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SUPERIOR/SUBORDINATE COMMUNICATION  
IN AN EFFECTIVE ORGANIZATION

by

Jim Sawdey

A Plan B project submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree

of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

in

Communication

Approved:

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Major Professor

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1997

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To my children Laura and Eric, thank you for taking care of yourself when you would have preferred the attention of Dad. Finally, and most importantly, thanks to Jan, my wife. Your unselfishness during this demanding time is exceeded only by your encouragement and help. No one could be luckier than I.

Jim Sawdey

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## ABSTRACT

Superior/Subordinate Communication in an Effective Organization

by

Jim Sawdey, Master of Science

Utah State University, 1992

Major Professor: Dr. James Derry  
Department: Communications

This thesis documents the communication climate of a Fortune 500 business to determine if it contains key components essential for effective communication. A model developed to identify components of an ideal managerial climate for effective communication between superiors and subordinates was used. The model was published in 1972 by Dr. W. Charles Redding of Purdue and applied to a rocket manufacturing plant's communication climate that existed from 1991 to 1996. The findings contain evidence that validates Redding's model 25 years after it was first published and provides a framework for improving communication effectiveness at the plant.

(103 pages)

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### Overview

This paper describes a Plan B project to study the applicability of key principles of organizational communication at the northern Utah rocket motor plant of Thiokol Space Operations. The principles were first articulated by the late Charles Redding of Purdue University. Redding (1972) believed that the first responsibility of management is to foster a supportive communication climate between superiors and subordinates. Without that kind of climate, organizational effectiveness and employee morale will suffer.

Specifically, this project involved setting up, conducting, and reporting results of focus group research using four work centers of the production department of Space Operations. Chapter 1 consists of a brief description of Thiokol and a review of the scientific literature about the relationship between communication practices and employees' satisfaction with their work environment. Chapter 2 contains a description of the methods used in this study, beginning with a discussion of the context in which the study occurred, followed by the procedure for selecting, forming, and conducting focus group sessions. Chapter 3 is a summary of the comments made by focus group participants, organized into categories as found in the literature. Chapter 4 is a discussion of the results of this project, plus conclusions, limitations, and suggestions for future research.

## Thiokol Space Operations

Thiokol Space Operations is the largest of several divisions of Utah-based Thiokol Corporation. Thiokol is a Fortune 500 company specializing in the manufacturer of solid rocket motors for space and defense, and of fasteners for the transportation industry.

Space Operations builds one product: the reusable solid rocket motor (RSRM) used to lift the space shuttle fleet into orbit. Space Operations has a manufacturing plant in Utah, and other facilities at Huntsville, Alabama, and at Kennedy Space Center. It employs 2,500 people, of which 2,300 work in Utah. Gross sales total nearly \$400 million annually.

The manufacturing plant in Utah is organized into five production work centers of about 175 employees each, and a testing area of about 80 employees. Facilities and administrative support personnel account for the remaining employees.

Space Operations has undergone tumultuous change. In January 1986, Space Shuttle Challenger exploded 73 seconds into flight. The cause was linked to the failure of an O-ring designed to seal two segments of the solid rocket motor. The seal failed when temperatures at the launch pad dipped below design specifications. The loss of ship and crew changed the U.S. space program forever. In the wake of the tragedy, NASA suspended plans for the production of 100 motors to support 50 shuttle launches per year.

However, instead of ordering massive layoffs as expected by employees,

Space Operations eventually hired hundreds of new workers when it was awarded the contract to redesign the solid rocket motor. Employment swelled to about 4,900, and \$250 million was invested in capital improvements. After two years of successful efforts, the shuttle returned to flight using Thiokol's improved solid rocket motor.

But times had changed, brought on in part by budget restraints, an end to the competition in space during the Cold War, and a shift in public perception. Instead of launching 50 shuttles per year, or even an updated schedule of one per month, shuttle launches dropped to seven per year. Employment at Space Operations dropped accordingly. From its peak in 1990, the number of employees dropped by half. More cuts are planned. Those remaining have had to deal with the morale and attitude changes inherent in downsizing and restructuring the company while maintaining high work standards demanded by the company and NASA.

### Review of literature

The study of organizational communication may well have begun at the Hawthorne Plant in the mid-1920s, but the field takes shape after the 1950s. The recognized "father" of organizational communication was the late W. Charles Redding. Redding (1972) sought to identify key variables that improve or harm effective communication within the organization. The underlying premise of this body of work was that effective communication translates into a more effective organization, with higher employee morale



and productivity.

Redding's (1972) research into organizational effectiveness was based on a systematic review of the literature from several fields. He selected studies that appeared to advance our knowledge and drew conclusions based on the findings of others. In this sense, Redding's first contribution was the consolidation and synthesis of a fragmented field.

Nearly a decade later, Fredric Jablin (1979), of the University of Texas-Austin, reexamined the emerging field of organizational communication and updated Redding's book (1972). Many of the original concepts of communication effectiveness were substantiated. These include five specific components of managerial climate. From both Redding and Jablin, these are: supportiveness; participative decision making; trust, confidence and credibility; openness and candor; and an emphasis on high performance goals.

In other words, work units with high productivity tend to describe their organizational climate as being supportive, participatory, trusting, open, etc. Moreover, each of these components of climate are believed to be affected by the kind of communication that occurs between superiors and subordinates. These components are reviewed in the paragraphs that follow, drawing on the literature cited by Redding (1984, 1972) and Jablin (1979) and on selected studies that have appeared since then.

### Component #1: Supportiveness

Rensis Likert wrote that a supportive climate exists when leadership and other processes of the organization are such that members of the organization are made to feel they can "maintain (a) sense of personal worth and (b) importance" (1967, p. 47). A supportive climate is one where supervision has (or gives) high consideration to working relations with subordinates.

Fleishman and Harris described a considerate boss as one who fosters "a climate of mutual trust, rapport and tolerance for two-way communication with their work groups (1962, pp. 43-56)." Productivity is associated with climates of high consideration, especially when the work is highly structured.

Similarly, Level and Johnson (1978 pp. 13-15, 91) found that in certain areas subordinate tendencies to distort upward communication can be reduced in two ways. First, the superior can become more considerate of others, and second, the superior can work to improve the accuracy of information passed downward to individuals. Thus, management can create a more supportive climate by striving for candid, open and sensitive communication.

A field study done by Penley and Hawkins (cited in Redding, 1984) offered strong evidence that the total communication climate can affect employee motivation. The researchers surveyed 354 employees of a financial institution in the southwest about employees' perceptions of supervisory and managerial communication. Their conclusions indicated that such factors as

a supervisor's willingness to listen, to accept feedback, to give deserved praise, to use a variety of media to transmit information, and to provide detailed information about career opportunities exerted an important influence on employee motivation.

A supportive climate was examined by Koerner, Goldstein and Fortson (1993). They noted that "immediacy" by superiors expressed through "confidence in subordinate ability" had the most influence on subordinate satisfaction with supervision while "putting down the subordinate" had the most impact on dissatisfaction with supervision. The authors defined immediacy as "supervisory communication used to make subordinates feel or not feel a sense of belonging, acceptance or closeness" (pp. 269-279).

A survey by Allen (1992) involving 244 university employees answering a questionnaire indicated that perceived organizational support was influenced by the top management-employee communication relationship and the quality of co-worker's and top management's communication. Perceived support mediated the co-worker's communication-commitment relationship.

#### Component # 2: Participative decision-making (PDM)

For Redding, participation refers to a "generalized complex of attitudes" more than to any single or particular set of behaviors (1972 p. 157). It is a set of attitudes that include concepts of supportiveness and consideration. Participation refers to the engagement of the individuals in the system so they are involved in decisions that affect them. Miller (1988)

reported that the effects of this participation and of allocation on organizational participants is moderated by the culture of the organization and the role individuals play within the organization. Krone (1992) added that every organizational climate is different and that organizational membership plays a more important role in climate than does centralized authority or leadership-member exchanges.

Whatever forms PDM may take, Redding wrote, "communication is not just a central feature, but an absolute prerequisite. It is impossible to conceive of events, processes, or behaviors which can meaningfully be called participation which would not involve some kind of communication" (1972 p. 158).

DeCharms and Bridgeman (1961) suggested that participation in decision making requires reciprocity of influence. For example, productivity was increased when subordinates worked under a leader who demonstrated willingness to accept suggestions. Chaney (1969) also found evidence to suggest that the supportive-participative climate increased employee motivation, which in turn contributed both to higher levels of effort and to more frequent inputs of problem solving methods.

Miller and Monge (1986) found that participatory involvement was positively correlated with job satisfaction and, to a lesser yet significant degree, with productivity. Thus, they argued that participatory behaviors were manifestations of commitment that reinforced commitment attitudes.

Another measure of a supportive-participative climate suggested by Redding (1984, 1972) was the degree to which the best ideas in a group could be utilized and the degree to which variant views were suppressed. He contended that this suppression of freedom of dissent has been damaging because, in particular, the quality of decision-making was reduced when argument was restricted. Krone (1992) concluded that a non-supportive, (low consideration) climate inhibits contributions of subordinates in group settings. While a lack of opportunity to participate in organizational decision making does not appear to drive subordinates underground, employees do appear to become less participative. Torrance (1957) warned that members of more or less permanent groups (as opposed to temporary or transitory ones) tended to suppress deviant views for fear that such expressions will be held against them later. However, senior management wasn't inhibited, so the leaders' opinions were complied with, and the group adopted these positions or solutions without considering other viewpoints and without giving full consideration to the merits of the chosen solution.

A communication model proposed and tested by Gorden and Infante (1991) found that employees who indicated they had freedom of speech in their work settings evaluated their organizations as more economically stable, participative in decision-making, committed to product and work-life quality, attentive to employee rights, and would be more satisfied with work, pay, supervision and coworkers.

Redding (1972) reported that when individuals feel their opinions had been heard they were more willing to accept the group judgement, while suppression of divergent views – from the boss or the group – could be dangerous to the organization, or at the very least, unhealthy, even when communication increases. Also, when conflict was perceived by the parties to be “win-lose” in character, communication between the contending parties would increase and the level of conflict would intensify.

In his research, Weick (1969) discovered that much of the literature on supportive and participative organizational climates suggested that “destructive conflict would rarely occur if the climate is one of (a) trust and confidence, (b) an ‘everyone wins’ approach, and (c) openness and candor in the airing of difference, hypothesizes that voicing strong differences of opinion may be beneficial to the company” (pp. 103-105).

Pondy (1967) said both the values and danger of conflict must be considered in the frame of reference of total organizational effectiveness. His three criteria for judging organizational effectiveness – productivity, stability and adaptability – are partially incompatible, that is, achieving maximum levels of one sacrifices another. According to Morse and Lorsch (1970), a more formal and authoritarian climate, for example, was likely to work better in situations characterized by highly structured and predictable operations. Participative approaches likely work better in more creative, less predictable situations. It has also been suggested by Rowell and Schlacter (1971) that PDM

methods may not be effective in motivating employees for whom no significant economic incentives are available – for example, those in civil service organizations. Berkwitt concluded that the argument was frequently heard that PDM is “all well and good – in boom times” but that when the going gets rough, as in times of “consolidation and retrenchment, participative management becomes a myth” (1970, pp. 25-27, 91).

However, certain levels of PDM can be achieved in all types of organizations when the outcome of increased participation improves job satisfaction and productivity. A report by the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (1994) found that participative decision making, greater trust and increased job satisfaction brought about by good communications had a measurable effect on organizational success.

### Component # 3: Trust, confidence and credibility:

According to Redding (1972), the notion of trust, confidence and credibility, which here are regarded as elements of a single cluster, is one of the most important and practical concepts in the field of human communication. Cutlip supported that view, declaring that intuitive and empirical evidence overwhelmingly supports a basic dictum: “Before there can be effective employee communication, there must be a climate of trust” (1971, p. 314).

Redding (1972) believed trust was often a matter of perception. In general, as people perceive more and more ways in which they are similar, they find it

easier to communicate successfully with one another. Ritchie and Miles (1970) agreed, saying, for example, whether a manager is actually competent or trustworthy is not what counts in human interaction; the manager must be perceived to be competent and/or trustworthy.

Goodman and Ruch (1981) collected data from General Motors and AT&T over several years through in-depth interviews. They found that even though employees often didn't know the names of their top managers, their perceptions of them were extremely important in forming attitudes about work. These perceptions were found to have more influence upon employees' over-all job satisfaction than factors such as salary, fringe benefits and job training. On the basis of these perceptions, employees drew inferences about the effectiveness of top management. Inferences were negative unless the image of top management was one of overall competence and concern for employees as human beings.

Gemmill (1970) urged managers to do all in their power to create a climate or a relationship with subordinates such that they will feel confident that they "will not be penalized" for disclosing their true opinions and feelings to their bosses. Gemmill said ways must be found to reward disclosure by subordinates of their opinions and difficulties. Rewards must be confirmed by the supervisor's actual behavior rather than mere verbal reassurances.

Papa and Pood (1988) reported that when an employee knows where the other person stands on an issue – "co-orientation accuracy" – he or she is



more satisfied with the process of discussions even in conditions of conflict.

Creating these organizational relationships and perceptions can help build organizational effectiveness and avoid the serious problems caused by distrust. For example, Mellinger (1956) found that a superior's accuracy in estimating or perceiving the attitude of a subordinate was not related to whether he or she was trusted by the subordinate. But, a subordinate's accuracy in estimating his or her boss's attitude was definitely higher where he or she was trusted by the superiors than when distrusted. Moreover, Redding (1972) observed that if the subordinate who distrusts his boss was an effective dissembler, then the boss would not be able to distinguish between valid reports coming from trusting subordinates and invalid reports coming from distrusting subordinates.

As a rule, accuracy, openness and candor by management in delivering timely information has a positive influence on employees' perceptions of trust, confidence and credibility. For example Perkins (1994) reported that a study of 152 episodes in which managers had to tell bosses or subordinates of events like plant closings, project cancellations, denied promotions and layoffs indicated that individuals who bungled the delivery of bad news faced demotions or a loss of credibility and trust, and their companies suffered lost productivity and credibility. Even those not directly affected by bad news will reduce their commitment to an organization when they feel coworkers are being treated poorly.

Accurate measures of trust, confidence and credibility among superiors and subordinates has proven difficult. For example, Minter (1969) asked 65 managers the question: "You can always trust managements' word" (p. 729). Managers answered a scaled questionnaire, then gave verbal responses. Scaled questionnaire responses were always more favorable than open-ended verbal responses, which leaned toward the negative. In the same study, Minter also showed that top levels of management could have inaccurate perceptions of how they were perceived by subordinates. Minter asked a group of seven top executives in the same organization to record (1) their own perceptions of management's credibility and (2) their predictions of how the population of 65 subordinate managers would respond. The seven leaders were overwhelmingly positive about themselves while the actual (free responses) from the 65 managers tended to regard the leadership more negatively. Conclusion: credibility of the leadership was much lower than imagined; and management may not have an accurate perception of their deficiencies in credibility.

According to a Roper Poll (1994), employees are angry and distrustful of management (because of downsizing, restructuring, etc.) to a degree perhaps unequaled since the Great Depression. Companies' credibility in telling the truth is being hurt because chief executive officers don't want to talk about company pressures that make them look like losers, not winners.

Redding (1972) concluded that while superiors and managers did not

enjoy consistently high credibility/trust ratings from their employees, especially on matters unrelated to the technical expertise or power possessed by supervisors, there was nothing prohibiting a superior from being perceived as trustworthy or credible by his or her subordinates.

#### Component # 4: Openness and candor

Redding (1972) said openness and candor primarily concern communication traveling upward and downward between subordinate and superior, or laterally among individuals or groups. Upward communication includes: openness in message sending, especially in the sense of candid disclosure of feelings of bad news and of important company facts; openness in message-receiving, especially in the sense of encouraging, or at least permitting, the frank expression of views divergent from one's own; and the willingness to listen to "bad news" or discomfoting information. Being open forces a person to engage in risky behavior, but if nothing dire happens, then risk leads to trust in message-receivers. Employees prefer open upward influence over more demanding rhetorical strategies because openness is safer and easier.

Of course, employees can't always be open. Zaleznik (1970) argued that people wisely resist saying everything they think to other people because they somehow have a deep recognition that this route leads to becoming overextended emotionally and, ultimately, to sadistic relationships. But there are healthy levels of openness to be sought out and found.

Expanding on his 1972 definition, Redding explained open, upward communication encompasses a variety of concepts such as empathic listening, question-and-answer columns in a newsletter, suggestion systems, feedback channels, open-door policies, attitude surveys, and is a concomitant of participative decision making.

Openness in upward communication is often perceived differently by subordinates and superiors. Vogel (1967) found that about a third of the employees rated their boss as "good" on being easy to see with a problem and only about a quarter rated him "good" on such matters as ability to handle complaints and encouraging suggestions. But a vast majority of those same managers saw themselves as readily accessible to employees. Moreover, Miles (1965) argued that many managers tend to believe they themselves deserve a greater voice with their own supervisors than their own subordinates deserve with them. They tend to be overly optimistic when assessing the blockage to upward communication experienced by their subordinates.

In their 1965 research, Lawler, Lyman, Porter and Tennenbaum observed that while openness is preferred by subordinates, it is often discouraged by their managers even while they seek more information in their organization. Superiors often claim they do not know what is going on in their organizations because subordinates fail to communicate adequately. But the least valued interactions are those where a superior evaluates an episode in

which a subordinate comes to him or her for a discussion. Thus, subordinates "learn" to avoid initiating contacts with superiors. In addition, a study by Lee and Jablin (1995) suggested that about 50 percent of supervisors and subordinates best remembered incidents in which they felt the need to do or say something to keep their work relationships steady or intact when the situation was one that might cause their relationships to deteriorate. In turn, about 25 percent of the situations were called routine, and 25 percent characterized as escalating relationships.

These findings are ironic when considered in light of Baird and Diebolt's (1976) discovery that a subordinate's job satisfaction is positively correlated with estimates of communication contact with superiors. Walden (1991) examined communication strategies that subordinates reported using in maintaining upward influence in their superior-subordinate relationships. He then examined the effects of relationship type on the use of upward maintenance strategies and found that subordinates in leadership exchanges (relationships characterized by support, trust, liking, and informal influence) used more personal, contractual, and direct, but less regulative tactics in maintaining upward influence with their bosses. Troy (1988) reported that surveys by the International Association of Business Communicators (IABC) indicated employees prefer to receive information about the company either one-on-one or in a small group, and want to hear it from their supervisors or a knowledgeable, authoritative source. Foehrenbach and Rosenberg (1982)

reported that another survey, conducted in 1982 by IABC and Towers, Perrin, Foster & Crosby of 32,000 employees in 26 U.S. and Canadian organizations, found that only about one-half of all survey respondents describe communication in their organizations as candid and accurate. More than two-thirds believe that official communication doesn't tell the full story. Gildea (1981) reported similar results obtained in a 1981 IABC survey, representing 45,000 employees in forty companies with the implication that mediocre credibility has a tremendous impact on management-employee communication.

Many employees fault their companies for not encouraging upward as well as downward communication. A nationwide sample by the Wyatt Company (1987) of 5,000 workers indicated that only 40 percent of subordinates sought input from supervisors on key issues, while 25 percent said that they did not feel free to express their opinions at all.

Young and Post (1993), studying companies judged as having effective communications, found that companies can preserve and increase productivity by converting employees' concerns about major changes like restructuring into support if they adequately and openly communicate the problem. On the other hand, if communication is inadequate, employees will be more resistant to change, virtually ensuring a drop in morale and productivity.

Redding (1972) believed that if based on actual observations of real-life

communication, there is little reliable information regarding cause-effect relationships between openness or upward permissiveness and organizational effectiveness. However, a large number of studies add up to these two conclusions: openness of communication, especially in the sense of "upward permissiveness" on the part of superiors, is (1) a crucial dimension of organizational communication, and (2) an essential ingredient in any overall managerial climate associated with organizational effectiveness (1972, p. 386).

Component # 5: Emphasis upon high performance goals.

Redding (1972) also believed that communication, in all its varied forms, is a focal concern in any effort to secure organizational commitment to high performance goals. Supporting this belief, Maher and Piersol addressed issues of (a) how clearly organizational members actually perceived individual and group goals and (b) the association between such "perceived clarity and organizational morale" (1970, pp. 125-130). There was a high correlation found in this study dealing only with self-reported perceptions and self-reported degrees of satisfaction, not actual job performance/productivity. The data suggest that employees' satisfaction with their job will be high when (1) they clearly perceive their individual job objectives, (2) they clearly perceive the overall objectives or mission of their location, and (3) understanding their mission and their location, they will perceive a relatively high degree of cohesiveness, teamwork and cooperation both within their

working unit and between their unit and other working units at the location (1970, pp. 125-130).

Understanding these goals is a long-term, two-way process. According to Karlins and Abelson (1970) one-way persuasive discourse – unless accompanied by other communication events and unless a variety of appeals are presented over a long period of time – is not likely to produce significant changes in attitude or behavior.



## CHAPTER 2

### METHODOLOGY

Thiokol Space Operations wanted to improve communications with its employees on the belief that good communication can ultimately improve quality, safety and reliability of reusable solid rocket motors (RSRM) while containing costs. In 1990 much uncertainty existed among its employees who faced tighter staffing, increased workloads, longer work hours and a greater emphasis on performance. This occurred at a time when Space Operations was beginning a long process of downsizing and reorganizing.

To address this problem, Space Operations set into motion a series of steps intended to improve communication effectiveness between management and employees. These steps included: establishing a communications department; formalizing the use of several communication channels; conducting a situational analysis of communications; formalizing an official communication policy; implementing a communication strategic plan; conducting plant-wide surveys for measuring communication satisfaction; and facilitating a focus groups discussing concerns measured in the surveys.

#### Establishing the Communication Department

Space Operations didn't have a formal communication department until 1990, when it hired a manager of communication. Responsibility for the new department was combined with some employee motivation programs and

named Communications and Employee Services (CES).

### Communications Channels

Some existing communication efforts were combined with new ones to provide Space Operations with a package of communication channels. These channels included newsletters, bulletin boards, electronic mail, etc.

### Official Communication Policy

The Thiokol Space Operations Open Communication Policy was established in 1991 to maintain open communications. The policy gave CES responsibility for establishing and maintaining a good communication climate and appropriate communication channels.

The basic policy states that:

Open communication between Space Operations leadership and work team members is essential to the success of the organization. Two-way information sharing and involving work team members in the decisions that affect the way they perform their assignments can improve decision making and work performance. In turn, this increased participation can contribute to higher levels of work team member satisfaction and quality of work life.

Open communication is a multi-directional process: up, down, and sideways, which requires timely and regular sharing of knowledge that builds confidence, enhances credibility, establishes trust and enables individuals to make decisions and seize opportunities.

Space Operations leadership has the responsibility to include work team members in the basic information flow, seek ideas from work team members on how to improve the business and give these ideas proper consideration, treat work team members as important, individual, contributing members of the team who can be trusted...

Work team members must in turn recognize and undertake

timely initiatives and interactions with others to ensure that as a team it meets commitments, solves problems and achieves goals (p. 1).

### Communications and Employee Services Mission

The CES Mission Statement (1992) was written to support Thiokol's communication policy:

To plan and execute relevant, credible communications to help promote work team member understanding, influence opinion, reinforce behavior and develop attitudes which will improve the effectiveness of the work team in the achievement of becoming a Total Quality Organization.

We exist to increase safety, quality, productivity and... morale by encouraging effective communication between leadership and work team members. We are committed to providing timely information to all work team members and encourage full and open communication at all levels of our business. We strive to provide these services in a knowledgeable, proactive, professional and courteous manner (p. 4).

### 1992 Communications and Employee Services Objectives

The Space Operations Communications Objectives (1992) support its mission statement while listing objectives it believes to be important leadership functions in gaining employee support for decisions, policies, practices, plans and actions:

- Maintain confidence among employees in the company's integrity
- Change employee behavior toward becoming more productive, safety conscious and quality oriented
- Give employees an understanding and appreciation of leadership objectives to stimulate their desire to participate in company plans and programs
- Encourage work team members at all levels of the organization to openly discuss suggestions, concerns, ideas

- and complaints with leadership without fear of retribution
- Promote a better understanding of reasons for management actions so that employees understand the organization and its leaders better
- Increase employee member understanding of the company and its products, organization, policies, changing corporate culture and external business environment (p. 6).

### Situational Analysis 1992

In 1992, CES made the following situational analysis to leadership when presenting its strategic plan, mission statement and objectives to the general manager for approval:

In 1992, Space Operations had an active program of written communications that included the biweekly Segments newsletter for all employees, the periodic Leadership Link for management, Today in Space Operations informational sheet produced periodically, the Countdown information sheet detailing upcoming space shuttle missions, e-mail messages to all computer users, bulletin board postings, interoffice memos, a corporate Benefits Newsletter, and the quarterly corporate Thiokol Magazine. In addition, a plant-wide intercom show was broadcast, an on-line information system called FOLIO was installed on the computer network, several areas installed electronic crawler signs, and a large roadside electronic sign was planned for placement at the entrance to the plant. All of these are basically one-way communication vehicles.

To improve two-way communication, the general manager and several members of management held round table meetings, the general manager held communications dinners after hours for employees and guests, a question box program was in place, and results from periodic surveys were distributed in a special bulletin. Also, committees were tasked with addressing findings from the surveys (p. 10).

## Strategic Plan

The Thiokol Space Operations Employee Communications Strategic Plan (1992) gives a comprehensive outline of communications planned for 1993 and gives lesser detail for outlying years. Although the plan is beyond the scope of this paper, it is summarized here:

The primary responsibility for effective communication rests with leadership at each organizational level. Good management includes the establishment of an internal climate conducive to effective work team member communications.

Communication between work team members and leadership is the crucial link in developing an ongoing, open system of listening, talking and acting that affects attitudes and productivity. Individuals at all levels need and deserve to know how company developments may affect their productivity, opportunity for growth, job security, feelings of self-worth and quality of work life.

The Employee Communications department will support leadership in developing a good communication climate. Internal communications can play a critical role in bringing work team members into a more understanding, cooperative and productive relationship with leadership, while at the same time improving their satisfaction and quality of life at work (p 1).

## Written Surveys

To measure the effectiveness of its program, CES conducted written attitude surveys almost yearly. Two surveys were used. One, identified here as a nationally produced survey customized for Space Operations by outside consultants, was conducted in 1990, 1992 and 1995. It was a comprehensive survey developed to measure overall attitudes within organizations. Only one of its questions directly measured communication satisfaction at Space Operations: "How satisfied are you with being kept informed?"

CES used this question again in smaller surveys conducted in 1993 and 1994 and was compared to the bench mark established in the consultant-produced surveys. The following percentage on the next page show they were satisfied:

Year of survey	Percent responding favorably
1990 national attitude survey	47
1992 national attitude survey	60
1993 in-house communication survey	77
1994 in-house communication survey	59
1995 national attitude survey	57

The 18 point disparity in survey results between 1993 and 1994 indicates a decline in satisfaction. These findings were reconfirmed with the 1995 survey.

#### Focus Group (1995-1996)

With human resource management's agreement that the conclusions drawn from surveys implied a decline in communication and employee satisfaction, the decision was made to validate the information by using focus groups.

The results of the 1994 survey were presented to the senior vice president of production at Space Operations with a proposal to examine the trends more extensively by conducting face-to-face interviews in four manufacturing centers (called work centers). Four focus groups in each work center would be formed and the findings would be presented to the center directors and their management teams. The goal was to identify communication strengths and

weaknesses so communication content and channels could be improved, which would improve communication satisfaction and, ultimately, work place morale and productivity. The vice president of production, always looking for ways to improve production efficiency, supported the proposal with a caveat that only one center could be surveyed. If the process appeared to be beneficial, the vice president would agree to allow the other centers to be surveyed. After seeing the results from the first center, the vice president endorsed the process and approved the study of the other three centers. Useful information was gathered and presented to center directors who shared the information with their subordinates. It was up to individual directors to recommend and implement changes based on the findings of the study.

### The Focus Group Process

The first step of this process was to identify which organizations at Space Operations would most benefit from the study. The choices included administration, quality control, engineering, operations support, facilities support and manufacturing. The manufacturing area, called Production, was chosen by human resource management because of its inherent and obvious importance to the success of the overall program and because the data base gathered from survey questionnaires was the best documented in Production.

Production is divided into five work centers and a testing area. The work centers perform various duties in the manufacture of the RSRMs. The five

areas are called Component Refurbishment, Insulation and Component Mix/Cast, Nozzle and Final Assembly. Test, as its name suggests, tests various components, but is not directly involved in the day-to-day production of the solid rocket motors. All told, Production and Test employ about 900 people and is the largest organization at Space Operations.

The Refurbishment Work Center in Clearfield is located away from the main plant in Promontory, Utah. It refurbishes solid rocket motor components that have been shipped to Utah from Kennedy Space Center after the motors have performed in support of a space shuttle launch, retrieved from the ocean and disassembled into large motor segments for shipment to Utah. The Refurbishment Work Center employs about 175 workers whose primary mission is disassembling the four large motor segments and nozzle into hundreds of component parts, assisting the main plant in conducting post-flight inspection, performing critical cleaning processes, and shipping the parts to the various work centers in Promontory.

The Insulation and Component Work Center has about 175 employees who reassemble the components into solid rocket motor parts, insulate them and prepare them for work to be done at other work centers.

Mix/Cast Work Center, with its 175 employees, mixes and adds the solid rocket propellant, ammonia procureate, to the motors.

The Nozzle Work Center and its 175 employees reassembles the nozzle that guides the solid rocket motor.



Final Assembly Work Center completes any assembly requirements not performed by the other work centers, including installing the rocket-fuel igniter device that fires the rocket. Its 175 employees also ship the four motor segments and nozzle to a Space Operations rail yard and load them onto rail cars for shipment to Kennedy Space Center.

Four work centers were ultimately surveyed: Component and Insulation Refurbishment, Mix/Cast and Final Assembly.

### Forming the Focus Groups

To set the process into motion, a task group was formed that included 10 members of three Human Resource organizations: Communication and Employee Services, Human Resources Development and Employee Relations. The groups established a goal in January, 1995, and set a nine-month time line to reach it. The goal, with the ultimate purpose of improving employee satisfaction with information they receive, was four-fold:

1. Gather data that can be used to measure the effectiveness of communication flow through the organization
2. Identify strengths and weaknesses in the communication process
3. Organize the data into meaningful information and present it to management
4. Provide assistance if requested

It was decided to gather data about employee satisfaction with

communication by asking participants two open-ended questions:

"What types of communication work well?" and "What doesn't work well?" The answers to these questions were gleaned from four focus groups in each of the four work centers. Two focus groups consisted of members from the production lines of each work center. A third focus group represented administrative support for each work center, including members from quality, safety, engineering and administration. The fourth focus group represented management. Seven volunteers were chosen for each group. Their names were randomly chosen from a computer list. To get seven volunteers, 14 names were actually selected from the computer list. A random order was chosen for calling the volunteers and requesting their participation. Once seven agreed to participate, the focus group was formed.

### Conducting the Focus Groups

Three members of the human resources task group attended the focus group sessions. One member was assigned as a facilitator who asked the questions, verified their meanings, probed for specifics, asked no leading questions and did not defend any existing practices criticized by the participants. Care was taken to keep the discussion focused on communication issues only. Another task group member stood by a flip chart and recorded specific comments and general categories that participants agreed were communication strengths and weaknesses. A category wasn't listed if only one member of the focus group discussed it and the other

members disagreed with it being a category. It was listed only if a consensus was reached by a majority of the participants. The list was also used to review what had already been said and to prompt further discussion. In most instances, I worked as the third task group member who took detailed notes of the comments.

Participants were told that their comments and their involvement in the focus groups were confidential. They were told that the note taker was being used instead of a recording device to enhance confidentiality and to encourage their candid comments. They were also told that individual comments would be listed, verbatim, under identified and agreed-to categories and would be presented to their work center director. Each focus group took about one hour.

After all four focus groups were completed, I transcribed the notes and presented the results to the other team members of the Human Resources task group, who reviewed and confirmed the accuracy of the comments. Comments from each of the four groups were rolled into one report. All comments were combined under general categories, such as face-to-face communication, upward communication, trust and confidence, meetings, etc. At the end of each category, a summary was made to help the director put the comments into perspective. The report was presented to the director in an informal setting with just two representatives from the task group present including the note taker who produced the report, and the employee relations

representative for that organization. The manager of the communication department was also present. After the briefing, the involvement between the task group and the work center ended unless the director requested more services.

### CHAPTER 3

#### FOCUS GROUP RESULTS

Senior management of Space Operations believed it had an employee morale problem by late 1994. Surveys conducted after 1992 suggested that employees were experiencing a decline in job satisfaction. In an effort to verify the decline in satisfaction and find causes of it, management decided to collect more information from focus groups. Beginning in 1995, focus groups were formed and then met for up to two hours. Group members were encouraged to speak freely on any communication issue they felt important to them.

Comments from each of the groups were recorded, and these were later organized according to the Redding's five components of an ideal managerial climate (1972). Comments from each focus group were not included unless a majority of the focus group members agreed to the accuracy of the statement. The fifth component, goal setting, was eventually eliminated from further analysis for the absence of focus group comments. Thus, in final analysis, four components of climate were examined. The components are:

- Support and consideration
- Participative decision making
- Trust, confidence and credibility
- Openness and candor

The human resources staff read each comment and placed it into one of the four components of climate based on consensus agreement. Since the purpose was to explore the loss of satisfaction and to speculate about causes, consensus was deemed an appropriate way to categorize comments.

In summary, the various focus groups produced 458 consensus comments, as follows:

<u>Numbers</u>	<u>Category</u>
252	Openness and candor
99	Trust, confidence and credibility
60	Participative decision making
47	Support and consideration

In the remainder of this discussion the nature of these comments is described and summarized for all focus groups combined, that is, for all production work centers. Then, comments pertaining to formal means of communication between management and employees, such as the bulletin boards, newsletters, and electronic mail are presented. A more complete transcript of focus group comments can be found in appendix A.

#### Focus Group Comments Pertaining to all Production Work Centers

##### Openness and candor

When asked to identify what types of communication worked well within their organization and at Space Operations in general, participants from 16 focus groups representing the four work centers made a total of 252

comments about openness and candor. Of these, 102 were positive and 150 negative.

While participants were specifically asked to address the topic of what works well, many of the positive comments were often made either in the past tense, or as a way of addressing an existing problem. A past-tense example is: "Group meetings work well when we talk on a regular basis, but we aren't right now." An example of addressing existing problems (at group meetings) is: "no foreman or supervisor can put their own twist on the information" presented at a meeting.

A majority of the 102 positive comments about what works well pertained to meetings between employees and management. Employees believe that open communication that flows up and down between themselves and management is best accomplished through formally scheduled meetings and spontaneous conversation. Lacking from focus group comments was a sense that openness actually exists, probably for two reasons. First, several focus-group participants commented that the frequency of meetings has declined; and a check among management confirms this. To paraphrase some examples: "All hands meetings worked well, but we never have them." Or, "Talking to the director helps address ugly rumors that would have never surfaced had he addressed the problem earlier." The second reason for perceived loss of candor is the commonly held belief among employees that the company will be sold, or about to be downsized, and management is not

willing to share this information. It's not surprising then, a lack of openness and candor topped the list of negative comments.

When asked to talk about what didn't work well, the comments were numerous and the topics were varied. Employee comments included concerns about information not flowing down from the top, not being listened to by management, management not being open and candid, and general information not being shared. Employees said they weren't being listened to, suggestion-box questions were unanswered, they didn't hear the results from surveys, and they were uncomfortable being candid with their boss. Thus, employees were most concerned about a lack of candid disclosure, bad news, and important company facts.

These findings point to a closed communication climate, especially upward communication, that can hurt trust, confidence, and credibility, and cause employees to believe they cannot participate in decision making. As Redding observed in his 1972 review of literature, openness of communication permitted by superiors is a crucial dimension of organizational communication, and an essential ingredient in any overall managerial climate associated with organizational effectiveness.

#### Trust/credibility/confidence

A general lack of trust, credibility and confidence was expressed by employees from all focus groups. In this category, focus groups made 99 negative and no positive comments. In one instance, employees complained



of "the director sending out spies" who were "writing down names" of employees. In this situation, which appeared not to reflect reality, was later confirmed by the director of the organization who said a manager who has since left the organization was responsible for the undercover activities. Milder versions of a lack of credibility and confidence were voiced by many employees who complained that management didn't respect them or have their best interests in mind.

Another common complaint was from employees who said they heard inconsistent messages from various sources, which caused confusion about what was expected of them and who had final authority in the decision making process. This confusion, lack of direction and frustration about information that seemed to change from day to day has hurt the organization.

Employees also said they were likely to be suspicious of any information voluntarily given to them by their superiors and that they were frustrated when seemingly harmless information wasn't shared with them. Many of these comments about lack of trust came from middle managers who said they did not trust their superiors. These were often the same middle managers criticized by their subordinates for the same reason.

Based on employee comments and a review of literature, it appears that before there can be effective communication, there must be a climate of trust (Cutlip, 1972). Increasing levels of trust can increase employee satisfaction and organizational effectiveness. Decreasing levels of trust can decrease

morale and productivity. Once damaged, trust is difficult to rebuild. Even when the situation that damaged trust is eliminated, the perception often remains (Redding, 1972). As Goodman and Ruch found in 1981, trust is often a matter of perception. It is essential to keep communication lines open especially in light of their findings that these perceptions have more influence upon job satisfaction than factors such as salary, fringe benefits and job training.

### Support

Employees made 60 negative and no positive comments about support and consideration for their efforts to do their job. Employees comments ranged from not being told of their work schedule in advance, which made it difficult to plan their personal lives, to a lack of management support by the human resources department.

Some of the comments listed under the support category could also be appropriately a listing under the other three components. For example, subordinates said superiors don't listen (openness) when they try to tell them how a work schedule would work better (participative decision making) because subordinates aren't trusted.

According to the literature, a supportive climate exists when leadership and other processes of the organization help maintain a sense of personal worth and importance. When employees are given consideration, they tend to be more supportive and productive (Likert, 1967). When support by

management is high, so too is mutual trust, rapport and tolerance for two-way communication within work groups. Support shown by a willingness to listen, to accept feedback, to give deserved praise, to use a variety of media to transmit information, and to provide information about career opportunities exerts an important influence on employee motivation. Group comments point to a problem with managerial efforts to create and maintain a supportive climate.

#### Participative Decision Making.

Forty-seven comments about participative decision making were made during the focus group sessions and all were negative. Employees complained about a lack of inclusion by management in the decision making process. Employees generally believed that they understood their work environment as well or better than their bosses. They wanted to participate in planning, scheduling and other decisions that affect them directly.

Participative decision making is usually defined as a process in which employees have some influence in day-to-day and strategic decisions within their organization (Redding, 1972). Communication is obviously necessary for that process to take place. When employees believe their ideas aren't being considered or supported, management risks alienation. On the other hand, when employees believe their ideas are at least considered, they are often more willing to accept the judgement of the boss. Morse and Lorsch (1970) suggest that participative decision making isn't always possible,

especially in organizations that are more formal, highly structured, and predictable. Such is the case with Space Operations. And Berkwitt adds that during "consolidation and retrenchment, participative management becomes a myth" (1970, pp. 25-27, 91). But some level of participative decision making is possible within any organization, even if it isn't feasible throughout the entire organization. Some level of participative decision making should be encouraged in light of findings by the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (1994) that participative decision making, greater trust and increased job satisfaction brought about by good communications have a measurable effect on organizational success.

#### Comments Unique to Each Work Center

Each work center is a semi-autonomous group of about 175 people, including line workers, administrative support, engineers and leadership. Each is headed by a director. Each is physically separated from the other. Each can be expected to have unique strengths and weaknesses. None of the focus groups wanted to spend time talking about what worked well within their work centers. The positive comments they did make, with few exceptions, were about openness and candor. Negative comments were varied. These are summarized for each of the four work centers that participated in this study.

### Insulation and Component Work Center

Focus groups from the Insulation and Component Work Center talked more about what didn't work well than about what did work well. One focus group spoke at length about how communication improved after a small support group the participants worked with was moved from a distant building into shared office space. Face-to-face communication was appreciated, ideas were more easily exchanged in person rather than on the phone or through e-mail, problems were solved faster, and openness and candor increased when personal contact increased.

A general lack of trust and confidence in leadership was evident, as was a lack of trust, specifically in the director, who was fairly new to the organization at the time of the focus group sessions were conducted. The groups were also concerned about inconsistent messages flowing down from management that were either changed by the sender or different from what someone else in management told them.

### Component Refurbishment Work Center

Of the four work centers surveyed, Component Refurbishment seemed most appreciative of formal and informal meetings. The focus group members spent most of their time talking about the need for open, face-to-face communications. They expressed appreciation for their director, who evidently made an effort to talk to employees one-on-one and in small groups.

Refurbishment is known by some circles at Space Operations as "Dysfunction Junction," primarily because of interpersonal communication problems. A lack of openness and candor, unresolved interpersonal conflicts among workers, and a lack of supportiveness by management all hurt levels of trust, confidence and credibility. There are many company theories as to why this atmosphere exists. The most popular theory expressed by management is that its isolation in Clearfield and distance from the main plant in Promontory 60 mile away causes resentment and creates barriers preventing that group from being part of the main culture. Some said both management and production workers are sent to Clearfield when they don't fit into the culture at the main plant. Also, while the main plant is composed of commuters from southern Idaho in the north to Bountiful in the south, Refurbishment is populated primarily by local residents. Refurbishment also has more minorities and women than the main plant. The culture is different and the difference is apparent by those who work in each location. What has developed is an "us verses them" mentality between individuals and groups, between the production line and management, between lower management and upper management, and between the Refurbishment Work Center and the main plant.

#### Final Assembly Work Center

The director's overall commitment to communicate with employees and his efforts to share information openly and candidly were the most noticeable

items that worked well in Final Assembly. Participants identified an electronic "crawler" sign placed in a central location as a focal point of accurate up-to-date information shared with the entire work force. They also identified an unofficial bulletin board as a good form of communication. It was treated as a community bulletin board that everyone could read and contribute to. In some ways, the unofficial bulletin board was like the local water cooler where information could be exchanged in a casual and friendly manner. The official bulletin board, by comparison, was criticized for its ineffectiveness. This was the one work center where participants in the focus groups noted an abundance of information to the point of complaining of communication overload.

Final Assembly focus group participants were probably the least critical of their organization of all the work centers. Information overload leading to information flow breakdown, especially during crisis was a subject that took up much of the focus groups' time. The reason for this seemed to stem from a crisis atmosphere that existed when the focus groups were being conducted. A flight-critical process needed to be changed and the space shuttle fleet was grounded while the problem was solved. The groups were able to identify many communication problems that existed during this crisis period that weren't as evident during normal production periods. Many participants said the crisis only amplified problems that already existed and made them more obvious. One of the biggest complaints was about poor management of

information moving upward, downward and laterally. Poor communication was identified in particular between the production line and engineers, and between the work center and an organization from another division – Information Systems, which is responsible for computers.

#### Mix/Cast Work Center

The need to change the subject concerning what worked well and comment on what didn't work dominated all four Mix/Cast focus groups. Most of the items that were mentioned as working well were items from the past. For example, a local newsletter worked well, but it was no longer published. Often, participants named an item for a "work-well" category, then criticized it and offered complaints. Of the four work centers, Mix/Cast made the fewest positive and the most negative comments. It is also the organization that seemed to criticize the most constructively, using a positive, mature tone. Lack of trust, not being kept informed and not being listened to were the criticisms most often mentioned.

#### Other Comments: Media

In addition the comments about managerial climate, participants from the focus groups made 208 comments about the communication channels management uses to send messages to employees. The channels are divided into four categories: newsletters and periodicals; electronic mail and memos; bulletin boards and electronic signs; and miscellaneous items.



### Newsletters and Periodicals

Three of the four work center focus groups made brief comments about newsletters and periodicals. Twenty comments were positive and seven were negative. Newsletters and other periodicals containing meaningful content were appreciated. Focus group participants said they wanted newsletters and periodicals to contain information that kept them informed about events that directly impact them.

### Electronic Mail and Memos

Electronic mail and memos received the most comments about communication channels. Fifty comments were positive and 46 were negative. The focus group members said they liked e-mail and memos because unlike conversations, they are permanent records of what was said that couldn't easily be altered. E-mail was especially popular because communication is fast and messages can be sent to several people at the same time. Lack of access to e-mail and poor distribution of memos dominated negative comments about this category.

### Bulletin Boards and Electronic Signs

Only 25 scattered comments were made concerning bulletin boards. For example, employees liked the time and temperature reading on the outside electronic sign and they liked bulletin boards that were updated regularly with personal and company news and information.

## CHAPTER 4

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Between 1990 and 1995, Thiokol Space Operations tried to study and improve internal company communication. To accomplish this goal, management commissioned a series of surveys to measure employee satisfaction, hired human resources staff, and approved a comprehensive communication strategy. Finally, senior management asked the human resources staff to study potential communication problems in depth by conducting a series of focus groups discussions using selected employees from four work divisions of the production unit.

Thiokol Space Operations Communication Policy 81-05-00 (1991), crafted and approved by senior management of Thiokol Space Operations, identified the importance of "two-way information-sharing and involving workteam members in the decisions that affect the way they perform." The one-page policy also states that "open communication is a multi-directional process: up, down, and sideways, which requires timely and regular sharing of knowledge that builds confidence, enhances credibility, establishes trust and enables individuals to make decisions...."

The policy gives leadership "the responsibility to include workteam members in the basic flow of information, seek ideas from workteam members on how to improve the business and give these ideas proper consideration...."

Finally, it highlights the responsibility of employees to "undertake timely initiatives and interactions with others to ensure that as a team it meets commitments, solves problems and achieves goals." This policy is further supported by the communication mission, objectives, and strategic plan.

A situational analysis, written in 1992, described an active communication program supported by management. Overall, the general manager, his senior officers, and middle managers were working together to improve communication with employees. For example, the organization held monthly general manager communication dinners open to any employee, the general manager published a monthly message to employees in the division's newsletter, and a video taped message to all employees was produced periodically. Most top managers held monthly "round tables" with employees; most work centers supplemented the division's newsletters with their own local newsletter; and general (all-hands) meetings were frequent. Several communication channels were used, such as electronic signs and on-line computer information services. However, records suggest that many of these efforts were discontinued or de-emphasized after 1993.

There is evidence that the Space Operations communication policy was effective in 1992, but not as effective in 1995. According to surveys, communication satisfaction improved 13 percentage points between 1990 and 1992, and another 17 points to 77 percent in 1993. Then suddenly, satisfaction declined 18 percentage points in 1994 and slipped again in 1995. The rise and

fall of employee satisfaction, as measured by surveys, is shown in Figure 1.

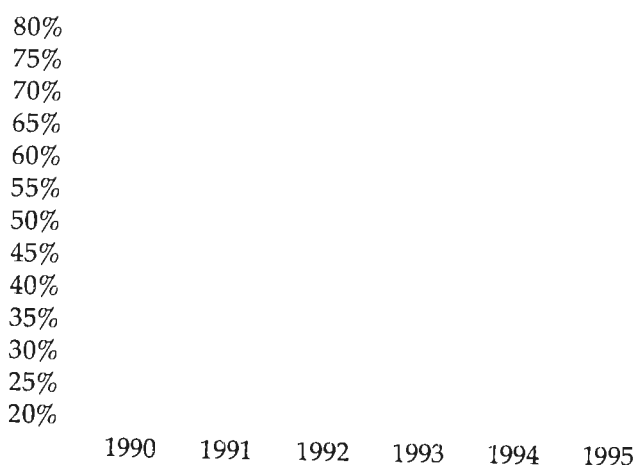


Figure 1: Changes in communication satisfaction between 1990 -1995

The increases in satisfaction between 1990 and 1992 took place despite the fact that the company was beginning its downsizing efforts. The decline in communication satisfaction coincides with the decline in efforts of management to communicate with employees.

Satisfaction in 1990, a year before the communication plan was in place, measured 47 percent. Two years later, in 1993, satisfaction peaked at 77 percent. Satisfaction dropped to 57 percent by 1995. Likely there are two reasons for this: First, the business climate changed. Two significant events took place during this period. Thiokol began averaging two lay-offs per year beginning in 1990, and persistent rumors circulated that the company was to be sold or dissolved. Second, there was a noticeable decline in communication services offered to employees that took place immediately after a general manager who strongly supported such services retired in 1993.

### Discussion of Comments from the Focus Groups

An organization's ability to achieve an "ideal" communication climate depends on the knowledge it has of its own shortcomings. Recognition of this gap between the actual and the ideal is the first step in establishing a better communication climate within the organization. As a summary of the situation in 1995, it can be concluded that employees were deeply dissatisfied with communication and with the organizational climate in general.

With few exceptions, focus group participants were critical of Space Operations management, including management focus-groups' criticism of their superiors. The groups rarely talked about what worked well in their organization.

Participants did make positive comments about openness and candor, but a majority of those comments were qualified statements with conditions attached. Openness was often mentioned as existing in the past, or that it could exist again in the future, but it didn't exist in the present.

Focus group members observed that openness and candor decreased, and this seemed to coincide with a decline in communication satisfaction as measured by five separate surveys conducted between 1990 and 1995. Early on, Thiokol had an active program to improve communication between management and employees that was strongly endorsed by the general manager. The program included a monthly communication dinner for any employee who wanted to attend, a periodic video message to employees, a

monthly letter in the company newsletter, and spontaneous walks through the manufacturing and administrative areas for informal one-on-one chats with employees. Those services were discontinued when he retired. The general manager also encouraged his vice-presidents to have round-table meetings with their employees, and directors to conduct monthly all-hands meetings within their organizations. Those meetings declined in frequency, as did staff meetings, all-hands sessions, and other formal and informal meetings.

As the business climate changed, the need for such a program grew, but Thiokol's commitment to it waned. In part this is a normal reaction by management to the stress associated with changing business conditions. The instinct is to fall silent and to withhold information because questions cannot be answered. Management may not know what will happen next or cannot say for fear of compromising proprietary information. Thus, management is caught in a quandary: they cannot answer questions, and they know what information they can provide will only generate new questions. So they choose not to communicate with their employees.

Without meetings between employees and leadership, there cannot be an open, honest exchange of ideas. Employees cannot participate in decision making. They cannot give or receive feedback. There is no reciprocity of influence. Good ideas aren't shared. The motivational power of "upward consultation" is lost. Trust, confidence and credibility is hurt. There is little

evidence of support. Job Satisfaction declines and morale and productivity suffer.

As Redding said (1972) without openness and candor, leaders become distant from their employees whose perceptions of them are extremely important in forming attitudes about work. These perceptions influence job satisfaction, and tend to be negative unless an employee's image of top management is one of overall competence and concern for employees as human beings.

Openness and candor is closely related to trust, confidence, and credibility, which focus group participants reported as their second greatest concern. When employees believe they cannot be open and candid, they often do not perceive their manager as credible or trustworthy. Without an open and candid exchange of information, employees are less likely to trust the accuracy of the information they do hear, hurting management's credibility and management-employee communication. If communication is inadequate, employees will be more resistant to change, virtually ensuring a drop in morale and productivity.

There was one exception to the overall dissatisfaction with communication at Space Operations. The Final Assembly Work Center reported the most positive comments and the fewest negative comments about communication satisfaction. This group also reported an overall commitment by their well-liked director to communicate with employees

and to share information openly, candidly, and in a timely fashion. Their director encouraged and held regular meetings, knew most of them by name, invited them to participate in decision making and openly supported his employees. Ironically, one of this group's negative comments was that they received too much information and suffered from communication overload.

Redding (1972) said supportive organizational communication can lead to supportive organizational climate and can increase worker satisfaction. The quality of an organizational member's communication, especially the communication of organization leaders, can have a major impact on the effectiveness of the organization. If communication is to improve, it must start at the top of the organizational hierarchy, with organization leaders encouraging workers to share their ideas with managers, and participate in decision making. Leadership communication has a strong influence on the development of communication climate. If management's policies and communication demonstrate concern and respect for organization members, the climate will reflect that concern; but if leader's policies and communication show lack of concern and disrespect for members, the climate will reflect that lack of concern.

In analyzing both the conditions at Thiokol and the results of the focus groups, it appears that two distinct factors have joined to adversely affect satisfaction with communication between management and employees. These are the uncertainties created by the changing business climate that



threatens employee jobs coupled with the withdrawal of efforts by management to talk candidly with people.

Change within the organization increases the need for communication. Partly this can result from a change in job procedures and the need to retrain employees. Partly this can result from a change in corporate culture created by changes in management style. As a company downsizes, job procedures are changed and as new management comes aboard, the culture changes. Both have happened at Thiokol.

Finally, change can heighten an individuals' sense of fear and foreboding. These are honest emotions with which management must deal. Since the new company culture is not perceived to be in tune with employees, that is, there is no sense for employees that they share a history with new managers, fears lead to greater frustration. Thus, during change management should likely increase its efforts to communicate with employees. Thiokol did the opposite. They cut back on such efforts, perhaps because they had nothing definitive to say. It is easier and seems safer not to say things, to stay silent and wait.

### Limitations

It is difficult to make generalizations to other organizations on the basis of a case study. The decision to conduct focus groups was made by a management team, and I was a participant/observer. This relationship

limited the amount of control I had over variables. Moreover, while the participants were randomly selected, they represent a single organization. Each organization has its unique climate, and it is expected that a different mix of problems will surface in other settings. Nonetheless, the results of this study generally support the efficacy of Redding's (1972) components of ideal management. If anything, the study is consistent with the conclusion that organizational communication needs to be studied in context, and from a systemic perspective.

## APPENDIX

### FOCUS GROUP FINDINGS

Focus groups were conducted in four work centers. Data from the focus groups were collected during 1995. Comments about what works well (positive) and what doesn't work well (negative) are compiled and reported here in two categories. The first category concerns the organization's communication climate at Thiokol Space Operations. The second category deals with communication channels for disseminating information between management and employees.

Organizational climate is divided into four subcategories: support; trust, confidence and credibility; openness and candor (with emphasis on upward, downward and face-to-face communication); and participative decision making (PDM). Communication channels are divided into four subcategories: newsletters and periodicals; electronic mail and memos; bulletin boards and electronic signs; and miscellaneous.

#### Organizational Climate

While groups from all four work centers made positive comments about openness and candor, none of the focus groups made specific positive comments about what works well with respect to the subcategories of support, trust, or participative decision making. Focus groups from every work center made negative comments about each of the four subcategories. Focus-group

comments on managerial climate are listed below for each work center.

Observations and summaries are provided to make sense of the individuals comments. Observations introduce most topics. Executive summaries introduce categories and subcategories. Comments are grouped under topics named by individuals in focus groups, and then placed in one of the subcategories. Comments were not intended to be read line by line. If more data is desired by the reader, the comments are provided, otherwise, reading the heading, observations and summaries should be sufficient.

#### Openness/Candor

Openness/candor was an important topic to the focus groups, and was mentioned 252 times during 16 session in four work centers. Of these comments, 102 were positive and 150 were negative. Taking the positive comments first, and then the negative comments, these are reported verbatim on each of the four work centers. Three times as many negative comments were made as positive comments. Face-to-face communication was praised when it worked; a multitude of criticisms were leveled at management who is seen as lacking openness.

#### Insulation and Component Work Center (openness/candor)

##### **On relocating engineering groups** (positive comments):

Observation: This group said face-to-face communication improved when two groups relocated to the same area.

- Since we've moved into the same work center, we have great face-to-face communication.
- It makes it easier to have informal gatherings, call meetings, challenge ideas and understand problems of others.
- It allows us to react quickly to problems that come from the line.
- ETP planning takes half as long as it took to do it over the mail.
- Co-location allows for more informal communication, which builds trust.
- It helps remove communication barriers (e.g. us vs. them).
- It's hard to be critical of someone when you co-locate.

**On group meetings (positive comments):**

Observation: Workers want meetings because they allow for upward, downward and face-to-face communication with immediate feedback. They are more inclined to believe information when it is face-to-face.

- They addressed anything on our minds and gave us the straight scoop.
- It works well when we talk on a regular basis. But we aren't right now.
- They communicate at the first of the week what needs to be done.
- Everyone hears the same story once.
- It brings the whole group together.
- It clears up rumors.
- It gives impression that management is serious about addressing concerns.

**On top-down information flow (negative comments):**

Observation: Concerns included a lack of timeliness, a lack of information sharing, and managers who don't listen. These issues hurt morale and negatively impact work performance.

- Information doesn't seem to get to the floor.
- There's no one to explain how to use new information.
- Safety instructions aren't shared (e.g. belt use, chemical use).
- Too much filtering of communication.
- The important stuff is filtered out before we get it.
- Information is subject to one guy's interpretation of a meeting.
- Staff meeting information flow-down is poor.
- Everybody puts their own interpretation on the meeting.

- By the time information flows down a couple levels, it's worthless.
- Multiple interpretation is sometimes done on purpose.
- General manager and (vice president) need to do more top-down communication about what is important.
- We're managers and we're not getting information from other managers.
- Too much information is filtered out before it gets to us
- We dump information on the floor guys. It's noisy, busy and confusing. I'll tell the guy something and he nods, but I walk away thinking the communication didn't work.
- If you are not in the loop, you don't hear about it.
- One crew doesn't talk to the other about schedules.
- Scheduler doesn't look at the whole process.
- Face-to-face meetings are saved up until they're two hours long. Then the information is old and worthless.
- Our management doesn't share senior management meeting information with us.
- All hands meetings are too long so important items don't get shared.
- They wait too long to have all hands meetings so the information is old.
- Could discuss more things in a timely manner in section meetings
- Director doesn't listen.
- Director thinks he grasps something, but he hasn't, and then goes on to tell others.
- Director should listen to what we say and share it with management.

**On lack of follow-through (negative comments):**

Observation: Participants believe communication processes are mishandled.

- Daily status report worked but was discontinued for no reason.
- It was communicated to us that TQM concept was bought off by (the vice president). But concept has been miscommunicated to other senior management and its focus has been lost.
- Messages from other work centers are not received by everyone.
- Not hearing feedback on time.

**On not being completely open (negative comments):**

Observation: Information is not being shared.

- Don't hear about changes when they take place.

- Hear rumors before we hear from source.
- Communication not open so you have to read between the lines.
- Our director is sincere but he doesn't communicate his standards.

#### Component Refurbishment Work Center (openness/candor)

Focus group comments suggest the managements' attempts at sharing information and providing information was appreciated by employees who said it wasn't done enough. The appreciation of information-sharing attempts was largely overshadowed by strong negative feelings toward management. Workers believe their management are either incompetent communicators, or purposely withholding information, or both.

#### **On the director talking to subordinates** (positive comments):

Observation: Participants said they appreciated their director and other managers when they made an effort to talk to them.

- I can talk about my concerns.
- It works well for specific information.
- It's the best type of communication.
- Director can talk to as many people (or small groups) that need to know.
- Director is one of the finest communicators in a small-group situation.
- Director flows a lot of information down on a small scale.
- Director resolves concerns by just showing up and talking.
- Director is very good at flowing down to staff and sets example to flow down further.
- Director's visits to the swing shift resolves concerns.
- Director will ask a lot of questions one-on-one rather than waiting for it to flow up.
- Our manager and director are on the floor a lot and they can tell us directly.
- The rumor mill is addressed.

**On access to leadership** (positive comments):

Observation: Managers who are accessible are praised while those who are not accessible are criticized.

- It's important that people have access to leadership.
- Being accessible gives feedback to people who don't normally have access to leadership.
- It would be good to have access to general manager even if the content of his message isn't very important.
- It's a good psychological boost to have access to go to the boss' boss even if the answer is the same given by the boss.

**On general meetings** (positive comments):

Observation: Openness that takes place in meetings is noticed and praised.

- Director had general meetings and he spelled out critical issues.
- General meetings gave opportunity for two-way communication.
- You don't have to wait for e-mail, memos to come from the plant.
- The source is right there.
- Content of the meetings is sometimes not as important as the fact that someone like the director or vice president is accessible.
- Anything can be addressed in these meetings.
- Former director was good in large group meetings; new director would do better in small groups.
- They are good if they are short and to the point.

**On all types of meeting** (positive comments):

Observation: Face-to-face contact available in meetings allow employees to get feedback, control rumors, build credibility, and get information the same time as everyone else in their group.

- They allow you to get feedback to your questions.
- We know it is reliable when it comes from the center director.
- It controls a lot of rumors.
- Would like to see meetings with director happen more often.
- At least we're getting something out of them.
- Most new information comes from staff meetings.
- Team leaders report information back to the group.



- Supervisors go over things that need to be done.
- Fast feedback on the same day helps get the job done.
- They bring info from director level meeting that I can pass on.
- Safety meetings are really general meetings to talk about current issues.
- Everyone is getting information at the same time.
- No foreman or supervisor to put their own twist on the information.

**On management not sharing information (negative comments):**

Observation: The topic of information sharing prompted a variety of responses from employees who believe they aren't being told everything they are entitled to. Workers actively resent management for not keeping them informed.

- Communication between Clearfield and plant is bad.
- We hear about things in paper before company tells us.
- Info in news releases is often general knowledge before we get it.
- Management holds on to information they should share.
- Want to know reasons for delays in getting answers.
- Want more concrete information.
- They don't tell us the whole story.
- We can't prepare for the future because we don't have whole story.
- HR communication isn't any good.
- HR doesn't communicate with us.
- HR says we should already know what they aren't telling us.
- HR isn't giving us the entire story.
- They don't listen to our ideas.
- You can't talk to leadership.
- Messages are shortened or people are not contacted at all.
- Need more information from management.
- Company won't confirm information so we depend on inaccurate rumors.
- Management could clear up rumors but won't.
- Rumors are everywhere so work literally stops until they're addressed.
- If company was more open in what they are thinking, rumors wouldn't be as bad.
- It isn't more accurate than management, but it has the appearance of being more accurate.

Mix/Cast Work Center (openness/candor)

Mix/Cast openness and candor comments negative comments outnumbered positive comments by a margin of three to one. Employees crave one-on-one contact with management but believe they are being left out of the information loop as a matter of company philosophy.

**Face-to-face** (positive comments):

Observation: Participants indicated they like one-on-one communication because it offers immediate feedback that can measure accuracy of information.

- It is immediate and the correct information can be given.
- If necessary, the information can be rebutted at that point.
- Communication works well. Supervisor can give information and answer questions in his words.
- Gives us the opportunity to discuss issues with our supervisors.
- With face-to-face we can talk about what is important to us at the time.
- Immediate supervision is easy to talk to and we have a good relationship.
- If supervisor knows something but can't tell us then at least he tells us he can't tell us.
- Informal flow down is good two-way communication.
- Face-to-face is good because you can talk to management.
- It has to be: "Bring them into the office and let them know." That's face-to-face.
- It lets you figure out what you're communicating.
- You get all the non-verbal. And that's 80 percent of communication.
- Face-to-face adds credibility to what you tell individuals.

**On meetings** (positive comments):

Observation: Open information flow makes meetings popular.

- You don't have to worry about flow down.
- Gives me what I need from management.
- We can talk about plant activities (now just work center activities).
- It flows down from (director) .

- It's not just (specific) information.
- Have a staff meeting when there is useful stuff to pass along.
- You find out what other people are doing during staff meeting.
- You can learn from others.

**On flow down of information (negative comments):**

Observation: Many concerns were expressed about the lack of openness of managers who don't share information. Employees indicated they feel purposely left out of the information loop. Managers say employees don't need to know everything.

- Sometimes flow down of information is lost or slower than it should be.
- Sometimes information really doesn't affect your job.
- The line is the last to get any information. They are not the target but just on the bottom of the flow-down.
- There is a problem throughout the entire plant with different organizations talking.
- One of the problems is that engineering, management and line workers don't interact or communicate. They seem to stay in their own little world.
- The workers on the off-shift miss out on information because you can't discuss issues with management or others like engineering.
- Manager sometimes knows information but doesn't tell. Seems like they are being secretive.
- Sometimes management doesn't know what is going on in other centers. Then they can't talk to us about it.
- Not sure where they are headed. Management hasn't communicated what is going on.
- Flow down from manager to supervisor isn't always complete. Some information is lost in the flow down.
- Is funneled so we don't get all the info.
- If it flows down too far it inundates a manager who has to filter it out before it gets to us.
- I would rather go directly to the source and not depend on it being flowed down.
- It's a bottle neck.
- They don't have to tell us final results, just what might happen.
- If you rely just on it – general manager tells vice present, to director, to me to someone else – flow down, it degenerates.

- I had some of my guys awarded Silver Snoopys and I didn't even know about it. I have never been notified when they are being given out and where. 250 of us all work together and we have good communication but I don't find out about Snoopys.
- I'm sure there are a lot of people in the production who never see you.
- It relates to our all-hands. Two way is almost nil. It's all one to the audience. Even all-hands with 20, I don't like.

**On flow up to vice president (negative comments):**

Observation: Employees believe they are not being listened too and that their concerns aren't being shared up through the management hierarchy.

- Director has no sense of what's happening in the field. We told him no. He told us yes.
- We can't input information to someone who makes a difference.
- I do not have a good channel to vice president.
- Communication to our own vice president is bad.
- Vice president doesn't always get the information he needs to make good decisions.
- We have quotas. The chance of getting things done properly is nil.
- Vice president will tell us to get something done but he doesn't realize that five other safety items won't get done. Had he known, he might make a different decision. But there is no channel to tell him. And it is not career enhancing to tell him.
- That's the first I've heard of all hands. That's a good idea.
- You get that person's point of view during an all-hands meeting.
- All hands meetings are face-to-face.

**On face-to-face in staff meetings (negative comments):**

Observation: These employees want staff meetings to improve.

- In our staff we don't cover the plant and I wish he would, so I'll get it over e-mail.
- The priority is staff agenda. So company business is at the bottom of the list and we never get it.
- We don't have staff and a lot is assumed and it shouldn't be. So you find out through the grapevine.

**On not sharing Surcon survey results (negative comments):**

Observation: The results of a survey measuring organizational

effectiveness was not shared with employees who believe they have a right to know.

- We haven't seen any Surcon survey results. We have just seen one piece of paper. It seems like it has fallen into a black hole.
- We answered a lot of questions on the Surcon survey but we haven't heard anything back.
- The Surcon survey was a waste of time.
- Would like to see what the numbers on the Surcon were.
- Would like to hear managements response to the Surcon questions.
- Haven't seen any changes as a result of Surcon.

**On not sharing company news** (negative comments):

Observation: Company officials do not make a point of informing employees of company news before they inform the public. This is viewed by employees as a lack of openness, candor and respect. Managers have the same concern about lack of company information that workers do.

- Many times you read it in the newspaper before you hear it.
- Has there been any company information in the recent past?
- We would like to know what is going on with the company.
- Feel like we're left in the dark.
- It sure makes you wonder where the company is going.
- Would like to know more about where the company is going. You have to read about it in the newspaper before you hear about it out here. What is the future?
- New business organization – give us a blip once a month. We don't receive anything from them.
- We build rocket motors so will somebody tell us where we're headed. We only get negatives, no positive.
- Tax refund in Wall Street Journal. See it next day on e-mail. Read it in paper first. Then you have to answer all those questions when you come to work. You read more in Space News than you hear at work.
- Why don't they say what they are going to do with that tax refund? Who is going to get it? We helped make the money. Tell us what we're doing with it.

**On rumors and grapevine (negative comments):**

Observation: Superiors and subordinates think its ironic that the grapevine is a more reliable and timely source of information than official channels.

- Grapevine a lot faster and fairly current, but gets distorted.
- Grapevine usually deals with issues that directly concern the worker.
- Information about the company isn't provided so the grapevine is relied on for this.
- It's strange how management is always catching up with the grapevine.
- You hear six different stories on the grapevine until management addresses it.
- (Leadership) is afraid to let out what they know.
- We'll hear about it from operators. They are always right.
- Then we'll hear it from director three months letter.

Final Assembly Work Center (openness/candor)

Negative comments outnumbered positive comments by a margin of two to one, the smallest margin of the four work centers. The criticisms tended to deal with the mechanics of information flow while the other work centers tended to criticize management for purposely withholding information. Final Assembly employees say their director is a big reason communication works well.

**On all types of meetings (positive comments):**

Observation: Participants said their organization has many meetings that are productive and positive. They say meetings increase the openness and accuracy of information being shared with them and provide them with a means of getting instant feedback on questions and concerns.

- Helpful to those who do not have e-mail or fail to get memos.
- Information doesn't get "lost or misinterpreted."
- Helps squash rumors.
- Addresses issues we care about.
- Includes information about the entire plant.
- Frequency of meeting seems adequate.
- Are open format.
- Question box issues are brought up & discussed .
- Opens communications paths with director.
- Is a two-way type of communication.
- Access to most of leadership.
- Message is clear, undistorted, one interpretation.
- Director shares his knowledge during general meetings.
- Director can be trusted, is credible.
- Dispels any rumor.
- Daily meetings work well because they are very timely.
- Daily meetings prompt discussions of previous days events/lessons learned.
- Daily meeting identifies what to look for or expect that day.
- Daily meeting information relates to all organizations.
- Daily meetings give opportunity for information to be exchanged.
- Daily meetings is where higher levels of leadership share information.
- Daily meetings works as a good coordination meeting for the day.
- Weekly staff meetings gives us a chance to "vent."
- Relaxed atmosphere creates open discussions.
- One-on-one meetings work well when engineers channel information to the foreman who would become the point of contact.
- One-on-one meetings is talking directly to the problem.
- One-on-one meetings get a response and feedback which assures understanding.
- One-on-one meetings usually involves those who can get an issue resolved.
- In one meetings it's easier to get a commitment.

**On information not being passed along (negative comments):**

Observation: Participants criticize when information isn't passed on.

- Lack of communication adds overtime to jobs.
- Information isn't being passed along.
- Changes are not communicated to everyone.
- Two different stories get communicated that originated from the same meeting because their may be two different interpretations.
- First decisions are not remembered.

### **On Engineering and Production not communicating (negative):**

Observation: This group said communication between the production and engineering organizations are poor, causing problems with quality of work.

- The missing link in communication is between Engineering and Manufacturing.
- Engineering isn't keeping up with the changes or else they haven't been informed.
- Engineers need to go down to and get the information rather than relying on a phone call.
- Operators are constantly bothered by engineers while trying to work
- Management needs to communicate who the point of contact is so operators aren't always bothered.
- Flow-up/flow-down method is not as effective as it once was
- Engineers are not getting the right information from the line and in turn, the engineers are not going down to get it from the line people either.
- Needs a procedure to put communications between Engineering and the line in place.

### **On flow up and flow down difficulties (negative comments):**

Observation: Information flow is filtered, creating credibility issues, causing rumors, and frustrating employees who believe they are not listened too.

- Too many contact points causes down time in production due to constant interruptions.
- Some tend to keep information to themselves rather than passing it down.
- Leadership filters out pertinent information when communicating.
- Information is not being shared with employees.
- Important information does not get flowed down.
- There is a lack of coordination with the right people.
- Written information needs to be innovative packaging to capture people's attention (colors, stars, etc.).
- Nobody is listening to our concerns.
- Embarrassed to admit problems because they should have been



discovered.

- Leadership does not always pass along all information because they feel it is not vital to the operations.
- Morning production meetings are supposed to take care of all communication problems, but they don't.
- Information is too filtered.
- Lack of information creates rumors – certain information should come from the main source.
- The right information is not getting to the right people
- A system needs to be developed that would get the right information to the right people.
- Directors need to be flowed sensitive issues (lay-offs, etc), so they can communicate it to their work force.
- Information doesn't necessarily involve everyone, so it doesn't need to be passed on.

**On information overload (negative comments):**

Observation: This is the only work center that complained of having too much information to deal with.

- Too many methods and sources.
- Much of the information doesn't apply to us.
- Team members have to filter out what they don't want.
- Needs to be a filtered information package specific to each area.
- Not filtered enough - a waste of time looking through useless info that doesn't apply.
- Is not always directed to the right people.
- The center needs to think who should actually receive information before it is distributed.

Trust/confidence/credibility

The four work centers made 99 comments about what didn't work well with regard to trust, confidence and credibility. No positive comments were mentioned by the focus groups. A lack of trust, confidence and credibility between management and employees was a common theme.

Trust, confidence and credibility is a major issue. Employees believe they

are being out-and-out lied to in many instances. They suspect management's ability to direct the organization. They distrust the motives of management that sends out mixed messages either purposely or because of incompetence. They especially distrust the director, whom they don't know, but think is responsible for many of the problems at the work center.

Insulation and Component Work Center (trust/confidence/credibility)

**On messages that hurt trust and credibility** (negative comments):

Observation: Uncertainty of the work center's direction and goals, and a perception that no one is in charge caused many employees to lose respect for their management. Employees lack confidence in management, whom they say has no credibility.

- Don't know who's running the company.
- What management says today changes the next day.
- It seems that management changes things that work just to mess with our minds.
- Confusion from higher-ups about what customer wants.
- Communication is so mixed up, we don't know what direction we're going.
- Confused because higher ups aren't pointing the way they want us to go.
- NASA, Program Office, etc., are going different directions.
- Don't know who's the boss. Even NASA has five different organizations.
- Mixed message on what priorities to set because different bosses say different things.
- One says make it cheaper while another comes by and says make it better.
- Mixed messages – someone says we can't afford to change something so be quiet; someone else says yell because the squeaky wheel gets greased.
- Design & Engineering is marching to a different drum.
- Director isn't aware that people aren't being treated equally.

- Director micro-manages. He wants to be involved in all communication venues.
- No focus in communication.
- We go one direction and then shift 180 degrees.
- Director says one thing in a meeting and something different face-to-face.
- Communication at the proper level is a problem.
- Director should communicate broad desires and allow subordinates to handle the detail.
- Worker gets double messages when director micro-manages.
- Messages are not communicated at the right level.
- Senior management should get same message at same time.
- Two people give different answers or the answers change day to day.
- Director's guidelines aren't uniform with others. Define rules. Make them consistent.

**On lack of trust (negative comments):**

Observation: Employees do not believe what management is telling them.

Employees believe management actively dislikes and distrusts them. They don't believe they are being listened too. The result is a lack of confidence in the organization and a deep distrust of management.

- Director has sent out spies.
- People are writing down names.
- Trust level for our director is shot.
- You can't believe anything they say.
- They manipulate you and force you to agree or you end up in trouble.
- Two-way communication is full of lies.
- They don't have our best interests at heart.
- They don't listen.
- They have their own personal agenda independent of the company
- People didn't come to focus group because they could get into trouble or no longer care.
- Management acts like they don't know what's going on but wouldn't tell us if they knew.
- Management is looking for people who are standing around so they can cut deeper. Why don't they say why they are there instead of doing it behind our backs.
- It seems like they don't care and are unconcerned.
- When they don't talk to us it says they don't respect us.

- Management doesn't believe what the floor tells them.
- You think the director is listening, but in the middle of transfer of communication, he draws a conclusion that isn't accurate and at that point communication stops. Then he tells other people what he thinks he knows.
- Company asked for new business product ideas, which we gave, but we got no feedback.
- Floor plates ideas should save money, idea was dropped, reason was confusing.

Component Refurbishment Work Center (trust/confidence/credibility)

Employees lack trust in their management, saying management isn't consistent when answering questions. Employees don't view their management as credible because the answers they do give don't specifically address their questions. The lack of trust and credibility damages management's credibility and its ability to manage.

**On lack of trust in leadership** (negative comments):

Observation: Focus group participants said they don't trust management so they don't trust the information they are receiving from management.

- Plant leadership comes down here and looks, but they don't see.
- We've lost confidence in (plant) management because we don't think we're going anywhere.
- Poor communication with (plant) management is causing a lack of confidence.
- Management tells us two different stories.
- Information given to us from management changes every day.
- I don't feel I can rely on the information I'm getting.
- Leadership acts like gods.
- Leadership is on a power trip.
- Fairness isn't being communicated.
- Tell the bosses and engineers to get rid of their god syndrome.
- It stretches credibility when lead asks foreman who asks supervisor. who asks manager and they all say they aren't aware, but the next day, the company makes an announcement.

**On trust level (negative comments):**

Observation: Information isn't being shared by management so management isn't trusted by employees. Employees believe management doesn't respect them.

- Jobs are filled before opening is announced, so we lose trust.
- Management isn't sharing what they know, so we lose trust.
- People rely on rumors when management won't talk so there is a lack of trust.
- Don't tell us things were unforeseen when everyone can see it coming.
- Memos are filled with double-speak so you can't trust what they say.
- Information is sugar coated and slanted instead of telling it straight.
- Directors know rumors are going around but he won't respond, creating trust problems.

Mix/Cast Work Center (trust/confidence/credibility)

When management doesn't share information, employees lose confidence in them and begin to distrust them. When management tries to share information, they are not considered a credible source because they are not trusted. Employees don't believe they are kept informed well enough to do their job effectively. They said if they were better informed, it would improve trust, confidence and credibility.

**On credibility and trust (negative comments):**

Observation: Employees believe they already know the answers to some questions and they want management to address them. Employees say they distrust management when they hear answers to their questions that run counter to what they say they know to be true. Because of this, they don't have much confidence in their management and actively disrespect them.

- Sometimes the information we are given isn't accurate. For example, they say there won't be a layoff then in two weeks there is a layoff.
- They say what seems to be politically correct.
- We would like to have honesty from the source even if it isn't what we want to hear.
- It's bad when supervision denies something then it happens.
- They try to out-think you. They think we're dumb.
- The managers should be up front.
- A lot of people are afraid to ask. They (we) know the answers, but they (management) just acts dumb so we don't ask.
- We already know the answer a lot of times and just want them to talk about it.
- It hurts their credibility.
- Satisfaction has dropped 18 percent because people are holding back on information.
- Secret complex in the industry.
- General manager memos are far and few. Not much good news. Don't know mission and goal. So we build our own kingdom. We don't have a common goal. We keep secrets.
- Have honesty, have integrity, trust what they say — instead, they withhold information or write it cryptically to cover notification law. Gives the impression that we're being lied to.
- Segments is so well prepared that we don't trust it. It doesn't mean jack to me because it's been reviewed, edited and every word weighed.
- It means much more to have the e-mail than a 3-page glossy color brochure.
- No one says things about new business because they don't want to build up hope. But it backfires. Tell us we made three bids and failed. It's better than hearing nothing at all.
- The notifications are well rehearsed and hard to read.
- We don't get information at our level in our terms. Pieces of information and rumors, but nothing that means anything.
- RIF by performance has been interpreted in every way imaginable. No one has communicated it well. It has changed communication because it threatened people.

**On credibility challenged in general meeting (negative comments):**

Observation: While management talks about not liking their credibility challenged in group meetings, employees talk about distrusting management who doesn't answer their questions completely.

- Manager shouldn't have to defend himself in front of 20 people. And some come loaded to purposely crucify him.
- 30 years ago they wouldn't come close to saying what they say.
- They challenge everything.
- Large groups don't work.
- People complain about not seeing their boss. But to assemble them in groups — wow.
- Squeaky wheels in a group of 20 speaks out and it appears everyone has an axe to grind. When it's just one, it doesn't happen.
- Changing to 10 hour shifts - Seems to be secretive. What is going on? We don't know.
- They said they were going to 10 hours shifts after we start to fly again and now we have flown why aren't we doing it. They should tell us.
- They don't tell us the real reason we are going on the 10 hour shifts. Is it so we can reduce manpower? We would like to know the real reason. Would like to hear the hard news.

**On not discussing changes (negative comments):**

Observation: Changes occur within the organization before employees are informed. Employees see this as a lack of concern and lose confidence in their management.

- Going on 10 hour shifts tell us we don't have any business now or in the future.
- Can't get any new business because we are getting rid our resources (layoffs).
- Morale was high to make change. Now the word is 4-10s are a result of not enough work.
- Had Mike said here are the problems (in starting up the 4-10s), everyone would know. Now, its just rumors. It is bad for moral.

Final Assembly Work Center (trust/confidence/credibility)

Summary of Final Assembly trust/confidence/credibility comments:

Employees did not take issue with management on the issue of trust.

Although they didn't say anything positive about trust, confidence and credibility per se, they had little negative to say about it either. This is the

same work center whose employees see their management as open and candid.

**On credibility issues** (negative comments):

Observation: When management is unorganized, they lose credibility.

- Supervision and leaders are not organized.
- Management won't acknowledge or admit there is a problem. when it is obvious there is one.
- Leadership doesn't know what they want.
- Advanced notice and preparation of things to come helps credibility and trust.
- Leadership uses information as a source of power so they don't share.

Support

Three of the four work centers reported 60 negative items and no positive items about managerial support. Final Assembly made no comments that were placed under the subcategory of support. Subject matter included concerns about management support of subordinates; interpersonal communication problems going unresolved; and lack of support of management by the company human relations department.

Insulation and Component Work Center (support)

Employees believe they are being ignored by management, causing confusion and a feeling of lack of inclusion.

**On scheduling** (negative comments):

Observation: Work team members are upset at how scheduling affects both their personal and home life. In addition, resolvable scheduling



problems would increase productivity, safety, quality and cost.

- We never know where we're supposed to be at the end of the week.
- Schedule is not explained at the first of the week.
- Can't plan personal schedule.
- Management doesn't show up to meetings requiring decisions.
- We have to make decisions for management when they don't show.
- There is a lack of representation at the decision-making level.
- We're on the floor and we know what's going on but they don't listen.
- We know how long it will take but leadership doesn't believe us.
- Less of a problem now, but sometimes a concept isn't put on the table
- Items discussed on day shift aren't shared with swing shift.
- Safety-belt memo wasn't shared with swing-shift.
- Yellow inspection slip wasn't explained to swing shift so when work was done without using it, inspector couldn't buy off on it – an evening's work wasted.
- Swing shift door was moved. No one told us about it.

#### Component Refurbishment Work Center (support)

This organization is know in some circles as "Dysfunction Junction."

Employees don't seem to like each other or management. Managers don't like or respect employees. Employees and management say they feel isolated from the main plant; believe the isolation is one reason why the main plant doesn't support them. For whatever reason, a lack of confidence at this work center is considerable.

#### **On isolation from main plant** (negative comments):

Observation: This group's organization is physically separated from the main plant by 60 miles. Participants believe the are isolated from activities that other organizations are included in.

- Clearfield is seen as separate from the plant.
- You don't feel like part of the space program at Clearfield like you do at the plant.

- We're isolated from the main plant.
- Memos/announcements take days to travel from plant to Clearfield.
- We have to rely on faxes to get memo because it takes days to get here from plant.
- The plant is the plant, Clearfield is Clearfield.
- We hear about things late and no rationale accompanies it.
- Statistics we hear about don't include Clearfield.
- Why read classifieds when the news is up there.
- Segments could focus on Clearfield occasionally.
- Everyone feels out of touch with the group.
- General manager and vice president should come down and attend all ups and walk around.

**On interpersonal communication (negative comments):**

Observation: A lot of concern was expressed about the amount of personal dislike employees had for each other. Poor interpersonal relationships is a major concern of employees and management.

- Personality problems exist between people.
- Management isn't stepping in properly and intervening.
- Management isn't dealing with interpersonal communication problems.
- Personal rumors are impacting people's careers but management won't address them.
- Some people won't talk directly to others. They go through their lead.
- For some, a lot of face-to-face communication isn't good.
- High badge-numbered people are using Safety Reporting system to get low badge numbered people in trouble so they'll get laid off.
- Hot line is being used as a personal vendetta.
- People talk behind other's backs.
- There's a lot of conflict between shifts and crews.
- Basic people skills are a problem.
- Need a class on basic problem solving.
- A lot of people can't communicate with each other.
- A lot of back stabbing.
- Too much like a family rather than co-workers.
- Gang wars. Sibling rivalry. One clique doesn't like another clique.
- You're here to work, but private lives seem to spill over.
- Lack of professionalism.
- People don't realize Thiokol pays good money for us to work here

- Some people need psychotherapy.
- When some managers don't get the response they were working for from their reports, they are no longer in the loop. So the reports try to please everyone and please no one.
- There isn't one person on swing shift that likes the another.
- It's not being communicated that we need to get along just like they expect us to follow other rules.
- Management shys away from telling workers they have a problem they have to resolve.
- It's easier for management to look the other way
- Clearfield has an us vs. them attitude. It's day vs. swing, washout vs. CNC, crew vs. crew.

#### Mix/Cast Work Center (support)

With the exception of Human Resources issues, support was a minor issue for Mix/Cast focus groups at the time they were being conducted

#### **On meetings** (negative comments):

Observation: none

- Was told we would have all-hands meetings but I haven't seen one yet from our director.
- Our managers have all-hands meetings, but not our director.

#### **On the Human Resources department** (negative comments):

Observation: The perception is strong that the human resources department is place to support management at the expense of the employees.

- One of my gripes is on HR people. Communication back and forth is terrible.
- I need a job description so I can promote people but I don't go to HR anymore.
- They are so legally correct in their answers that they don't tell you anything.
- My perception of HR is they are supposed to act in behalf of people, but they act like it's in behalf of the company.
- They are a terrific road block but they are no where around when you need their help.

- HR information is tied up for a long time and the information that comes back is bad.
- If there is a status problem, it seems it is always HR holding it up.

#### Participative decision making (PDM)

The four work centers made 47 negative comments about participating in decision making and made no positive comments. Topics included concern for participation in scheduling and planning; support for swing shift; and a need for inclusion by management of subordinates in the decision making process.

#### Insulation and Component Work Center (PDM)

Focus group participants feel left out of the participative decision making process. They believe that their participation would improve the quality of work.

#### **On scheduling** (negative comments):

Observation: Employees believe they have better answers in work processes than their management.

- Goals they set are unrealistic.
- Management doesn't understand the scheduling, but the floor does
- Poor scheduling has a lot to do with bad communication.
- Management gives unrealistic scheduling requirements.
- Floor understands scheduling better than leadership, but leadership doesn't ask for our opinion.
- We communicated to them what we can do and how long it will take but they don't listen.
- They tell us what we are going to do, not understanding the process on the floor.
- When people miss meetings, a lot of re-communication is required, resulting in more meetings.

- Management doesn't agree with decisions made at meetings they missed.
- Two-shift communication isn't working. Swing shift is forgotten
- Swing shift doesn't always agree with day shift.

#### Component Refurbishment Work Center (PDM)

This group feels they are not invited to participate in decision making with the main facility 60 miles away. They believe isolation is a factor.

#### **On isolation from main plant** (negative comments):

Observation: Isolation from the main plant 50 miles away makes many employees feel like they are not part of the organization.

- Decisions have to suit plant, not Clearfield.
- Always have to clear ideas with plant.
- They make the rules and we feel like the English Colonies ready to revolt.
- We've got to be part of the plant or we have to be here. Not both.
- They don't get to us as a group and talk things out.
- Tell them to listen to us.

#### Mix/Cast Work Center (PDM)

Participants believe processes are not in place that are conducive of a supportive managerial climate.

#### **On lack of cooperation** (negative comments):

Observation: Complaints about being left out of decisions are common.

- We don't have any idea what they are doing between shifts in Mix/Cast and Support Maintenance.
- No communication between work centers anywhere outside our core groups.
- Everyone is their own little entity.
- Core groups aren't communicating well.
- Before, scheduling was for everything. Now it's segmented (and

doesn't work).

- In maintenance, there might be different people every day. Hard to bring consistency, especially with shift rotation of people.
- Documentation is hard to pass along.
- Work orders that come are real vague.
- If you don't talk directly to that person, you don't know what's going on.
- Work orders need more detail.
- Put tape on what needs to be fixed and say exactly what's wrong.

#### Final Assembly Work Center (PDM)

Employees tend to blame processes that can be fixed for the organization's shortcomings rather than blaming their managers. Support by management was not an issue. Lack of support of in-place procedures and policies was an issue. In this work center, management and employees tended to show a considerable amount of respect for each other and tended to listen to each other's concerns and ideas.

#### **On lack of planning** (negative comments):

Observation: Focus group participants say the lack of PDM is caused primarily by who do not follow existing procedures and processes, but could be easily fixed.

- Emergency situations create big miscommunications between Engineering, Planning and Production.
- Manufacturing needs to get on the ball and get the information to Planning.
- The procedures are not being followed because everyone is in a hurry
- No one knows who the decision makers really are or who the final authority .
- If a decision is reversed, it doesn't get communicated to the appropriate individuals who have a need to know
- The planning isn't available because the scheduling hasn't been completed.

- If scheduling decides to change the schedule, they should check first to see if it can be done.
- Reasons for delays are not included in communications, resulting in a "blame it on someone else" attitude.
- Someone needs to be appointed as the "point of contact" in each bay.

#### **On Information Systems (negative comments):**

Observation: Another division of the corporation, Information Services, is greatly disliked by those who have to deal with them on computer-related problems. The criticism is that Information Services division does not support Space Operation division, including Final Assembly Work Center

- Computer team was started, but IS representatives fail to come to meetings.
- Doesn't meet Final Assembly's customer needs.
- Lacks support (They do not document how to access software after it is installed).
- Fail to inform individuals of changes in processes
- They upgrade software then not tell anyone, disrupting how team members do their jobs.
- Trouble calls take forever or they prioritized them.
- New "Software Change Plan" will throw everyone off because lack of training/knowledge by users.
- IS decision makers aren't involving those who will benefit and/or actually use the software.
- Not enough computers/have to share computers.
- Software isn't standardizing programs.

#### **Communication Channels**

All 16 focus groups from the four work centers made various comments about the communication channels used to communicate with employees. With the exception of electronic mail, the focus groups spent little time on communication channels, keeping remarks brief and limited in number.

Summaries follow each of the four major communication channel groupings.

#### Electronic mail and memos

Electronic mail and memos were important to focus groups who mentioned the topics 96 times. Fifty positive comments and 46 negative comments were made, with a majority about electronic mail. The positive comments are reported for each of the work centers, followed by the negative comments.

##### Insulation and Component Work Center (e-mail and memos)

###### **On e-mail** (positive comments):

- E-mail is an instant, direct, from the source and not filtered.
- Once I learned how to use e-mail, it was easy.
- Both VAX and Novell should be combined into one e-mail system.

###### **On e-mail** (negative comments):

- Two systems should be one, but they are both good.
- People not on it don't get the information they need.
- I'm not smart on the computer so I don't use it.

###### **On memos** (negative comments):

- Memo that said swing shift safety belts would be removed from floor wasn't shared with swing shift so work requiring belts didn't get done.
- Often too long, indirect and never get to the point.
- Ambiguous and subject to interpretation – sometimes on purpose.
- Want to know what's in it for me.



Component Refurbishment Work Center (e-mail and memos)

**On e-mail** (positive comments):

- Written information that is easily available.
- Know it is from a reliable source.
- E-mail phone messages are paperless.
- Can be copied and circulated.
- Routed so I know it's been read.
- It's gotten real good the past year or so with a variety of messages.
- People can decide what is important.
- Receiver can decide what to keep and what to leave out.
- I like the way communication manager has disseminated information.
- It's easier than the phone.
- Can tell where it came from and respond.
- You have to read it whereas you might just pass a bulletin board.

**On routed memos** (positive comments):

- We have to check it so he knows we've read it.
- Information is filtered out for our benefit so we don't have to sit through meetings.

Mix/Cast Work Center (e-mail and memos)

**On e-mail** (positive comments):

- It's personal access to information and can be checked on a regular basis.
- Has helped out to get information back and forth between workers and organizations.
- It's instant and it can get the information out fast. It is a good source of club information, sending classified ads and it is personal.
- Easy to transmit without paper work.
- Save it or print it out.
- Doesn't get buried on desk.
- Good for stuff like policies and procedures, launches, etc.
- It's timely.
- I get better information than flowed down from staff meetings.
- You can leave a message.
- I can send one message to 100 people.
- Face-to-face is interpreted as it is passed down and gets screwed up. E-mail doesn't.

- E-mail is easy to print.
- You know if it's been opened.
- E-mail forces people to organize their thoughts.

**On memos (positive comments):**

- Memos usually are a follow-up with face-to-face communication and they are something good to look back on.

**On e-mail (negative comments)**

- They took their passes away because a few people were screwing off with the system and spending the whole day on the computer. They can't use it anymore.
- People count too much on e-mail. My computer was down for three days and important information didn't get to me.
- Sometimes it's slow. My weekly report arrives several hours after I send it.
- It doesn't transfer over to windows well. Thiokol needs to upgrade.
- Folks working on the line don't have access at all so e-mail doesn't get to them.
- Even though communication manager says pass it on, it isn't.
- It's (e-mail) almost a phobia. I'd rather talk to someone face to face.
- Some people don't know how to write, or type well.
- It can be abused.
- Operators have very little access. You usually just post it on the board. If it's not there, the crew doesn't get it.
- Sender can't discern if it's getting out. If it's mandatory, you better face-to-face it or phone.
- E-mail in print looks like doctrine sometimes when it's just misinformation.
- It's not signed. Hard to know if it is official, etc.

**On memos (negative comments):**

- Most information in memos is late or not current.
- Memo contain information after the fact instead of upcoming information.
- A lot of the memos don't apply to what I'm doing.

Final Assembly Work Center (e-mail and memos)

E-mail was by far the most popular communication channel available to

employees. It's ease of use, it's timeliness, it's reliability and its accuracy were mentioned several times. The biggest criticism by employees is that not everyone is on it and not everyone uses it. Another criticism is that there are two, incompatible systems that employees want combined into one. Memos were also mostly seen in a positive light, mainly because employees know being told something in writing is better than being told verbally. Memos were also liked because they are permanent records.

Note: observations are not included in the communication channels categories.

**On e-mail (positive comments):**

- Good for those who have access to it.
- User has option to read what they feel is important.
- Acts a "real time" communications.
- A quick source.
- Good for non-sensitive information.
- Eliminates paper hand delivered messages/notices.
- Likes the hand delivered messages/meeting notices from secretaries.
- They ensure everyone has the info.
- Hand delivered is similar to face to face communications.

**On routed memos (positive comments):**

- Indicates who needs to see it/ who has already seen it.
- Good way to circulate information so those who need to know actually get it.

**On memos (positive comments):**

- Good if the message is "to the point" and if they get to the right individuals.
- Hard copies can be filed for future reference.
- Good if they are hand delivered, understandable and can be discussed general manager's memos.
- Appears he is sending out more "need to know" information than

- previous general manager.
- General manager's memos show concern and is a clear, unfiltered source of important information
- Is "first-hand information" from the source.

**On e-mail (negative comments):**

- Lack of access to use it
- Contains a lot of back-logged data by the time I get to it.
- More communications via e-mail would be better than memos etc.
- May not get opened in timely manner
- Could be easily or accidentally deleted.
- Not everyone has access to it.
- The two major systems (Vax and Novell) should be compatible
- Memos for instance are not signed and do not carry the needed authority.
- E-mail copy - not sure if its a draft or a signed release.
- E-mail isn't as credible as a signed copy.
- Not all have access to it.

**On memos (negative comments):**

- Circulation of memos is the problem.
- There is limited distribution.
- Those who have a "need to know" are left of distribution list.
- Too many unapplicable memos send out.
- Previous memos are never rescinded, therefore lead to a breakdown in communication.
- Particular memos should be conveyed by director rather than general manager memos.
- Sometimes line workers see important memos before management does, thus placing management in an awkward position.
- Advanced notification of controversial memos and or notices should be passed on to leadership before hand so they can be prepared to answer questions.
- Confidentially doesn't exit; rumor mill knows what is going on.
- Memos don't allow for team member feedback.

Newsletters/periodicals

Three of the four work centers made comments about newsletters and other periodical vehicles. Twenty positive and seven negative comments

were made. All comments were brief. As with other communication channels were seen in a positive light, not so much for their content, as for their availability. The major criticism of many of the periodicals available to employees is that they don't contain useful, timely information, and are instead public relations mouthpieces for the company. They are seen more as sources for entertainment and educational information than as important news sources.

Note: Observations were not provided for communication channels categories.

Insulation and Component Work Center (newsletters/periodicals)

**On the Insulation and Component newsletter** (positive comments):

- It keeps us informed.
- It applies directly to us.

**On Classifieds and Segments newsletters** (positive comments):

- They keep you informed every two weeks.
- Can be picked up and read at leisure.

**On the Hope Newsletter** (positive comments):

- Most utilized form of communication I've seen.
- Distributing it to us tells us Thiokol is concerned about our health and welfare.

Component Refurbishment Work Center (newsletters/periodicals)

**On Leadership Link newsletter** (positive comments):

- It's straight forward and to the point.
- I can use it to answer people's questions.
- Prime topics are covered.
- It skips the little stuff.

- I can circulate it to people plus put it on file.
- It's better than a meeting.

**On news releases** (positive comment):

- It's nice to read it here before we read it in the newspaper.

**On newsletters in general** (positive comment):

- We get to read about a variety of things in them.

**On Segments newsletter** (positive comment):

- Can be read at leisure.

**On Benefits News newsletter** (positive comment):

- Is really good, short, direct.

**On Classifieds newsletter** (positive comment):

- Very popular.

Mix/Cast Work Center (newsletters and periodicals)

**On Segments newsletter** (positive comment):

- Tells you about what's going on in different areas.

**On Leadership Link** (positive comment):

- It's a good piece – if you get it.

**On Mix/Cast Work Center newsletter** (positive comment):

- It's good but it hasn't 't been put out in six months.

**On Mix/Cast newsletter** (negative comments):

- What happened to it? Our secretary doesn't put it out.
- They started it so everyone knows what's going on.
- They wait too long to put out information.
- She took control of it and won't let any one help.

- It's the same kind of info we get out of Segments. So I already know about it.
- But it has small group awards that never get published.
- It needs to be local and leave the other garbage out.

### Bulletin boards and electronic signs

The four work centers made a total of 16 positive comments and nine negative comments about bulletin boards and electronic signs.

While few comments were made about these channels, most were positive. They were appreciated for what they were: not very important sources of information, but useful.

#### Insulation and Component Work Center (bulletin boards/electric signs)

##### **On electronic sign** (positive comments):

- Like the time and temperature sign

##### **On Bulletin boards** (positive comment):

- Used well and everyone has access to them, unlike e-mail.

#### Component Refurbishment Work Center (bulletin boards/electric signs)

##### **On daily notes** (positive comments):

- It prioritizes things for the day and is posted on the bulletin board.

##### **On bulletin boards** (positive comment):

- Memos are posted out in the open for everyone to see.

#### Mix/Cast Work Center (bulletin boards/electronic signs)

While few comments were made about these channels, most were

positive. They were appreciated for what they were: not very important sources of information, but useful.

**On bulletin boards (positive comment):**

- Bulletin boards are good for the company to communicate to us

**Bulletin boards (negative comment):**

- Some are kept current and some are not. They work good when foreman keep them current. Can be misinterpreted.

Final Assembly Work Center (bulletin boards/electric signs)

**On small electronic signs (positive comment):**

- Everyone has opportunity to read them daily.
- Acts as "one" point of contact.
- Because it is one source, the information is credible.
- Are effective for the people who take the time to read them.
- Messages change continually.
- Sometimes acts as a directory in identifying another detailed source.

**On unofficial bulletin boards (positive comments):**

- Are more entertaining than official bulletin boards.
- Allow free and open-types of communications (not work related).
- Continually change and therefore not boring.
- Constant flow of unofficial information.

**On official bulletin boards (negative comments):**

- Relates to elsewhere - doesn't apply to us.
- Memos/bulletins are dry and boring.
- The information doesn't change often enough.
- Information is pretty much a "waste of time."
- No creativity in memos, etc...
- Feels that approximately 10% read them.

**On electronic message boards (negative comment):**

- Need to be utilized more



. Miscellaneous channels

The four work centers made a total of six positive comments and 53 negative comments about miscellaneous communication channels. Remarks about weekly activity reports, news source accuracy, and accountability for distributing information were common.

This broad category was mostly filled with negative comments about an assortment of processes and procedures that aren't working well. Another major category or theme that developed was that communication channels aren't being used properly. Employees say they like the communication channels that are available to them, but they do not like the content. They believe the content is purposely generalized by the company to avoid creating conflict by reporting unpopular information.

Insulation and Component Work Center (miscellaneous channels)

**On weekly reports** (positive comments):

- There are some reports that are good, and contain good information
- They have a place.
- There is some communication that I wouldn't know about otherwise.

**On news media** (positive comments):

- Get information from newspapers before it comes from company .

**On weekly reports** (negative comments):

- Communication for communication's sake to prove we worked.
- Some of them are forced communications.
- Contains too much trivia.
- I have to put out information even though I know it isn't useful.

**On news media (negative comments):**

- Want to hear it at work before it's read in newspaper.
- At least I know I'm not being lied to when I hear it on television.
- Why not tell us first when we know it is possible. Don't tell public first.

Component Refurbishment Work Center (miscellaneous channels)

**On FOLIO on-line computer service (positive comment):**

- Policies and Procedures is there when I have to find something

**On news releases (positive comment):**

- It's nice to read it here before we read it in the newspaper.

**On accountability for communication (negative comments):**

- Is anybody really over all communications? Everyone seems to be doing their own thing.
- Is there another company with better communications to see what they are doing.
- There's got to be other companies communicating better than we are
- There is a policy that requires you to communicate well and it isn't being followed.
- Who is the head guy who decides who gets what and then getting stuff to us?
- It may be that information is being put out but we're not getting it.
- Large percentage of my guys aren't getting the information.
- Why is 401k information distributed so well but info on RIF isn't?

**On meeting format (negative comments):**

- Director is hard to understand in all-ups because of the noise.
- High bay is not a good place for meetings.
- Director doesn't repeat questions in all-ups for everyone to hear.
- All-ups needs a new PA system.
- People don't want to go to director's meetings because he's soft spoken

**On distribution channels (negative comments):**

- Memos routed sometimes don't get passed on.
- Company news is stacked in break room instead of passed around.
- Segments is stacked and you don't see it unless you happen to walk by.

**On work orders (negative comments):**

- Requester calls in work order and we spend a lot of time tracking down originator.
- Info in work order isn't shared so we can't work on it until next shift.
- Work orders aren't shared by enough people who know what needs to be done.
- Main plant sends down one-liner that isn't understandable.

Mix/Cast Work Center (miscellaneous channels)

**On distribution channels (negative comments):**

- I throw away so much information on what the mission is.
- We're wasting a lot of paper in communication.
- They send me a copy for every man who works for me. They throw them away and read the one on the table.
- Supposed to get a specific amount of Safety bulletins. The organization size will change (get bigger) but the amount hasn't. So I won't get the Safety bulletin and that's a problem.
- I can't remember when the last time I got a Segments in my mailbox. And my people don't get them either.
- And the general managers message – one person gets them and throws them away.
- A lot of people aren't getting the safety video. The closer to incident the more meaningful the message. One copy for 250 people isn't enough.
- Mission Links is another one that doesn't get out.
- Everybody doesn't get Segments.

**On computer access (negative comments):**

- Manager will not let Operations on computers because he is afraid they will take advantage of them.
- You rely on a foreman for information because you don't have computer access. Some are good and some aren't. (Referring to operators getting info).

- Operations should have a central computer they can use.

**On question box** (negative comments):

- It's abused. People are using it to complain. It stirs hate and discontent.
- Someone puts in a stupid question then management thinks the entire crew thinks the same way. The questions in the box should go up through the chain of command instead of going to the top first.

Final Assembly Work Center (miscellaneous channels)

**On weekly status reports** (negative comments):

- The information flowed up is outdated by the time the status report gets to work team members.
- Probably not accurate.
- Not used for it's intended purpose.
- Could be filtered information
- It's slow.
- Used to ""justify your job" rather than passing along information.

**On news media** (negative comments):

- Are not factual or sometimes inaccurate.
- Company spokesman holds back information, then the news media scurries to find another source which often is worse than in reality.
- Team members hear it from the news sources before the company announces it to the work force.
- Information is released to public before the company the company releases it to their employees.
- Its embarrassing not to know as a leader what's going on and/or to be able to defend the honor of the company.

Concluding observations about organizational climate and

communication channel categories:

Overall, most employees participating the communication satisfaction focus group sessions were more interested in the organizational climate than they were in communications channels. Support; trust, confidence and

credibility; openness and candor (especially upward, downward and face-to-face communication); and participative decision making concerns affected how they felt about their jobs, it affected interpersonal communications, and it affected how much respect they had for the organization. Most employees wanted the communication channels available to them such as memos, newsletters and electronic messages, but they did not like the content, believing it to be lacking in usefulness.

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