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Andersson, Rickard; Heide, Mats; Simonsson, Charlotte

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LUND UNIVERSITY

PO Box 117
221 00 Lund
+46 46-222 00 00

ANNUAL REPORT · COMMUNICATIVE PUBLIC ORGANIZATIONS

Communicative coworkership

Rickard Andersson, Mats Heide and Charlotte Simonsson

Department of Strategic Communication

Lund University - October 2021



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Department of Strategic Communication
Lund University

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Summary

Communicative coworkership is an area with great potential for both organizations and communication practitioners. Communicative coworkership is also an area where there is a clear link between the core operation and the communication of the organization. It is fairly easy to demonstrate the value of communicative coworkership for an organization, for example in terms of crisis aversion, innovation, listening, learning, branding, trust and other aspects that have an important strategic value for organizations in general.

In this report, we present previous research on communicative coworkership and propose a definition of the concept. We provide a model that shows three areas of responsibility for communicative coworkership. In addition, we discuss obstacles to communicative coworkership and the support that the organization can provide to coworkers.

In the final discussion, we present the wheel of communicative coworkership with six factors that must exist in order to realize the idea of communicative coworkership: (1) sensemaking approach to communication, (2) communicative leadership, (3) decentralized organizational philosophy, (4) open communication climate, (5) internal trust and (6) identification with the organization.

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Introduction

The project Communicative Public Organizations focuses on *trust* and *relations management*. Previous research clearly identifies these areas as essential for organizations as well as for communicators as a professional group. Trust and relationship management are studied for three years (2020–2022) in relation to three areas:

- communicative coworkership
- digitization
- communication professionals' role and development

This is the first of three reports within the three-year research project Communicative Public Organizations. The project started in January 2020 and will end in December 2022. It is being conducted by PhD Rickard Andersson, Professor Mats Heide and Associate Professor Charlotte Simonsson. The overall purpose of the research project is to generate new knowledge about the role of managers and coworkers in creating and maintaining trust and relationships. This project is funded by the 11 organizations participating in the study (see page 13).

During the first year of the research project, namely 2020, we studied the area of communicative coworkership through case studies in three of the organizations involved in the project. We also conducted a content analysis of the steering documents of the participating organizations such as policies, strategies, guidelines etc.

In this annual report, we describe and discuss the most important findings of the three case studies. The report will mainly describe and discuss communicative coworkership.

QUESTIONS ANSWERED IN THE REPORT

- How can communicative coworkership be understood?
- What makes coworkers want to contribute to take communicative responsibility?
- How can organizations work to promote communicative coworkership?
- How can communicative coworkership contribute to strengthening and maintaining the organization's relationships with stakeholders and their trust in the organization?

On the importance of trust

In research, trust has been highlighted as a prerequisite for individuals, organizations and other agents playing an active role in society. Well-functioning societies are heavily dependent on the mutual trust of the actors operating in society, that is to say, actors believe that other actors can be trusted.¹ If the actors trust each other, this means, in short, that society functions more effectively. If social actors lack confidence in each other, for example when they believe that other actors cannot be trusted, the consequence is that society as a whole operates less well.

In organizational research, trust is often described as a psychological state in which an individual accepts *vulnerability*, because they have positive expectations of others' intentions and actions.² Vulnerability means that an individual is prepared to take a risk when acting with the conviction that the other party can be trusted.³ If an individual does not have confidence in another agent, the individual is not prepared to expose themselves to risk. As a result, the individual is usually not prepared to act. Although this description of trust is not primarily intended to describe citizens' trust in public institutions, it contributes to an understanding of why stakeholders' trust in public institutions is so important.

Coworkers and communicative coworkership

Research has shown that intangible assets are not created mainly via the communication or the campaigns by the communications or marketing depart-

ment. Instead, brand, reputation and trust are largely created when the organization's coworkers and its external stakeholders meet. This is also very consistent with the idea behind the communicative organization. In order to meet the growing demands for openness, speed and interactivity, all Swedish organizations will soon be using social media. The survey results from the previous research project Communicative Organizations show that nine out of ten managers and coworkers see communicative competence as increasingly important in today's working life. This suggests that there is great awareness that communication is a key element of many job roles.

Researchers in strategic communication have emphasized how important it is for communicators to act as internal consultants and educators, teaching others the importance of communication and how to improve their communication skills.⁴ In many organizations, efforts have been made to develop managers' communication, not least by launching the communicative leadership concept. It is now high time to focus on coworkers and communicative coworkership as well. In this report, we delve deeper into the communicative coworkership.

Studies during the first year

During the first year of the research project, three case studies were carried out with a focus on communicative coworkership. The three organizations that have been studied are the Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency, Svenska kraftnät and the Swedish Police Authority. In addition to these three case studies, we have also conducted initial informant interviews in all organizations as well as an analysis of different steering documents in the participating organizations.

In the section below we will briefly present the empirical material we have compiled and analyzed, and the purpose of the various sub-studies.

Informant interviews

In the spring of 2020, we conducted the so-called informant interviews with communication directors, communication managers and strategic communicators in the eleven organizations involved in the project. These interviews have helped increase our understanding of the organization's starting points, conditions and planned communication-related projects. We asked questions about, for example:

- the communication climate
- whether the organization is regarded as communicative
- what internal trust looks like
- how people have been working on communicative coworkership
- how far the digitalization of the organization has progressed
- what efforts have been made to increase the professionalization of communicators in the organization

Document analysis

Strategies, guidelines, policies and other types of steering documents are often found in abundance in organizations. Documents of this kind sometimes tend to become dead stock but there are also examples that they can become a more active part of the operation. Either way, the steering documents say a great deal about the ambitions, norms and views that prevail within an or-

ganization around, for example, internal communication, social media, leadership and coworkership. We were therefore interested in analyzing various policy documents in order to gain knowledge of how coworkers' communication is described in them. What communicative roles and expectations of coworkers do the steering documents attest to?

We collected and analyzed policy documents from all participating organizations. We analyzed 38 different steering documents in total. The documents had titles like:

- communication policy
- communication strategy
- coworker policy
- internal communication guidelines
- core values
- social media handbook/guidelines

Case studies

In 2020, we conducted three case studies of the Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency (MSB), Svenska kraftnät and the Swedish Police Authority. In the present report we will not present the results of each study separately. Instead, we have chosen to summarize the most important results and the insights from the various studies and incorporate them into the remaining part of the report on an ongoing basis.

Below we give a brief presentation of the organizations and the purpose of the case studies.

Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency (MSB)

In 2020, the Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency (MSB) came to public attention in connection with the COVID-19 pandemic. Representatives of the organization appeared on television every week, and other coworkers participated in various reports and articles. MSB is the authority responsible for supporting society's preparedness for accidents, crises and civil defense. It can be argued that MSB is in a special position when it comes to communication regarding crises and crisis management, because there is a great deal of expertise within the authority for exactly that purpose. In other words, MSB is particularly well placed to manage crises compared to other organizations.

The purpose of the study was to increase knowledge of the role of internal communication in a complex crisis such as the pandemic, and how important it is for communicative coworkership – and ultimately for the trust in the organization. We conducted 17 semi-structured interviews over Skype. The selection was strategic, and we searched for people with different types of experience, work and responsibilities in order to get a broader picture of the

situation in the organization. We have analyzed several different policy documents as well as information about crisis management and the COVID-19 pandemic on the Intranet. The steering documents that have been analyzed are: MSB 2030, Communication Strategy, Communication Policy, Coworker and Manager Policy, Communication Strategy for the Crisis and War Preparedness Area. In addition, we have analyzed: Executive email, Communicative status reports, GD's weekly newsletter as well as special coronavirus pandemic pages on the Intranet.

Svenska kraftnät

Svenska kraftnät is the authority responsible for ensuring that the electricity transmission system is safe, environmentally sound and cost-effective. The Authority is responsible for the purchase of electricity and for the monitoring and construction of the electricity transmission network. Svenska kraftnät operates in an industry with a high degree of complexity where the allocation of responsibilities between different agents and organizations can be perceived as unclear. Svenska kraftnät is an organization that has been working actively for many years to develop leadership in the organization. The authority has been working on a comprehensive leadership program, having developed a leadership handbook. It is an ambitious and exemplary handbook on leadership.

What is also interesting about this authority is their declaration that all coworkers in the organization are managers regardless of whether they have a formal managerial position. Furthermore, there is a communication strategy that clearly highlights the communicative role of coworkers. As a result, we chose to focus on the communicative coworkership in the organization.

The purpose of the study at Svenska kraftnät was to generate more knowledge about how coworkers perceive expectations for communicative coworkership and the support provided by the organization. The study consists of interviews with five managers and six coworkers. The interviews were conducted via Skype in early October 2020. We have also carried out a document analysis of: Operational plan for the Communication unit, plan for increased trust and reputation, procedures for social media, leadership handbook and performance review templates.

Swedish Police Authority

In recent years, the Swedish Police Authority has become more visible and active on social media, mainly on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. The accounts – whether managed by individual police officers, police areas or from a central location – are often very popular with the public, as evidenced by

the number of followers and by the large number of comments and engagement generated by the accounts. That the Authority's social media presence evokes commitment and opinions even outside the comment fields was particularly noticeable for a few weeks at the end of 2020. The Authority's *Instagram* campaign *Ingripandepoliserna* (*The Intervention Police Officers*) resulted in a number of debate posts in several news media, including Expressen, Dagens Nyheter and Sydsvenskan, in which journalists questioned the Authority's presence on social media.

The Swedish Police Authority describes that the presence on social media should contribute to the Authority's achieving its overall goal: to reduce crime and increase people's security. This objective is complemented by a number of interim objectives, which emphasize the Agency's ambition to be visible and accessible, proactive, transparent and an attractive employer.

The purpose of the study at the Swedish Police Authority was to investigate what coworkers' communicative practice on social media really looks like and how coworkers who are active in official government accounts perceive their communicative roles and the Authority's work with social media. We conducted 13 interviews via Skype or over the telephone. The selection was strategic and we searched for coworkers with different types of experience, work and responsibilities in order to get a broader picture of how coworkers perceive their communicative role. We also analyzed the Authority's communication policy, social media handbook, coworker policy, guidelines for websites and core values. Finally, we also analyzed posts over a month on a selection of the Authority's social media accounts on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter.

Conferences with participating organizations

Over the year, we organized four conferences with representatives of the eleven organizations included in the study: Swedish Public Employment Service

- Swedish Social Insurance Agency
- Lund University
- Malmö Municipality
- Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency (MSB)
- Swedish Police Authority
- Swedish Tax Agency
- Stockholm City
- Svenska kraftnät
- Swedish Transport Administration
- VA Syd

During the conferences, we have presented results from the various studies that we have performed. Furthermore, we have had discussions with the representatives and included suggestions, ideas and thoughts that we have been able to use in our continued work and in the analysis of the empirical material.

Communicative coworkership in theory

In this chapter we go through the concept of coworkership and previous research on communicative coworkership. We also present a model that shows three areas of responsibility that we believe are central to understanding communicative coworkership.

Coworkership as an idea and concept

Coworkership as a concept originates from Sweden, however, it is also present in our Nordic neighbors. Coworkership is clearly linked to Swedish legislation, collective bargaining agreements and more democratic and participatory leadership, as well as a long tradition of collaboration between employers and coworkers. During the 1990s, more and more organizations became hierarchically flatter and the micro-management of coworkers decreased. As a result, the number of managers in Swedish organizations decreased, thereby increasing the demands on coworkers to take responsibility, solve problems and ensure effective collaboration. The development towards more complex and knowledge-intensive organizations has further contributed to the importance of active coworkership. It is important to underline that coworkership does not replace leadership – rather, it is a prerequisite for good leadership.

There is no generally accepted definition of coworkership. Andersson and Tengblad define coworkership as the actions and attitudes that coworkers develop in relation to the employer in general (i.e. to the organization as a whole), their managers and their colleagues.⁵ However, this way of defining coworkership is problematic, as it is only descriptive and says nothing about the actual activity that is taking place.⁶

In line with the suffix “ship” we mean that

COWORKERSHIP REQUIRES IMPORTANT ASPECTS SUCH AS:

- commitment
- responsibility
- initiative
- collaboration

The important thing about the concept of coworkership is that it is about seeing and understanding coworkers as active and important resources for an organization. In other words, coworkers should not be regarded as passive recipients who perform the acts ordered by managers.

“*En liten bok om medarbetarskap*” (*A Little Book on Coworkership*) by Söderfjäll and Svensson proposes a slightly fuller definition:

Coworkership comprises the attitudes and behavioral patterns that an coworker exhibits in their work in order to carry out their duties, to interact and collaborate with their colleagues and to be part of and represent the organization that is their employer.⁷

Coworkership means expecting coworkers not only to perform their regular duties, but also to contribute to their colleagues and the organization. Furthermore, coworkership means that coworkers help the organization develop and adapt to changes within or outside the organization. It is therefore expected of coworkers that they themselves should have a *drive* and *take initiatives* to develop both themselves and the organization. The idea of coworker participation challenges institutionalized norms and notions of what coworkers should contribute and how they can create value.⁸ Usually, the focus is only the values associated with the actual tasks performed by the coworker.

The concept of coworkership is hardly found in international research literature. Instead, the term *followership* is used. The researchers who use followership often point out that they have abandoned the traditional view of the leader as the strong, lonely hero who must make all decisions and who can control the subordinates. We believe, however, that the term “followership” cements the image of the active, strong leader and the passive, weaker follower, reinforcing an outdated image of how leadership works in practice.

In order for today's organizations to be able to cope with the ever-growing competition and the rapid changes in the world around them, committed and responsible coworkers are required, who take own initiative and solve problems as they arise. In the literature discussing coworkership, communication is usually taken for granted. But at the same time, for example, Tengblad emphasizes that today it is not enough to simply carry out your tasks as a coworker – you also need to be a dialogue partner, innovative, socially competent and committed.⁹ There are also great expectations towards coworkers to be ambassadors for the organization in order to boost confidence in different stakeholders.

In marketing, there have been a lot of discussions about part-time marketing experts.¹⁰ In the field of communication, as far as we know, no researcher has proposed the term part-time communicators. We also believe that such a term would be unfortunate as it is not likely to help clarify the role of professional communicators, nor would it strengthen their sometimes-questioned position and status in organizations. This reasoning could also be taken to mean that if everyone in the organization has a communicator assignment, then professional communicators are not needed either. To avoid the risk of misunderstandings, we prefer the term *communicative coworkership* and the next section describes how the term can be understood and defined.

Research on communicative coworkership

Insofar as coworkership has previously been discussed from a communicative perspective, the discussions have often been about the coworker being an ambassador or brand builder as seen from outside. However, much of this research has had a leadership focus and has regarded coworkers as mouthpieces that convey what the management wants them to.¹¹ There is also some research on the coworker's communication role via social media and as a border crosser between units within an organization or between stakeholders and the organization. Recent research has been interested in what creates the conditions for coworkers to communicate in their professional role. Examples of factors that influence this include position, motivation, psychological facilitators and obstacles, as well as conditions in the organization such as culture and leadership.

All in all, not so much has been written about communicative coworkership in research so far. Heide and Simonsson published the article "Putting coworkers in the limelight" ten years ago.¹² The article underlined that coworkers have communicative responsibility and should be put more in the spotlight, as they have become increasingly important for an organization's success. As mentioned above, previous research has primarily focused on the coworker being an ambassador and brand builder in relation to external stakeholders. In the article above, Heide and Simonsson emphasize that the

coworkers' communication roles are more or broader than that. Based on Andersson and Tengblad's view of coworkership (see above), Heide and Simonsen assume that coworkers not only have a communicative role in relation to their employer/organization in general, but also in relation to their manager and colleagues:

- Communication role towards *the organization*: this includes being an ambassador for the organization and living according to its brand. It can also be about conveying the organization's message to different target groups.
- Communication role towards *managers*: includes co-creating and interpreting both operational and strategic information. All coworkers interpret information based on their experience, understanding, knowledge, interest, opinion etc. This interpretation may be of great significance for the organization's decision-makers as it creates broader understanding. This role also includes being a co-leader and dialogue partner to managers.
- Communication role towards *colleagues*: this includes collaborating and networking to create new contacts, strengthen relationships and generate new knowledge. It also includes giving and receiving feedback to each other and sharing information in a meaningful way.

In subsequent research, Madsen and Verhoeven have reviewed a large number of articles and books that discuss communicative tasks and roles that coworkers may have.¹³ They have searched for patterns and were finally able to develop eight different communication roles for coworkers. Below we present a slightly modified and simplified version of their roles:

EIGHT COMMUNICATION ROLES

Brand builder: This role implies that the coworker "embodies" the organization's core values and brand promise. In other words, it means that the coworker acts, communicates and responds to stakeholders according to the values, norms and brand that apply to the organization.

Advocate: In this role, the coworker communicates positive messages about the organization to various stakeholders such as users, citizens and customers. It is also possible to describe it as the role of an ambassador where the coworker acts as a positive ambassador.

Defender: When a coworker, in their communication, diverts criticism of the organization in the form of accusations, rumors or other wrongful attacks, they act as defender.

Relationship builder: In this communication role, the coworker makes sure to create, maintain and develop relationships with stakeholders. Here, it can be a matter of having a good attitude towards the stakeholders and acting professionally.

Information seeker: An important communication role for the coworkers is to take responsibility for searching for and sharing information about the organization and what is happening in the outside world. This means that the coworker must partly seek information that they need in order to carry out their own work and partly be able to act as an ambassador or representative for the organization. Communicative coworkership thus also includes ensuring that you have sufficient information to be able to answer stakeholders' questions about the organization or at least be able to refer them to someone within the organization who has more knowledge about the issue.

Sensemaker: This role has a clear connection to the previous one and is about the coworker's actively trying to create meaning and understand different kinds of information. In order to create meaning, it is often necessary for the coworker to communicate with others and discuss the information.

Innovator: When the coworker takes responsibility for contributing ideas on how the operation can be developed and improved, the coworker takes on the role of innovator. This may involve everything from continuous development work to coming up with proposals for new products and services that the organization may offer in the future.

Critic: In situations where a coworker shares their views and point out problems and shortcomings to management, managers, and colleagues, they act as critic. This is probably the most difficult role because it presupposes an open communication climate where coworkers are encouraged to express criticism and are continuously given feedback on what they have said.

To better understand how communicative coworkership is perceived in practice, we have conducted an analysis of how communicative coworkership is expressed in the various steering documents of the participating organizations (e.g., communication strategy, communication policy, leadership and coworker policy). What communicative coworker roles can we discern in the documents intended to provide principles, guidelines, and support for the communication of the organization?

The document analysis shows the following patterns:

- The role of *brand builder* was the only role included in the steering documents of all eleven organizations.

- The role of *relationship-builder*, *information-seeker*, *sensemaker* and *innovator* was also common and was found in the steering documents of eight to nine organizations.
- Four organizations included the roles of *critics* and *advocates*, while the role of *defender* was not included in the steering documents of any organization.

We have mentioned earlier that research has primarily highlighted the coworkers' role in strengthening the brand. Although the document analysis points to a fairly wide spreading of different communication roles in the steering documents, the emphasis on coworkers as brand builders is also strong within these. It is also interesting to note that the role of defender is not found at all in the steering documents. The role of advocate is not particularly dominant either. One possible interpretation is that it is perceived as excessive to require that coworkers actively defend or advocate the organization.

It is also interesting that the role of critic is not highlighted in the steering documents of more organizations. Problems with a culture of silence are common and it is therefore important to show in various ways that criticism is both welcome and desirable. Perhaps the role of critic should be emphasized better and more clearly in steering documents describing communicative expectations and roles? Our point is not that an open communication climate can be controlled or ordered, but that highlighting criticism as important for the development of the organization sends a signal about the importance of daring to be open with problems and mistakes.

Communicative coworkership as three areas of responsibility

Madsen and Verhoeven's eight roles help nuance and broaden the view of communicative coworkership.¹⁴ However, we see that several of the eight roles overlap and it can be cumbersome to work with so many roles in a practical context. In order to describe communicative coworkership in a straightforward way, we have therefore chosen to sort the different roles into three different areas of responsibility:

- contribute to a common understanding and meaning
- contribute to an open communication climate and to developing the organization
- contribute to strengthening the trust and reputation of the organization

With the word "contribute", we would like to emphasize that all three of these responsibilities are part of a collective, common process. In leadership research, there is an increased emphasis on coworkers as co-leaders and leadership as a collective process.¹⁵ Managers need to create different conditions for coworkers to contribute to these responsibilities and roles, but at the same

time it is required that coworkers' own commitment and actions go beyond the operational job role. Similarly, it is not only the coworkers' communication that builds the organization's trust and reputation, but also, of course, central, organization-wide communication efforts in the form of campaigns and media relations.

In the figure below (see Figure 1), we have sorted Madsen and Verhoeven's eight roles under the three areas of responsibility that we propose.¹⁶ In addition, the figure provides examples of communicative actions in these areas. We have also given examples of where this communication can take place and in what way.

Contribute to a common understanding and meaning	Contribute to an open communication climate and to developing the organization	Contribute to strengthening the trust and reputation of the organization
<p>Roles</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • information seeker, meaning-maker and partner for discussions <p>Examples of communicative actions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seeking and actively take part of information related to one's own work but also to other units and the organization in general • Actively sharing information with managers and colleagues • Engaging in conversations with managers and colleagues in a constructive way <p>Where, how</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meetings, internal social media and other digital media, informal conversations with managers – mainly within their own working group, but also outside it • Seeking information in both internal and external media 	<p>Roles</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • relations builder, innovator and critic <p>Examples of communicative actions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Building of relationships and networks with colleagues from other units – breaking down silos • Presenting and discussing ideas on how the company's products and services can be developed • Providing suggestions on how the company's structure, work processes etc. can be improved • Identifying shortcomings and problems in order to make the company better <p>Where, how</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internal meeting forums, internal social media and other digital media; informal conversations – both within and outside one's own working group 	<p>Roles</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • organization representative, brand builder, advocate, defender <p>Examples of communicative actions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Building relationships and networks with relevant external stakeholders • Telling about the organization's goals and mission in an interesting and understandable way • Speaking positively about the organization in meetings with external agents • Responding to rumors and misrepresentations about the organization • "Embodying" the organization's core values - practise what you preach <p>Where, how:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In meetings and other contacts with external individuals and organizations • In the organization's different social media accounts

Figure 1. Communicative coworkership – divided into different areas of responsibility and roles.

The three areas of responsibility are interlinked and partly interdependent, which we want to illustrate with the following figure (see Figure 2):

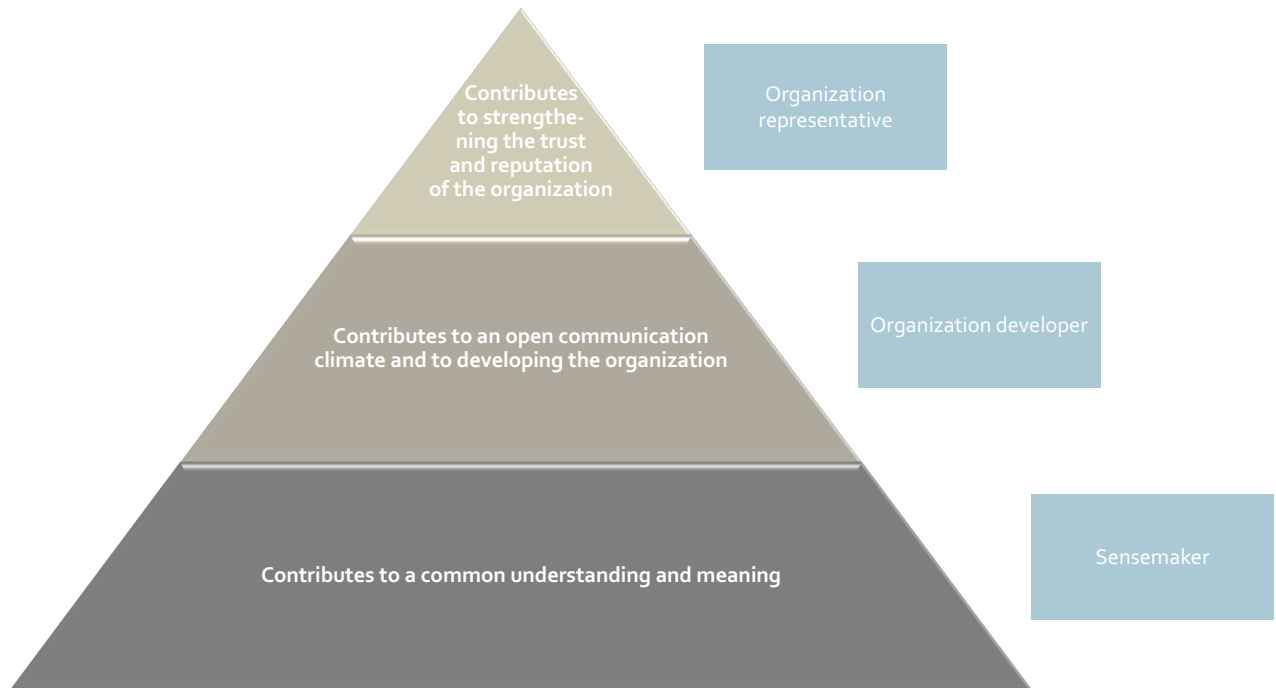


Figure 2. Relationship between coworkers' communicative responsibilities

“Contributing to common understanding and meaning” is the most genuine responsibility for communication and we also see it as basis and prerequisite for being able to fulfil the other two responsibilities. If the coworkers lack knowledge and understanding of what is happening within the organization and in the world around them, it is difficult, for example, to contribute with ideas and suggestions on how the operation can be developed. Without common understanding of matters such as the organization’s goals and mission, it is also difficult to represent the organization and help strengthen its trust and reputation. The area of responsibility in the middle is also a prerequisite for creating strong trust. Without an open communication climate and an organization focused on development and improvement the coworkers’ opportunities and willingness to contribute to strong trust decrease. With our merging of the roles, three roles emerge:

THREE COMMUNICATION ROLES FOR COWORKERS

- **Sensemaker** has the communication responsibility for contributing to common understanding and meaning.
- **Organizational developer** is responsible for contributing to an open communication climate and developing the organization.
- **Organizational representative** is responsible for contributing to the strengthening of the organization's trust and reputation.

Definition of communicative coworkership

Finally, we want to link the different theoretical approaches in a definition of communicative coworkership:

COMMUNICATIVE COWORKERSHIP

A **communicative coworkership** means that the coworker takes responsibility for and reflects on their communication with managers, colleagues and external stakeholders. Communicative coworkership also means taking responsibility in communicating with others to actively contribute to a communication behavior that generates:

- shared knowledge and understanding
- open communication climate and organizational development
- strong trust in the organization

Reflecting here means that the coworker relates to their own and others' communication, and considers how it can be developed. The reflexive approach to communicative coworkership can also be formulated as the coworker reflecting on their own, as well as on managers', colleagues' and the organization's, communication. This is to challenge truths about communication that are taken for granted and thereby to contribute to the development of the organization.¹⁷

Communicative coworkership in practice

In this chapter we highlight how communicative coworkership can be realized in practice. First, we briefly discuss how the model presented above with communicative responsibilities and roles can be applied. Afterwards, we discuss various obstacles that need to be removed, and then what kind of governance and support promotes communicative coworkership.

How to apply the model with three communicative responsibilities

The model with three responsibilities and associated roles and communicative actions, which we have presented in the previous chapter, can be used to clarify and develop the communicative coworkership in organizations. In this section, we address some issues that are important to include in such development work.

The three responsibilities are relevant in all organizations, but not all roles are equally important in all organizations. A piece of advice is therefore to *discuss which roles are most important or most valuable* in your own organization. A role as brand builder may be relevant in certain public activities – for example, where a public organization exists in an industry where private agents also operate or where it is a matter of developing a municipality as a place for business and tourism. However, sometimes an emphasis on branding and ambassadorship can also bring about a market logic that does not belong in the public sector. In several public organizations, it may therefore be more relevant to describe the role of coworkers in representing or acting on behalf of the organization. We would also like to emphasize that there may be more relevant roles than those identified in the research so far.

Another issue to consider is whether all coworkers really must, or indeed can, fulfil all roles and take equal responsibility in all three areas. While it is clear that it is necessary to clarify coworkers' communicative responsibilities, there is some hazard in trying to cast all coworkers in the same form. For example, you cannot expect everyone to be as comfortable communicating and representing the organization in social media, as well as not everyone can be good at contributing to conversations about how the organization can be

developed and “innovated”. Personality or the professional role as such, can determine how much responsibility each coworker can or should take in different areas. The matter of what is reasonable and how much one could actually expect from coworkers is also crucial to consider.

THINGS TO CONSIDER

- Although all three areas of responsibility are important, one area may need to be given priority over the others. What does your organization look like – is there any responsibility that needs to be specifically emphasized and what can the communications department do to support coworkers in that work?
- What words and terms are relevant to use in your organization to describe different communication roles or communication expectations? What fits with the organization’s goals and mission and already existing approaches to leadership and coworkership?

Obstacles to communicative coworkership

Implementing communicative coworkership in an organization is not always easy. Before starting work on communicative coworkership, it is important to understand and map the organization’s conditions and any obstacles that may exist. Only when we reflect on our own situation and understand it, is it possible to set realistic goals and take small steps forward towards development and a changed and improved situation.

At the same time, in many organizations there exist both old and new ideas about communication, leadership and coworkers. The dominant notions in an organization are important to know in order to be able to successfully introduce communicative coworkership.

The old notions reward and value the managers and their work. It is assumed that the managers are best suited to make all decisions, and that the coworkers will carry out what is decided. Although this description can be seen as something extreme, it is also a picture regularly described in organizations, academic journals and textbooks. More recent notions assume that it is impossible to solve the complex problems an organization faces without active coworkership. And the connection to communicative coworkership is particularly clear.

In addition to dominant notions in organizations, there are other obstacles that are important to be aware of in order to have realistic expectations for the development of a communicative coworkership. In our studies, we have

found a number of different obstacles to communicative coworkership. These notions make it difficult to realize a communicative coworkership.

In order to be able to work successfully with communicative coworkership, it is important to first identify any obstacles to communicative coworkership that may exist. When you have an overview of existing obstacles, it is easier to first think about measures to deal with them and then prioritize these.

Below we present and discuss a number of obstacles to communicative coworkership.

The status of communication: Communication is taken for granted in too many organizations. Communication then becomes something largely ignored, and there are notions that it should only work by itself. It often follows from here that the communication function does not have a big enough budget. It is also usually expected of communicators to work primarily with operational tasks such as designing messages and filling the media with content.

Downpipes and suction pipes: In the vast majority of large public, but also private, organizations there exist so-called downpipe organizing. This is often linked to a strong emphasis on line organization and a strong belief in that way of organizing. This type of organization is based on the idea that responsibility and reporting should be assigned to different functional units responsible for different areas of activity. Line organizations have a clear hierarchy and specialist division of operations. One effect of this form of organization, where each unit deals only with its area of expertise, is that only the management has a holistic approach to the operation. Consequently, the top management gains great power.

In today's complex reality, the line organization is an obstacle to efficiency, the organization's adaptability to change and coworker engagement. In addition, rigid reporting and responsibilities mean that coworkers cannot be proactive and deal with problematic situations themselves, as it is the managers who make the decisions. The line organization creates organizational downpipes in which information and communication flows. The problem is that communication and information stay within each downpipe and does not reach other parts of the organization. An interviewed communications manager in one of the organizations claimed that further pipes had even been developed within the downpipes, namely suction pipes. Line organizations per se constitute an obstacle to a culture of cooperation or open communication in which coworkers can exchange experiences and knowledge with each other. In addition, the line organization contributes to a narrow focus on one's own specialty and function rather than a more holistic perspective. As citizen or customer, a coworker is expected to have rea-

sonable understanding and view of the organization's activities, but this opportunity is made more difficult by the downpipe behavior that occurs with a line organization.

Transmission view of communication: The downpipes that exist in most line organizations usually go hand in hand with the transmission view of communication. The focus is then on the dissemination of information from a sender to a receiver – usually from the management to the coworkers. Communication is considered successful when the information has reached the recipient via any of the communication channels. Behind this understanding of communication, there is an almost “engineer-like” view of communication. It is assumed that more information is the solution to dealing with ambiguity, when in practice there are no given and simple answers. When this view of communication is dominant, the communicators are expected to publish information, and over time a publishing culture forms. The focus of the communicators' work will therefore be to publish regular newsletters, update the Intranet and produce internal videos with messages from the management to the coworkers. This view of communication is very common in Swedish organizations. This understanding of communication is also the one most often found in encyclopedias and textbooks.

The problem with this view of communication is that it presupposes that the recipient receives, understands and accepts information disseminated by a sender. The interpretation of information is completely ignored, even though we know that people interpret the information differently depending on their interests, experience, education etc. The people we have interviewed confirm that their organizations talk about communication as a waterfall or a cascade, and that recipients should be provided with information. The main emphasis is on getting the information through. Other problems with the transmission vision are that it has a top-down perspective and that it does not embrace the importance of dialogue and discussion with coworkers.

Lack of understanding for the communicative mission: Our study shows that one problem with communicative coworkership is that there may be lack of understanding among coworkers about them having a communicative mission. Although some coworkers are well aware that they are expected to represent the organization, there may be a lack of understanding of the broader communicative mission. As coworker, you may also perceive it as extra burden to also assume communicative responsibility, and it might seem that it takes time from the “real” work. Some coworkers argue that they do not want to engage in marketing and branding; they just want to do their job.

Lack of understanding of how trust is created: There are also tendencies for coworkers and managers to see the trust issue as something for which communicators are primarily responsible and which they should handle. Trust is a complex phenomenon that is largely based on communication, and not least on coworkers' communication with external stakeholders such as citizens.

Incompatible ambitions: We have carried out a document analysis of various steering documents in the studied organizations, such as their communication strategy and coworker policy. One tendency we found in the analysis was that the documents in general "spoke with a forked tongue". The document clearly stated that there was a strong desire for the organization's communication to be coherent and consistent. This gives a clear impression that the organization wants to guide and control the communication through, for example, templates and ready answers. At the same time, the documents show that the coworkers wish to be, for example, independent, broad-minded, committed, courageous, creative, active and solution-oriented. Here, incompatible ambitions arise between a desire to govern and control from above, and a desire to give coworkers room to improvise and manage the situations that arise. These contrasting ambitions give the impression of a fragmented organization, where it can be difficult for coworkers to understand how to act.

Collision in communication: One obstacle related to the above – incompatible ambitions – is that the steering documents state that, in critical situations, coworkers are expected to take an active communication role as sender and receiver and represent the organization. However, in internal crisis communication, coworkers are treated only as information recipients. In many organizations, it is common for a traditional view of crisis communication to dominate the way organizations carry out internal crisis communication. The focus is then on effectively disseminating information about the crisis to coworkers, rather than consider them active communication partners and resources to manage the crisis.

Culture of silence: In recent years, the mass media have regularly reported on a perceived culture of silence among public organizations. Of course, it is possible to dismiss such reporting by saying that it is a way for coworkers, who have not achieved what they wanted, to protest. At the same time, the fact that people's experience affects the way they choose to act should be respected. If a coworker is of the understanding that there is a culture of silence, where criticism may not be expressed or where coworkers who express criticism are subjected to various forms of sanctions, it will be difficult to generate communicative coworkership. It is important to underline that

a culture of silence can arise and be maintained through the actions of both managers and coworkers.

It has been emphasized many times that it is power-hungry or frightened managers who create a culture of silence. The power-hungry manager sees information as a source of power and wants to feel in control of the information. Such a manager is usually not interested in taking in others' opinions and experiences and is thus uninterested in listening. Managers who are afraid of criticism or different opinions will not encourage coworkers to share their thoughts. There are also many examples of managers who have penalized in various ways those who present criticism or negative information, which in itself naturally reinforces the silence in the organization. The interviews have shown that coworkers can also encourage and maintain a culture of silence by pointing a finger at those who do not comply with the regulations or who have a different opinion. There are ideas in all organizations about how things should be done. And when other coworkers do not follow these, they may be subject to sanctions. This creates an assessment culture where the focus is on assessing individual performance, which also leads to fear of making mistakes.

Strategic listening is not appreciated: In order to really realize communicative coworkership, it is important that the top management emphasize the importance of listening and that they do listen openly to coworkers in practice. It has great symbolic value for others in the organization – managers and coworkers – that the management believes that listening is important and so listens actively. If the top management listens and becomes a pioneer, this will positively affect the others in the organization. Listening actively to coworkers does not mean that managers can please everybody. Coworkers should still receive feedback on the suggestions, thoughts and ideas they put forward, otherwise the interest in making their voice heard will significantly decrease.

As we know, communication consists of speaking and listening. Yet, communication is often defined and understood as the dissemination of messages with the aim of influencing a recipient. As a result of this notion of communication, too few organizations engage in listening or strategic listening where it is more planned and systematically implemented. Insofar as organizations listen, they do so to external stakeholders such as customers and citizens. Internal listening is usually not as systematic as external listening.

Who are we and what do I represent? In some larger organizations, it can be difficult for coworkers to understand what the organization's mission is. This is particularly true for authorities with a broad and vague mission. Then it can be problematic to create a united front and become coherent, which is a clear communication goal in several of the studied organizations. It can also be difficult for individual coworkers to represent the whole because they do not understand its mission. Coworkers then choose to primarily identify with and represent their own unit.

To manage or not to manage coworkers

Regardless of whether the organization has a more centralized or decentralized structure, management and control are important for a successful organization. Having said that, it is important to ask yourself under what conditions communicative coworkership is promoted. In the discussion below, we particularly highlight communicative coworkership in social media, because the matter of managing communicative coworkership becomes quite clear.

In our study of the Swedish Police Authority, it became apparent that communicative coworkership and responsibility are dependent on a genuine commitment and interest on the part of the coworkers who are active in social media. The coworkers underlined the importance of being able to make decisions about content and treatment. In order to make informed decisions and respond to followers correctly, they emphasized the importance of formal frameworks such as the Authority's core values and social media handbook, as well as the importance of receiving support and advice in conversations with, for example, managers and communicators.

During the study, we understood that the Swedish Police Authority's presence in social media has reached a kind of breaking point, or shift. While the activity and presence in the past were largely based on the voluntary commitment of individual police officers, presence has now become more of a central operational issue and part of the Authority's overall work on strategic communication. This in turn has meant that the Authority's activities and presence in social media have become more centrally organized.

The question then becomes to what extent the presence in social media can be centralized without the centralization itself becoming a problem? For an organization, it is a difficult balance between, for example, the central and the local, the formal and the informal, and the serious and the light-hearted. However, we see a risk that an excessively centralized and prescriptive presence might have a negative impact on an organization's success on social media. If the coworkers' presence on social media were to become too controlled,

for example through key content directives, we see a risk that the coworkers' genuine commitment would be lost. Tighter control centrally also risks reducing the followers' perception that they get authentic insight into the coworkers' everyday lives and what is happening in the organization "behind the scenes". The fact that the content is perceived as authentic is in turn important in order for posts to be spread and to arouse commitment among followers.

At the same time, organizational research underlines the need for a certain form of centralization in order for decentralization to function properly.¹⁸ When there is a clear framework for how a good representative should act on social media, coworkers are given the opportunity to have freedom with responsibility. The framework helps coworkers create meaning in their daily work, as they can then relate their work experiences to the formal expectations clarified in formal documents. Here it is important to emphasize that it is often not the documents themselves that are used, but that these often have an indirect steering and control effect. They become effective through the support and advice that coworkers receive in conversations with, for example, managers and communicators.

We therefore advocate a reflexive approach to the balance between centralization and decentralization. More specifically, this means that the strengths and weaknesses associated with a centralized focus and respectively a decentralized focus in how work is organized and identified over time are continuously discussed and managed. In other words, the tensions arising from centralization and decentralization contribute to the development of the set-up of an organization's social media. On the other hand, too much centralization could lead to the loss of authentic and genuine commitment, while too little centralization could lead to chaos and disorder. However, it is almost impossible to know in advance where the boundary ends. Here, the reflexive approach to social media presence – which means that the presence is constantly discussed by the parties involved – becomes of great importance. This is done so that we can identify and act whenever there is an imbalance between centralization and decentralization.

Communicative coworkership benefits from certain management and control in the form of clear framework within which coworkers have self-determination and communicative freedom with responsibility. On the other hand, too much centralization of coworkers' presence on social media will most likely have a counter-productive effect on communicative coworkership, as this is based on "bottom-up engagement".

Support for communicative coworkership

In the interviews with coworkers from the three organizations that we have studied, several occasions emerge when it is difficult for a coworker to act as

an ambassador for the organization. This is especially true when criticism is aimed at the organization. Then it can be difficult to stand up for and defend the organization. But as a starting point, it seems natural for coworkers to represent and act on behalf of the organization. However, coworkers are asking for more information about what is going on, and for a continuous discussion between immediate superior and coworkers about how ongoing events can be understood. In organizations whose mission is vaguer and broader, it is especially important for coworkers to be helped to get the big picture of what the organization's mission and input are. An ongoing study of Master's degree students at the Department of Strategic Communication at Lund University shows that interviewed nurses feel very bad about the uncertainty and ambiguity arising during the COVID-19 pandemic and they feel that the management is not communicatively present in the organization.¹⁹ The lack of clarity, information and dialogue contributes to the feeling of confusion, which per se causes stress. The interviewed nurses, on the other hand, mean that they do not feel bad mentally from working long hours.

In this section, we present some different suggestions for support that the organization can provide to its coworkers so that they are better equipped to perform communicative coworkership.

SUPPORT FOR COMMUNICATIVE COWORKERSHIP

Formulate responsibilities in strategy documents: A first step towards communicative coworkership is to set it as the goal or focus of the organization's strategy. It is, of course, not necessary to use the term "communicative coworkership"; the most important thing is to include the purpose of communicative coworkership in the strategy. In this report, we have formulated three communication responsibilities, which can be used to describe and discuss coworkers' communication responsibilities, see Figures 1 and 2 above.

Strengthen the identity of your organization: One way to create better conditions for communicative coworkership is to launch a strategy that focuses on organizational identity. This strategy work should aim to help coworkers better understand who we are in the organization, for whom we should create value and how we want to be perceived. A clearer framework of this kind supports coworkers in their communication with different stakeholders.

Focus on internal trust: Many organizations devote energy mostly on developing and improving external trust first. It is then hoped that this will have an impact on internal trust. We are convinced that it is a better strategy to first build up internal trust, which in turn can develop external trust. The same tendency can be seen in branding. The focus is then placed on external trust

and the perhaps slightly faster external brand, while forgetting the staff as an important target group. When internal trust exists, it is also easier as an individual coworker to live up to communicative coworkership.

The importance of management for internal trust and pride: Our research shows that management is of great importance in building up internal trust and pride. One coworker we have interviewed underlined: "As a coworker, you have to feel that what is said by the management reflects what they do and that it really becomes a culture". Coworkers are very sensitive when the management say one thing, "we think it is important to get feedback from coworkers", but then do not live up to it. In one of the studies, some of the respondents pointed out that division managers do not have a common view on leadership and how to work with culture. This was perceived as leading to "silosification" (inward-facing systems where information communication is vertical without any exchange between units), which has had a negative impact on the sense of togetherness and cooperation.

Create clear expectation: Coworkers want there to be clear expectations of what is required of them in the communicative coworkership. This is not just about describing expectations in steering documents, but about actually working and discussing them with coworkers. This is a responsibility of communication practitioners, and they should run the process together with the managers who are in charge of direct discussions with coworkers.

Awaken the desire to search: In the most successful and innovative organizations, there is a great deal of freedom among coworkers to solve the problems that arise.²⁰ At the same time, this must be done within a strategic framework. This framework may consist of rules and approaches, but a clear culture works even better. All people are pre-charged with emotions (e.g. fear and curiosity) and with related actions (e.g. focusing on the threat or going forward by trial and error). Fear is the strongest of emotions and will always win. The playfulness and willingness to test different solutions is quickly hindered by negative emotions like fear, which always take precedence over the positive emotions. We are all born with emotional impulses that make us want to investigate, experiment, and learn. This is part of the natural search system. Unfortunately, this search system often clashes with the organizational reality that hinders or prevents people from seeking different solutions. So many times, people's creativity has been suffocated by various forms of rules that they are afraid to break. As a result, a learned helplessness arises at work. The question then is what an organization should do in order to arouse people's desire to search. One way is to allow a greater degree of improvisation and a clear understanding that mistakes are a source of learning and development.

Dare to improvise: One success factor for communicative coworkership is that the managers in organizations dare to test different solutions. This applies not least to the use of social media. A company that is usually promoted as a model for strategic use of social media is Dutch airline KLM.²¹ Coworkers have been allowed to test social media for different tasks. It was in connection with the volcanic eruption in Iceland in 2010 that KLM began using social media to communicate with its travelers. This crisis meant that the company had to use greater customer-centric focus instead of working from the inside out, which is a common approach. Since the volcanic crisis, coworkers at KLM have tried social media in various ways to stay in touch with travelers, strengthen the relationship with them and increase the trust in the organization. The great advantage of allowing coworkers to improvise is that communication is perceived as more authentic. Of course, many mistakes will happen, but these should be seen as basis for learning and development. The Swedish Police Authority has also allowed its coworkers to test their way forward, and over time an increasing amount of knowledge has been accumulated. This knowledge is shared and further developed in informal groups where coworkers help and rely on each other.

Developing message platforms: One way to help coworkers with their communicative mission is to offer message platforms containing the views of the organization on various issues. This can help each coworker gain understanding of how the organization views different issues, which in turn can help them in their communication with external stakeholders. In order for these platforms to be valuable, they need to be discussed with one's immediate manager and coworkers. What do the messages mean to me and to us? How can the messages be interpreted and translated into different contexts?

Focus on behavioural goals: An excellent way to promote communicative coworkership is to include it as a behavioral goal that is discussed during the performance reviews between immediate manager and coworker. Svenska kraftnät has been working on this for a couple of years. In this case, for example, it is discussed what each coworker has done in order to take responsibility for the communicative assignment. It can be questioned whether the coworker's immediate manager can really measure or determine whether the coworker has achieved a behavioral goal. However, the important thing is not whether it is possible to measure communicative coworkership; the important thing is for the organization to mark that communicative coworkership is a priority area. One manager we have interviewed has emphasized that this behavioral goal has helped him clarify what communicative coworkership means. What should be noted is that a manager often knows too little about their coworkers' behavior and that this behavior can be confused with what someone is like as a person.

Communication training: Many managers and coworkers need help in developing their own communication skills. Communication training can have different orientations focused on understanding the importance of communication, how to respond well and how to really listen to another person.

Closing discussion

Successful communicative coworkership presupposes that the organization has broad understanding of the fundamental importance of communication for the organization's existence and operations. It is of course possible to half-heartedly use and work with communicative coworkership. Then the communicative coworkership becomes a form of campaign and good response is primarily most likely focused on citizens and customers. Communicative coworkership has strong ties to the communicative organization that has an open communication climate, where coworkers are encouraged and rewarded for making their voice heard. This must also apply in situations where the information being provided is not positive, such as a mistake that has been made, or where there are negative views among stakeholders towards the organization's activities or management.

Internal trust

Another, more general problem is that organizations often place more emphasis on external trust than on internal trust. This is probably because internal confidence is often taken for granted. Organizations regularly measure the external trust in the organization among stakeholders and make various efforts to strengthen it. Internal trust is sometimes measured by means of coworker surveys, but no corresponding work is done to strengthen, for example, trust between coworkers and senior management.

One basic prerequisite for success in communicative coworkership is that there is internal trust that is largely based on the coworkers' feelings being seen and heard. When coworkers feel that they are listened to and that their information, knowledge, feeling, intuition, experience, and opinions matter, they will become engaged. These are factors that are also important for the organization as a whole and require an organizational culture and leadership that values coworkers' skills and gives them the freedom to act.

Professional war

In many organizations, there is constant professional war or war of logic. Whose logic counts? We believe that it is not fruitful to claim that certain terms or concepts are more important than others. For example, the most

important thing is not to use the term “communication organizations”, but rather to link communication logic to the culture or management philosophy that applies in this context, for example trust-based governance.

A general challenge in many organizations for communicative coworkership is strong specialist culture that constitutes a form of Achilles’ heel. In so-called professional organizations with strong experts and specialists, coworkers usually have a stronger connection and identification with the profession than with the organization. When coworkers in such organizations are expected to have a communicative mission, this can be misinterpreted as an obligation to engage in pure marketing. Coworkers might argue: “I focus on my work and do not do marketing”.

However, we believe that there does not necessarily have to be a conflict between acting professionally and exercising communicative coworkership. Rather, professionalism is largely about good communication with stakeholders where listening has a particularly important role. In order to be able to demonstrate this connection, training in communication is needed so that coworkers could understand more clearly the relationship between professionalism and communication.

Responsible coworkers

An important prerequisite for being able to realize the idea of communicative coworkership is that coworkers also take responsibility for communication. In organizations with long-standing strong focus on the managers’ importance for the success of the organization, there is a risk that coworkers are rendered passive in their responsibilities beyond the actual task. Communicative coworkership requires the management and other persons in charge to be clear that coworkers have a communicative responsibility. But they must also be given the prerequisites to take that responsibility. Training in communication and treatment may be needed to ensure that coworkers have sufficient tools to shoulder communication responsibilities. Furthermore, it is also necessary to have an open communication climate that invites coworkers to make their voice heard and ensures that this voice is wanted and appreciated.

The limit of communicative coworkership

We are aware that a critical observer may consider communicative coworkership to be in line with the ideal of an organization that speaks with one voice – the monophonic organization. The idea of communicative coworkership is not at all linked to this management ideal. Although the monophonic organization is occasionally highlighted as a desirable state by strategic communication researchers, studies carried out in an attempt to realize the

monophonic ideal show that, on the contrary, it has counter-productive effects. Rather than unified communication that helps strengthen the organization's reputation, management's attempts to realize the ideal often have negative consequences in the organization because coworkers perceive their voice as being restricted. A Norwegian study of the work of 25 organizations with internal reputation *management* found that in striving to realize the notion of the monophonic organization, the organizations engaged in controlling, coercing, and limiting the coworkers' voice in order to make them live up to this ideal.²²

In other words, communicative coworkership is far from the notion of monophonic organization where all organizational members are limited to communicating centrally sanctioned messages. However, communicative coworkership naturally means that coworkers act professionally and with good judgment when meeting external stakeholders. The ideal of the monophonic organization, where everything the organization communicates is formulated and controlled centrally, runs counter to the approach to governance advocated in trust-based management.

The communicative coworkership means that coworkers speak on behalf of the organization when meeting external stakeholders, but that their voice should not be controlled or restricted from above. Responsibility for communication must be delegated to the coworker, who, through continuous dialogue with colleagues and managers, has had the opportunity to learn and thereby develop their communicative coworkership.

The communicative coworkership wheel

A clear result from the first year's studies is that coworker communication is on the agenda of most of the participating organizations. Interviews confirm that communicative coworkership is seen as important. The steering documents of several organizations underline the importance of coworker communication. There are often high expectations towards coworkers. On the other hand, responsibilities and roles are not always clearly defined, and we hope that this report will provide inspiration for possible ways to clarify these. Once there is a clear idea and an active conversation about the meaning of communicative coworkership, the next question would be what conditions are required for coworkers to want, dare and be able to live up to those expectations.²³

In the model below, we have tried to highlight the most important prerequisites for creating communicative coworkership.

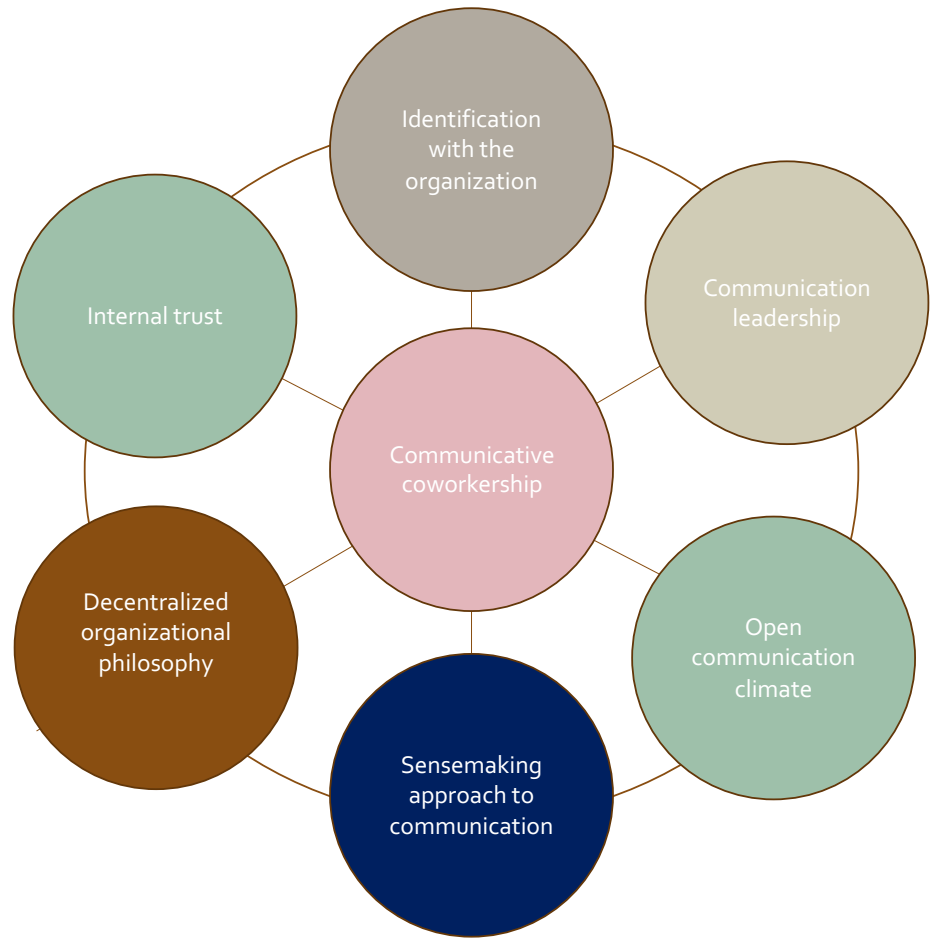


Figure 3. The communicative coworkership wheel.

The model shows that communicative coworkership does not occur in a vacuum. Communicative coworkership presupposes an organizational context or system that supports and facilitates it. Communicative coworkership should therefore be seen as part of a larger system, where the different components are interconnected and support each other. More specifically, this means that it is difficult to work with communicative coworkership as a special initiative or as a separate track. It also means that several functions and professions such as HR, communication and organizational development need to work together to realize the idea of communicative coworkership.

The model shows that there are many factors that interact with each other and that must be in place. This means that it takes time, perseverance, and patience to achieve communicative coworkership. For example, developing an open communication climate and internal trust is not something you do overnight; it can take years to develop.

What significance do we then attach to the concepts in the various circles of the model? We describe this briefly in the box below:

THE COMMUNICATIVE COWORKERSHIP WHEEL

Sensemaking view of communication. The dominant view of communication in an organization affects the ability to exercise communicative coworkership. If the organization is stuck in a traditional transmission approach to communication, this leads to internal communication and leadership, where one tends to stop spreading and making the information available. The conversation and discussion where the information is given a meaning are important for coworkers to be able to fulfil their communicative responsibilities.

Communicative leadership. Leadership and coworkership are, to a great extent, two sides of the same coin. If managers in the organization do not practice leadership with a focus on sensemaking, dialogue, openness, and participation in building up relationship with their coworkers, it will of course be difficult, if not impossible, for coworkers to assume the communicative responsibility we have described. By communicative leadership we mean not only one's immediate manager, but also the senior management and other managers.

Decentralised organizational philosophy. Communicative coworkership thrives in an organization characterized by a decentralized organization philosophy – that is, an organization characterized by goal and value management, working in teams and networks, a coaching leadership and independent coworkers with a mandate to largely make their own decisions. By the word “organizational philosophy”, we would also like to point out that it is a matter of finding a coherent and common view of management, leadership and coworkership. It is important that different professions and functions within the organization do not develop different views or pursue their own rhetoric about leadership and coworkership.

Open communication climate. An open communication climate where critical opinions and communication about errors, mistakes and shortcomings are welcomed and heard is an important basis for communicative coworkership. The opposite – a closed climate or a culture of silence – makes it difficult to practice communicative coworkership as we have defined it here. Meanwhile, it is of course also necessary for coworkers themselves to show certain courage and to be open with their ideas and experiences.

Internal trust. We have already pointed out above that it is at least as important to work with internal trust as it is to work with external trust. In order for the coworkers to want to take communicative responsibility in the way we have described, they must have confidence that their management, managers

and colleagues are doing a good job and that they can trust them. Furthermore, it is important for the coworkers to feel that they understand the goals of the organization, where the organization is headed and what is happening internally and externally that is important to the organization.

This is vital in times of change and crisis, which may cause uncertainty and ambiguity. Such things have a negative impact on coworkers, and they then need help to understand and create meaning in the situation. But I as a coworker must feel that others in the organization have confidence in me in order for me to dare take communicative responsibility. The interviews within the Swedish Police Authority showed that the trust of the management and managers to communicate fairly freely in social media was an important driving force for coworker commitment.

Identification with the organization. If you as coworker do not identify with the organization you work for or do not feel proud of it, it is difficult to mobilize the commitment and responsibility required for communicative coworkership. Of course, a coworker can responsibly respond to others inside and outside the organization in a positive and pleasant way – without personally identifying with the organization. However, in order to fulfil the roles of ambassador and defender, the coworker must identify with the organization – at least if the communication is to be perceived as authentic.

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Endnotes

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