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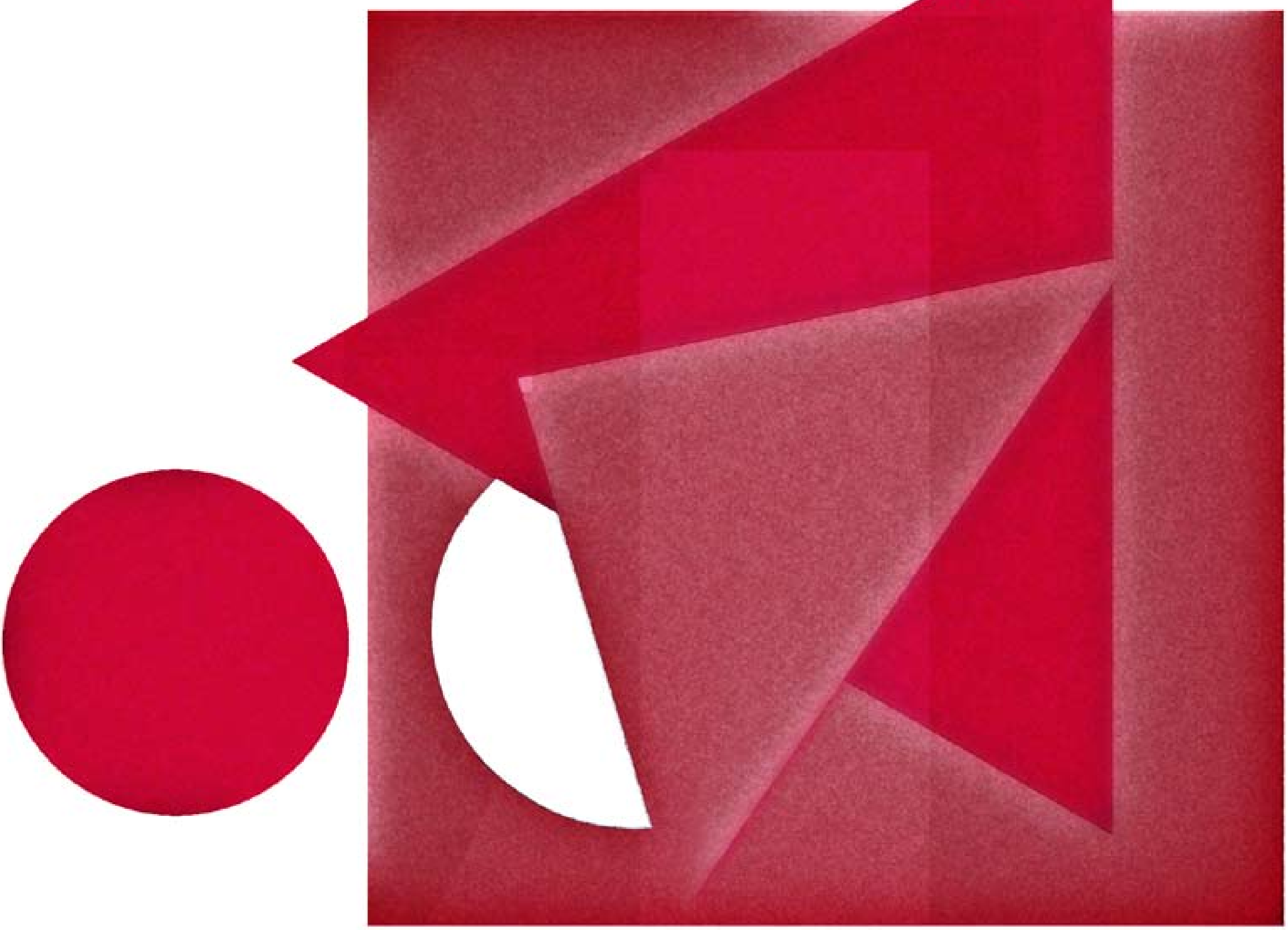
FINAL REPORT IN THE RESEARCH PROJECT
BUSINESS EFFECTIVE PROFESSIONAL COMMUNICATION



THE PROFESSIONAL COMMUNICATOR'S ROLE IN LEADERSHIP

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I would like to thank everyone who has made this research project possible. You have been pioneering and courageous. You have participated in raising the professional communication industry to a new level. You have been involved in the development of new knowledge within the the field of communication. We are making this knowledge available to our colleagues in the Swedish Public Relations Association, as well as to colleagues in our global network. You have grasped what more, and more communicative, organisations can accomplish.

Margaretha Sjöberg
Managing Director
Swedish Public Relations Association

Introduction

This research project is now approaching its end and it is time to summarise the results it has generated. For me personally it has been a very exciting experience. I had a feeling right from the start that there was a great deal of interest among professional communicator's to develop their professional role.

However, as it turned out that interest was considerably greater than I had dared to anticipate. My expectation was that I would be able to locate myself at the centre of the network and have frequent contact with everybody, but this proved not to be possible when the numbers of people involved really started rising. Instead cooperation developed in the network in that a large number of people made individual contributions, while a smaller number got more involved and even took part as co-authors of the reflections that were published. What has been important for the project's success has been the scale both of the number of contributors and their interest in the research question. In total some 1,000 people have taken part in the project.

I am therefore extremely grateful for all the contributions that the project has received. It is my hope that the results will be reflected in an ever more developed role for increasing numbers of professional communicators.

It is already possible to observe trends in this direction. One such effect is that the Swedish Public Relations Association, which is after all the initiator of the project, has clearly been inspired by the research findings in its new vision, "More, and more communicative, organisations".

My conviction is that the role of the professional communicator is extremely open to development, perhaps even uniquely at this precise moment in time. Organisations' communication skills are being increasingly tested in today's changeable network environment. It is important for all organisations to regularly find new creative approaches to developing their ability to communicate so that they are alert to changes in the world around them. At the same time a turbulent global environment demands that organisations are more robust and contiguous in relation to the world around them. Today's organisations have to be like efficient sailing boats that derive benefit from the dynamics in the winds and move forward on a stable, and yet flexible, course. The capacity that brings together all the factors that combine to achieve a powerful, stable and dynamic craft such as this is precisely communication skills.

I therefore hope and believe that a large number of professional communicators will confront the future replete with opportunities to develop their professional role, and will find a leadership position in their organisation. Should the results from this project make a contribution to inspiration and guidance in such a development, we will have the ultimate acknowledgment that it has been beneficial for business.

Sven Hamrefors

Outline

As this is a final report, good research practice requires an account not only of the results that have been produced, but also of the methods that have been used. The report therefore starts with an account of the research question and method. A large proportion of the results have already been published in the previous reflections and they will therefore be repeated in this final report. It will thereby be more extensive and be based on the chaos theory model that was the fruit of the research process.

After the introductory sections on the research question and method I describe the context within which today's communication work functions. This context is comprised partly of the tradition that previously characterised professional communication and partly of the changes that have taken place in the way businesses are organised.

I THEN PRESENT certain criticisms that can be directed at the traditional way of working with professional communication. The reader should be prepared here for a rather "raw analysis" in this section. My aim is to indicate clearly that there is a need for a fairly thorough reform of the role of the professional communicator if the ambition is to take a more active part in the organisation's leadership. I perceive a need for a paradigm shift in the view of the role of professional communication in organisations.

Having laid out the issues, I address a number of fundamental aspects concerning the way in which human beings think and apprehend their existence and present a review of human cognition (how people think) in a social perspective. This is what is usually called social cognition in the literature.

THIS IS THE BASIS ON WHICH I THEN present the chaos theory model that the project has generated. It is based on how human beings function cognitively and the requirements that the external environment places on professional communication to enable people to develop their cognitive capacity.

I subsequently present and analyse how Professional communication can operate within the four areas that have been identified in this research project. These areas are: processes, structures, social interaction and organisational wide relations.

FINALLY I ANALYSE the four professional roles that professional communicators have to be able to play in the organisation in order to contribute to its leadership and to develop its communication skills. These roles are: system builder, mediator, coach and influenser.

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FORSKNINGSFRÅGA

Research question

The initiative for this research project came from the Swedish Public Relations Association (Sveriges Informationsförening). The association has been involved in developing the role of the professional communicator for a long time. It has constituted the foundation of the Association's support for various research initiatives, courses and activities to convey knowledge. A very clear example has been the Association's initiative to develop the Communication Executives Program, which has contributed to advancing the careers of many professional communicators.

It is therefore in the Association's interest to make an active contribution to the development of knowledge within professional communication.

THE SWEDISH PUBLIC RELATIONS ASSOCIATION UNDERTAKES REGULAR surveys of how the professional communicator's role is perceived and in these surveys it has noted the increased significance of the role, simultaneously as the role has becoming more indistinct. There was a need to develop knowledge in relation to the question of how the role of professional communicators could be developed towards a managerial role. This need led to the Association taking the initiative for this research project. Professional communicators should be able to occupy a variety of roles, for example, a strategic position or a tactical or practical role. Professional communicators are consequently not a uniform professional group, rather they are represented at different occupational levels.

THE NEED THAT LAY BEHIND this project was to develop knowledge about the professional communicator as a strategist or expressed more concretely: how professional communicators can contribute to leadership in their organisations.

Leadership, as opposed to managership, is characterised by the fact that influence is exercised over other people's work with an effect on the organisation's external effectiveness. Leadership is therefore broader than managership and can only be assessed on the basis of the effect it has on the organisation's effectiveness in relation to the world around it. This is usually denoted by the term ”effectiveness”. Managership entails influencing other people's specific tasks and it therefore relates primarily to the internal effectiveness that is usually denoted by ”efficiency”. It is therefore easier to measure efficiency in managership than in leadership. Leadership is therefore associated with genuine ambiguity while managership is associated with measurable uncertainty. Based on this distinction between leadership and managership, the research question for this project is defined as:

How can professional communicators work with professional communication to contribute to their organisation's effectiveness and thereby take their place in its leadership?

THE RESEARCH QUESTION AROUSED THE INTEREST of several organisations with members who hold some sort of leading position in their organisations and a consortium was set up to support the project. They all deserve substantial recognition for their support for the project.

Financiers behind the project are *Alecta, Cision, Ericsson, Folksam, Gullers Grupp, Hyresgästföreningen, JKL, KK-stiftelsen, NCC, Nordea, Posten, SCA, Scania, SEB, Skanska, Vasakronan, Vattenfall* and *Volvo.*


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Method

This has been commissioned research. A process such as this is characterised by the existence of a client who has taken the initiative for the research project and who has therefore had an influence on the research question. Commissioned research therefore differs from other types of research processes. It is possible to broadly define three types of research processes: Basic research, applied research and commissioned research.

BASIC RESEARCH IS CONDUCTED without any influence from the external world. Such research is based on the researcher's own interest in a particular issue and there are no requirements or ideas regarding the results to which the research will lead. One such research process is perhaps the kind that is usually thought of when it comes to research – the ”free” researcher who ”discovers something” (hopefully).

Basic research in its traditional sense is however becoming increasingly rare. One reason for this is that nowadays knowledge is generated in a large variety of forms due to the development of the network society that I will describe later. Universities and research institutions no longer have a monopoly on knowledge in the same way that they did in the past.

WHEN CONDUCTING basic research there is a large arsenal of methods that can be applied. The imagination plays a major role in basic research processes and it can take many years before the value of the basic research emerges. When Einstein discovered the theory of relativity he fantasised about what it would be like to do as Münchhausen did and sit on a lightbeam and travel through space. He imagined this at the start of the 20th century, but it wasn't until 30-40 years later than there was empirical evidence for the theory's sustainability.

It's true, Einstein did receive the Nobel Prize, but he was awarded it for discovering the photoelectric effect, not the theory of relativity.

APPLIED RESEARCH is the opposite of basic research. Here light needs to be shed on a tangible issue. It often concerns establishing whether something is true or false. Applied research always has a concrete aim and there is therefore a reduced arsenal of methods that can be used. There is frequently reference to use of one kind of method – the deductive. When a deductive method is used the relationship between cause and effect is studied and an attempt is made to prove that such a relationship exists.

The client in applied research often wants to know whether the relationship between a cause and its effect is true. The research philosopher Karl Popper has however convincingly demonstrated that a deductive method can in fact only be used to show that a relationship between a cause and its effect is false. So, if it has been possible to find a connection it is because, according to Popper, it has not yet been possible to falsify it. This is clearly an extremely dreary process and help is therefore often gleaned from statistical methods to demonstrate the likelihood that a particular connection actually exists.

A common form of applied research is scientific studies of the effect of medicines on illnesses. Such studies do not leave any room for the imagination, but are limited to the strict research question. Another consequence of applied research is that the method is not simply deductive in character, but the choice falls on a quantitative method. It must be possible to ”compute” the result in order to attain sufficient certainty in the judgement.

COMMISSIONED RESEARCH falls right in the middle of the previous two. In this case there is a client, as with applied research, but this client orders a research process – not a desire for a particular result. There is consequently some commissioned research that borders very closely on basic research and some that is close to applied research. In commissioned research the client has a decisive influence on the research question, but not on the method.

It is therefore important that the client and the research leader are in clear agreement about what the research question is and that both parties take mutual responsibility that the question is illuminated in the best way. In this case the research question has certain inherent features that had a major influence on choice of method.

The most important feature is that the client wants to generate knowledge, not validate or test already existing knowledge. In reality it is only basic research that generates new knowledge, but the price of this is that nobody has a clue about what will emerge from the process. Applied research is good at testing knowledge, but has shortcomings in terms of generating new knowledge. So the question was thus which method could be used in this case to make it sufficiently likely that new knowledge would be generated, at the same time as providing sufficient control over what sort of knowledge it would comprise.

THERE ARE A LARGE RANGE of research methods, but the most common are the *deductive* and the *inductive* methods. The deductive methods are used to validate/test knowledge. This type of method is used very frequently and has the advantage that it leads to results that are perceived to be ”robust”.

The problem, as I indicated above, is that this method cannot actually lead to a verification of knowledge, but only a falsification. Furthermore it is not able to accommodate the human imagination. If Einstein had used the deductive method to arrive at the theory of relativity, he would not have discovered it. However, there has subsequently been great success in testing his theory using deduction.

THE INDUCTIVE METHOD IS USED when there is a desire to generate knowledge from the way in which reality is constructed, pictures are, as it were, sieved out of reality. The advantage of this method is that it is possible to discover things that were not anticipated in advance, however it has the weakness that it too leaves too little room for the imagination as a generator of knowledge. A common form of inductive method within the social sciences is a method called ”Grounded theory”, developed by Glaser & Strauss. The method is used when you want to know how things might turn out, e.g. how prospective students reason when applying for different university courses. Grounded theory is certainly somewhat more open to the imagination, but it is limited to the imagination of the researcher.

A THIRD CATEGORY of research methods that has not been very common, but which is starting to become so, is the *abductive*. It was formulated as far back as the 19th century by the American philosopher of science Charles Peirce.

It is based on the notion that there are a number of parties involved in the process of generating knowledge. In this method is it not just one party, the researcher, who has the monopoly on interpretation, but there are a number of parties involved in the process and who ”knock their heads together”. The method gained popularity within social science in the 1980s through the researchers Guba & Lincoln. The method makes it possible to ”negotiate” knowledge into existence through a dialogue between several parties.

As the aim of this research project is to generate new knowledge about the role of the professional communicator, the abductive method fits like a hand in a glove. It makes it possible for a large number of individuals to use all their experience and imagination to participate in the process. The choice of method was therefore obvious. Moreover, there are plenty of examples of how knowledge is generated in this way.
Linus Torvalds developed the ”Linux” program in an open environment where thousands of programmers cooperated.

The well-known control model ”Balanced scorecard” was developed in a similar way. The Harvard researcher Robert Kaplan derived a lot of inspiration from numerous chief accountants, leading to the new method that has had such a great impact in organisations.

THE MODEL THAT WAS DEVELOPED for this project is based on the notion that professional communicators possess a great deal of knowledge and ideas concerning how their professional role can be developed.

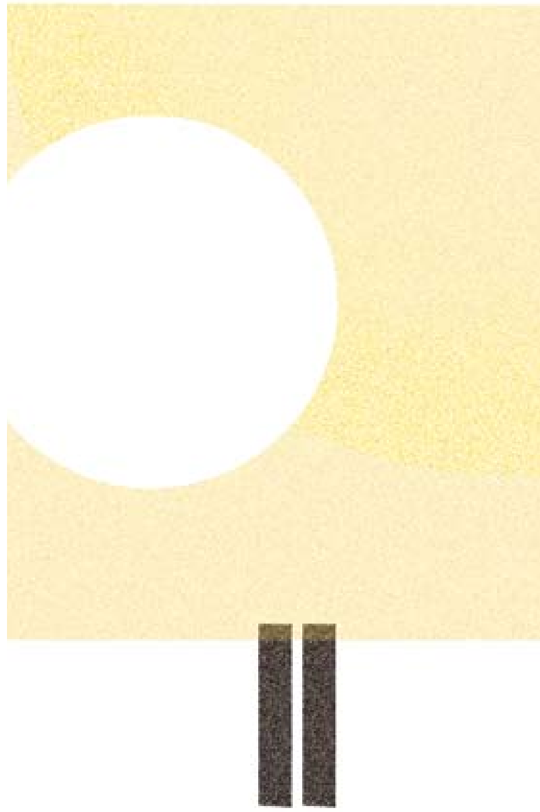
An invitation to participate in the project as a contributor was sent out through the Association’s network of contacts. The response was overwhelming and there were more potential contributors than I had the resources to deal with. Over time almost 1,000 people have taken part as contributors in one form or another. As the project has attracted international attention, contributions have been received from many countries.

As the contributions have been received they have been categorised and returned in various forms to the contributors and others. The most important form of feedback has been the reflections that have been published four times per year.

IN PARALLEL WITH THE DIALOGUE that came about in the knowledge network that was formed, I have also studied different theories that match patterns to the knowledge that the network generated.

In this way a theory has gradually emerged on how professional communicators can contribute to their organisations’ effectiveness. From the responses I have received during the course of the project I also know that the knowledge has started to generate various attempts to develop professional communication work in a large number of organisations.

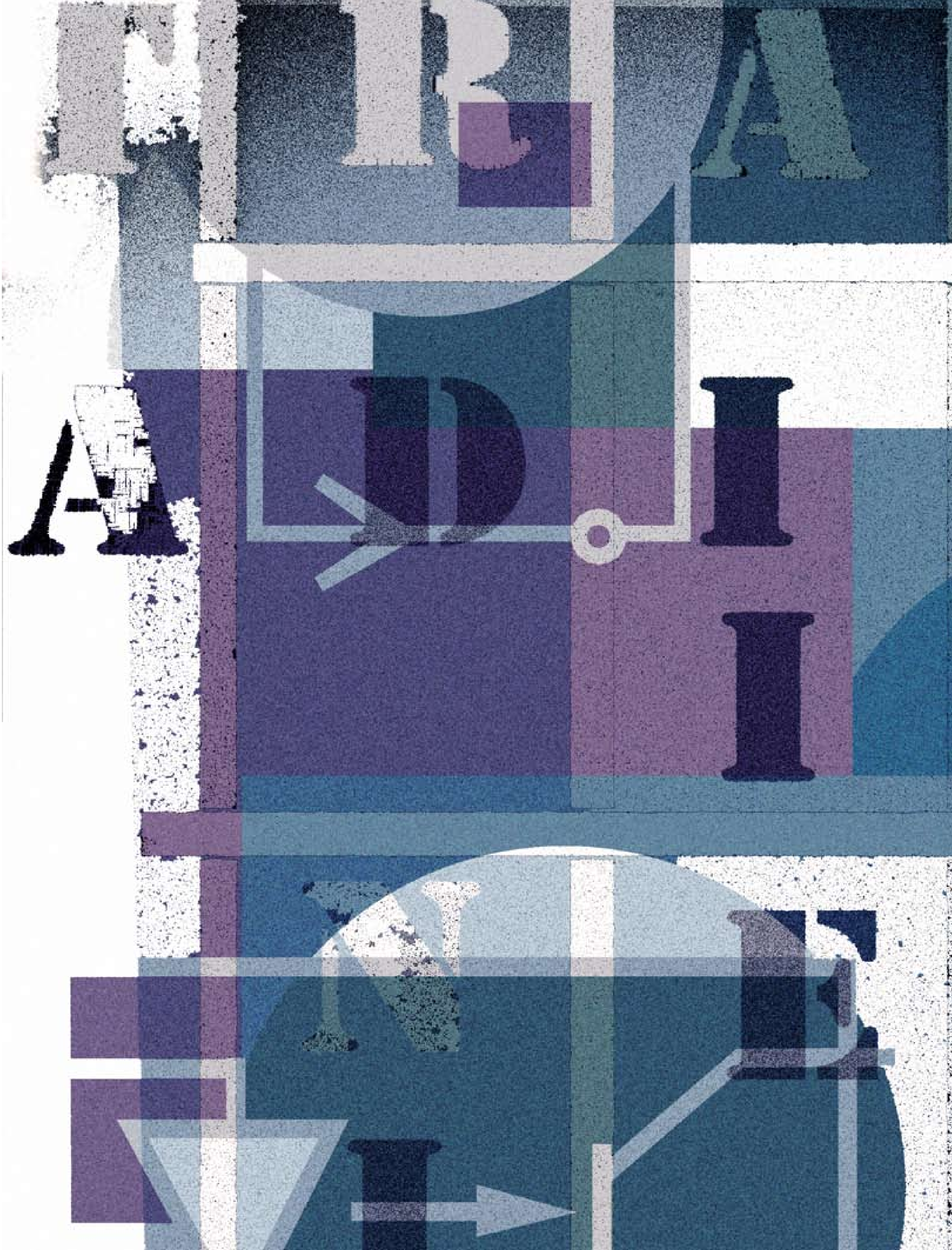
It appears therefore that this project might have contributed to a paradigm shift within professional communication; a move away from the view that



professional communication is about managing communication processes to one that suggests it is about building communicative capacity.

IT IS IMPORTANT to understand that the result of this research is a proposal for a changed approach to professional communication. It is not an account of what professional communication is, but rather what it has the potential to be.

As always when a change in approach is proposed it encounters resistance in some people while others feel inspired by it. Even at this stage I can see that the results have been met by both reactions, but that those who feel inspired are in the majority. It instils hope.



The tradition within professional communication

According to Grunig & Grunig, the tradition within professional communication can be traced to the late 19th century when it mainly involved publishing information. The perspective gradually moved to one of producing changes in outlook and moulding opinion. These researchers subsequently arrived at the fact that to be effective the communication process must be two-way. There are distinct elements of the German philosopher Habermas in Grunig's ideas.

However, if you observe how professional communication functions in practice, it is not particularly often that you see signs of two-way communication processes, it is rather the case that there is still a predominant perception that professional communication is mainly to do with influencing without allowing oneself to be influenced.

PROFESSIONAL COMMUNICATION HAS NUMEROUS "COUSINS" within other disciplines. The closest is perhaps marketing. This discipline is in fact younger than professional communication, but it rapidly gained a practical foothold due to the fact that it generated a large number of concrete procedures to influence people's inclination to purchase and to measure this inclination and the effect of marketing measures, namely market research. This gave marketing a clarity in terms of the connection between communication and benefits for businesses. However, at the same time it produced a narrow approach, namely that the important relationship is the one with the customer.

THE TRADITION WITHIN PROFESSIONAL COMMUNICATION has gone in the other direction; developing relationships with a lot of parties and creating a situation that is influenced by a multifaceted palette of values and ethical positions. This has given professional communication a unique role in promoting a broad basis for establishing relationships between organisations and the wider world. However, it has simultaneously brought about a lack of clarity in terms of what professional communication can contribute in terms of business benefit.

Recently however, due to the currents that can be observed in the realm of organisations, the significance of professional communication as the instrument for establishing broad relationships has increased in importance. Professional communication is still nevertheless encumbered with the weakness of lack of clarity in relation to business benefit. Some people are trying to remedy this lack of clarity by attempting to measure the effectiveness of professional communication. Such an operation does however encounter problems when it comes to width; it is not possible to measure the effect of professional communication throughout its entire width. It is therefore common that the systemic approach is limited in such measurements, thus increasing the degree of tangibility, but simultaneously reducing the validity. It it therefore easy to end up in the situation where professional communication becomes synonymous with marketing communication.

ALONGSIDE these currents more and more examples are emerging of how professional communication is taking initiatives that are producing a substantial effect on organisational effectiveness. One example that has attracted a great deal of attention is Fritidsresor's communication director's actions in connection with the tsunami disaster. The sensitivity of the stock market to how professional communication is dealt with by companies is also increasingly manifest and statements at analysts meetings and similar events have dramatic effects.

It is therefore possible to claim that we are living in a period of expectations with ever more people anticipating that tomorrow will not be the same as yesterday. The experience of change is the normal state of things, but the question can be asked as to whether change is equally common in people's everyday lives. This has created a distance between people's thoughts and actions, which is producing complexity in the way that relationships are constructed with them.

ALL OF THIS INDICATES that the practical application of professional communication is in the process of departing from the simple model of one-way communication and is viewing it not just as a two-way process but as a multi-dimensional process which produces effective relationships.

The development of organisations

It wasn't long ago that there was a belief that it was possible to isolate economic systems and plan them far in advance. This was the basis for the rational decision-making models that flourished during much of the 20th century.

The researcher Herbert Simon started to question this in the 1950s and included human complexity in the economic model. This was the start of regarding economic activity as a part of complex human cognition. Having created economics, human beings incorporated their own complexity into it, but find it difficult to understand that complexity.

FOR THAT REASON it has long been believed that organisations can be managed separately from their context and that their activities can be broken down into a range of precise functions. This is what the traditional organisation is like. This approach has given rise to a multitude of organisational rituals, such as division into functions, budgetary work, job descriptions etc.

As long as the organisation is actually, at least partially, separated from its surroundings, such rituals can be functional. Once the organisation starts to open up to establishing more extensive relationships with the surrounding world, the rituals become problematic and can gradually become nothing but rituals with no basis in reality.

Real organisation's have never been entirely separated from the world around them, and in recent times they have become even less so. During the last 20 years there has been a dramatic development in the world of organisations.

TWO FUNDAMENTAL FACTORS have driven this development. One is the rise of professional communication technology (ICT), the other is the significance of knowledge as a factor in production.

ICT has increased in significance as a result of the computer networks that have grown up and brought people closer to each other.

The Internet has contributed to it now being possible for the man in the street to access knowledge, or people with specific knowledge, without too much effort. Sources of information are becoming more and more open and it is becoming more and more difficult to enforce copyrights. One reason for this is that the networks themselves are becoming increasingly connected to the Internet. Another is that search engines are becoming ever more intelligent (see the previous reflection 1/06, by Fredrik Landqvist and I in this series of reports). This means that it is now possible to start talking about knowledge networks, and those who understand how to "think in concert" with such a resource can derive considerable benefit from it in their own efforts to build relationships. We have only seen the beginning of the importance of this resource.

The effect of the technological revolution is that there has been a considerable increase in transparency, resulting in increasing diversity.

All opinions make themselves heard, perspective emerges as fast as lightning, values are spread via blogs and other opinion fora. Exposure time is consequently reduced and everything becomes perishable.

THE SECOND FACTOR, knowledge, has a relationship to ICT. As it is easier to access alternative ways of viewing problems and solutions, an innovative engine arises in the networks and it is important to join in as a cog in such engines (see the earlier reflection 2/05, by Robin Teigland and I in this series of reports).

Opportunities thereby arise for new developments that are not always governed by explicit needs. New things are initiated quite simply because they are possible, not because there is a necessity. It leads to fewer and fewer organisations having the capacity to create value on their own, instead they have to be a part of knowledge development in the networks. The important thing is not to possess all knowledge, but to have access to it by

building relationships in the network.

The development of these two external factors has given rise to a new type of production organisation, which has been designated a ”value network”.

Organisational theory already included something called the value chain. It describes how value is developed within an organisation or between organisations through their cooperation, similar to a relay team. A makes something that B then develops further and that C then additionally refines and after several such stages the product or service reaches a final destination where someone consumes the value.

There is much in society that is based on this idea. VAT is one such example. The idea is that a country's value creation processes should be taxed as the value in the chain increases. This is why VAT has also become problematic now that companies are starting to cooperate in ever looser, transnational, forms.

A value network can be regarded as a more complex value chain. It is no longer a simple relay. A might do something for B who does something for C who in turn does something for A. Internal loops are common in value networks. A particular actor can play several roles in the network and they also change form more quickly in these sort of networks, primarily because there is such rapid growth in knowledge. *See figure 1.*

IN SUCH A NETWORK ECONOMY all actors are more dependent on each other to be able to create value. There is increased uncertainty about what tomorrow holds in the form of opportunities and threats. The perceived pace of time (what the ancient Greeks called ”kairos”, in distinction from measured time, which they called ”kronos”) is increasing, and this means that everyone has problems in keeping up.

All these factors become manifest for all actors, but they are more troubling for some than for others. For some they cause problems, but for others they represent opportunities.

The major difference between those who regard an existence such as this as conducive to opportunity and those who regard it as problematic, is whether one has succeeded in positioning oneself correctly in the network.

THE WORK OF FINDING THE CORRECT position in the value network is becoming a central task of the organisation's management. In part it concerns developing a conception internally of which position is most appropriate for the organisation, in part developing the capacity to influence the other actors in the network to demand such a position and finally acting in a forceful and proactive way in the position attained.

The strategic work of finding the position has to include deciding which type of position the organisation aspires to. Terms have long flourished within the business world for this. The two central terms are ”first mover advantage” and ”second mover advantage”. They are sometimes jokingly described as:

> ”The early bird gets the worm, but the second mouse gets the cheese.”

IT IS THEREFORE VITAL that there is clarity about how this positioning is regarded from a strategic perspective. When the decision is taken there has to be an understanding of the risks and opportunities to which it will lead.

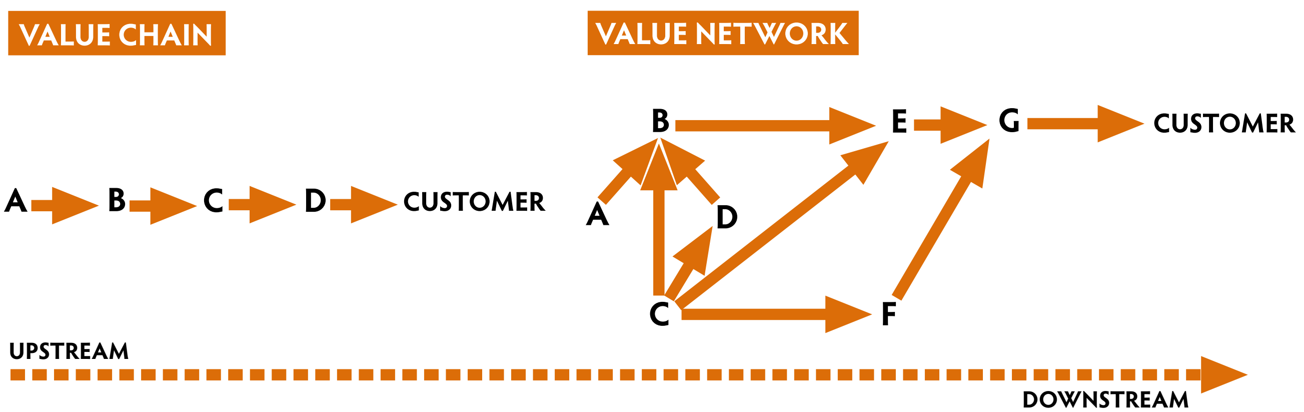


Figure 1: Value chain and value network.

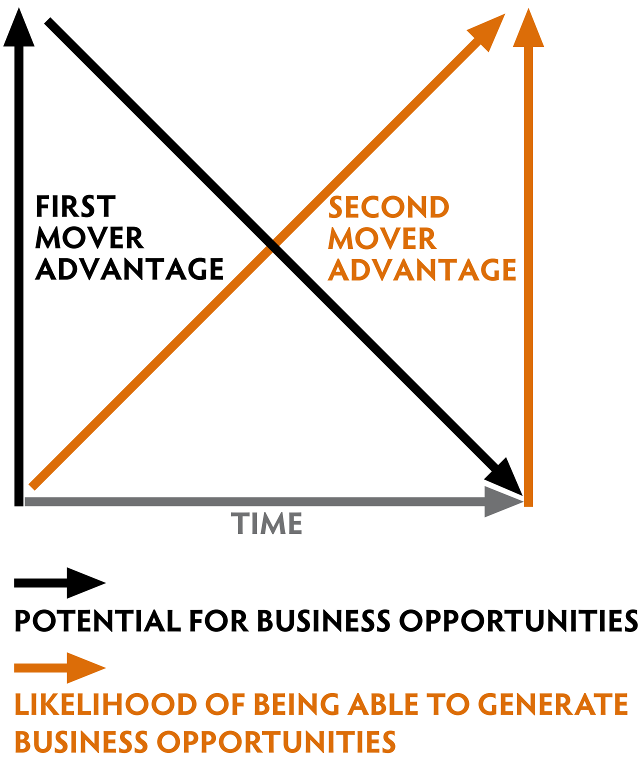


Figure 2: First mover advantage and second mover advantage.

If there is an endeavour to be ”first mover”, benefit can be derived from the fact that there is great potential to create an opportunity for value/business, quite simply because nobody has been there previously and developed an opportunity, either mentally or physically.

At the same time you have to put up with a low probability of being able to generate value or business from the existing potential. If there is an endeavour to be ”second mover” the situation is the reverse. There is limited potential for a business- or value opportunity as others have got there first. The likelihood of creating value from existing potential is greater in this case as benefit can be derived from the knowledge that has already been developed through other activities. *See figure 2.*

HISTORICALLY, it has generally been most profitable to try to avoid the ”first mover” positions and to cunningly wait for a chance to be ”second mover”. The Americans usually express this as ”Only fools rush in”. However, the advent of value networks has modified this truth.

The problems and opportunities that were previously inherent in these two positions remain, but a fresh problem has arisen and that is the risk of being replaced. As the options are continually increasing in the value network, it is easier to change partner.

The more of a ”first mover” (i.e. a successful and effective one) an organisation is considered to be, by the other actors in the network, the higher the value they consider it to represent, and the more power it receives from the others.

A “first mover” is consequently less dependent on the others than the others are depended on them.

There is thus a strategic advantage in being ”first mover” in the value network that was not previously so evident in the traditional value chain. This leads to the majority of the actors who are part of the value network constantly having to make efforts to become more of a ”first mover” in one of the many available ways. This turns most of the old ”truths” upside down.

One such is ”it’s good to be close to the customer”. This rule does not have the same significance as it used to. Being the organisation that has a direct relationship with the end user when value is produced by a complex value network can be extremely troublesome.

You have to take responsibility for what a lot of people have done and that can be difficult to deal with in terms of relationships. On the other hand, occupying an important key role inside the network can be a much better position.

Being indispensable in the creation of value for others can be a very powerful position. This is the position occupied by Bosch in terms of ignition systems for cars and Intel in terms of processors for computers.

However, to occupy such positions requires being ”close to the customer” mentally. It means that you have to develop insights into the contexts in which you operate and have the capacity to develop relationship with a large number of actors that directly and indirectly have an influence on your own position. At the same time it entails developing your own ideology to ensure clarity in your position.

In other words, it entails developing both breadth and depth in your relationships with other actors of various kinds.

DEALING WITH THIS positioning work requires the organisation to develop its communicative leadership. This is nothing new, it has happened in earlier historical periods, which I have described in previous reflections in this series of reports. However, this historical perspective is important so I will return to it again here.

Elizabeth I and Sir Francis Walsingham

When Elizabeth I acceded to the throne she transformed England from an isolated island kingdom into a political superpower. She had the capacity to maintain discipline in her own subjects in England (she was, after all, the daughter of Henry VIII so it can be assumed that this gift was genetically determined in her), but when she expanded her domain of power to encompass the entire English Empire she encountered a problem and that was maintaining order in such a heterogenous group of people. She consequently wanted to develop leadership that was supplementary to her own that could keep a check on and create multiple relationships in the heterogenous networks.

This was an opportunity for Sir Francis Walsingham to develop England's secret service. He did an extremely thorough and systematic job, and the fact is that the effectiveness that is still to be found in the English intelligence agencies such as MI5 and MI6, is in many respects based on the excellent foundations laid by Walsingham several hundred years ago.

Louis XIII and Cardinal Richelieu

The French King Louis XIII had similar imperialist aspirations to Elizabeth I, but unlike her, he had problems on the home front.

Political life in France was characterised by instability and this made it difficult for the King to consolidate his forces for effective empire building.

This represented an opportunity for Cardinal Richelieu to ramp up the rules of the game for political life in France. This constituted an improvement in order and some systems that he introduced are still present in France today, the practice of ministerial government for example.

Gustav II Adolf and Axel Oxenstierna

The Swedish king Gustav II Adolf had the intention of making Europe Protestant and he started marching out into Europe with Swedish troops. At this time Sweden was a fairly homogenous society, however, once other countries were incorporated Gustav had a problem similar to Elizabeth's.

It led to administrative disorder. To facilitate communication in the new network environment that Sweden had entered as a result of its military actions, the King commissioned Axel Oxenstierna to develop an administrative system. Large parts of the system are still intact in Sweden today.

THE EXAMPLES I HAVE GIVEN ABOVE are good illustrations of how ideological leadership can be supplemented by a form of leadership with the task of developing communication with a wider context. A less successful example can be mentioned by way of contrast: Hitler and Goebbels.

Adolf Hitler and Joseph Goebbels

As we all know, Adolf Hitler's intention was to establish a new "Reich" of Greater Germany that would last for 1,000 years. He set up a war machine that exceeded anything the world had seen before, and there was nothing wrong with its operational effectiveness. Instead Hitler's problem was on

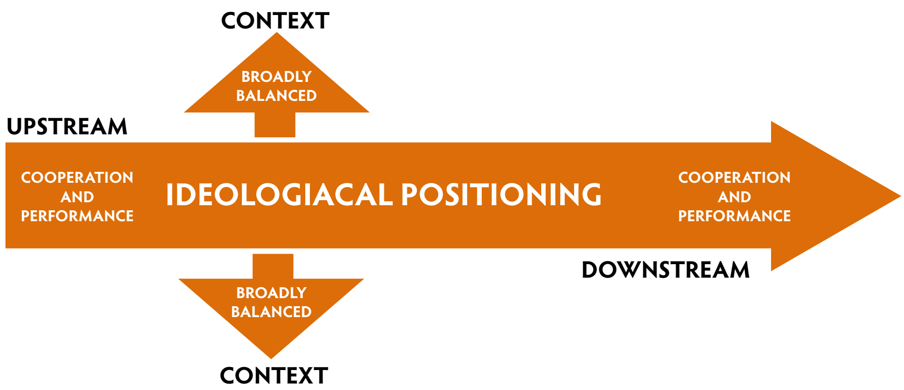


Figure 3: Ideological and contextual leadership.

the mental plane. In part he maintained an ideology that put one particular kind of human being at the centre. They were called ”Aryans”.

The problem with Aryans is that they are a fictitious race. It is simply not possible to determine who is an Aryan and who isn't on the basis of any objective criterion. It was therefore difficult for people to relate to the Nazi ideology. Another problem he had was that he was not particularly sensitive in terms of building networks. The result of this was that those who had the misfortune of being invaded by the Germans had the sense of being literally run over.
In such a situation Hitler needed someone who was able to maintain communication in a wider context.

This was Joseph Goebbels' task. He was highly skilled at communication techniques and the propaganda products that he instigated are in many respects unmatched throughout history. However, they led nowhere. All the thousand year plan amounted to was 13 years of misery.

THESE EXAMPLES SHOW that when an organisation enters into a network situation, it has to develop two types of leadership.

The first is *ideological* and it positions the organisation clearly on the map. Such leadership chisels out the direct role of the organisation in the position in which it creates value, and develops immediate relationships with the partners with whom it has created value. The ideological leadership is a task for the senior management and it should therefore personify the organisation's ideology.

Ideological leadership is therefore developed primarily in relation to the immediate partners an organisation has in the value chain and is displayed to a wider public in order to further strengthen the organisation's position. That's why we are seeing ever more examples of organisations with leaders who personify the ideology that the organisation stands for; Ingvar Kamprad, Richard Branson, Michael O'Leary, to name a few.

THE SECOND FORM of leadership that the organisation has to develop can be designated as *contextual*. Its task is to manage the complex relationships that the network is dependent on in various ways, and the central responsibility of this leadership is therefore to develop the organisation's communication skills on all levels. Such contextual leadership is thus executed in relation to the wider value network and by those actors whose function it is to support the organisation's position in various ways. *See figure 3.*

WE ARE MOVING RAPIDLY towards an increasingly integrated network society that is placing demands on organisations' capacity to act as ”first movers”. To be able to persistently maintain such a position requires the development of both these forms of leadership, ideological and contextual.

The latter is a suitable task for professional communicators. To be able to meet this challenge requires that professional communicators move their professional focus from leading communication processes to developing the organisation's communication skills on all levels.

Dead ends

During the work on this research project I have heard numerous descriptions of how professional communicators perceive that their work has entered various types of dead ends and they have found it difficult to develop their professional role further.

Naturally, this isn't a pleasant experience for those who encounter it, however, to lighten up the description I have chosen to give the different situations somewhat humorous names. I have identified four fundamental types of situations that create such dead ends and I am denoting them ”The Firefighter”, ”Sir Hiss”, ”Don Quixote” and ”The Head Waiter”.

The Firefighter

This situation is characterised by the management acting slowly in a dynamic environment and much of the work is routine. In other words, there is an attempt to produce an internal order by creating a certain isolation in relation to the surrounding world. There can often be strong ideological leadership in an organisation such as this, however there is a lack of sensitivity in relation to the wider world.

The organisation would rather influence the world around it than allow itself to be influenced by it and that influence is exercised through well-developed and narrow operational processes. As long as a status quo prevails in the world at large, this situation does not usually lead to any major problems. However, when there is increased turbulence the organisation becomes vulnerable to changes and when they impact on the organisation they are regarded as crises.

IN THIS SITUATION the professional communicator frequently takes on a special role as a crisis manager. He/she becomes the firefighter who turns out when there is no time to lose.

As the crisis is externally generated and there are ways of dealing with it, the professional communicator is able to develop special skills in crisis management that are regarded as valuable.

Crisis management is a natural part of a professional communicator's work, however, if legitimacy in the professional communicator's role is entirely centred around this defence function, it can lead to the professional communicator having less incentive to develop techniques to proactively prevent crises encroaching upon the organisation at all and a reactive approach thereby becomes entrenched in relation to external changes. The professional communicator becomes, as it were, a hero every time he/she succeeds in dealing with a crisis and this can create a certain dependence on reward. A corporate communication manager I interviewed said with unmistakable passion:

”There's nothing to match a real crisis!”

In other words, the situation that arises can form a vicious circle preventing the organisation from apprehending the structural changes that are taking place in the external environment, and managing crises reactively gradually becomes an inadequate response. Ultimately the realisation suddenly dawns that changes have not been made in time and the organisation is lagging behind.

Sir Hiss

I have derived inspiration for this character from Disney's Robin Hood film. Sir Hiss is Prince John's aide and he has to take care of all the messy situations caused by the Prince. The Prince completely lacks self-criticism, and neither does he have the capacity to recognise how his behaviour is regarded. He places himself at the centre of the universe and repeatedly enters into rash actions. Sir Hiss is dispatched on assignments to patch up the mess caused by the Prince.

I have heard many accounts from professional communicators that are strongly reminiscent of this situation. The common denominator is that the management puts measures into place or makes public pronouncements that lead to criticism or even to some some form of crisis. At this point the head of corporate communication is sent forth to put everything right.

They then develop various tactics to rescue the situation such as ”doing a poodle” i.e. acting defensively or the opposite ”doing a pitbull”, i.e. meeting the crisis aggressively.

Necessity is said to be the mother of invention and these sort of situations often lead to more or less creative solutions. However, they generally only have a short-term effect and they lead to the professional communicator's role becoming more embedded as a reactive and subordinate role.

Sir Hiss thus has less legitimacy than the Firefighter and the role is not rewarded internally. In some cases this has led to outright burnout and in the worst case the professional communicator can be regarded as a consumable in his/her organisation.

The role then has extremely low status and is similar to that which Stalin used to designate as ”Useful idiot”. If the truth be told, this is not a desirable role.

IN DISTINCTION FROM the Firefighter's role there is less learning in this role. The Firefighter has the chance to develop procedures and rules of thumb for how to deal with crises as they often have certain common denominators.

In Sir Hiss' situation there is not the same systematism, rather he has to improvise as best he can. The capacity to improvise is an important skill in managing crises, and this is something we have developed in previous reflections in this series of reports (see 4/06), however it only works well if the possibility exists of developing silent knowledge by dealing with crisis situations and successively learning from them.

This possibility is highly curtailed for Sir Hiss. Not least due to the fact that he is himself a pawn in the political game that he is supposed to ”fix”. As he does not have sufficient power it is not possible for him to manage his own learning experience.

Don Quixote

This is a very common role. The situation here is distinguished by the organisation being dominated by locked functional thinking. In this context it is more important to be able to justify one's existence by fulfilling a function, than contributing to the overall results.

Systems thinking becomes narrowly focused in organisations such as this, leading to a desire for rapid and precise feedback on how different operations are functioning. The narrow thinking consequently results in an increased requirement to gauge the internal efficiency of departments and measurements of quality are often used to clarify the state of the operation's effectiveness. This leads to a strong focus on internal efficiency while external effectiveness is not put under an equal spotlight.

MOST DEPARTMENTS have a relatively concrete operational basis, making it possible to measure their efficiency.

There are quality standards for financial control, production management and marketing. Not necessarily because they are the ”correct” standards, but they are accepted by the relevant professional body. They thereby deliver a picture of the department's efficiency that many people find credible. In this context corporate communication department has a problem that the other departments do not have and it is that corporate communication department, by definition, covers everything that communicates, which is absolutely everything.

The consequence of this is that if a narrow systems perspective is institutionalized in professional communication you will indeed achieve measurability which is highly reliable (accuracy in terms of the actual measurements), but you are encumbered by inadequate validity (precision in what you are measuring). You can consequently carry out specific measurements of demarcated information initiatives, but they have very little to say about how effective the organisation has been in its communication.

There is the risk, therefore, of measuring the wrong things correctly, which in its turn is not particularly interesting for others to know.

AS THE INTERNAL CULTURE in this type of organisation means that if you don't succeed the first time you do the same thing again but more thoroughly, you end up defining problems at the micro-level and it becomes very difficult to gain an overview of what the problem actually involves.

As was the case for Don Quixote, this leads to a situation where the professional communicator goes all out to generate interest in professional communication issues, but is increasingly unsuccessful in getting the attention of the others in the company. It becomes a question of tilting at windmills.

MANY CORPORATE COMMUNICATION MANAGERS are experiencing dissatisfaction due to the fact that their role has taken on this character and it is hard to break as such a change would require the organisation to strengthen the perspective it takes on the context in which it exists, and of course this is the complete opposite of narrow systems thinking.

The Head Waiter

This is the final character. In this situation the entire organisation (and not just the management) is used to placing itself at the centre of the universe. As a rule this perception is supported by a long and successful history, which is evidence of its greatness. The organisation often dominates a section of its environment and it therefore cultivates narratives about its own invulnerability. Organisations such as this talk about the strength of their own brand and lean back securely in the certainty that the future will be as impressive as the past has been.

In this case the task of the professional communicator is to serve up the ”correct” messages to support the perception of the company's invulnerability. Here too a lot of measurements are taken, but they usually involve the strength of the company's own brand.

WHEN THE SURROUNDING ENVIRONMENT changes into the type of value network that I described above, it leads to the organisation finding it difficult to understand what is happening in the world around it. For that which is new frequently takes place in arenas where the company is not active.

One category of organisations that are severely affected by this are universities and colleges. Knowledge is increasingly being generated outside traditional academic circles, making it difficult for the universities to understand it. This leads to financing problems, leading in turn to decline.

Professional communicators in such organisations consequently often take on a role similar to that of the head waiter.

IF THE HEAD WAITER ROLE EXPANDS in legitimacy it leads to the role of master of ceremonies, which gives the professional communicator responsibility for generating various types of ”events” to further reinforce the image of the invulnerable organisation.

The role then also becomes associated with power in a similar way to that of the firefighter and it brings an abundance of rewards. This can ultimately lead to a role similar to that of a propaganda minister and there is then an increased risk of the myths of one's own greatness being punctured.

The end can therefore be brutal for both the organisation and the professional communicator. As has perhaps been clear from this description, the account of these roles is stylized and accentuated, and this was deliberate on my part.

I want to use these descriptions to stress that there are great dangers in allowing the role of the professional communicator to develop along these lines. There is also a common denominator in these descriptions and that is that the professional communicator has become restricted in some ways. In the case of the firefighter, the restriction lies in specialising in crisis management, in Sir Hiss' case the role is restricted by being the management's obedient tool, in Don Quixote's case it involves being imprisoned in functional thinking and in the case of the head waiter the restriction lies in the uncritical attitude. To avoid these traps professional communicators must elevate their role to one which encompasses the overall situation.

The role is therefore more to do with taking responsibility for the organisation's communication skills and not just taking responsibility for specific communication activities.

I DO NOT WANT IN ANY WAY TO SUGGEST BY THIS that professional communication does not involve running and developing traditional communication activities.

On the contrary, the fact that they are embedded in a professional group is important in providing legitimacy in a management context. A parallel can be drawn with other occupational groups. Accounts managers or heads of finance are often elected onto managerial bodies.

They are not invited on board due to their accounting skills. It is taken for granted that they know about accounting and have a stable knowledge base when it comes to finances and financial processes. If they didn't, it would naturally be inconceivable that they would be considered for their specialist role.

Why are they so frequently to be found in management contexts?

Well, because they have succeeded in convincing the other members of the managerial structure that establishing financial strength is of major importance for the survival and development of the organisation. Strength such as this is developed partly by being able to govern economic processes, but also by finding creative and innovative solutions that establish financial strength from an overall perspective.

The same requirements are placed on professional communicators.

This presupposes that the professional communicator is competent in his/her professional field, but moreover that he/she is good at managing the organisation's communication skills from an overall perspective. It is therefore not sufficient for professional communicators simply to fulfil the traditional role of professional communicator if they aspire to an executive position.

IT IS THEREFORE POSSIBLE TO NOTE a distinct trend in that the job of professional communicator is starting to divide into several different professional roles. There are some professional communicators who are specialists at actually providing information, some who exercise managership in that they plan and run communication processes, and some who have responsibility for the organisation's strategic communication capacity.

The fact that the profession is starting to divide up into different categories is a natural consequence of professional communication becoming an established field of work in society.

This field is therefore developing in the same way as other professions that have become institutionalised. It ends up as a practical profession, along with tactical and strategic management.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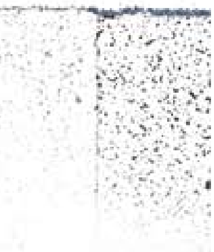


Social cognitive prerequisites

We have now arrived at a sufficiently advanced stage in the analysis to make the observation that there is a certain discrepancy between the ideal that has traditionally existed within professional communication and the requirements that modern organisations place on the development of contextual leadership. To enable professional communicators to shoulder the responsibility that goes with being a member of the organisation's top management body, there has to be an understanding both of how people function in terms of their way of observing reality and their way of comprehending it.

This is called cognition in the literature. As individuals do this in social interaction with other people, these processes have to be seen from a social perspective and it is thus called social cognition. A strategic communication manager must therefore have an insight into social cognitive processes.

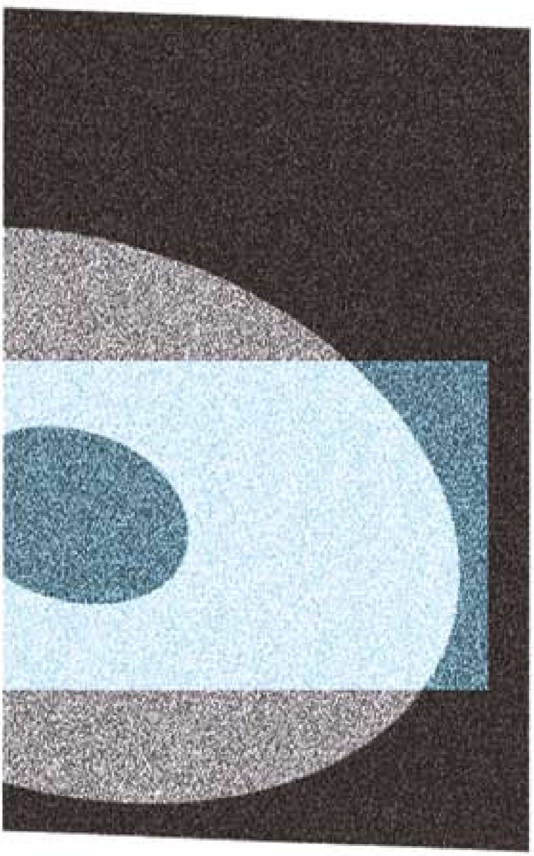
HUMAN BEINGS HAVE two fundamental properties in terms of cognition. In part we search for people in terms of images of reality that we believe we already understand, and in part we need some new images. These two properties are in contrast with each other.

The first one entails trying to see reality from the perspective that we already have, based on prior experiences of reality. They are stored in our memories and comprise an omnipresent frame of reference. We find it very difficult to go outside this frame of reference and perceive reality in new ways. This frame of reference is developed throughout life and has various effects on our cognition at different stages of development. There is consequently always an element of conservatism in people's ways of thinking, the most distinctive periods being early and late in life.

Anybody who has had children knows that they are conservative, they do not want to try new foods. The reason for this is that they have a narrow cognitive frame of reference as they have not had time to experience much variation. They therefore seek confirmation of what they already know they like. The task of the parents is therefore to gradually widen the child's frame of reference and wise parenting does it at an optimum pace, not too fast and not too slow.

Old people develop another sort of conservatism and it is based on the fact that they have experienced a great deal but that their experiences have not encompassed everything. This leads to a situation where they feel as if they have experienced ”everything” already and fresh information consequently doesn't contribute anything new. On the contrary, there is a tendency to feel that everything ”was better before”. The problem here is that the frame of reference has become highly expanded and can serve as a framework to judge everything.

In this context conservatism lies in not being able to perceive what is new in the new, but persisting in perceiving the old in the new. The experience then becomes one characterised by there being nothing new under the sun.



DURING THE PERIOD between starting life and its latter stages, human beings display the optimum balance between seeking confirmatory information and being open to the new.

The size and variability of the reality with which one is working is also significant. If this reality if broad and multi-faceted, it requires longer to develop an optimum perspective in terms of judgement.

That's why, for example, you find that researchers in philosophy reach their peak at 50-60 years old, while researchers in the sciences generally make their most important discoveries at 20-40 years of age.

THE OTHER PROPERTY entails us being constantly on the hunt after something new. Curiosity is actually built into our genes and this leads us to try to find new things to stimulate us. Both properties, looking for confirmatory information and searching for new information, are supported by an inherited property of dependence on reward. In other words, we seek experiences in reality that provide us with situations that balance old and new and that therefore satisfy the two cognitive sides of our nature, thereby generating a rewarding feeling of satisfaction. Our capacity to absorb new impressions is also affected by various cognitive factors that are linked to our experiences in life. In particular those that we have early in life.

One such factor has been labelled ”sense of coherence”. This term was coined by the sociologist Aaron Antonovsky. He discovered that some people have a more developed ability to perceive totalities in the reality in which they find themselves and that this gives them a greater capacity to relate to that reality.

Later studies have shown that human beings develop this ability in early life, especially in the first 18 months. During this period, when the child is not yet able to use words as mechanisms to create concepts, all impressions are emotional and enter directly into the sense of self. It is therefore of great importance that the small child experiences maximum security during the initial period.

Another factor that plays a role in our capacity to experience new things is our ability to perceive reality in its temporal context. David Ingvar has coined the term, ”time's arrow”, as a description of this phenomenon. Cognition is located in a fluid state between the past and the future and the experience of current reality has to be balanced between these two time axes. There are consequently circumstances that can disturb this state.

One example is traumatic experiences that are incorporated into the experience of the past and which prevent the present being experienced as belief in the future is impeded.

Another example is various drugs, alcohol in particular. All drugs that stimulate the central nervous system reinforce the experience of the present at the expense of the past and the future. In turn this leads to the user only being able to experience the present through the drug as the experience of the other temporal dimensions had disappeared and along with them the way that they support the experience of the present.

THE COGNITIVE BALANCE between searching for confirmatory information and new information converges in a perception of the extent of the demands set by the surroundings. All human beings have a perception of their own ability, which they place in contrast to the perception they have of the

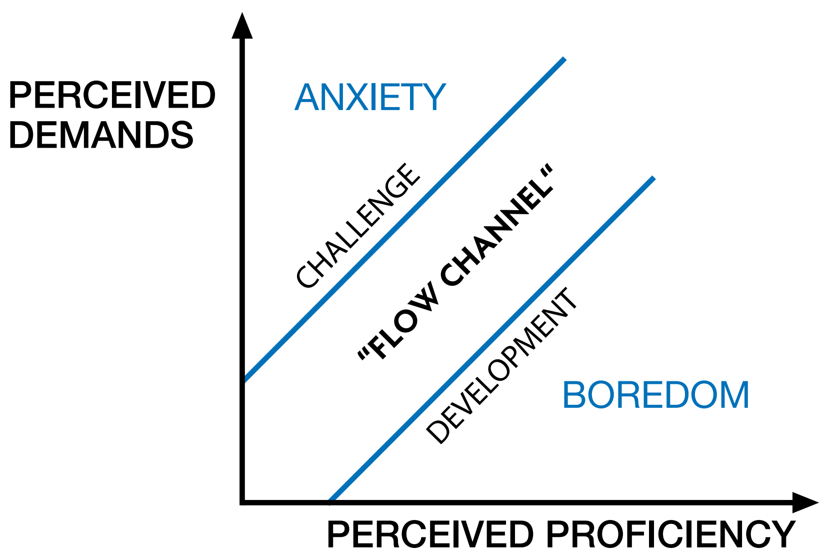


Figure 4: Flow as a function of perceived demands and perceived proficiency.

demands set by the surrounding environment.

This issue has been studied by the psychologist Csíkszentmihályi. He found that people develop creativity and attention to the task they are engaged in if they experience a balance between the demands of the situation and the proficiency they feel that they have. These states are called ”flow channels”. Note that it concerns the perception of demands and proficiency and not the actuality of the situation.

If the demands are felt to substantially exceed the person’s perceived proficiency it leads to an anxiety-ridden experience and this is in its turn negative for creativity. If the demands are substantially below the perceived ability, it leads to an experience of boredom, also resulting in lower creativity and attention.

New information must therefore not diverge to too great an extent from the information that one is used to. It should be located just outside what one is used to, so that it is perceived as a challenge. *See figure 4 on the previous page.*

WORKING LIFE TODAY IS FULL of examples of people who are burnt out due to having had to face situations where they were bombarded by information that is way beyond their comfort zone, at the same time as they have the feeling that they are ”stuck” in routines they are not able to influence. Such situations produce individuals who are afraid of change and they turn in on themselves, despite a low level of actual demands, because the level of demands is perceived to be high.

Organisations that instead convey overall pictures that establish meaning and leave a lot of room for employees to try out different solutions, can instead produce situations where demands are pitched at precisely the right level so that they are perceived as exciting and interesting. In such situations people can be made to function well even when the actual level of demands is high.

Chaos theory

Chaos theory is a group of theories that have become increasingly useful in describing complex systems. They have been used for many years in the natural sciences and have given rise to a lot of interesting models of how interaction takes place in complex systems. One field of application has been meteorology. Understanding of how the climate is developing is also based on chaos theory models.

IN A SYSTEM where chaos alone prevails it is impossible to find anything meaningful as everything is variable in a way that precludes understanding. In a system where order alone prevails change is impossible as everything is predictable within the framework of the prevailing order.

CLASSICAL CHAOS THEORY THEREFORE says that development takes place in systems where order is combined with chaos.

There are two prerequisites that have to be fulfilled. The first is that order and chaos must be present simultaneously in a system and the second is that they have to interact with each other. It is perhaps not too difficult to understand the former, but the latter is more difficult.

It does seem strange that something that is orderly should be able to interact with something chaotic, as they are opposites.

The solution to this problem is that order and chaos must be represented by different aspects of the situation. It might be that they represent different processes that form a common result or that they represent different concepts or affect the situation in some other way from different directions. *See figure 5.*

A CLASSIC EXAMPLE of how chaos theory functions in practice is the processes that lead to the creation of snow flakes. All snow flakes are similar to each other, but each one has a unique crystal pattern. The reason for this is that they are produced in line with chaos theory. They are the product of an orderly process in combination with a chaotic process.

The orderly process is to do with the fact that when a drop of water in a cloud is exposed to a temperature of below zero it freezes into ice. The process is the same every time it occurs and it is entirely predictable.

There is always a chaotic pattern of vibrations present in the ether. It is caused by everything that is happening and it forms a constant noise of vibrations that is not predictable.

At the exact moment when a drop of water freezes into ice there is a pattern of vibrations that is unique and it affects the snow flake's crystal pattern. This means that it is possible to predict with certainty when and where snow flakes will be produced, but not what they will look like.

CHAOS THEORY also functions among human beings. One person's actions lead to another person acting in a particular way, which influences a third person, initiating a long social process. We rarely know what the results of these processes are and they can therefore be surprising. One example is the rule that ”initiating a social process automatically initiates its counter process”.

This is often a problem in terms of lobbying processes. One is aware that making a social chess move will initiate a counter process, but it is hard to assess its final result. Sometimes you get half way. When SJ, Swedish State Railways, ran a lobbying campaign to reduce the preference for having company cars, an attempt was made to get the politicians to make having a company car less beneficial. However, the car industry immediately initiated a counter campaign and the result was that in one way the benefit of having a company car diminished as fuel was taxed by volume. At the same time the general benefit became cheaper for those who had company cars, which meant that they profited from the change.

You sometimes end up with a final result that is entirely contrary to your wishes. When, for example, a campaign was conducted to construct a high-rise hotel at the northern exit from Stockholm, it awoke a dormant environmental opinion that sympathised with the idea that instead the area should be a national city park.

THE INTERESTING THING ABOUT CHAOS THEORY is that it has a lot in common with the way in which human beings function cognitively. After all, we have a propensity to look for confirmatory information at the same time as we have the opposite tendency to want to have new information. On the one hand, we want the world to be recognisable, which can be described as a wish to experience order. On the other hand we want to experience something new in order to prevent the sense of boredom that we otherwise risk experiencing. We consequently feel best in an environment that offers just the right combination of order and chaos. In this context the words might perhaps be playing a semantic trick on us as they are both - ”order” and ”chaos” - to some extent intrinsically value-laden.

It is perhaps therefore more appropriate to say that we need a certain form of stability combined with a certain form of variability to enable us to develop our capacity to affect reality in a progressive way.

The question then becomes what is to represent stability and what is to represent variability in the communication situation and that is what are going to address now.

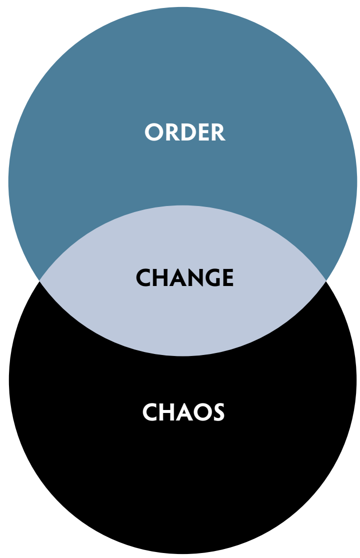


Figure 5: The capacity to change as a function of the interface between order and chaos.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The communication situation

Cognitive stability is an effect of how our memories are organised in the brain. Such stability is important in ensuring that we avoid a psychological phenomenon that is usually known as cognitive dissonance. We experience such dissonance on a daily basis in small doses and we always resort to the same method in dealing with it, namely looking for confirmatory information. If you've just purchased a car of a particular make, you will automatically see many more cars of that make on the road than before making the purchase. Clearly there are no more cars of that make on the road, rather you have quite simply become more aware of the make as you want to confirm that you have made "the right choice". So many others "can't be wrong".

The memory functions as an instrument for categorising. When you are experiencing something in reality you access your memories and ask what it is you are experiencing. The brain then conveys categorisations in the form of "schemata" (categorisation of situations or things) or "script" (categorisation of courses of events).

This makes it easier for the brain to make associations in terms of the situation and depending on how well the associations are made, the situation can be dealt with more or less intelligently. Associations can be both positive and negative. The positive associations provide the possibility of perceiving potential in situations that would not otherwise have been possible.

The negative associations are simply confusing and reduce the possibility of perceiving the potential in situations. This is where the factors we dealt with above play a role; the sense of coherence and time's arrow.

FOR A SITUATION to facilitate the use of memory as a creative instrument for categorising situations and creating productive possibilities for associations, it must therefore communicate stable conceptions and concepts that do not lock thinking into particular ways of acting. On the contrary, the communication must contribute to stimulating associations with different ways of acting. In terms of chaos theory it can be represented in the picture below.

THE FIRST CONTRIBUTION in this research project is therefore a suggestion for a general rule with regard to organising in order to benefit communication skills:

> Communication should be organised according to the principle of creating situations where employees are guided by stable concepts, but are simultaneously stimulated to produce variability in their activities.

THIS APPROACH IS dramatically different from the approach that predominates in traditional organisations. Ever since Henry Ford's days the traditional way of organising operations has been to communicate effectively what people have to do, how they should do it and how to assess the results.

Most traditional control mechanisms are based on this principle. However there is very little in traditional organisation theory about how to get people to think in a certain way without it making them behave in a predictable manner.

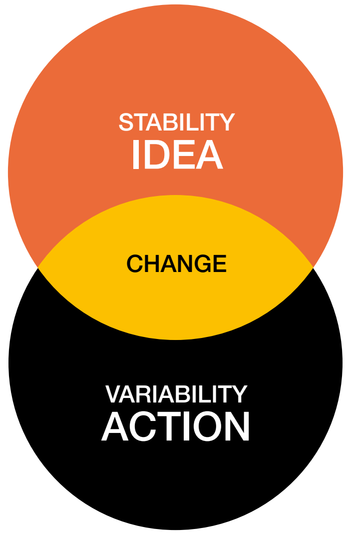


Figure 6: Chaos theory balance between ideas that create stability and variability in activities.

Management dimensions

If professional communicators are to be trusted to take part in managerial tasks they are required to make it clear that they can contribute something that the other members of the management team perceive as valuable in a management context. Leadership is not synonymous with managership.

Mats Tyrstrup, a researcher at the Stockholm School of Economics, has defined managership as leading programmed and planned activities, and leadership as leading development under conditions of great uncertainty. This uncertainty exists in the very long perspective and the very short perspective. It can thus be stated that leadership takes place when a person leads others in an improvised fashion that is simultaneously visionary. A leader puts his/her vision into practice there and then, a manager ensures that the process runs according to plan.

Traditional professional communication work is often about managing processes according to plan. Professional communication in a leadership context has to raise the level of the work to developing the organisation's communicational qualities. A professional communicator will therefore not gain access to the managerial body by being able to draw up communication plans. This presupposes that the person in question has these practical skills. You gain access by making people believe that you can develop the organisation's communication skills.

THE NEXT CONTRIBUTION (after the previous contribution concerning organisation principle) from this research project is therefore that:

Professional communicators who have the ambition to participate in the leadership of the organisation must take responsibility for developing the organisation's communication skills.

This statement does not imply that professional communicators should abandon their practical work. Heads of corporate communication in the management team must also build on their communication know-how to be professional in their capacity to develop the organisation's communication strengths.

In that role the task entails supporting the head of the operation in his/her role as ideological leader and simultaneously taking responsibility for the organisation's contextual leadership.

IDEOLOGICAL LEADERSHIP involves leading the organisation's performance vis-a-vis the direct relationships it has in order to make them effective. In this context it is important to produce and maintain an operational concept that articulates an effective role for the organisation in its direct network relationships. This ambition can sometimes extend a bit too far.

A Swedish company called Skolfoto provides a service taking photographs of school pupils and producing school catalogues. The company came up with the idea of touching up the photographs to make the children look ”more attractive”. However, this met with great opposition from the parents who had to pay for the pictures.

From a technical photographic point of view, manipulating the photos represents an improvement in the actual service, but it was regarded as objectionable as the parents did not want to bow down to the ”hysteria surrounding appearance” and wanted to have a record of what their children really looked like.

This offer might very well have been the product of strong ideological leadership that had become too narrow. They would perhaps have been better served by developing contextual leadership. This would have been able to address the question of what this action signaled to the surrounding world. It might then have been possible to avoid this mistake. At the same time contextual leadership can emphasis opportunities that would not have been considered by the ideological leadership. In this case there is an obvious potential for development.

A quick analysis indicates that Skolfoto's operation is targeted at three groups: the pupils, the parents and the school. One possibility for development might therefore lie in producing differentiated school catalogues; sports academies might be produced differently than other schools, for example.

THE CONTEXTUAL LEADERSHIP is thus able to support the ideological leadership by contributing awareness of both the risks and opportunities inherent in various possible actions. In this role it is important not to act as a part of the problem, but rather as a part of the solution.

The banker J. P. Morgan articulated something similar regarding his need for lawyers: ”I don't want to have lawyers who tell me what I'm not allowed to do. I want lawyers to tell me how to do what I want to do”. The ability to generate proposals for alternative constructive solutions is thus a distinguishing feature of contextual leadership.

The key activity for contextual leadership is therefore to support the ideological leadership with ”a wider perspective” and it is therefore a natural development of the professional communicator's role.

THE OTHER ASPECT of contextual leadership is to lead the organisation in developing relationships with the overall breadth of actors in the organisation and in the world around the organisation.

This responsibility includes both those with whom the organisation has direct relations that need broadening and stabilising, and the indirect relations that need to be constructed with a large range of actors. It entails being able to predict how complex connections can be developed, being creative in terms of analysing how it is possible to deal with developments and constructive in terms of analysing which resources are to be used and when.

This role is therefore an extensive ”putting together” of a large number of variables and the effective contextual leader creates systems, expertise and a culture that facilitates the creation of complex, but comprehensible, perspectives. The basis for contextual leadership must be a profound insight that ”everything communicates” and that it concerns understanding how.

THE RESPONSIBILITY FOR EXPANDING the organisation's communicational qualities means that the contextual leadership has to be able to work with this ability in four operational dimensions:

- process
- structure
- social interaction
- organisational wide relations

Figure 7: The contextual leader's operational dimensions to develop the organisation's communication skills.

I-IV

Four operational dimensions

I will now run through the dimensions; process, structure, social interaction and organisational wide relations and provide an overview of how a professional communicator can deal with them in order to develop contextual leadership.

PROCESS

Processes are sensemaking through the way they function. Communication that creates meaning is generally very powerful as it is easy to take for granted that conditions will remain as they already are. The given design of the process thus creates the conception that it is natural for things to be organised in the way they already are, people say ”this is how we do things in our company” and are thereby not particularly aware of alternatives.

HISTORY OFFERS US many examples of this. One example is the western car industry. Henry Ford set up a business to mass produce cars in the early 20th century. Conditions in the USA at this particular moment in time were somewhat special. There was a major requirement for a cheap car.

Most of the people who had this need were farmers and as a rule they owned a tractor. Ford hit upon a new manufacturing method, the production line. In fact it wasn't entirely Ford's own idea. He was inspired by slaughterhouses in Chicago.

They ”dismantled” cows on a production line and Ford turned it around and conceived the notion that he could use this production technique in an assembly process for cars instead. He needed workers for the production line and they had to carry out standardised operations. Ford consequently had a recruitment policy that he unashamedly articulated in public as: ”Why should I employ an entire person when I only need two hands?”.

He also instructed his workers to only use their two hands and not to think too much about what they were doing and this led to an operation that certainly produced a large number of cars per unit of time, but with a lot of construction faults in the cars.

It was therefore necessary to put a repair shop after the production line to rectify the most obvious faults, however when the cars were delivered to the customers they still had manufacturing defects. However, as the customers were generally farmers who were used to repairing their tractors and as the car they had just purchased, a model T Ford, was constructed in a very similar manner to his tractor, he was willing to carry out the final repairs to his newly purchased car. He had the need, he had the knowledge and above all: he had no option.

It was due to these rather special circumstance that Henry Ford was able to succeed, despite the fact that his product was actually not particularly distinguished technically.

This production concept was subsequently copied by most western car manufacturers, largely without modifications. This instituted an ”industry culture” and everyone took for granted that this was the ”natural” way to manufacture cars.

For some 50 years, right up to 1954, this was an obvious and basically irrefutable fact.

THAT WAS THE YEAR WHEN TOYOTA instituted a new production concept called Kaizen. It enabled cars to be manufactured with a minimum of defects, fast deliveries etc. This production concept revolutionised the way that cars are manufactured. It is currently gaining ground in a large number of industries and is now called ”lean production”.

The funny thing about this example is that it was not Toyota itself that came up with the idea. However, the company was already disposed to apply it as it had been producing looms since the 1800s with a production technique that was similar to ”lean”. The actual idea came from American organisation researchers who had been commissioned to propose a new type of production organisation. Their client was General Motors, however, the company was not able to take the knowledge on board, instead it was Toyota that produced the idea's external effectiveness. It was naturally highly significant that Toyota had already been down this route with its loom manufacturing process. In the literature the phenomenon is usually denoted as ”path dependency”, i.e. that you become dependent on the processes that you have already built into your operation. You do what you have always done and it is hard to change the habit. This example illustrates the force of habit in process thinking.

THE PROFESSIONAL COMMUNICATOR CAN contribute in numerous ways to the process design effectively supporting external effectiveness. I will go through the ways that have already emerged in this project.

Flow in processes

This is the most fundamental issue in developing communication ability.

If the operation managers have the sole mandate to design processes it is easy for the design to comply with the industry philosophy and for them to feel that a certain amount of bottlenecks in the production process are acceptable. This is easy to justify by conducting optimisation calculations in relation to the production flow.

What is omitted is the effect that the process design has on the cognition of employees.

If you compare an organisation with processes that flow smoothly with one that has ”optimum” bottlenecks, you often find that the staff in both companies are largely satisfied with the situation they have. However, the group that experiences processes that run smoothly will contain more people who are, relatively speaking, unsatisfied with the situation. It might seem paradoxical that the group that is already experiencing a better situation is generally more dissatisfied than the group that has an inferior situation. It is said that necessity is the mother of invention, but this in not always the case. If necessity is experienced as natural and unavoidable then the need for improvement will not arise. People quite simply do not believe that things can be much better than they are and they ”comply the situation”.

In the group that experienced improvements there is an expectation that the future can be even better as history has already shown this to be realistic. An important aspect of the process work is therefore to establish processes that function better than the operational circumstances require.

At Toyota there is a rule that the production line can be stopped if a fault is observed. If a fault arises every worker is authorized to pull a cord in the ceiling that stops the line and the problem is investigated. This rule has been combined with another rule that dictates that the process has to be constantly changed so that the line is stopped twice a day by someone. To facilitate this the system is put under pressure by, for example, reducing stocks of input goods. This reveals defects that are latent in the system but that only appear when the system is under pressure. Faults are thus rectified before they affect external effectiveness. This is communication through process design.

ANOTHER MEASURE that has a bearing on this problem is ”benchmarking”.

This is a method of achieving process development by comparing the company’s processes with those that are better. The usual, and routine, way of implementing benchmarking is to compare the processes in one’s own company with the best in the industry. What does this accomplish? Well, the answer to this question is that the company usually receives confirmation that it is doing quite well and that it can’t be best as it has learned that it has to compare itself with the best in order to improve, and thus it can never be best. It might be better, but never satisfactory.

Those companies that have grasped this mechanism use benchmarking in an entirely different way. They start by closely defining which process they want to improve. They then look for another organisation that is as different to their own organisation as possible, but which has a process that has some similarities with the one they want to improve, plus the fact that the company’s process is perfectly developed.

Such a procedure can produce a lot of creative new knowledge about how to develop one’s own process and amaze the other players in the industry.

One example of this is Southwest Airlines. It is a budget airline. It doesn’t get much money from its passengers as it doesn’t charge them much and it therefore needs to keep its costs down. One problematic expense is the capital expenditure for its planes. This means that the company does not want to have the planes on the ground for any longer than is necessary.

This in its turn generated a need to refine the process of getting luggage and passengers in and out of planes as quickly as possible. To gain inspiration as to how the process could be improved the company studied the processes that took place in the pits at Formula 1 races. They observed how the cars went into the pits and a few seconds later many of the parts had been replaced and the driver was able to carry on in pursuit of victory.

This inspiration contributed to the airline being able to considerably reduce time at the airport and it had a positive effect on capital expenditure.

ALL THIS SUGGESTS that an organisation has to develop its process flow to a greater extent than is justifiable from a production point of view. If you are located in a network environment you have to reduce the risk of being replaced by continually improving your processes over and above what the network requires, in order to exceed the expectations of the surrounding world. In this respect the contextual leadership can assist the ideological leadership in finding creative new opportunities to produce a broader base for such a development.

Dividing processes

In many organisations the employees experience change processes that are like a concertina. During one period everything is to be decentralised and during another they are centralised only to then return to decentralisation and so on. The problem is that these measures tend to be one-sided and as the situation never seems to improve much, such reforms continue. This can lead to reform projects that never result in any actual change as people feel that the change proposals do not actually concern them and so they carry on as before. So reforms breed a need for new reforms.

Professor Nils Brunsson at the Stockholm School of Economics has developed these theories regarding the preservational effect of reforms and he uses the Swedish railway company, SJ, as an example. It is an organisation that has undergone innumerable reform projects, but the trains still run as before. In other words the talk has changed over the years, but the actions remain the same.

Such organisational games often involve professional communicators. They are obedient tools in the work of implementing change that is simply preservational. If the reforms do impact on the actual work that is performed, it often results in a hopelessness. People feel themselves to be victims of change processes, and this does not generate participation.

HOW THEN SHOULD PROFESSIONAL COMMUNICATORS act in order to contribute to a more effective division of processes? Chaos theory provides a suitable basis for dividing processes according to the perspective they should communicate. The processes that are to convey variable, local perspectives should have local support and should therefore be decentralised. The processes that are to convey stable, central perspectives should be centralised. It creates what I usually call ”the centralising paradox of decentralisation”, i.e. if you want to decentralise the processes effectively you have to centralise certain processes in order to create a balance in terms of chaos theory.

An engineering company decentralised almost all processes to subsidiary level, but a handful of processes were centralised. This was the case with processes that concerned aquisition of new companies. Such processes were run solely by the parent company.

The reason for this was naturally to maintain the focus on the overall business, but to simultaneously stimulate innovative technical solutions at the local level.

INSTEAD OF ”concertina behaviour”, processes should be continually developed with the aim of maintaining a satisfactory balance between central and local processes in order to create awareness of the central concepts and at the same time to create the incentive to develop new solutions close to the market.

Skills provision

Knowledge has become an increasingly important production factor in the modern network economy.

Knowledge has to permeate all processes. Furthermore, knowledge has to be continuously supplied to the processes. This is usually not without pain as a process design entails incorporating specific ways of performing tasks and this means that knowledge that does not fit into the picture is hard to integrate.

On the one hand, this task entails integrating suitable knowledge into already existing processes with the aim of gradually boosting external effectiveness. On the other hand the task entails supplying knowledge to change the processes in order to bring them into line with developments in external knowledge.

AN UNDERLYING VARIABLE that governs the ability to supply knowledge optimally is transparency.

We have described in an earlier reflection (3/07) how financial processes can be better controlled if transparency is established in relation to the question of how macro-economic variables affect financial accounting.

One important feature that has to be incorporated in order to achieve this transparency is the development of a policy on how the organisation should allow itself to be influenced, however I will address this issue under the section below on the external environment.

The actual provision of knowledge includes both the ability to find the right knowledge at the right time and the ability to integrate the knowledge into the processes and to thereby generate knowledge internally, which has the effect of making sense of the internal process environment.

THE MOST FUNDAMENTAL task in knowledge provision is making the knowledge available to the employees in an effective way. Achieving this entails developing some kind of search system for knowledge.

Such a system should help people to compensate for the weaknesses they have in their ability to search out the right information at the right time.

We have dealt with this problem in a previous reflection (1/06). A system has to be designed so that it is an effective tool to enable employees to find the right sources of information at the right time.

To start with it means that the system must contain an efficient search engine with effective search logic. The traditional way of searching for information in databases has been to use logic based on categorising information. This mode of procedure however leads to rather cumbersome search processes and in addition you get quite a lot of extraneous information.

The new generation of search engines makes searching much more flexible and artificial intelligence enables the construction of a profile for each person served by the system.

In this type of system the searcher does not even need to specify questions, the system understands which questions are of interest to each person. This is why this type of search function is being incorporated in the work stations that staff use in their everyday work. Many banks now have an automatic link between work stations and external databases. This link supplies the staff with the information they need in real time as they carry out various types of assignments, e.g. preparing loans.

THERE ARE SIMILAR INSTALLATIONS at many large industrial companies. A designer at an engineering company might have a search function such as this directly connected to the CAD/CAM system that he/she uses to draw new technical designs. In other word, employees do not conduct searches themselves, rather the system searches for the information on their behalf using logic that the person would have used personally if he/she had carried out the search. This means that the fundamental functionality in these systems is based on ”pull”, i.e. the system pulls out the information that the person would have extracted him/herself if he/she was qualified to do it. The logic that the system constructs is to focus on such information that the user will largely perceive as supporting the person's already existing perception. In other words, the system becomes a tool to search for confirmatory information in a more effective manner than the person can achieve him/herself. It is effective in terms of chaos theory in the sense that it strengthens the ordering basis for concept development.

However, there is also a drawback associated with this ”pull” technology and that is the risk of having too much confirmatory information, which can inhibit the propensity to test out new solutions. Many modern search systems have however also taken this problem into consideration. As the system provides several people with searches it has also ”learnt” these individuals' preferences.

This makes it possible for the system to draw conclusions about which information might be of interest to a particular person, despite it not conforming to the direction in which the ”pull” technology is moving. This is already being used in a lot of commercial applications, e.g. Internet booksellers. If you search for books on these sites you often get tips about other books that have been the subject of searches by others who have searched for the same book as you did.

SIMILAR FUNCTIONS CAN be incorporated in work stations to, for example, create a bit more circumspection in a situation where credit is being granted, or to generate ideas for new design solutions for an industrial designer. What the system does in a such a case is to supply new information in the form of an ”induced push”.

For such a push to have the desired effect it has to be sufficiently different to be perceived as new, but not so different that it is perceived as irrelevant or alien. The design of such a search system therefore requires the incorporation of a well thought-out communication strategy, which is a task for the contextual leadership.

ANOTHER IMPORTANT FORM of knowledge provision is actively forming relationships with persons in external knowledge networks. We have dealt with this in an earlier reflection in this project (2/05). In some sectors knowledge provision is an issue of survival and in these situations knowledge provision cannot be confined to what databases can deliver. Knowledge always arises in people's heads, it is also continually being refined in people's heads, it is consequently, by definition, perishable. By the time it reaches databases it has often passed through publications and some time has passed since it was in somebody's head. To be at the cutting edge of knowledge growth you therefore have to have access to the growth that is taking place in people's heads. That knowledge is however accessible in a form that suits the person who possesses it, and it therefore has to be translated if it is to be conveyed to someone else. Knowledge is not successfully conveyed until the recipient has reformulated it so that it fits his or her situation.

Transfer of the living knowledge that exists in our heads can consequently not take place by means of methods that are at too great a distance, furthermore the method must be sufficiently fast not to lose the freshness in the knowledge. For these reasons it is important for knowledge-rich companies to keep themselves up to date with new knowledge and to develop their capacity to construct their own knowledge.

IT IS THEREFORE NECESSARY to be on the ball in terms of the development of external professional knowledge networks that can offer sufficient breadth and speed in the provision of knowledge. The ability to develop internal knowledge requires combining these external networks with internal operational knowledge networks that are integrated into the internal processes. This gives the company a capacity to widen its intake of know-

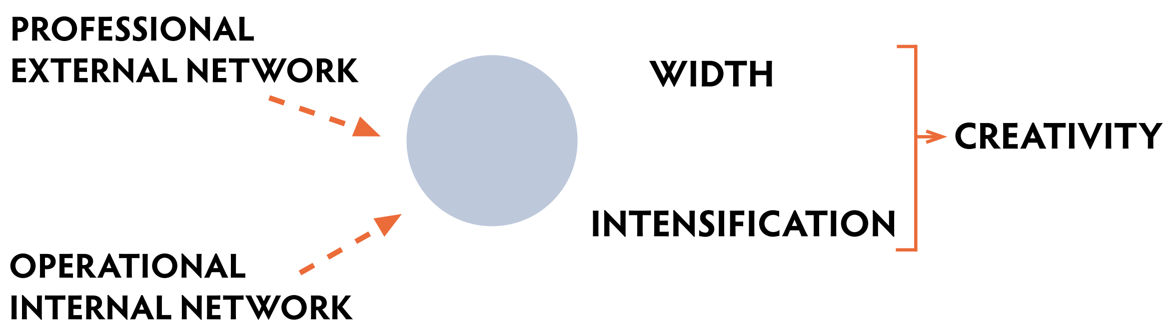


Figure 8: Development of professional external knowledge networks and internal operational knowledge networks.

ledge and to extend the knowledge in its own processes so that it becomes operational. This means that the knowledge is simultaneously updated and extended, producing a perfect situation for creativity in terms of chaos theory. *See figure 8.*

IN JAPAN THEY HAVE BEEN developing a tradition of this sort of exchange of information for many years and there is even a name for those who specialise in it. They are called ”shogai katsudo”. This can be roughly translated as ”information exchanger”. These persons, from many different companies and organisations meet regularly to swap information in a way that is beneficial to them. For information and knowledge has the wonderful quality that it can be exchanged so that both parties feel that they have benefited, a so-called ”win-win”situation. It is therefore possible to develop a capacity to exchange knowledge in such a way as to benefit all concerned.

At the same time the rule also applies that if you don’t develop your professionalism in exchanging knowledge you will easily fall ”victim” to barter, not necessarily because the others have bad intentions but mainly due to the fact that you are not capable of exploiting the opportunities that arise.

Three forms of strategies and skills

The majority of businesses have already reached the level of knowledge requirements that demands active involvement in network-based knowledge exchange and in that context it is important to develop three forms of strategies and skills for the operation:

1 There must be continual monitoring of the origin and growth of knowledge networks. As these networks frequently arise in unexpected quarters, surveillance has to take place over a wide area and it should not be taken for granted that knowledge only arises in certain ingrained environments. It is not obvious that knowledge is generated in universities and colleges.

Firstly, such institutions are starting to differentiate themselves, which means that they are becoming knowledge-rich in different fields. In addition they are becoming variable as the ”knowledge workers” who work there are becoming increasingly mobile. Expertise in an academic institution can be eroded in the space of a few months after having taken years to build up.

Secondly, a lot of knowledge growth is currently taking place in clusters outside the traditional circles.

Universities are no longer the obvious locations for knowledge growth. It might involve trade associations, for example, perhaps in combination with a university. The project on which this report is based is an example of this. A consortium headed up by the Swedish Public Relations Association has run the project in conjunction with the Stockholm School of Economics and Mälardalen University.

Society is also increasingly tending to recognize knowledge growth through collaboration. The Knowledge Foundation has a number of programmes where collaboration is a fundamental criteria in providing funding.

2 When the knowledge networks in which the organisation would like to participate have been identified, an attempt has to be made to gain access to them. This is usually accomplished through people. This means that relationships have to be developed with interesting people, not just because they have interesting knowledge, but also because they have interesting network relations.

This is something that has to be clearly communicated when recruiting new personnel. Knowledge networks should be selected on the basis of an insight into the position that the organisation is capable of occupying in the network. It must be possible to both give and take. The networks where the organisation has most to offer will also be the ones that deliver the most benefit.

3 Once an organisation has joined a knowledge network it has to operate effectively. This means that those employees that take part in ”barter” must be mandated to do this and they must have received optimum training in how to go about it.

If the organisation is in an industry with rapid growth in knowledge and it does not provide its employees with a mandate and training in exchanging information, they might engage in it anyway and run the risk of doing it ineffectively, which can be highly damaging to the company.

THE OPERATIONAL KNOWLEDGE NETWORKS have to be linked in to the company’s processes, which basically means that it has to be possible to generate knowledge in real time and in an improvised manner.

In turn this entails designing processes so that it is possible to test new knowledge in them.

This is not always possible and consequently the only option is to do it in another environment. It might be a separate environment in the company itself or an environment outside the company in another organisation with which there is cooperation. The most extreme form, which is called ”open innovation” in the literature, entails running pure innovation projects together with other external actors. I will deal with this extensively under the heading ”organisational wide relations” below.

Horizontal process communication

A major problem for many organisations is that the division into different functions has gone so far that it is jeopardizing holistic thinking and thereby reducing external effectiveness. In such a situation the different functions can be poorly coordinated with each other. They might also counteract each other and a particular function can dominate at the expense of other functions. In some cases this can go so far that it can be referred to as internal ”cannibalism”.

To avoid these pitfalls, and instead to lay the foundations for optimal overall cooperation among the different functions, the contextual leadership should work actively to ensure that knowledge and perspective is exchanged between functions and that the business' central idea permeates the different functions' processes.

This can be achieved in part through different forms of process cooperation, and it can also take place by arranging meetings so that there is familiarity with each other's environments and problems.

In one company meetings were arranged in which there was an exchange of roles, producing a better understanding of how different functions can contribute to creating value.

Games and play are communication techniques that modern organisations use a great deal to generate understanding, an area that I will deal with in detail under the heading ”social interaction” below.

Vertical process communication

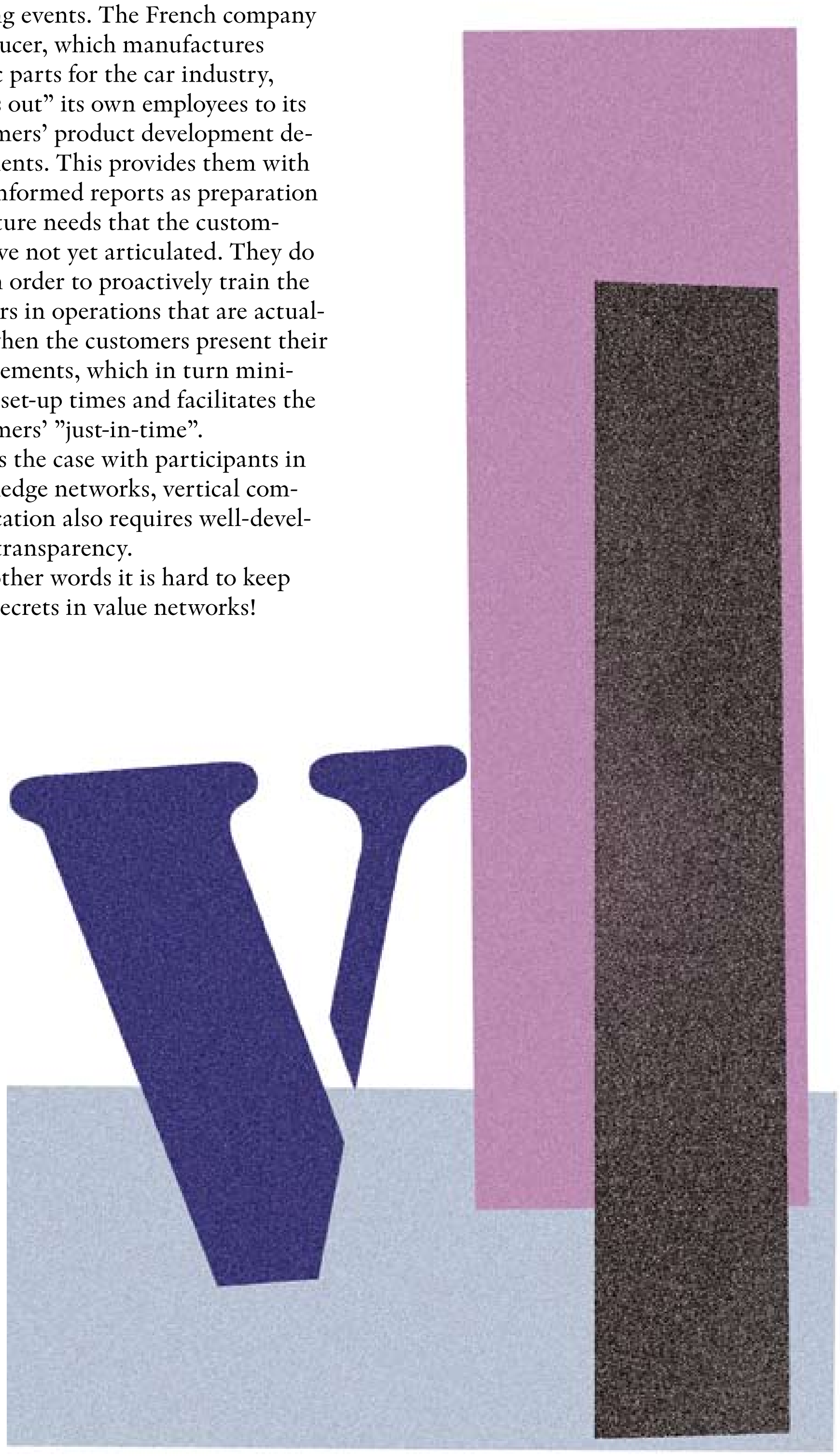
Organisations with network relations have to maintain healthy communication with the actors that are located up- and down stream in the value chain to which they belong.

Upstream entails the necessity of communicating information to the actors that are located there in order to prepare them for changes so that they can adjust in time. After all, in a network environment time is often an extremely important competitive factor, requiring sufficient transparency to give the partners upstream a satisfactory overview of the situation.

Toyota's suppliers have access to Toyota's own financial accounting in real time precisely because it is in Toyota's own interests that all members of its value creating network are able to keep themselves rapidly updated to ensure that ”just-in-time” will work. The company must also establish communication downstream that facilitates preparations for forthcoming events. The French company Manducer, which manufactures plastic parts for the car industry, ”lends out” its own employees to its customers' product development departments. This provides them with well-informed reports as preparation for future needs that the customers have not yet articulated. They do this in order to proactively train the workers in operations that are actualised when the customers present their requirements, which in turn minimises set-up times and facilitates the customers' ”just-in-time”.

As is the case with participants in knowledge networks, vertical communication also requires well-developed transparency.

In other words it is hard to keep back secrets in value networks!



STRUCTURE

The sociologist Anthony Giddens has coined the term ”structuration”. It refers to the fact that the structure of an organisation emerges through gradual, small changes.

It gradually begins to communicate back to the employees via its structure and it is perceived to generate possibilities that have not been observed before, but also new restrictions that were not present before. Even though this effect will always be uncontrolled to some extent, measures can be put in place so that the structure communicates in the direction required to boost external effectiveness.

Chance is thus not the only thing that governs structural development. Structure is to do with wholeness. If a structure does not develop into a whole, which can also be conceived in an overall perspective, then it is not a structure.

IN OTHER WORDS, structure is a phenomenon that exists in the eye of the beholder in the form of an overall experience. The task of professional communication is therefore to generate communication that both creates the prerequisites for structuration to proceed in the direction of external effectiveness, and establishes transparency that enables employees to comprehend the organisation as a whole. Structure can be both physical and mental. The physical concerns the structure that people can find in reality and the mental is what people refer to. These two structures do not always coincide.

The physical structure is sometimes not the same as what is spoken about and this can have both positive and negative effects.

It might be the case that the verbal structure does not describe the actual one. This occurs quite frequently and it can help the organisation in being able to do things in a particular way, but simultaneously display another image to the world at large.

If the way of talking also has the effect of changing the behaviour in the organisation, it can lead to development, which often takes a long time as the perceptions and procedures of a large number of people have to be changed. However the opposite can also occur, namely that the ingrained behaviour is preserved behind a smoke screen of talk. If you look at which companies are the most polluting, you find many that have very good environmental accounting in their annual reports. A highly advanced quality accounting procedure in a recognized quality instrument, e.g. ISO 9000 or suchlike, does not necessarily correlate with a high level of quality in performance.

WHEN IT COMES TO PHYSICAL STRUCTURE the design of the organisation is the most fundamental element. In the western tradition there is a propensity to organise into functions. The idea behind it is that division of labour is effective as each person can contribute what he or she is best at.

It is often taken for granted that these functions can cooperate in a way that produces positive overall results. However, this is not the obvious effect of organisation into functions. There is often a tendency in organisations to keep functions going long after they have become redundant.

One such function is financial control through budgeting. This emerged in the mid-20th century as an idea to create order and transparency. However, it transpires that it has not had such an effect, but instead it has usually had a preservative effect.

In the 1960s the Facit company had excellent financial control through budgeting and the company was often presented as an example for others.

An awareness existed within the company that development was underway within electronics that could have an impact on the company's production of calculators, however, the internal control mechanisms had such a powerful influence on the employees' perspective that nobody realised that an external factor such as this could jeopardize the company's future. The effect of budgeting is thus that forward control is exercised by looking backwards and this can be effective as long as the future resembles the past.

Now that the surrounding world increasingly resembles a dynamic value network, budgeting has become a problematic function, but many organisations keep it going because they are quite simply not capable of letting it go.

ANOTHER EXAMPLE of functions that have clung on is the organisation of Swedish municipalities, which Carina Asplund and I dealt with in a previous reflection (4/07). The way in which local politicians have a direct influence over municipal operations is a vestige of a time when Sweden was a peasant society with independent farmers. The feudal society never gained a foothold in Sweden and the local population was consequently able to develop a high degree of autonomy.

However, this no longer reflects reality and the network society, in which it has to be said Sweden is highly involved in, is now placing entirely different demands on municipalities. This is making the professional management structure in many municipalities too weak and the changeable nature of the various political winds is having a direct influence on municipal operations.

At the same time municipalities have gone from running a monopolistic operation to being exposed to competition and they are increasingly taking on the role of running networks with many and various operators to be coordinated into an effective overall pattern. This is taking place under the threat that if a municipality does not provide overall efficiency and excellence in its role, businesses and citizens might move elsewhere.

THE VARIABLE POLITICAL CONTROL, which worked in a simple peasant society, has thus become a hindrance for modern municipal organisations. In our reflection we therefore offered a suggestion that Swedish municipalities should bolster their ideological leadership so that it achieves a stabilizing effect on municipal activities.

Political control has to take place in dialogue with the operational management and not directly within the organisation. At the same time municipalities have to develop more professionalism when it comes to controlling their operational networks and feeding back signals from their ”market” (citizens, companies, users, customers etc.) regarding beneficial experiences of municipally run operations.

The fundamental communication concerning structure must therefore begin as early as the stage at which the form of organisation is selected, and today we are observing an increasing number of new organisational forms that have the aim of helping the organisation to take up a more effective position in the value network.

Before it was sold, the Gant company was an almost purely virtual organisation. It consisted solely of a handful of people and just about all its functions were outsourced to other companies. The only core in the company were the functions that represented design and brand. All communication therefore circled around these two concepts and all functions could be rapidly replaced or adapted to them.

The equivalent central functional concepts within IKEA are design and logistics. All structures are built up around them and communication in relation to them is transparent.

The development towards an economy based on value networks thus leads to a questioning of traditional functions and thereby opens the door for organisational innovations.

WITH A GIVEN ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE it is also important to establish effective forms to communicate the overall picture. The central tool for doing this is the intranet, which partly has the function of facilitating transparence and partly facilitates navigation in terms of conveying knowledge.

I have already dealt with the latter function in the process section above and here I will address the former.

The cartoonist Tikkanen did a drawing for the Dagens Nyheter newspaper many years ago depicting a rather sad looking old man who says: ”I have all the information, now all I need to know is what it’s all about!”.

Users of an intranet that is designed simply to convey information quickly come to regard it as impenetrable. The information is available, but it is hard to understand its context. The intranet must therefore also be designed to convey overall images. If the organisation is sufficiently complex, such a measure requires a high degree of professionalism in its design. The most important dimension is to convey a picture of what the organisation’s collaborative structure is like. It is more important to convey how functions interact than to describe them in detail.

An organisation in a network environment has to appear to be a network itself in which all its functions occupy a comprehensible place and an overall picture is conveyed that this network has great potential to be developed further. It can otherwise easily be the case that the overall picture produces a sense that there are a large number of structural restrictions in the organisation that set limitations on thinking in terms of opportunities to create value. The structure’s potential to create opportunities is therefore an important aspect of quality in an effective intranet.

The other side of structure is the mental i.e. the talk in the organisation. On the one hand it is important that the talk has an intelligible relation to what the organisation actually does, but on the other hand the talk must not be too restricted by that. We have already observed in the section on communication between processes that what an organisation does has a major impact on ways of thinking and talking, however a conceptual basis must be formulated in order to raise ideas above the immediate action horizon to make it easier to perceive alternative possibilities.

Talk is a function that can be divided into what is spoken about and how it is spoken about. I will deal with the latter under the heading ”Social interaction”, the former concerns structure and I will therefore address it in this section.

AN EXTREMELY FUNDAMENTAL structural factor is the concepts, ideas and central ideas that the organisation is supposed to represent. This factor is highly regarded and it can be viewed from various points of view and therefore has many names: Vision, mission, business idea, policy, core value etc. All these variants can be intended to articulate different aspects of the organisation’s idea, but there is a core within them that is communicated. The core is the ideological position that the organisation wishes to establish and develop.

To avoid getting lost in the nuances of this concept I have chosen here to describe this core as ”operational concept”. What I mean by this expression is the social construction (a perception that has become sufficiently widespread and accepted) that the organisation has succeeded in establishing with regard to its position in the value network.

The operational concept is a phenomenon that is the subject of changes in fashion in the management market. These fashions are driven by the popular literature that is disseminated at airports, in book clubs and in business journals. From the 1960s to the end of the 1980s it was popular to try to become ”biggest, best and most beautiful”. The aim was to be ”Number 1”.

What happens to the employees when the management communicate that ”We will be Number 1”? Well, they ask themselves: ” When will we know that we are Number 1”?

This is not an easy question to answer, however, there is one person in the organisation who has the answer and that is the head of figures, the chief accountant. This person presents a key financial ratio in response to the question, ensuring that the company is focused on getting a certain return on its capital.

With this in mind it is possible to detect numerous, seemingly interesting business opportunities and there is a tendency to enter into hitherto unexploited areas. The decision to do this is thus coloured by the desire to be ”Number 1”, rather than basing it on a satisfactory assessment of the company's core expertise.

What happened was also that companies started to diversify and get involved in areas in which they lacked expertise. In other words, they were too loose in their ideas and too promiscuous in trying out different kinds of commercial experiment.

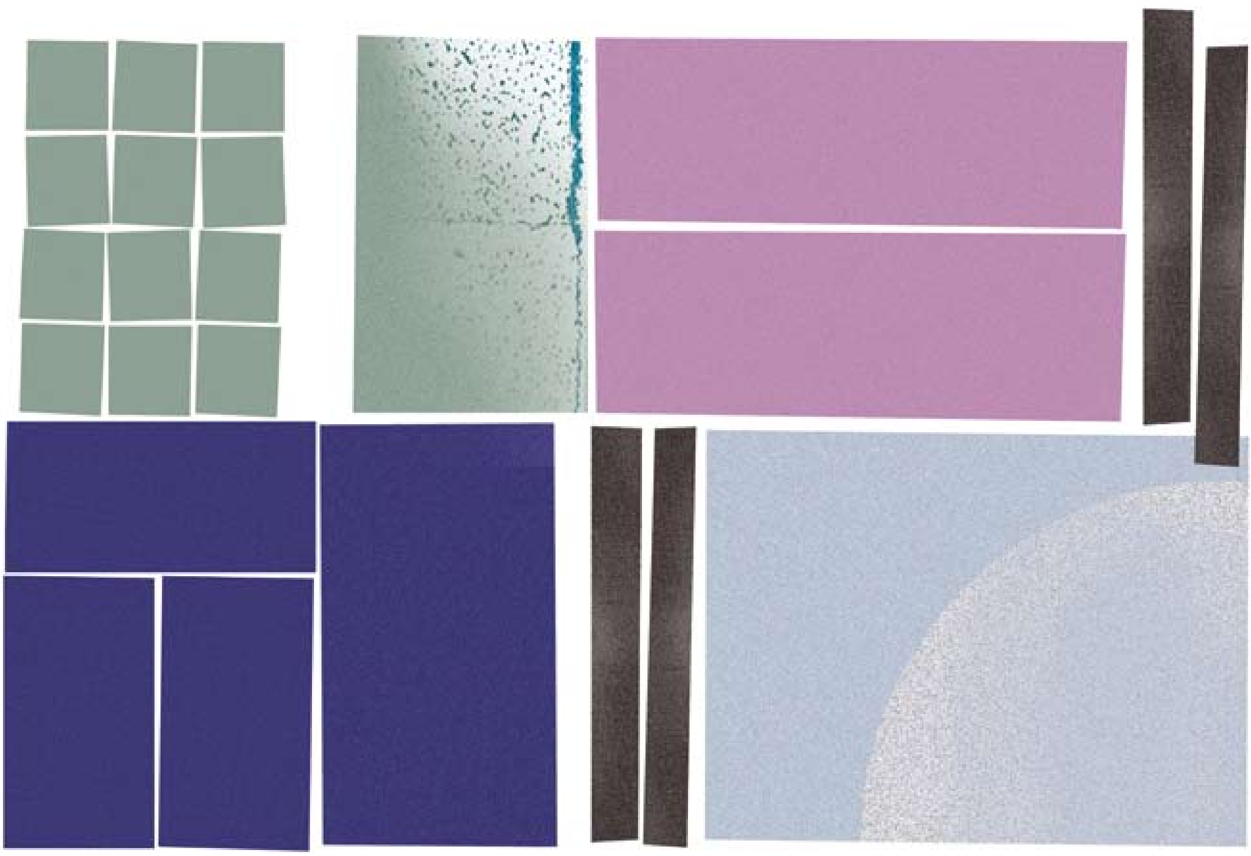
THIS CHANGED in the 1990s when instead the reverse became fashionable and companies started to focus on slimming down. Terms such as ”core business”, ”stick-to-your-knitting” etc. came into vogue. This led to companies starting to dispose of operations and get rid of people. Outsourcing was in. Some businesses became more efficient in this way, but it also weakened a lot of companies. There has been a tendency to ”throw the baby out with the bath water”.

The result is that many businesses are now so thin that they have become ”anorexic”. These companies are consequently far too narrow in their activities at the same time as being overwhelmingly focused in their ideas.

WHY DOES FASHION have such a powerful effect on the formulation of operational concepts? Well, it's a tough question and the answer probably lies in the question's complexity. Defining and communicating a good, enduring operational concept is probably one of the most difficult managerial tasks and there is consequently a propensity to be receptive to all kinds of advice, including fashion. To gain a better understanding of the linchpin for an operational concept that communicates properly, the chaos theory perspective that I presented above can be used.

It is based on the fact that the organisation should communicate stable concepts and stimulate variability in its activities. People should therefore think along similar lines, but have different opinions and do different things. Operational concepts should therefore communicate stable social constructions and challenge the way employees perform.

If operational concepts are regarded from this perspective you arrive at the conclusion that a suitable formulation of an operational concept is a ”role definition”. A role is a function that is constructed on the basis of the external impression it should create.



In other words it is a way of describing oneself based on the perceptions of others. There is therefore an inclination to ask the important questions that govern positioning in the value network:

What position in the value network is most suitable for us?

What can we do to be selected to that position?

What action can we take to develop the position?

THE IDEAL OPERATIONAL CONCEPT, expressed as a role, should be based on a stable social construction and simultaneously stimulate variability in terms of activities. Increasing numbers of companies are starting to develop these sort of ideas. Some examples are of considerable age.

Walt Disney set up his business in the early 1930s as he observed how the depression in American society was starting to cause the disintegration of families. His idea was therefore to offer situations where parents and children could enjoy themselves together and thus reinforce family ties and reduce the risk of family breakdown.

This idea has proved to be robust over the years and still remains the linchpin of Disney's organisation.

Another example is the idea that governs IKANO, the collection of businesses run by Ingvar Kamprad, including IKEA. There is an overall idea in this organisation that can be expressed as "We will save money together with our customers". The idea is ubiquitous throughout all the businesses that are operated within the group and it guides all activities without having a restrictive effect.

IN BOTH OF THESE EXAMPLES it is easy to observe that they are based on stable constructions. In Disney's case the structure is "Family" and in IKANO's case it is "saving money". Both of them are stable and will never become out of date. They thereby have the effect of maintaining an onward force that arrives at its destination. A good role definition doesn't lead anywhere, simply onwards in a never-ending journey.

Apart from consisting of a stable core of social constructions, it must also be possible for the idea to be related to all kinds of activities. This quality can also be observed in the examples I have mentioned here.

There are no activities in IKANO and Disney, existing or prospective, that cannot be related to the central task. Everything and everyone has cause to feel involved in what they do and reflect on what they could do to improve the performance. Businesses that are driven by role-based operational concepts consequently also become more innovative in terms of gradual innovations within the framework of existing operations (so-called incremental innovations).

It is also easier to perceive which other operations can be accommodated as improvements are made in judging how well the operational concept and the core expertise can be imported into these new contexts.

It was no coincidence that IKANO entered the banking sector. Offering to "save money together with the customer" was a message that was gratefully received by bank customers who were fed up with their bank's charges and poor deposit terms.

The development of an effective, role-based operational concept includes communications elements that demand professionalism:

BREADTH OF ACTIVITIES. It must be possible for a role to have an impact on all sorts of activities, including peripheral activities such as sponsoring. How many sailing competitions or golf tournaments are sponsored due to the organisation's operational role and how great a proportion of such activities are driven by the personal interests of the executive management?

MULTIPLE DISTRIBUTION. A role has to be distributed in a variety of ways. As well as using "cold" media, such as printed matter, it must also take place via "hot" media.

One of the most important media is the "small talk" that takes place in the organisation. An operational concept idea that does not function as an engine for the everyday chatter in the organisation has not reached the level of quality expected of a role definition. Likewise, it must be possible to disseminate the idea through all kinds of external media to create realistic expectations regarding the organisation's performance promises.

An important form of distribution is pedagogical and it is substantially to do with the management's capacity to personify the company's idea.

A business role thus requires the management to live as they preach and the smallest weakness can be devastating for the position of the business in the value network.

SOCIAL INTERACTION

The third dimension in developing the organisation's communicational qualities is social interaction.

It is an important area as perspective and knowledge is modelled in interaction among people. If this process does not function effectively the organisation will gradually lose its capacity to spot opportunities.

ALL ORGANISATIONS ARE SITUATED IN a cultural framework. This means that some social constructions, which are conveyed via this framing culture, can promote external effectiveness, while other act in the opposite direction.

The impact that the framing culture has is generally very substantial and takes place on the institutional level. When a social construction has become so strongly embedded in people's consciousness it becomes an institution. This expression refers to a social construction that is entirely taken for granted and is therefore not initially questioned.

If you want to occupy a strong position in the value network, you therefore have to understand which institutions you must not break with, which you can and which you should – if you are to make a difference. This is naturally a cluster of problems that is closely linked with the idea that the company represents.

A Swedish company that used a Volvo as its standard company car in Sweden established itself in the Italian market. The company's operational concept entailed ”moderation and efficiency”. In Sweden there was a general perception that this idea corresponded with the selection of Volvo as company car. In Italy on the other hand Volvo is associated with ”luxury” and the company was consequently not able to choose Volvo as the company car for its Italian employees, but instead chose an Italian make of car that conformed more closely with the Italian perception of ”moderation”.

THE TROUBLESOME QUESTION is naturally determining when you should break with the ingrained institutions and when you shouldn't. When Toyota was setting up in America it chose to site production in Mexico, which several commentators criticised on the grounds that it would not be possible to get the Mexican car workers to work according to the company's Kaizen philosophy.

Today this plant is at least as efficient as all the others. It is thus possible to succeed in pushing through a concept that can appear superficially alien precisely because something is being offered that a sufficient number of people find interesting and innovative.

Large numbers of people queue to work at IKEA's stores in Russia due to the fact that they offer an environment that is so different from the traditional way of running Russian companies. The crucial point here is to understand what people would consider a welcome break in the traditional mode of thinking.

THE WORLD IS ALSO FULL OF EXAMPLES of the opposite. When the company Toys-R-Us was establishing itself in Sweden it did not understand how its institutionalised collision course with the trade unions would be damaging to its own credibility. When McDonalds, which has a highly standardised way of operating in different markets, establishes itself in different countries, in some cases it has to make local modifications in order to fit in better. In Finland the market demands rye bread, while in Sweden it is not at all such a strong institution.

The claim can therefore be made that professional communicators have an important role in contributing to making assessments as to the extent to which an organisation should adapt itself to the prevailing conditions and the extent to which it should stick out and generate new social constructions. It involves cunningly weighing up which war to get involved in and which to avoid.

THERE ARE ALSO DIFFERENT TRADITIONS within management in different countries. In Anglo Saxon countries it is common for employees to be confined within very well defined job descriptions.

A Swedish man who was travelling in the USA changed Swedish kronor at American banks on several occasions and found that in about 10 % of the times the cashier mistook Swedish kronor for Swiss francs. On one occasion he asked for the manager of the bank and informed him of the mistake and asked somewhat sarcastically:

“Don't you train your staff to think?”

The manager then responded:

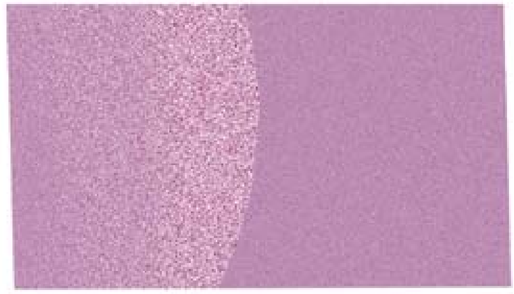
“They are not supposed to think!”

In organisations where people simply act according to job descriptions the result can be a loss of contact with reality.

THE OPPOSITE PROBLEM is present in many Swedish companies.

The sociologist Geert Hofstede has studied decision-makers in various countries and discovered that Sweden is notable for a combination of two styles. The first is extreme individualism and the second is extreme collectivism in decision-making. The result of these two characteristics is naturally extremely protracted decision processes that can produce unforeseen results.

It sometimes produces a breeding ground for creative solutions, but it usually results in long discussions and strange decisions. An professional communicator who wants to get involved in the contextual leadership must find ways to develop the organisation's decision culture to minimise the negative effects of such decision-making patterns.



Formation of perspective and knowledge

An organisation that wants to maintain its position in the value network must be effective in how it maintains its perspective and its knowledge. This is a very important area of responsibility for professional communicators who want to act as contextual leaders.

THE FIRST PROBLEM IS ensuring that general effectiveness is integrated into the company's meeting culture. Rituals can easily emerge in how meetings are run. Such rituals are maintained by the tendency of people to categorise each other into social stereotypes. It is easy to take for granted that some positions are represented by particular types of individuals. We ”know” what salespersons are like, what chief accountants are like, what production engineers are like, and so on.

We learn certain stereotypes as early as during childhood and they are therefore very firmly fixed in our minds. Unfortunately this has certain undesirable effects such as men having preferential rights of interpretation over women.

Many of these characteristics can also interact with our propensity to put a value on words and when companies develop value-laden words they can be used in the social interplay that is based on the stereotypes that the company allows to run riot in meetings. Such words are often generated with the kind assistance of professional communicators and they are generally value-laden.

Words that were intended to facilitate the development of external efficiency can therefore often have the reverse effect. If in a discussion about a new product an older man says the word ”quality assurance” it can give rise to a sense of hopelessness and thereby put a damper on the willingness to implement development.

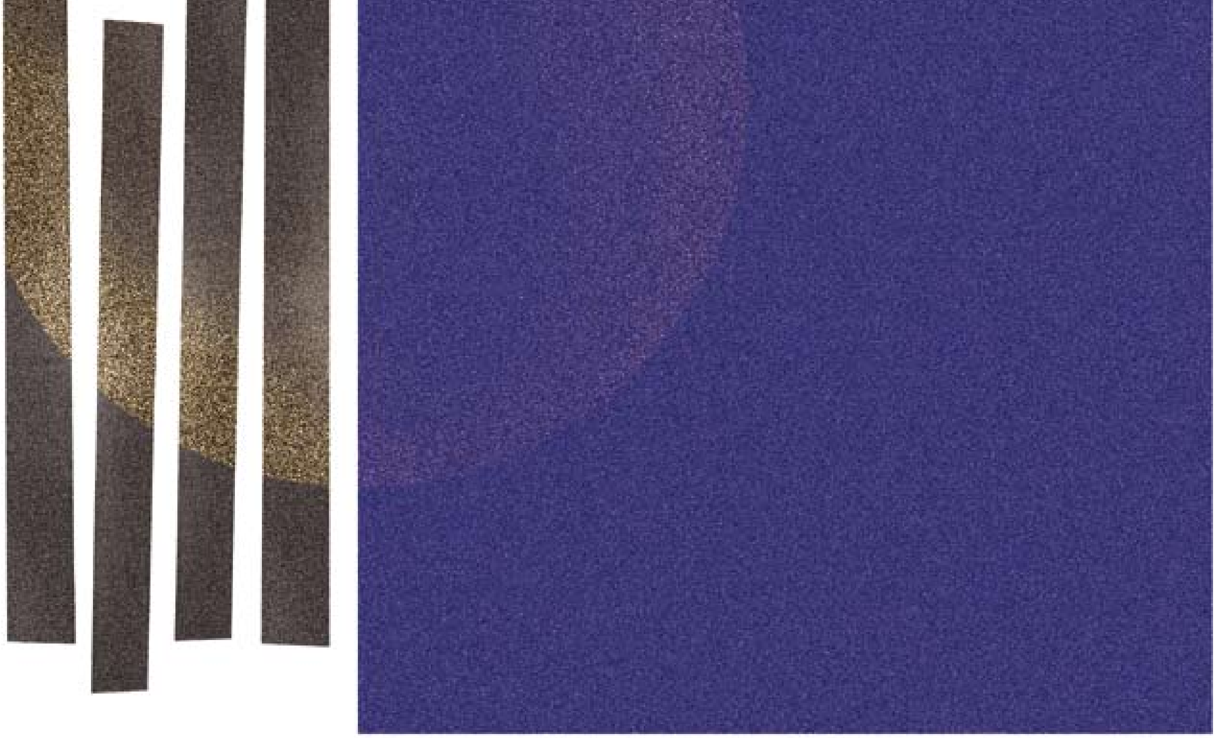
Unfortunately, many so-called ”value systems” have this effect, especially if the words used are used generally and are not based in a sustainable business idea. Such value-laden words can drift around in the company's meeting culture and cause numerous unforeseeable effects, which generally result more in preservation of perspective than development.

THE SECOND PROBLEM with regard to the formation of perspective and knowledge is how to deal with the dedicated processes for developing knowledge. The difference between dialogue and debate is the most fundamental problem. Debate entails there being a conversational culture that is based on a predetermined contest to win the conversation. The game is therefore dominated by the endeavour to ”be right”.

If a debate culture is allowed to establish itself it leads to a gradual impoverishment of the organisation's knowledge base. Debate is namely a very effective tool for reverse learning.

When debate is practiced the perspectives that are considered, for one reason or another, to be ”wrong” are gradually rooted out, leaving what is ”right”. The base for different perspectives is gradually reduced and the perception of what is ”right” is simultaneously preserved. This increases the risk that what is regarded as ”right” increasingly becomes wrong in an external perspective. The situation then arises in which ”your thinking was right even though you were wrong”. Debate is a deceptive conversational form because it can feel so right.

It can give the impression that the organisation is vital, ”on the ball” and dynamic in other ways. Dialogue on the other hand can feel a bit fainthearted and less effective.



EVEN THOUGH DIALOGUE is more effective than debate, in general, there are pitfalls with dialogue if it is not developed effectively. Many people associate dialogue with ”all talk and no action”. And there is a basis for this misgiving. Many dialogues are conducted with the aim of giving people the opportunity to ”talk it out”, ”have their say”, ”express their opinion”, ”listen to what others have to say” etc. There is naturally nothing wrong with this, but when this ”soft” view of dialogue is allowed to completely dominate it is easy for the situation to arise where the tool of dialogue is used to completely distance oneself from the operation.

The result is that things are discussed that do not become reality and talk and reality start to become disconnected in a way that does not contribute to increased effectiveness, but that instead generates conceptions that do not lead anywhere or in the worst case lead in the wrong direction.

For a dialogue process to contribute to external effectiveness it has to be formulated professionally. This partly involves the choice of participants, partly the design of the actual process and partly the way the results are dealt with.

IF THE AIM OF THE dialogue is that ”everyone should have their say” this easily leads to meetings being called about issues that have little connection with the business. It is therefore important that the question that the dialogue is about is clearly related to the operation and its idea.

To start with, the selection of participants in a dialogue process must take place according to the principle that everyone should agree on the question’s significance. If this consensus is not present the dialogue should be postponed until the question has become significant. In that case there are other things that should be done first, for example, the gathering of external information to reinforce the perception of the questions’ dignity (see the section on the organisational wide relations on the next page).

If the question has taken on this dignity the second selection criterion for participation is that everyone should represent as many different operational perspectives as possible.

This can be explained by the chaos theory prerequisite that the participants should think along the same lines but have different opinions. The third selection criterion is that only participants who are themselves affected by the question in their daily work should take part in the dialogue. Without motivation such as this in relation to the question, participation might otherwise be at arm’s length resulting in a lack of dynamism in the dialogue.

THE ACTUAL DIALOGUE PROCESS is not a universally open discussion over a cup of coffee, but a constructive process that has the specific aim of producing new knowledge or new perspectives. It thus involves a creative process and should therefore also be formulated as such.

Firstly, this means that communication surrounding the process’ relationship to the organisation’s business idea must be clear so that all participants understand what should be produced and why.

Secondly, it means that the process must be designed to ensure that it is possible to undertake an overall inventory of all the knowledge and all the perspectives that can be used to sustain the discussion. This requires careful preparations and information resources linked to the discussion.

Thirdly, the dialogue process must be led in a professional manner, which often requires that it is led by a person who is educated and trained to run such processes.

THE RESULT OF A DIALOGUE PROCESS, that has to be connected to something that the organisation is intending to try out in reality, must also be confronted by reality as soon as possible. When this ”soon” is naturally depends on the circumstances.

Some issues concern things that are of immediate consequence and they naturally have to be reality tested quickly. The slightest delay can cause major losses in the form of gaps in knowledge.

This involves not least knowledge that the company intends to use for knowledge exchange in the knowledge networks that I dealt with above. The value of knowledge often declines rapidly.

Waiting too long can sometimes be directly harmful as it can contribute to a belief that the organisation has sufficient knowledge and is therefore not equally alert to absorbing fresh knowledge. It is when you think you know everything that you are in the worst position! However, some perspectives can have a long shelf life.

When in the late 1960s Shell produced scenarios on a possible oil crisis it didn’t benefit from the knowledge until 1973, when the oil crisis arrived. Shell was then prepared and the knowledge it had was still at least as valuable as it was six years previously.

ORGANISATIONAL WIDE RELATIONS

It is true that organisations that only apply themselves to monitoring the world around them through the everyday reconnaisance that the employees conduct in their ordinary work can be good at spotting opportunities within the parameters of their existing operation, but this does not enable them to understand what arrives in the form of surprises. The most common problem is not that we don't see what is going on but that we don't understand it. As Paul Simon has written in one of his songs:

"When something goes wrong
I'm the first to admit it, but
the last one to know."

ASSEMBLING LARGE AMOUNTS OF INFORMATION is therefore not much help, rather there has to be a willingness to be influenced by the surrounding world. If this desire is lacking the information will not be converted into knowledge.

It is the rather the case that one can be lulled into a sense of security that one is not being influenced by the surrounding world because one's own position is secure.

On the Titanic there was no reaction to the icebergs around the ship because the ship was supposed to be unsinkable. It's the same with many organisations where potential threats are spotted in the world at large but it is hard to take them on board.

It is therefore the task of the contextual leadership to get the organisation to understand what is happening in the world outside the employees' normal field of vision and to get them to understand what action they can take to turn the potential threat into an opportunity. For it is the case that there are no threats without inherent opportunities and no opportunities without elements of threat. How reality is perceived is thus more significant than that it is perceived.

TO UNDERSTAND how to open yourself to external influences you have to know something about yourself. It is therefore important to purge your own perception of myths and misconceptions.

The most dangerous myth is the one concerning your own invulnerability. The communication department that devotes itself to producing internal myths about its own grandeur (the head waiter role that I described above) is therefore doing its own organisation a disservice.

A myth that is almost as dangerous is the reverse; that the organisation is sensitive to everything that happens. Such a myth can lead to employees overreacting as they are frightened of the most minor external event or becoming passive as they have ”given up”. It is therefore the task of the contextual leadership to develop the employees' ability to judge what they should absorb from the outside world and provide support in these processes.

BUSINESS INTELLIGENCE SHOULD BE FORMULATED as a proactive function. It should study connections in the world at large and draw conclusions about how different external events can influence each other in the long-term. It is partly to do with selecting such connections from the beginning that might reasonably have an impact on the organisation's own operation, and partly to do with being able to form scenarios on how the connections can be developed.

The mistake is often made of drawing the conclusion that a particular connection will not affect the company because it has not done so before.

We are experiencing a situation such as this at precisely the time of writing. The credit crunch is starting to spread around the world. The primary generator was the American mortgage crisis. As few people considered the home loans situation in the USA to have affected them it was difficult to imagine that it might do so. The actual connection between the high level of debt and the deregulated neoliberal activities in the investment banks are not hard to understand per se, but it is harder to grasp how one is going to be personally affected.

It is therefore difficult to make prophecies (especially about the future, as Mark Twain said) and the level of ambition for business intelligence should be to prepare the organisation for those connections that are moderately tangible. The connections that are entirely new will always come as a surprise and in this context, as Hans Werthén said on one occasion:

”The most important thing is perhaps not to predict that it will rain tomorrow, but to have an umbrella in case it was to suddenly do so."

IN OTHER WORDS, the organisation can incorporate contingency planning without knowing precisely what it is preparing for. Such preparations are based on properly communicating perspectives regarding change and the logic for change. You then learn to see patterns and this leads to improvements in producing opportunities from these patterns. Or as Louis Pasteur put it:

”Luck favours the prepared mind."

IT IS THE TASK OF the contextual leadership to contribute such preparations by incorporating communication skills into all of the four operational dimensions I deal with here. Correctly handled it provides a general mode of spotting opportunities that generates preparedness to exploit chances when they arise. It stimulates the employees to have a better understanding of events in the surrounding world and their relationship to the organisation's ability to create value. In the more specific role as a trend spotter, however, it is imperative that the contextual leadership is mandated to seriously challenge the internal ”truths”.

The role that is then adopted is similar to that which the jester had in the medieval kingdom. The jester sat by the king's throne and had the task of whispering into the king's ear what the king didn't want to hear, but needed to understand. Nobody else had this mandate for the king knew that, even though the jester was actually manipulating him, he had his best interests at heart. He trusted the jester's intelligence and he therefore allowed himself to be influenced. Effective business intelligence must have a similar mandate. This mandate goes way beyond routine press clippings and database searches.

TO BE ABLE TO ACT AS THE "JESTER" in the organisation, professional communicators must start by developing the internal relations.

It is not sufficient to understand which information the employees might need, rather the most important insight is which information they might react positively to. The role of "jester" is therefore not about gathering the perfect information, but the perfect stimulation to get the activity started.

In this sort of context perfect information often has a counterproductive effect as it increases the risk that the recipient will reject the information. The professional communicator must therefore understand the situation that the employees find themselves in and how they reason.

Having understood that, it is possible to grasp which information could work best as the spark to ignite the flames of hope in the eyes of others.

One consequence of this complex of problems is that when professional communicators act as trend spotters they generally have to devote more time to monitoring inwards than outwards.

TO BE ABLE TO SUPPLY THE ORGANISATION with the right stimuli at the right moment the surveillance activities must be ongoing and systematic. A method exists called the "intelligence cycle" that should be utilised and adapted to individual surveillance requirements.

One such surveillance cycle starts by identifying which connections have to be understood in the outside world. Hypotheses are subsequently constructed regarding which connections there might be. Information is then sought that supports and/or repudiates the hypotheses. Finally all indications that have been found are put together in a pattern, which is conveyed to the employees.

In other words this involves more of a process of making sense of information than simply creating information.

THE OTHER SIDE of external communication is to do with how the organisation decides it will influence the surrounding world. I have previously made the claim that it is hard to keep secrets in network environments. The fundamental principle for external influence is therefore that it is imperative to try to create a high degree of transparency.

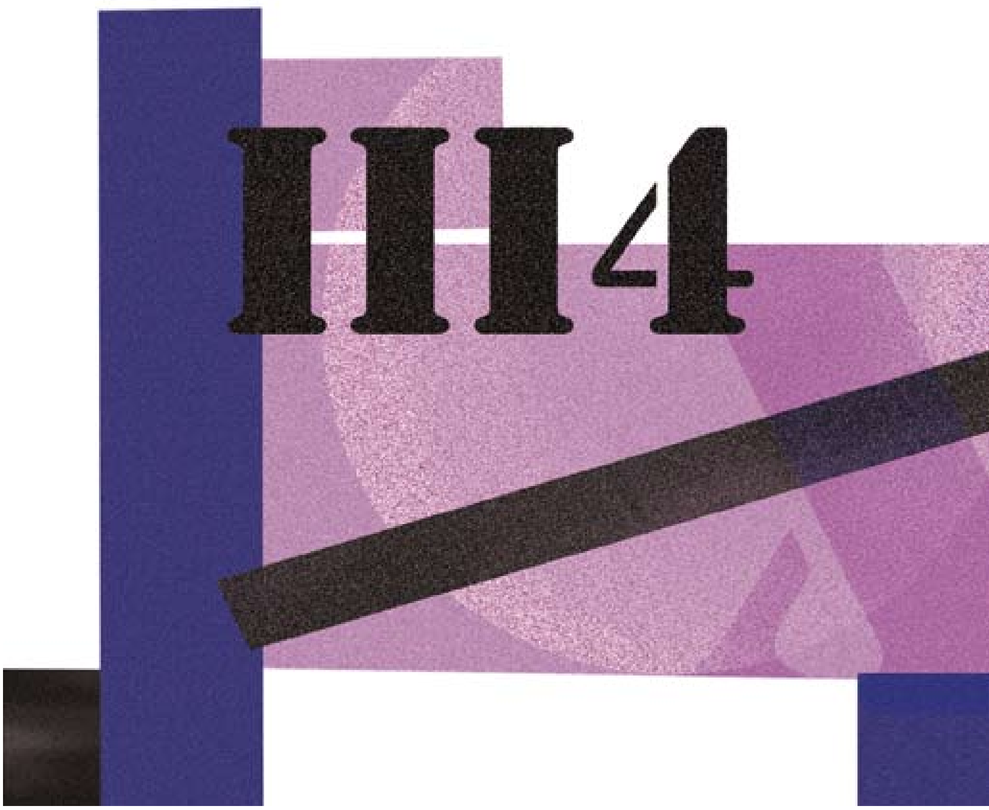
This sort of fundamental strategy generates external confidence in the organisation's intentions and this in its turn creates a platform for influence. The majority of activities for exerting external influence should therefore take place relatively openly, and what is developed is rather a way of interacting with others in the networks to attain a critical mass to move an issue in a particular direction. Influence is consequently exerted on each other by training others in the network to perceive the opportunities they haven't spotted themselves.

Negative manipulation generally produces counterproductive consequences as there is a more of a tendency to stimulate the processes that are not wanted and an incapacity to support the processes that are to be promoted.

A few years ago there was a concept called information warfare.

The idea was that states could wage war against each other by manipulating information. Some attempts were made along these lines, but the results were simply the creation of more problems than there were before.

In today's network society it is not possible to control the spread of information and the idea of information warfare therefore falls down under the weight of its own absurdity. There is a Chinese proverb that says "Those who try to cheat everyone, cheat themselves" and it is relevant



in terms of manipulative external operations. I am not implying by this that you can't be manipulative in any sense.

Measures to influence the surrounding world should have a manipulative element, but they must have a constructive basis. This partly means that the actions have to be based on a genuine desire to change the surrounding environment and partly that there has to be an ability to join in and take the consequences if that happens.

In other words, you should have already perceived the challenges that your own organisation is facing when you actively try to change the surrounding world. Simply having the intention to change a situation for short-term benefit usually rebounds on the organisation in a network environment. Losing face in such an environment can take a long time to repair.

ACTIONS DESIGNED TO CHANGE the outside world are very similar to the sort of behaviour that entrepreneurs indulge in. There is an often used definition of entrepreneurship that runs: "Entrepreneurship is creating value using resources over which one has no direct control".

This is very similar to an effective lobbying strategy. The basis for businesses is the desire to create value, and value in a network is constituted by the extent to which you help others to create value to enable the entire network to create more value.

It is therefore possible to view this role as an extension of contextual leadership into the adoption of a leading role in the entire network of which one is a part and getting it to function in a way that benefits the whole. There is then no discrepancy between the general good and self-interest, rather they merge.

This should be the strategic goal for an effective lobbying operation.

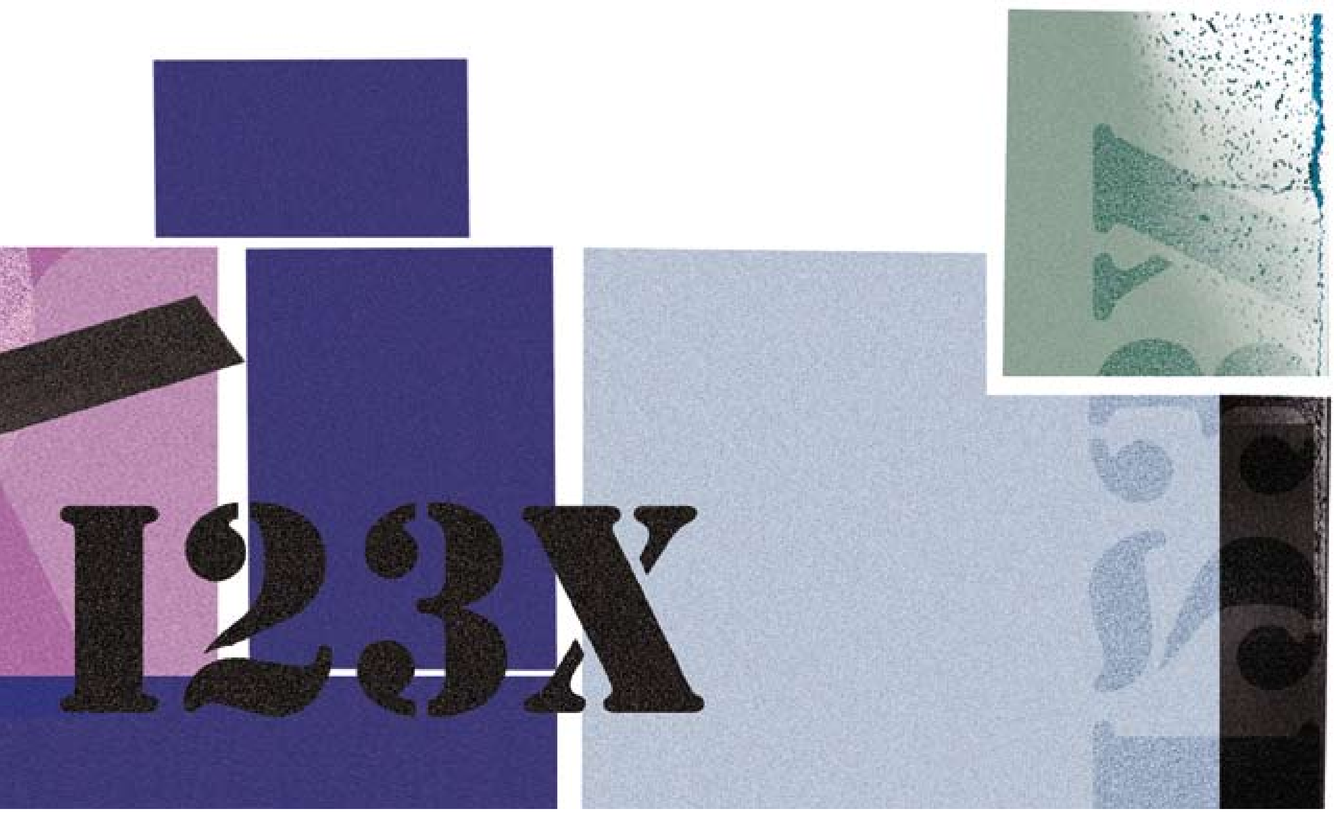
Summary

The four operational dimensions that I have now run through are not mutually exclusive. When professional communicators act as contextual leaders they must be able to operate in all four dimensions. In some cases one dimension will get the upper hand while in other cases another dimension will predominate.

It is therefore necessary to be flexible in terms of leadership and to adapt the mix of operational dimensions according to the situation. Contextual leadership therefore becomes, just as all other forms of leadership, inserting the overarching vision in the situation.

The difference between the ideological leadership and the contextual leadership lies in the fact that the former focuses on the immediate performance, while the latter focuses on the context for that performance. In tackling this task, professional communicator's must be able to take on a variety of roles in their leadership.

It just so happens that there are four of these roles too.



The professional communicator's four management roles

After having dealt with the four operational dimensions I will conclude this final report by dealing with the four roles that an professional communicator can adopt in the capacity of contextual leader. As with the dimensions these are not mutually exclusive either, rather a contextual leader must be able to take on all the roles to varying degrees in different situations. Accommodating all the roles in a single person would not be feasible, rather the contextual leader should be able to perform all four roles through the unit he/she leads. In other words the roles must be represented in the unit/department for corporate communication.

The system builder

As must have been evident from my description above, developing processes requires involvement on the part of the contextual management. It entails being able to take the initiative in all the issues that apply to process development. It entails not simply being a passive referral body, but making sure to be involved at an early stage in process development.

The system builder must be able to perceive the way in which processes communicate depending on how they are organised. This area of expertise contains all the aspects I covered above; how knowledge is conveyed, how frames of reference are constructed, how cooperation between processes takes place etc.

It is not possible to be a good process builder unless you have basic skills in process design. You have to understand how different types of processes function in an overall perspective and which options there are to change and streamline processes.

I want to link the other side of system building to what I described above regarding development of transparency and holistic thinking in structures. Here too the system builder is required to understand what structure is and how it impacts on creating meaning.

The example from ABB in this series of reflections (3/06) describes the role of system builder in both of these dimensions. In part it involved a structural installation through the establishment of a unit called ”Communication Center”, in part it was a process installation in terms of the way in which professional communicators were integrated in all elements of the process environment.

By achieving natural structural support in combination with effective support for processes in this way, it was possible to contribute an increased communication capacity. In this case the rise in quality involved increasing the capacity to communicate the business perspective in the processes.

THE ROLE OF SYSTEM BUILDER is generally long-term and becomes prominent in organisations with continuous processes. However, even in cases where the processes are seemingly fragmented, this role can be especially important, as perhaps then there is a small number of people who care about the wholeness of the structure.

When the dominant perspective is to optimize each process individually, it can lead to a deterioration in overall unity. In cases where this leads to a clear suboptimization of the end result this is perhaps not such a problematic issue to emphasise.

It is worse in those cases where the processes produce a satisfactory collective result, but the overall communication creates a negative situation. This is what can happen when marketing and sales processes are poorly coordinated. The overall sales results of such activities might be OK, but as a result of their defective coordination they take time unnecessarily from the customers, producing a negative reaction. In the long-term this sort of thing can produce negative relationships, which can be hard to deal with if not tackled in time.

The system builder must therefore establish a broader perspective vis-a-vis the organisation's system design than others might have reason to do. It is precisely this additional attention that makes the contextual leader of value in designing systems.

The mediator

The traditional role of the professional communicator is to act as the conveyor of messages. To that extent it is a practical role and the professional communicator has little effect on the actual message, rather it is given.

When the role of the professional communicator is developed into that of a contextual manager, this traditional way of viewing the professional communicator's input no longer holds.

Instead of conveying messages, the role becomes one of creating meaning in conjunction with a large number of parties. In this context the professional communicator acts as a mediator between the different points of view that might be held by a number of parties and pushes through a common change of these positions to enable everyone to unite around a shared conception.

This is basically a negotiating role; one develops insights into the parties' viewpoints and motivations, notes room for manoeuvre and influences the conversation in the direction of possible solutions.

THE MOST COMMON SITUATION for performing this role is when the organisation is planning changes. It is then often important to start analysing far in advance how different parties might view the change that is to be achieved and start to set the pattern for alternative approaches and solutions. It is as important to understand where different parties are heading as understanding their current opinions. One's analysis therefore contains an assessment of the positions of various parties regarding the issue in question, what is motivating them in different development directions, which benefits and disbenefits they can perceive in different solutions and their current links to the views of other parties.

In other words, this is about conducting a comprehensive analysis of a political game and it is thus important to understand the parties' motives. The professional communicator then has to start acting in good time to involve important parties in such a way as might be of benefit to them and to the organisation as a whole. Such mediation processes are always extensive in both time and space.

ONE SITUATION IN WHICH THIS IS a prominent role for the contextual leader is when the organisation has the intention of moving an operation from one place to another or closing down an operation or making a similarly extensive change that several parties might perceive as ”affecting” them.

In such cases it is important to invite a large number of parties to create a new reality as the more participants there are in a constructive process the greater the likelihood of generating constructive solutions. The contextual leader must therefore find a balance in terms of being both a listener and an instigator in these sort of development processes.

ANOTHER SITUATION in which this is an important role is when several parties are invited to participate in product development or other innovation processes. In such cases the end result is not known, it is rather the case that leadership here entails developing new perspectives when everybody is in the dark. It is then important to understand what the motivations of various parties might be in order to detect what in business development is usually called ”pain” – latent needs that people might have without understanding them and being able to put them into words themselves.

The role of the mediator is thus to do with leading the development of new perspectives that can become social constructions and thereby helping to create a new reality.

The coach

The contextual leader also has the task of assisting others in developing their communications. The task comprises both helping others to improve in conveying the organisation's ideology and their own contextual communication.

WITH REGARD TO DEVELOPING ideological communication the coach often takes on the role of helping managers and other leaders to improve their own ideological communication skills.

This task can be on both a large and a small scale. In some cases it might involve being a sounding board for the senior management. In this context the contextual leader does a lot of training of certain individuals in the organisation's top management to ensure that their conduct in relation to the mass media and in other public contexts is effective from an ideological point of view.

THIS ROLE is quite similar to that of the theatre director. You create a character and it then involves doing it in a way that is credible and enduring. The difficulty lies in perceiving the person's potential for development and then stimulating him/her correctly to enhance his/her ability to convey the ideological message. The danger naturally lies in trying to create a role for a person who is not suitable for it. When the former Prime Minister, Göran Persson, was ”transformed” into ”Mr. Nice-Persson” in the mass media, it undoubtedly had a positive short-term effect, however there was subsequently a powerful reaction and many political commentators consider that the Social Democrats lost the election primarily because the electors became fed up with Persson, rather than the Social Democrats. The way in which the Social Democrats recovered after the election in terms of opinion polls also indicates that this was the case.

THE ROLE OF THE COACH CAN ALSO BE PERFORMED on a wide-ranging basis. The example we published in this series of reflections about the development of Volvo's middle management's communication skills (2/07) shows that it is possible to systematically coach a lot of people at the same time. In this case, Charlie Nordblom, who is head of Volvo's strategic internal communication, acted as contextual leader in the role of a kind of ”head coach”.

He designed a system for measuring communication skills in the middle management and then coached them systematically. In this instance it concerned developing the capacity of these managers to convey the organisation's ideology and the system was constructed in such a way as to produce decentralised coaching that safeguarded cultural differences. This ensured a development in which the overall ideology was conveyed more effectively through a multicultural approach. This example demonstrates the substantial measures that professional communicators can contribute if they develop their capacity for contextual leadership in the role of coach.

The influenser

The final role, the influenser, is perhaps the most spectacular and most difficult to develop in a balanced way.

The role of influenser is indirectly incorporated in all the other roles but it also comprises a role in itself. It involves acting forcibly to change perspectives and it is most prominent in the organisational wide relations operational dimension. It therefore entails taking responsibility for instituting a modified view of the organisation from an external perspective and it always involves the risk of treading on sensitive toes and sacrificing sacred cows.

It is therefore also a dangerous role, because it is easy to be smeared.

THERE IS AN INHERENT DESIRE in all organisations to try to become as independent as possible of the ”wicked” outside world. Professor Sven-Erik Sjöstrand at the Stockholm School of Economics used to start his lectures with the statement:

”A company is an organisation that tries to create an internal planned economy in a competitive environment.”

TO SOME EXTENT the role of influenser fits perfectly with the other roles as it entails taking a position that is counter to the thinking on ideological positioning.

The strong ideological organisation should in fact regard its capacity to further its ideology without taking others into consideration as a strength, however the influenser's role calls attention to dependence on others. It is therefore a sensitive role that has to be developed with care. The basis for this role is that one has the mandate to act in the same way as the medieval king's jester. Without such a mandate the role is absolutely impossible to perform.

THE CASE OF THE LAUNCH of ”Free television” in the Swedish Television Company (SVT), which was published earlier in this series of reflections (2/06), is an example of when a professional communicator performed the role of influenser skillfully. Helga Baagøe, who is head of corporate communication at SVT pushed through a change in perspective, based on external signals that the company's ideological communication was not sufficiently effective. The way in which she implemented the actual internal change was similar to the method that programme makers and journalists at SVT usually utilised when they were trying to influence others. Moreover there was an ideological dimension in the term ”Free television” that the previous term, ”public service” could have conveyed in adequately. Ultimately the new term was challenging and it initiated a discussion both internally and externally as to whether SVT was fulfilling this ideological approach in all its parts.

As with the Volvo case, this is therefore an example of professional communicators having the ability to act forcibly as contextual leaders by fulfilling a managerial role in the right context.

Conclusion

This project has now come to an end and it has been an exciting journey. The aim was to develop knowledge in relation to the professional communicator as a leading figure in organisations. The result was a proposal that:

• The professional communicator should adopt the position of contextual leader with responsibility for developing the organisation's communication skills.

• The task should be pursued with a foundation in chaos theory and with the aim of developing communication skills on the basis of stability in ideas and the stimulation of variability in activities.

• The professional communicator's contextual leadership should be focused on four operational areas: processes, structures, social interaction and organisational wide relations.

• The professional communicator should work within four roles as contextual leader: system builder, mediator, coach and influenser.

EVEN THOUGH THIS FINAL REPORT NOW BRINGS THE PROJECT TO AN END, two further activities are planned. The first is that the results will be published by Norstedts Akademiska in spring 2009 in a book. The book will deal with communicative leadership in network structures and will address both ideological and contextual leadership.

The second activity is that the project will continue to develop knowledge in relation to the question of how professional communication can contribute to developing organisations' capacity to innovate. The project will be conducted under my leadership via my research team at Mälardalen University.

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