslie Good, Ph.D. and Peter Ehrenhaus, Ph.D.

I understand that the project involves verbally responding to questions asked by Warren J. Brown. I understand that this interview will last approximately one and a half hours and will be audio-taped.

I understand that I can refuse to answer any question. I also understand that I can stop my involvement at any time before or during the interview. If I decide to withdraw from the interview, the interviewer will hand over all audio tapes and notes from the interview session and the information will not be used in any way.

It has been explained to me that the purpose of the project is to understand public and private employees' perceptions of the utility of informal and formal communication channels.

I may not receive any direct benefit from participation in this study, but my participation may help to increase knowledge which may benefit others in the future.

Warren J. Brown has offered to answer any question I may have about the project and what is expected of me in the project. I have been assured that all information I give will be kept confidential and that my identity will be protected in any discussion of results or in any written research summary.

I understand that I am free to withdraw from participation in this project at any time without jeopardizing my relationship with Warren J. Brown, Portland State University, or any other business organization.

I have read and understand the above information and agree to participate in this project.

________________________________ ____________

Signature Date

If you experience problems that are the result of your participation in this study, please contact the Chair of the Human Subjects Research Committee, Office of Grants and Contracts, 105 Neuberger Hall, Portland State University, (503) 725-3534.

If you have any questions about this project, please contact Warren J. Brown (503) 725-3548, Leslie Good, Ph.D. (503) 725-3608, or Peter Ehrenhaus, Ph.D. (503) 725-4939.

APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Prior to the interview session, please complete the following form. Demographic information may be linked to responses. However, you are assured of complete confidentiality. The demographic information might not be published. However, this type of information helps the researcher establish the link between the interviewee and the organizational culture.

EMPLOYMENT HISTORY

Please begin by listing your present employer. Remember all information will be kept confidential by the researcher. No identifying information about yourself nor, your employer(s) will be published.

1.	Present or Last Employer	Approximate Number of Employees in Present or Last Employer	Public or Private Employer	
Your Title / Position		Length of Time In this Position	Full-Time or Part-Time	Number of Employees Supervised

2.	Previous Employer	Approximate Number of Employees in Organization	Public or Private Employer	
Your Title / Position		Length of Time In this Position	Full-Time or Part-Time	Number of Employees Supervised

3.	Previous Employer	Approximate Number of Employees in Organization	Public or Private Employer	
Your Title / Position		Length of Time In this Position	Full-Time or Part-Time	Number of Employees Supervised

4.	Previous Employer	Approximate Number of Employees in Organization	Public or Private Employer	
Your Title / Position		Length of Time In this Position	Full-Time or Part-Time	Number of Employees Supervised

APPENDIX D

INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR STUDY

A. This group asks the respondent to draw an organizational chart based on how they see themselves within their current organization. Using the chart as a guideline, the respondent is then asked to describe and compare his/her experiences in communication networks.

1. I thank you for agreeing to participate in this project.

2. Based on how you see your current workplace, can you draw me an organizational chart?
    - Who you communicate to?
    - How you communicate to these people?
    - When you receive information from management, how do you receive it?
    - How would you like to receive information from management?
  - **Question set-up:** I am interested in how employees address, and/or use titles with other employees and supervisors.
    - How are employees and supervisors addressed?

3. What would this chart look like using your previous work experiences?
    - Who you communicate to?
    - How you communicate to these people?
    - When you receive information from management, how do you receive it?
    - How would you like to receive information from management?
  - **Question set-up:** I am interested in how employees address, and/or use titles with other employees and supervisors.
    - How are employees and supervisors addressed?

B. This group inquires what respondents report as definition of terms used in the study.

Question Set-up: Some say that within organizations, information can be sent and received by formal and/or informal routes, or channels, of communication.

1. What does "formal routes of communication" mean to you?

2. What does "informal routes of communication" mean to you?

C. The respondent is then asked to describe his/her organizational experiences (using stories, rites, rituals, etc.).

1. Can you tell me a good communication experience from your current organization?
   - How about from your previous organizations?
2. Can you tell me a bad communication experience for your current organization?
   - How about from your previous organizations?

Question Set-up: I am interested in how organizations initiate and communicate change to its employees.

2. In your experience, what happened the last time an organization had a policy, employment, or internal issue to communicate to its employees?

Question Set-up: Some say the grapevine is a way to send and collect information about the organization.

3. What does the office grapevine mean to you?
4. When you use the grapevine, what kind of information do you talk about?
   - How was the grapevine used in your previous jobs?

Question Set-up: Sometimes information can be true or false.

5. In your experience, how much faith do you place in the accuracy of information you receive from others?
6. In your experience, when you send information to others, how much faith do you place in them understanding the message?
   - How do you send information to others?

D. This group asks the respondent about personal (informal) and organizational (formal) benefits from using formal or informal communication channels. More specifically, this section looks at the content of communication.

Question set-up: Here, I am interested in the content of the messages sent and received in organizations.

1. Task coordination between workers is important. In your organizational experience, how do you communicate in order to coordinate activities?

2. Some say that within organizations, friendships may be created, maintained, or destroyed. Socially, how do you communicate within your current organization?
   - What do employees talk about?
   - Socially, how did you communicate within your previous organizations?

E. This group asks the respondent to identify problems that hinder communication within an organization.

1. Personality related problems with other employees sometimes occurs in organizations. How do you communicate with an employee or supervisor when a personality problem arises?
   - What communication channels are used when a personality problem arises?

2. Other than personality problems, what are other causes for communication problems within organizations?

F. Concluding Remarks

1. Let me summarize the information that you shared with me. What do you think?

2. In thinking about our interview, is there anything else that you would like to add?

APPENDIX E

PILOT STUDY INTERVIEW GUIDE

A. This group inquires about what respondents report for the definition of terms used in the study.

1. I thank you for agreeing to participate in this project.
2. What does internal business communication mean to you?
3. In a business, what does formal communication channels mean to you?
4. In a business, what does informal communication channels mean to you?

B. This group asks the respondent to draw an organizational chart based on how they see themselves within their current organization. Using the chart as a guideline, the respondent is asked to describe and compare his/her experiences in communication networks.

1. Based on how you see your workplace, can you draw me an organizational chart (and explain who you communicate to and how you communicate)?
2. What would this chart look like from your previous work experiences?
3. Can you tell me a bit about the internal communication from your work experiences?
4. Can you tell me a story about your current organization or prior organization's internal communication?
5. In your experience, what happened the last time an organization had a major policy or internal issue to communicate to employees?
6. When you receive information from management, how do you receive it?
7. How would you like to receive information?
8. When you need to know critical information about the organization, how do you get the information?
9. When you need to know non-critical information about the organization, how do you get the information?
10. If central management communicated like you do in your work group, what would it look like?

C. This group asks the respondent about personal (informal) and organizational (formal) benefits from using formal or informal communication channels.

1. In a business setting, what does personal rewards mean to you?
2. In your experience, how do you communicate in order to gain personal rewards? <Who do you communicate to, to gain personal rewards?>
3. In a business setting, what does organizational benefits mean to you?
4. In your experience, how do you communicate in order to gain organizational benefits? <Who do you communicate to, to gain organizational benefits?>

D. This group asks the respondent to estimate the utility of using certain communication channels. Additionally, this group identifies problems that hinder communication within an organization.

1. In your experience, how much faith do you place in the information you send through communication channels?
2. In your experience, how much faith do you place in the information you receive from the communication channels?
3. What do you see as the sites of communication problems within organizations?

E. Concluding Remarks

1. Let me repeat the information that you shared with me. What do you think?
2. In thinking about our interview, is there anything else that you would like to add?

APPENDIX F -- Document #1

[redacted]

COUNCIL

[redacted]
Mayor

[redacted]
Mayor Pro Tem

[redacted]

CITY MANAGER

[redacted]

February 4, 1997

Human Subjects Research Review Committee
Portland State University
P.O. Box 751
Portland, OR 97201

To Whom It May Concern:

This is to provide notice that Warren J. Brown has submitted a thesis prospectus to the [redacted] Department. Mr. Brown's organizational communication thesis is entitled "The Juice is Loose? A qualitative study of employees' perception of informal and formal communication channels." Part of the thesis method requires that data be collected through observations. Mr. Brown has informed the [redacted] Department of his intention to observe our organizational communication practices.

This letter is to notify you that the [redacted] Department approve Warren J. Brown's thesis project. We understand that Mr. Brown will observe members of our organization. Furthermore, we understand that the data may be presented to the Speech Communication Department, presented to our Department, and/or submitted to journals. Mr. Brown has assured the [redacted] Department and the [redacted] that the identity of all employees will remain confidential. Additionally, pursuant to our request, Mr. Brown will keep the identity of the [redacted] Department confidential in any and all preliminary reports, thesis drafts, and the final thesis document.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,

[redacted]

MG/ckl

[redacted]

APPENDIX F – Document #2

OFFICE OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH
Research and Sponsored Projects

DATE: December 9, 1996

TO: Warren Brown SSN#: 532-98-1770

FROM: for Vikki Vandiver, Chair, HSRRC, 1996-97

RE: HSRRC Waived Review of Your Application titled, "The Juice Is Loose? A Qualitative Study of Public and Private Employees' Perceptions of Informal and Formal Communications Channels."

Your proposal is exempt from further HSRRC review, and you may proceed with the study.

Even with the exemption above, it was necessary by University policy for you to notify this Committee of the Proposed research and we appreciate your timely attention to this matter. If you make changes in your research protocol, the Committee must be notified. This approval is valid for one year from date of issue.

c: Maureen Orr Eldred
Project Advisor

APPENDIX F – Document #3

OFFICE OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH
Research and Sponsored Projects

DATE: March 25, 1997

TO: **Warren J. Brown** SSN#: 532-98-1770

FROM: for Vikki Vandiver, Chair, HSRRC 1996-97

RE: HSRRC approval renewal of your project, "The Juice Is Loose? A Qualitative Study of Public and Private Employees' Perceptions of Informal and Formal Communication Channels."

In response to your request for an approval of change in your original HSRRC application, the Human Subjects Research Review Committee has reviewed your above referenced project (last approved on December 9, 1996) for compliance with Department of Health and Human Services policies and regulations on the protection of human subjects. We note that there are no major alterations in the research plan originally proposed.

The Committee is satisfied that your provisions for protecting the rights and welfare of all subjects participating in the research are adequate.

c: Maureen Orr Eldred
Leslie T. Good, Project Advisor

chgok.mem