Chapter 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The historical roots of research in modern communication reach back into the nineteenth century, when scholars began their systematic inquiry into the changes in the pattern of life brought about by the industrial revolution. According to Lang (1989) the spread of literacy and the development of popular literature, which were part of this transformation, received attention as did the daily newspaper, judged by many to be the most powerful organ in the formations and expression of public opinion.1

However, the domain of human communication study and practice concerned with relations between communication phenomena and the functioning of those collectives known as organisations began to take shape in the late 1940s. Redding (1989) stated that, historically, specialists in the field had debated whether communication was a central component of the process of organising or merely one of a number of variables affecting the ways in which an organisation functioned. Some theorists have proposed that 'communicating' and 'organising' are virtually synonymous terms.2

Most behavioural scientists have perceived communication as an independent, dependent, or intervening variable alongside other variables, like organisational structure, technology, leadership style, working conditions and motivations. Communication specialists during the 1950s and 1960s tended to
follow this trend as they examined the relationships between communication behaviours and such variables as job satisfaction, employee morale, group decision making, absenteeism, attitudes towards supervisors, and various other indicators of productivity.

Traditionally the academic study of organisational communication has focused on the so-called internal phenomena, those communication events and behaviours thought to take place within the boundaries of an organisation. This posture typically has resulted in the exclusion from the study of such subjects as public relations and advertising on the grounds that they belong to external communication.³

Perhaps the most significant study on the various dimensions of communication was conducted by the UNESCO (1980). After studying the various problems and issues relating to information and communication the study states, "communication can be an instrument of power, a revolutionary weapon, a commercial product, or a means of education; it can serve the ends of either liberation or oppression, of either the growth of the individual personality or of drilling human being into uniformity".⁴

Referring to the democratisation of communication the report deals with the large number of initiatives launched to break down, or at least reduce, the barriers in democratisation of communication. The report speaks of four approaches emerging in this regard: (a) broader popular access to the media and
the overall communication system through assertion of the right to reply and criticise, various forms of feedback, and regular contact between communicators and the public; (b) participation of non-professionals in producing and broadcasting programmes, which enables them to make use of information sources, and is also an outlet for individual skill and sometimes for artistic creativity; (c) the development of alternative channels of communication, usually but not always on a local scale; and (d) participation of the community and media users in management and decision-making (this is usually limited to local media).  

Hence in a democratic communication scenario individuals and groups are more and more participating directly in multifarious forms in communication processes - with existing media, through official or institutionalised media, via alternative media - and finding new, effective outlets for creative expression. Democratisation is a process rather than a static concept. Its further development is vital for the future, as failure to keep pace with social needs and technological advances can only mean that man will be subjected to increasingly dehumanised and alienating experiences.

In the context of organisational communication a number of research investigations were conducted at the Western Electric Company’s Hawthorne plant in Illinois, USA that had become collectively known as ‘Hawthorne Studies’. Most of these studies there were conducted by Elton Mayo of Harvard University. As reported by Roethlisberger and Dickson, (1939), the research
team attempted to discover aspects of the task environment that would maximise worker output and hence improve organisational efficiency. Four major phases marked the Hawthorne studies: the illumination studies, the relay assembly test room studies, the interview programme, and bank wiring room studies.

The findings of the studies by Mayo and his colleagues revolved around the social and emotional needs of workers. First they concluded that worker output increased as a result of the attention paid to workers. Second finding was that worker output increased through working of informal 'social factors'. Finally the researchers found that 'management style' could account for some of the observed productivity changes.

A study conducted by the Research, Education and Economics Mission Area Management Co-ordinating Committee in the United Kingdom identified best practices in internal communication that could be implemented within the organisation and its agencies. Conducted in 1996, the aim of the study was to "recommend exemplary practices that will enhance two-way communication." The three areas in which they sought best practices were: encourage communication with employees up and down the chain; increased use of technology to enhance communication; and facilitating multi-disciplinary work through cross-agency information sharing.

The recommendations included: emphasising face-to-face meetings using site visits, town hall meetings, chat sessions; utilising multi-media communication
methods; having print and electronic publications; using satellite video teleconferencing and promoting positive communication skills among management staff, like issuing communication tip sheet necessary to them.

A massive three-nation study was conducted by Dozier et al (1995) involving 321 organisations in Canada, the United Kingdom and the United States of America on communication excellence. They concluded that communication did affect an organisation's bottom-line in a number of direct and indirect ways. Excellent organisations have the expertise for advanced two-way communication practices. Many such organisations have participative organisational cultures that nurture communication excellence. They have found that the respondents, who were chief executive officers and top communicators, recognise that some communication effects were critical to several other departments in an organisation, or the organisation as a whole. Although they could not separate communication effects from those of the other units, they saw excellent communication as essential to overall effectiveness.

Another study was conducted by the International Bench-marking Clearinghouse, USA, on internal communication as the process of creating employee agreement and trust with the corporate vision, mission and values which is known as achieving alignment. The bench-marking activities in this study focused specifically on internal communication planning, innovative methods, and measurement systems for purposes of achieving alignment. It was done after
making site visits to ten companies in the USA. A critical finding was that each organisation's structure and culture had a profound influence on its need and processes for internal communication. Innovative practices in one company might be of limited usefulness in another company with a different culture or organisational structure.9

Eyo's (1985) investigation of a major multinational corporation reveals the communication effects of efforts by upper management to introduce organisational change. Eyo used focus-group interviews of a sample of employees in involvement teams, their supervisors, and the facilitators of the groups to examine the sharing of fantasies related to the forming of the involvement teams that was a major organisational change.

Eyo found two important rhetorical visions in the populations he studied. The first vision he called "participative productivity" and the second "victimization".

The first vision portrayed the instituting of the involvement teams as changing the organisational climate for the better. Workers were given an opportunity to provide input into decisions relating to working conditions, quality improvement, and productivity increases. They had a chance to meet their supervisors in a setting that cut down on status barriers. So real communication could take place and they often found that the supervisors were more humane and more approachable than they had originally thought. Evidence was accumulating
of increased morale, more organisational commitment, increased productivity, and higher quality work since the change.

The victimisation rhetorical version, on the other hand, portrayed the change as forced upon participants by the efforts of upper management. Victimised by upper management the workers had been left with additional duties to add to their burden with no additional reward. Generally the participants in the victimisation rhetorical version were cynical about what had happened and portrayed their communicative climate as bad before the change and getting worse because of it.¹⁰

Freeman et al (1994) made use of quantitative content analysis and network analysis procedures to analyse written corporate messages as an objective, precise step in describing organisational culture. They found that analysing written corporate messages in a less subjective, more precise manner could strengthen the link between the messages produced by an organisation and the understanding of its corporate culture. Results of the content analysis and network analysis are presented, and a description of the corporate culture is offered based on the word patterns identified in the corporate messages.¹¹

Rice and Case (1983) examined the introduction of electronic mail into a university organisation and reported some evidence that administrators began communicating with lower level personnel, but these contacts were not necessarily
desired. These new contacts may have been initiated because of the limited diffusion of the technology within the university.\textsuperscript{12}

The general trend of the findings of studies by Singer (1986) on new communication technologies like electronic mail suggests that communication technologies exert some changes on authority structures in organisations. By circumventing hierarchical filtering structures, the existing social order is mediated. By permitting open communication that bypasses hierarchical channels, the nature of information changes, which can change the symbols used to express and maintain the social order.\textsuperscript{13}

In an experimental study of electronic mail users, Siegel et al. (1986) found that electronic mail was perceived as carrying fewer social context cues, and reduced cues situations were associated with more antisocial behaviour and more extreme decisions.\textsuperscript{14} Sproull and Kiesler (1986) found that the decrease in social context cues on electronic mail substantially deregulated communication. Specifically, messages from subordinates were no different from messages from supervisors, there was a greater willingness to communicate bad news, and users tended to flout social conventions. However, electronic mail was tended to be preferred for upward communication over downward communication, suggesting that superiors tended to desire status cues when communicating with subordinates while subordinates tended to take advantage of the absence of cues when communicating with superiors.\textsuperscript{15}
The study of Hardy (1971) was on the role which telecommunications and more specifically, the telephone plays in economic development. Intuitively, the telephone can be seen as a facilitating factor for economic development. This study sought to empirically demonstrate that the telephone does facilitate economic development, to quantify the degree of facilitation which occurs, and to explore how it facilitates economic development through communication processes.

It was hypothesised that communication media, as channels of information, increase the potential of information flow in a business enterprise, and the variability of communication structures which can exist. The telephone as a two-way interpersonal medium was hypothesised to create greater potential for information flow in business, and greater variability in potential communication structures than one way mass media.

It was concluded that the telephone does facilitate economic development. This facilitation seems partially due to the telephone’s potential for supporting a variety of communication structures. It may not facilitate economic development through business communication, to the extent expected. Evidence of facilitation through non-business communication over the telephone was found.16

Gains (1979) conducted an organisational communication study in an industrial setting. The purpose of the study was to test empirically variables contributing to the frequency and accuracy of information transmitted up the chain of command by employees in industrial organisations.
Major findings were that job situation, trust, and ambition did not adequately explain the projected frequency with which employees communicated upward; however, they did account for distortion. Second, in neutral job situations, trust and ambition were negatively related to projected frequency of communication. Third, of all distortion types, withholdings were most prevalent. Fourth, in problem situations, trust and ambition were negatively related to withhold distortions. Last, in neutral job situations, ambition was negatively related to puff distortions.

The study concluded that industrial managers need accurate data if they are to make intelligent, rational decisions. Much of their information is supplied by underlings who are closer to job situations. This research demonstrated that distortion is a predictable part of a subordinate’s behaviour.\(^\text{17}\)

Young (1993) did a study on communication inside a newspaper establishment. This study is a descriptive, analytical look at the journalists and the organisation of *The Rocky Mountain News* in Denver, USA. It related to inquiry into organisational culture, interviewing and observing these journalists and later became a participant observer in the setting.

Throughout his investigation he heard stories of confusion in the newsroom. They talked of the rich heritage of the profession and the idiosyncrasies and challenges it faces. He also witnessed several intriguing instances of coping behaviour including use of humour in the work place, airing
organisational gossip through an outside publication and sabotaging other members through the computer system.

Most importantly this study illustrates organisational conflict and confusion and the impact they have on organisation members and the organisation’s product. This antagonism is couched in a restricted economic context. And so the organisations culture and the journalistic culture clash as each struggles to survive.¹⁸

Trumbo (1997) conducted a study on how individuals come to a judgement about a potential environmental health risk, examining the phenomenon of risk judgement as it relates to three questions: (1) where do people get information for making risk decisions; (2) how do individuals process risk information, and (3) how do information channels and information processing influence judgement of risk and propensity to hold extreme, or polarised views of risk?

These questions were addressed through a case study utilising a combination of mail survey and other interview methods. The case involved a neighbourhood in which some residents believed a cancer cluster existed due to the operation of a small research reactor once located near the neighbourhood.¹⁹

Plowman (1995) conducted a study on the professionalism aspects of public relations practitioners in an organisation. Negotiation tactics can empower public relations practitioners to become part of the process of strategic
communication in the management decision-making group of an organisation. The premise for this study, was that negotiation tactics are an integral part of the two-way model of symmetry for communication practices.

The method of investigation was depth or long interviews. The study concluded that public relations would become a part of the dominant coalition if it has knowledge and experience in the mixed motives of the two-way model of public relations to include contention, assistance, compromise, accommodation, and co-operation plus being unconditionally constructive and win/win or no deal.20

In his study Lyle (1998) describes cultural assumptions in the student travel industry, relying upon protocols previously established within the functional perspective and explains how these assumptions may have evolved by examining the basic communicative processes wherein industry culture has been made manifest.

The quantitative research methods consisted of in-depth interviews with the industry’s “elite” members, as well as content analysis of selected historical and contemporary documents.

The study concluded that industry cultures underlie corporate cultures but also describes how an industry’s culture has evolved by examining communicative “performances” of its cultural assumptions. In doing so it uncovered a primary source of these assumptions, and provided insight, not only into existing theories
of organisational and industry culture, but also into the relationship of communication and culture.\textsuperscript{21}

Pacanowsky (1978) made a study on communication theory relating to an organisation. Characteristics of the theories of organisational communication were of three models: (1) the individual as a psychological or sociological "machine", (2) communication as a process of information transfer, and (3) the organisation as a self-regulating entity. In this study these models were critiqued and rejected, and an alternate theoretical perspective was proposed.

This alternate perspective was based on models of (1) the individual as meaning-maker (2) communication as a convergent process whereby meaning is co-constructed by communicators, and (3) the organisation as nothing other than networks of co-actors who by communicating, attempt to construct communication definitions of situations and act within the framework of the common meanings they have established.\textsuperscript{22}

Koral-Jarboe's (1986) longitudinal study reveals how attempts by upper management to change an organisation's saga affects the members' communication. She conducted an intensive study using the method of participant observation to track the sharing of fantasies associated with a major organisational change. She used direct observation of meetings both formal and informal, written documents, memoranda, informal written messages, and interviews in her study.
The study provides a vivid account of the communication geography and its changes during the transitional stage.\textsuperscript{23}

Cronberg (1981) conducted a study on the impact of information technology on domestic life in Japan. The study indicated that isolation was an urgent problem in modern society and it would be sensible to organise society in such a way as to facilitate contact between neighbours. The information technology is not a necessary condition for such a development, but it could make matters easier in several ways: (1) the new technology would increase productivity and lead to a reduction of manpower needs, (2) it would reduce the length of the working day in the formal economy, (3) it would reduce the need for transportation in general and for commenting in particular and (4) it could help to break the economy at a time when increasing transportation costs are further reducing the profitability of the currently dominant centralistic models.\textsuperscript{24}

Though the researcher could not locate any study concentrating on communication within an organisation in the knowledge management perspective, a few studies have been found exclusively in the emerging discipline of knowledge management. A few among them have relevance to the topic of the present research.

In the study on the temporal interplay of three factors critical in Buckman Laboratories' knowledge management programme, in the United Kingdom, Pan et al. (1996) studied information technology, culture and human resource
management. The findings of the study were as follows: Knowledge Management (KM) tools alone are not enough and technology does not guarantee success; KM is a process shaped by implementation and involving change in work practices; human resource management (HRM) and human resource development (HRD) are crucial to facilitating and sustaining change; HRM and HRD issues are important in creating the context of KM: culture, communities of practice, rewards and trust; HRM shapes the effectiveness of KM through the selection, motivation and retention of people; and HRM and HRD provide the infrastructure for KM through communities of practice, shared language, employment pattern and careers.25

In their research on the learning orientations and facilitating factors, Nevis et al. (1995) conducted studies in four companies, Motorola Corporation, Mutual Investment Corporation (MIC), Electricite de France (EDF) and Fiat Auto Company, representing both service and manufacturing settings in US and European environments. They found that all the four organisations have good learning systems with formal and informal processes and structures for the acquisition, sharing and utilisation of knowledge and skills. The well-developed recruiting, socialisation, training and development and rotating assignment policies have effectively supported assimilation of learning at a fairly deep level. They have also found that the nature of learning and the way in which it occurs are determined by the organisation's culture or sub-cultures so also are the styles of learning systems.26
Komsky (1994) studied the impact of electronic mail in democratisation of organisational communication, in a university set up.

The results argue that a simple casual relationship whereby a particular medium can cause democratisation to occur. On the other hand, the results do not argue against the potential contribution of this medium to democratisation. The results highlights the complexity of the relationship and provide some indicators of factors that contribute to the complexity.27

In the next chapter the dimensions of knowledge management and its application are discussed so as to understand its relevance in the subject of organisational communication.

References


3. Ibid., p237.


5. Ibid., pp.166-174.


