

The Leader as Effective Communicator

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All organizations operate with a finite amount of resources (material, financial, informational, and human) which, in turn, creates challenges to prepare employees for future leadership roles. Leaders must be effective communicators, regardless of their hierarchy of authority within the complexity of organizational structure. The authors of this study conducted secondary research via library databases, popular press books, government sources, and periodicals found online with Google Scholar, to determine if any best practices exist for leaders who are also effective communicators. We found that when a leader has developed reasoning and emotional intelligence as a skillset, employees are encouraged to work harder for that leader: employees are more willing to share responsibility for goal achievement, irrespective of the management tier. In this study, we identified four best practices any manager can implement to become a leader as an effective communicator.

Keywords: communication, leadership, emotional intelligence, managerial, style, benchmark, best practices

LEADERSHIP AND COMMUNICATION

Leadership and management are often used interchangeable. Organizations will normally give top managers titles where there is complex organizational structure, or accountability to the public, such as: Chief Executive Officer, Chief Operating Officer, Chief Financial Officer, Chief Information Officer, Vice President of Marketing, and many more. These titles are loaded with meaning. Top level managers are considered the organization's leadership. Nevertheless, does a top manager title automatically make a top manager a leader? The answer is "That depends." Of course, a top manager title is not a guarantee of an effective leader; moreover, an immoral manager might have extraordinary influence over subordinates reporting to him or her within the organizational hierarchy. Who can forget Bernie Madoff? A pied piper with bad ideas can lead the entire organization astray. This phenomenon is established in the leadership

literature. One book in particular, “*Management Mistakes and Successes*” has detailed the consequences of management decisions on the respective organizations of the decision makers (Hartley, 1994).

A leader is someone with a responsibility to influence one or more followers by directing goal achievement, and managers can use interpersonal communication as a scientific management approach to increase employees’ personal productivity (Bell, 2011; Bell & Martin, 2012; Sethuraman & Suresh, 2014). Managerial communication is perception and expectation of the recipient, which makes demands on both parties. Information can become communication only when data received is perceived by the individual to have interpreted meaning; therefore, one of the main tasks of the manager is to “motivate and communicate” (Drucker, 1954; Drucker, 1973). Strong communication competency is required to work with diverse groups, especially in a global environment. Managerial communication is a learned skill developed over time with practice (Bell & Martin, 2019a). A leader must be aware of his or her followers’ weaknesses to improve followers’ weaknesses (Winston & Patterson, 2006). Various studies have found methodologies, strategies, and techniques for successful leadership communication. For example, Sethuraman and Suresh (2014) promote a contingency theory which focuses on factors connected to the environment, which might determine the leadership style most appropriate for a particular situation. They argue situational theory emphasizes leaders will choose the best style of leadership based on the situation, based on the group to be influenced.

Leaders are made—not born. There is a relationship between leadership style and performance (Sethuraman & Suresh, 2014). There are three situational dimensions associated with the effectiveness of a leader: 1) leader-member relations, 2) task structure, and 3) position power. Leader-member relations helps a leader determine their subordinate's loyalty, dependability, and support. Task structure focuses on subordinate routine jobs. Position power is where leader authority is displayed. All three situational dimensions can help leaders with situational control (Sethuraman & Suresh, 2014). Leaders in managerial roles who exhibit critical thinking skills, intuition, insight and the use of both persuasive rhetoric and interpersonal communication, including both active listening and positive discourse, and if there are gender based managerial feedback tendencies that will foster goodwill among employees (Roebuck, Bell, & Hanscom, 2016; Roebuck, Bell, Raina, & Lee, 2016; Winston & Patterson, 2006).

The success of a leader depends on his or her ability to communicate effectively by self-awareness. Knowledge of managerial communication techniques will help leaders understand the necessity of communication across functions and tiers of the organizational hierarchy (Bell & Martin, 2019a). The importance of self-awareness is also critical. Being self-aware is a hallmark of a leader (Huston, 2018). With self-awareness, authentic leadership suggests that in order to lead, leaders must be true to themselves and their values and act accordingly (Huston, 2018). Research shows that there are theories of leadership hypothesizing about the nuance problems of effective leadership within a professional work environment (Sethuraman & Suresh, 2014). Scholars are constantly attempting to understand what exactly managerial communication is, and how is it applied to leadership. Theorists search for the best practices leaders use to engage in communication effectiveness.

The term managerial communication is a set of management and communication skills to make information commonly understood in order to accomplish organizational goals: communication is at the heart of the leadership function of management, and is its main task (Bell & Martin, 2019a; Bell & Muir, 2014; Drucker, 1954). Scholars include the four functions of management in nearly every generic definition of management: “*Management is the process of planning, organizing, leading and controlling the material, financial, informational, and human resources of the firm to achieve the stated goals judiciously*” (Bell & Martin, 2019a). This is why managerial communication over the years has developed from “a promise as a field of research” to a well-recognized field of research. Moreover, communication is covered as a chapter included in the leadership part of most principles of management textbooks (Bell & Martin, 2008; Nguyen, White, Hall, Bell, & Ballentine, 2019). According to the National Communication Association, communication is defined as “*a group of instructional programs that focus on how messages in various media are produced, used, and interpreted within and across contexts, channels, and cultures, and that prepare individuals to apply communication knowledge skills*

professionally” (Bell & Martin, 2019a). Simply put, communication is a process of sending and receiving messages.

A Leader’s Professional Communication Skills

The professional communication fields merge in the workplace, most often at the discretion of a leader in one or more forms simultaneously. *Organizational Communication* is the study of how in a complex system-oriented environment people send and receive information within the organization. *Business Communication* focuses on the study of primary use of both written and oral skills. *Corporate Communication* focuses on creating a desired world reputation and image of the organization. Therefore, when managers combine organizational communication, corporate communication and business communication principles with the main functions of management, this culmination represents the main theories of *Managerial Communication* as a field of study (Bell & Martin, 2008; Bell & Martin, 2019a).

Apolo, Baez, Pauker, and Pasquel, (2017) explore elements of corporate communication through identity and image. Using the appropriate type of work-place communication will lead to the path-goal theory of leadership. There are two major hypotheses in the path-goal theory of leadership: acceptability and motivation; acceptability focuses on leadership behavior and its acceptance by subordinates to the extent that the action provides an immediate source of satisfaction or instrumental to the ultimate fulfillment of the subordinate (Evans, 2002). On the other hand, Evans (2002), citing from House and Mitchell (1974), claims:

Motivational function of the leaders consists of increasing the number and kinds of personal payoffs to subordinates for work-goal attainment and making paths to these payoffs easier to travel by clarify the paths, reducing roadblocks and pitfalls and increasing the opportunities for satisfaction en route. Acceptance and motivation attribute to various forms of communication in the workplace (84).

There are different communication channels [a channel is the medium over which a message travels] and networks [networks are normally informal communication channels or grapevines for spreading gossip] used in the work setting by managers and employees to effectively disseminate and or extract vital information. A few examples: phone, web, video conferencing, intranet/internet, collaborating software, email, Google Docs, and instant messaging (McIntosh, Davis, Luecke, & American Management Associate, 2008). The type of communication channel chosen by a leader for sharing a message is an essential component in the change communication process, especially at the technical core, frontline of management (Baughman, Williams, Oatis, & Bell 2007; Bell & Martin, 2019b).

A barrier is any psychological or physical inhibitor to the flow of a message over its channel, from a source to the receiver, known as noise. Noise can be a complete barrier to message reception if not corrected. Several barriers challenge leaders’ communication effectiveness: defensiveness, feedback, physical distance, group size and status differences, internal conflict, groupthink, prejudgments and language issues (Bell, 2012b; Bell, 2013; McIntosh, Davis, Luecke, & American Management Associate, 2008; Nguyen et al, 2019; Williams, et al 2019). When faced with communication barriers, leaders must effectively demonstrate critical thinking and decision-making skills. Different types of decisions come in at different levels of an organization. The hierarchy of leaders plays a role in the effects of business decisions and to plan and control decisions must be strategic to overcome barriers (BPP Learning Media, 2013).

A Leader’s Emotional Intelligence Skills

Daniel Goleman, in his 1996 book “*What Makes a Leader,*” argues most effective leaders have a high degree of emotional intelligence (EI). Goleman outlines five skills of emotional intelligence that helps leaders maximize their team’s performance through communication. The five skills are: self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills (Goleman, 1996; Nguyen, et al, 2019).

The first skill of EI is *self-awareness*, which is the ability to recognize and understand our moods, emotions, what drives us, as well as their effect on others we encounter. Individuals that have a high self-awareness tend to be more self-confident, have realistic views of their self-assessment, and can be very frank and honest when admitting personal failures. This self-assessment will allow us to identify better areas of weakness in our communication that need course correcting. Goleman (1996) suggested that in his research, it was determined that many executives did not view self-awareness as important as it should be.

The second skill of EI is *self-regulation*, our ability to control or redirect disruptive impulses and moods (Goleman, 1996). It is also the partiality to suspend judgment-to think before acting or reacting in certain situations. In any organization, the best leaders that have this skill will be able to maintain higher integrity levels and trustworthiness from members of their team. These leaders will be able to be comfortable with ambiguity and the openness for change in this ever-growing global market (Drucker, 2004). Leaders are the catalysts for organizational change via their communication strategies. Leaders foster the climate of trust despite the vulnerabilities of trust (Bell, 2012b; Bell & Bodie, 2012b). This skill of EI can be challenging in stressful situations but exercising self-restraint will allow the individual in the workplace to be able to communicate effectively.

The third skill is *motivation*, the passion for working for reasons that go beyond compensation or status, or the tendency to pursue goals with energy and persistence (Goleman, 1996). Our success as a leader depends on our ability to communicate effectively (Bell & Martin, 2014). Individuals that can self-motivate themselves inadvertently lead by example without having to communicate at times verbally.

The fourth skill is *empathy*, ability to understand the emotional makeup of other people and the ability to treat people according to their emotional reactions (Goleman, 1996). Having an awareness of others requires the skill of empathy and attention to non-verbal cues such as visual, body language and environmental (Prati, Douglas, Ferris, Ammeter, & Buckley, 2003). Practicing empathy at a high level will allow for expertise in building and retaining talent, cross-cultural sensitivity, and better communication to clients and customers.

The fifth skill is the *social skill*. If performed at a high level, social skills will help leaders become more proficient in managing relationships and building networks. It also gives an ability to find common ground and build rapport while communicating (Goleman, 1996). Social skills allow better persuasiveness while communicating in the workplace. It will enable us to apply all of the five components of EI while communicating with individuals in an organization. Social skills are seen as a culmination of all the other dimensions of emotional intelligence. Figure 1 shows a summary of the five emotional intelligence skills leaders need to use and hallmarks for each skill.

FIGURE 1
GOLEMAN'S FIVE SKILLS OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

Self-Awareness	Self- Regulation	Motivation	Empathy	Social Skill
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The ability to recognize and understand your moods, emotions, and drivers, as well as their effect on others • Hallmarks: Self confidence, Realistic self assessment, and self deprecating sense of humor 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The ability to control or redirect disruptive impulses and moods • The propensity to suspend judgment- to think before acting • Hallmarks: Trustworthiness, integrity, comfort with ambiguity, and openness to change 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A passion to work for reasons beyond money or status. • A propensity to pursue goals with energy and persistence • Hallmarks: Strong drive to achieve, optimism in the face of failure, and organizational commitment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The ability to understand the emotional makeup of others. • Skill in treating people according to their emotional rections • Hallmarks: Expertise in building and retaining talent, cross-cultural sensitivity, and service to clients and customers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proficiency in managing realtionships and building networks. • Ability to find common ground and built rapport. • Hallmarks: Effectiveness in leading change, persuasiveness, and expertise in building and leading

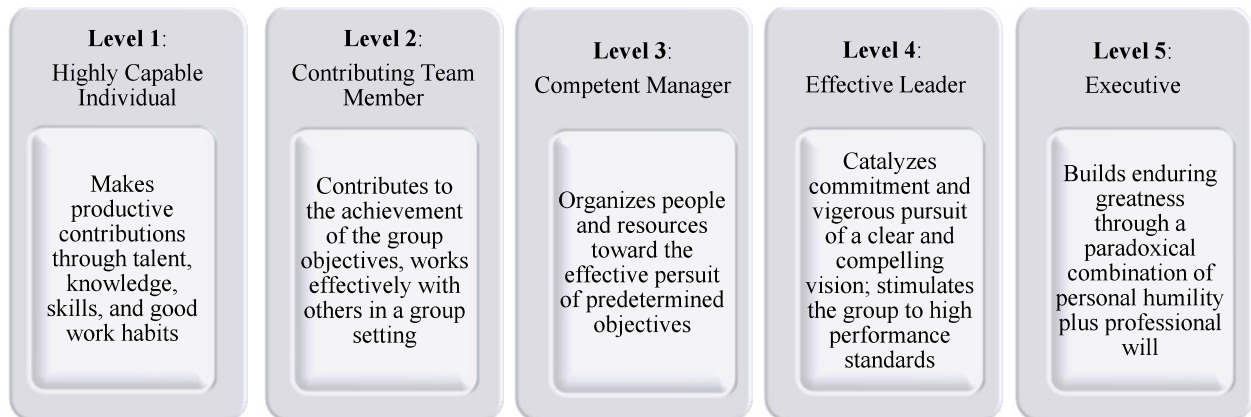
Goleman also created a new model, focusing on four key categories and various sub-categories within them. These categories are self-awareness, social awareness, self-management and relationship management (Goleman, 2000; Nguyen, White, Hall, Bell, & Ballentine, 2019). In retrospect, the norm was perceived to think that cognitive intelligence was the most important driving factor in job performance. Now, with a new generation of workers entering the workforce, millennials seem to need a different approach. That approach will have to incorporate more EI to cope with the change in the mindset of these workers (Goleman, 2006).

There is a positive relationship between emotional intelligence and communication effectiveness. Leaders with high self-regard are more probable to have effective communication in their organization (Jorfi & Jorfi, 2012). Effective leaders ensure that their team completely understands their behaviors, action plans, and information needs. Managers should understand that incivility in the workplace tends to be reciprocal; therefore, the climate of culture is largely mitigated by being civil towards each other (Shane-Joyce, & Bell 2010). This means that their communication works downward by asking questions and upward by looking for clarification responses: Management by Objectives has relevance in the application of emotional intelligence too (Drucker, 1954; Drucker, 2004). According to Andy Green, our emotional abilities allow us to grasp verbal and nonverbal clues in our communication channels. This will enable managers and employees in the workplace to pick up valuable clues as they try to communicate their messages (Green, 2009).

The Five Levels of Leadership

In 2001, The *Harvard Business Review* published an article explaining the importance of the five levels of leadership. Individuals at each level can produce high levels of success, but only one can make a significant impact on a company. The five levels of leadership shown in Figure 2 are: 1) Highly Capable Individual, 2) Contributing Team Member, 3) Competent Manager, 4) Effective Leader, and 5) the Executive (Collins, 2005).

FIGURE 2
THE FIVE LEVELS OF LEADERSHIP



The first level *Highly Capable* individual is the most basic level of leadership. It is where an individual defines who they are and whether or not they want to become a leader. At this level, this is where a person usually decides if they're going to settle where they are or take steps to progress up the ladder. Although they have good work habits and are productive, the minimum contribution to a goal is usually the output from this individual.

The second level is the *Contributing Team Member*. Not only does your level of contribution increase, but this level also requires you to connect and communicate with others in your group. Strong relationships are vital when you're in a leadership position, and that process begins at this particular stage. Developing a foundation for relationship building is the most important aspect of succeeding at this level of leadership.

The *Competent Manager* is the third level of leadership. This is where you begin to organize both people and resources to reach a goal. At this stage of the hierarchy, production is paramount. Managers have to be able to use their relationships, communication skills, work ethic and determination to produce and contribute to the bottom line. The competent manager leads by example and gets people to buy-in to reaching the set before them.

Level four is known as the *Effective Leader*. At this level, there's a commitment and pursuit of a clear and compelling vision. The leader stimulates the group to high-performance standards. The people that you're leading are now in the position to be developed to perform at a high level. Effective leaders understand the importance of producing quality results and communicating clearly to those in which they lead to achieve them.

The fifth level *Executive* leadership is an amalgamation of all four previous levels. The Executive sits atop the hierarchy and is responsible for transforming an organization from good to great (Collins, 2005). Executives have traits that separate them from the rest, most notably the ability to display a great deal of humility. Executives possess a level of drive that is unmatched, accepts blame when something goes awry, and shy away from seeking praise and adulation. At each level of leadership, each individual is committed to building a great organization through hard work and not through self-promotion (Pegg, 2017).

In order to become an effective leader, one must fulfill all requirements as listed above. You must be able to communicate effectively, display emotional intelligence at all times and learn how to lead by continually maintaining a genuine level of authenticity. Before leading others, one has to know thyself. Maintaining a healthy level of self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills are essential to becoming a great leader. These tried and true methods and basic rules will assure success to the individual who abides by them.

Effective leaders understand the importance of the techniques of effective communication in order to achieve the overall goals within their organization. This can be done as they work their way up throughout the five levels of leadership. Once all five levels of leadership are fulfilled, individuals are equipped with all the necessary tools needed to lead with confidence and become integral parts to their respective teams.

EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

Communication skills are paramount when navigating through competitive business environments. One must possess three key skills to be a better communicator and leader. They must be assertive, be an active listener, delegate responsibilities effectively and without ambiguity, and manage several points of view (Bell & Bodie, 2012a; Store, 2019). According to *Discovering Your Authentic Leadership*, the most successful leaders are those that are aware of their true selves. These leaders come across to their teams as positive and understanding because they are authentic, making communication channels easy to decode because the team is more open to the messenger (George, Sims, McLean, & Mayer, 2011). People can easily differentiate between someone who is putting on an act and someone authentic. Billionaire Mark Zuckerberg conducted a presentation for Facebook investors dressed in jeans and a hoodie because he is comfortable with being himself with no qualms about being authentic (Bradberry, 2018).

Effective leaders also have several ways to effectively obtain and circulate information within their organization in order to deliver their messages as clear and concisely as possible. The communication process can always change at a moment's notice, so leaders must be ready and willing to use all methods at his/her disposal. Groupthink, internal conflict, language issues and physical distance are a few examples of communication barriers that leaders will face as they navigate through their roles as managers and leaders. These barriers can be overcome by effective planning and smart decision making.

When one fully understands exactly what it takes to be a leader, it places them on a playing field above the rest. Effective leaders differentiate themselves because they have developed excellent communication skills and can apply them seamlessly in different ways to a diverse set of individuals. These skills can be cultivated by gaining knowledge from scholars of yesteryear who have dissected and analyzed the importance of management and communication. Since the professional working environment is constantly evolving, effective leaders must evolve along with it. However, through that evolution, core competencies such as intuition, critical thinking and active listening remain the same. The success trajectory of a manager depends heavily on those factors.

Effective leaders must be cognizant of the three dimensions that are directly linked to maintaining the status of an effective leader. Task structure, position power, and leader-member relations are all vital to helping leaders maintain situational control at all times. Within these three dimensions, leaders learn to display authority, focus on the tasks of their subordinates, and they establish the allegiance, trustworthiness, and support each subordinate can contribute.

The crux of maintaining a healthy and viable work environment is effective leadership. Organizations find themselves behind the eight ball when it comes to obtaining the necessary resources to prepare employees to become future leaders. Acquiring a firm understanding of both interpersonal components and organizational communications components could be a great asset to a future leader. Knowing your audience, perception and dialect are the key factors of these components.

The Seven Logics of Leadership

One of the most important attributes of a leader is how they handle themselves and their environment when their power is challenged (Rooke & Torbert, 2005). The ability to manage your own emotions and the emotions of others is what sets leaders apart (Burnham, 2018). In these moments of truth, a person's leadership style and approach to tough situations will be at the forefront. When a person knows themselves and the logic they possess, they will understand exactly what it takes for them to become leaders. Rooke and Torbert (2005) identified seven types of action logic: opportunist, diplomat, expert, achiever, individualist, strategist and alchemist.

- *An Opportunist* usually takes the "win at all costs" approach and may also be manipulative in the process. Although they are useful in emergency situations, few people want to follow their lead.
- *A Diplomat* avoids conflict and doesn't rock the boat. They aren't apt to make tough decisions when called upon.
- *An Expert* is a prodigious contributor who rules by logic and believes he or she is always right. Experts have view those with lesser expertise as non-existent, and can lack emotional intelligence.
- An *Achiever* is always open to feedback and are solely committed to achieving goals. However, they rarely partake in thinking outside the box.
- An *Individualist* is an excessive communicator who tends to operate in unorthodox ways. Their tendency to ignore rules that are in place eventually becomes problems to their colleagues and superiors.
- A *Strategist* is inordinate at handling conflict when it arises and are highly collaborative.
- An *Alchemist* tends to have charisma and can re-invent within an organization in historically significant ways. The changes an Alchemist can implement generally leads to society-wide changes.

Many organizations lack the proper tools and resources needed to develop high-level leaders that communicate effectively. Studies have shown that emotional intelligence helps drive successful communication in the workplace. Our research also suggests there are several barriers leaders are challenged within management communications. How will an organization train their leaders of the future?

Organizations must build first a strong foundation by starting with setting workplace communication standards. They must also: lead by example, encourage feedback and participation, clearly define roles and responsibilities, work towards a common goal, create a culture of respect, and leverage technology to effectively communicate. When these actionable steps are practiced at an organization, it allows for a positive atmosphere that can be conducive for effective leadership through managerial communication.

Best Practices of Leader as Effective Communicator

When laced with a complete understanding of managerial communication, a leaders' natural progression is to become an effective communicator in all facets. Many techniques can be used by leaders to apply their managerial communication knowledge, most notably when it comes to utilizing emotional intelligence (which is a good measure of agreeableness) in certain situations within the workplace amongst other professionals. There are four best practices leaders should implement as benchmarks for their future communication successes.

Best Practice #1

Organizations must implement quarterly (or yearly) training workshops for effective communication practices. Depending on the organization and structure, there should be personality tests given to all upper management during these workshops. This will allow individuals to self-reflect and become more self-aware of their strengths, opportunities, and traits that make them who they are. It helps to make leaders aware of how to communicate effectively with the different personality styles, allowing them to take a specific approach with each manager to deliver information in a way that it is received properly.

Best Practice #2

Each organization should have a succession plan for the future based on a communication audit. This should be utilized to pick out the top performers each quarter and allow them to further develop their emotional intelligence and overall managerial communication skills through internal seminars and workshops. This will enable managers to develop into leaders and for leaders to develop into effective communicators.

Best Practice #3

Managers with less than one-year experience or recent hires must attend a company led managerial communications workshop. The workshop will incorporate the standards for workplace communication; it will give tools and resources to help these managers develop into better communicators. As we have mentioned, we know that communication works upwards and downwards.

Best Practice #4

Conduct yearly peer and subordinate reviews, asking each employee to rate managers' communication effectiveness. This will allow for constructive feedback from team members and colleagues. If conducted properly, these results should be reviewed and discussed with your supervisor. An action plan should be put into place to work on any opportunities identified in the evaluation. This, as well as all the above recommendations, will allow for continuous development and training to help managers and the entire organization communicate effectively in the workplace.

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