

**COMM 402: Organizational Communication**  
**Spring 2015**  
**Dr. Ellen Hay**  
**Augustana College (Rock Island, IL)**

All readings are available on the course Moodle.

**COURSE OBJECTIVES:**

By the completion of this course students will have:

- Developed an understanding and explanation of cultural performance as a metaphor for organizational functioning.
- Articulated the values that underlie how organizations structure themselves to accomplish goals.
- Explained patterns for messages within organizations and the assumptions that are the basis for these messages.
- Discussed causes of and responses to organizational change and how basic organizational values are challenged during times of change.
- Evaluated organizational responses to conflict and crisis.

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS:**

Case Studies: The course is divided into five units. At the end of each unit, students will write a case analysis using concepts from the unit. See pp. 5-6 of the syllabus for more complete explanation of what is included in a case analysis and the rubric that will be used to evaluate each analysis. All students will do case #1. You can select one of the remaining four cases write-up NOT to do, but still should discuss.

- Three short case write-ups at 25 points each
- One full case write-up at 50 points

Case discussion participation: 6 points each + 1 point Rater for a total of 25 points

Class attendance, quizzes and participation: 5 points per class for a total of 110 points

Organizational Ethnography Slideshow: 40 points. See the syllabus for more information and procedures.

**TENTATIVE SCHEDULE:**

*Note: Augustana does semester length classes in 10 weeks rather than the traditional 15. Class sessions are longer. Assignments and activities will need to be adjusted for a traditional semester, probably making each unit three weeks rather than two.*

### Weeks 1 & 2-Culture as a metaphor for organizations

The management of ENRON regularly road motor-cross together, laughing as some in their midst received serious injury. The shiny, glass exterior of their headquarters was designed to "reflect" their forward thinking approaches to buying and selling energy. The history and values of an organization are reflected in its communication. Communication also works to create the history and values of organization. Traditions, stories, rituals, politics and power can be examined to better understand organizations what organizations value and promote. Readings:

- Sanchez, P. (2004) Defining corporate culture. *Communication World*, 21(6), 18-21.
- Pacanowsky, M.E. & Trujillo, N.O. (1983) Organizational communication as cultural performance. *Communication Monographs*, 50, 126-147.
- Aust, P.J. (2004) Communicated values as an indicator of organizational identity. *Communication Studies*, 55(4), 515-534.
- Barge, J. K. & Schlueter, D W. (2004). Memorable messages and newcomer socialization. *Western Journal of Communication*. 68 (3), 233-256; Do self-assessment at the end of *Organizational Culture* chapter p.519
- Cohen, R. (2012) Death of the Hull House: A nonprofit coroner's inquest. *Nonprofit Quarterly*.

### Weeks 3 & 4-Organizing the Organization

"In short, people are treated more as infants than competent human beings. ...organizations are willing to pay high wages and provide adequate seniority if mature adults will, for eight hours a day, behave in a less than mature manner!" (Argyris, 1957) Since the industrial revolution, organizational theorists and researchers have examined how best to structure a group of individuals to accomplish their objectives. The various approaches demonstrate a widely differing view of human nature. Some advocate controlling human behavior through extensive systems of punishments and rewards. Others argue that humans want to make valuable contributions and only need to be empowered to do so. Readings:

- Grodsky, T. (2010). *History of Management Thought*. Polaris-UMUC
- Neuliep, J.W. (1996). The influence of theory x and y management style on ethical behavior in organizations. *Journal of Social Behavior and Personality* 11, 301-12.
- Bowen, S.A. (2004). Organizational factors encouraging ethical decision making: An exploration into the case of an exemplar, *Journal of Business Ethics*, 52: 311-324
- Senge, P.M. (1990). *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization*, Chp.1. New York, Doubleday.
- Argyris, C. (1994). Good communication that blocks learning. *Harvard Business Review*, 76(3), 98-105.
- Ouchi, W.G. (1981) *Theory Z: How American Business and Meet Japanese Challenge*. Chps. 4 & 8. New York: Avon Books.

### Weeks 5 & 6-Who Says What When?

"The greatest single loss of time to get anything done in an organization is caused by rules that require ten people to communicate when only two people need to" (Herzberg, 1982). Communication in an organization proceeds through a number of channels and results in both foreseen and unintended consequences. How communication occurs and what messages are sent are powerful indicators of how human nature is viewed within the organization.

- Thatcher, M. (2003). The grapevine: Communication tool or thorn in your side. *SCM*, 7(5), 1-5.
- Sager, K.L. (2008). An exploratory study of the relationships between Theory X/Y assumptions and superior communicator style. *Management Communication Quarterly*, 22(2), 288-312.
- McCroskey, J.C. & Richmond, V. (2000). Applying reciprocity and accommodation theories to supervisor-subordinate communication. *Journal of Applied Communication*, 28 (3), 278-89.
- Griffin, E. (2012) *Structuration Theory in A First Look at Communication Theory, 8<sup>th</sup> Edition*. New York:

McGraw Hill.

- Parson, M. & Urbanski, S. (2012) Recognizing dysfunctional communications a means of improving organizational practices. *Online Journal of Communication and Media Technologies*, 2 (4).
- Steimel, S. (2013) Connecting with volunteers: Memorable messages and volunteer identification, *Communication Research Reports*, 30 (1), 12-21
- Conger, J.A. (1998) How generational shifts will transform organizational life. in *Organizations of the Future*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Hoover, E. (2007) New study finds most narcissistic generation on campus, watching you tube. *Chronicle of Higher Education*, February 28.
- Hersey, P. & Johnson, D.E., (1998) Situational leadership in the multicultural organization. In *Organizations of the Future*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

### Weeks 7 & 8 Communication, Conflict and Crisis

In the fall of 2011, one of the most storied college football programs was tarnished by the actions of an assistant coach. The university president, two vice-presidents, and its long-time coach were dismissed. Organizations regularly face conflict and crisis. As was the case at Penn State, sometimes the organizational culture and communication actually create the crisis. In other instances, communication is vital in addressing the situation. The response to instances of conflict and crisis reflect the ethical standards and communication patterns of the organization.

- Article based on: Rahim, M.A. (2002). Toward a theory of managing organizational conflict. *The International Journal of Conflict Management*, 13 (3), 206-225.
- Allyn, D. (2010) Mission mirroring: Understanding conflict in nonprofit organizations. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 40(4) 762-769
- Meluck, A.L. & Walter, H.L (2012) Conflict Management Styles and Argumentativeness: Examining the Differences between Face-to-Face and Computer-Mediated Communication. *Ohio Communication Journal* (50) 31-47.
- Dubrovski, D. (2009). Management mistakes as causes of corporate crises: Managerial implications for countries in transition. *Total Quality Management & Business Excellence*. (20)1, 39-59.
- Zoch, L.M. & Duhé, S.F. (1997) "Feeding the media" during a crisis. *Public Relations Quarterly*, 15-19.
- Rugis, P. (2011) *Domino's Pizza*. Ontario: Richard Ivey School of Business.
- Coombs, W.T. (2007) Protecting organization reputation during a crisis: The development and application of situational crisis communication theory. *Corporate Reputation Review*, 10, 163-176.
- Sisco, H.F. (2012). Nonprofit in crisis: An examination of the applicability of Situational Crisis Communication Theory. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 24, 1-17.

### Weeks 9 & 10 Communicating Change

In the 1950's Howard Johnson restaurants provided travelers with wholesome food in a predictable, clean environment. Known for its 28 flavors of ice cream, the organization was seen as innovative, and their stock price reflected their popularity. Twenty-five years later the company was sold, and now only three of the 800 restaurants remain. What happened? What changes occurred in our society? Why wasn't the organization able to identify and adapt to a changing environment? Can organizations change, yet remain true to their stated mission and values? When organizations change what happens to the people who are a part of the organization?

Readings include:

- Williams, E.A & Connaughton, S.L. (2012) Expressions of identifications: The nature of talk and identity tensions among organizational members in a struggling organization. *Communication Studies*, 63, 457-481.
- Kreigel, R. & Brandt, D. (1992) *Scared Cows Make the Best Burgers*. Chp. 2. New York: Warren Books.
- Smeltzer, L.R. (1991) An analysis of strategies for announcing organization-wide change. *Group and Organization Management*, 16(5), 5-24.

Torppa, C. B. & Smith, K.L. (2011) Organizational change management: A test of the effectiveness of a communication plan. *Communication Research Reports*, 28(1). 62-73.

Strategic planning as a change vehicle.  
*Authentically Augustana* (2005)  
*Affirm, Assure and Assess* (2011)  
*Augustana 2020*

Wind, J. & Crook, C. (2009). From mental models to transformation. *Rotman Magazine, Spring*, 29-33.

Sirkin, H.L., Keenan, P. & Jackson, A. (2005). The hard side of organizational change. *Harvard Business Review*, 87(2), 42-48.

## **CASE STUDY ANALYSIS**

The case study method of teaching and learning is well-suited to our course in organizational communication. The cases allow students to apply (not just memorize) the theories, concepts and research that we are learning about in class. By following the case analysis process, students develop critical thinking abilities that will contribute to their future success in a variety of organizations. Communication skills are also enhanced through the written and oral consideration of each case.

### **Five Step Process**

- I. Problem Statement  
 What is the overall problem that this organization and these individuals face? What are some of the ways that the problem manifests itself?
- II. Problem Analysis  
 What are the causes of the problem? What are the effects of the problem? How does organizational communication theory and research help us understand these causes and effects?
- III. Possible Solutions  
 What are the options in addressing this situation? What possible solutions are available?
- IV. Criteria and selection of best solution  
 What criteria will you use to decide on the best solution? Of the options available, which is the best? Why does this option best address these criteria?
- V. Implementation of Solution  
 What action steps need to be taken to implement the best option? Who should do each step? When should these be done? How will the effectiveness of the solution be monitored and evaluated?

### **Written analysis**

The written analysis is essential a paper with five parts. The questions above are not to be answered per se, but the response should be integrated into your discussion of each of the five steps. The written analysis will be evaluated using the rubric. The written analysis is due on the day of discussion and will not be accepted after that day. Short analyses include the first two parts of the above outline. Students can choose which of analyses will be short and which long.

### **Discussion**

Each of the five cases will be discussed in class. Your participation in these discussions will be monitored by two-three of your classmates. They will keep track of the number of responses you make, the type of response that you make, and their appraisal of the quality of your response. (See rubric below) Final points will for each discussion will be determined by Hay using the data

provided in terms of number and quality of participation. There is no way to make-up a missed discussion.

+		-
Original thought		Repeats thought
Applies class material		Not relevant to class
Clear		Fuzzy

**COMM 402: ORGANIZATIONAL COMMUNICATION-Short WRITTEN CASE**

Name _____	Case # _____
<b>I. Problem statement</b>	
Problem is clear. Who the decision-maker is, what decision must be made and what constraints are in place?	2 points _____
Problem is described using language appropriate to the field.	
Ramifications of the problem are definite.	
<b>II. Problem analysis</b>	
Clear, coherent reasons/causes of the problem are stated.	2 points _____
Explanation of reasons/causes using:	
Class discussion, lectures, visits and videos are included	7 points _____
Assigned readings are integrated.	8 points _____
Previous class material is integrated.	2 points _____
<b>III. Writing</b>	
Freedom from mechanical errors	2 points _____
Bibliography	1 points _____
<b>VII. Supplemental comments</b>	1 points _____

**COMM 402: ORGANIZATIONAL COMMUNICATION-Long WRITTEN CASE**

Name _____	Case # _____
<b>I. Problem statement</b>	
Problem is clear. Who the decision-maker is, what decision must be made and what constraints are in place?	5 points _____
Problem is described using language appropriate to the field.	
Ramifications of the problem are definite.	
<b>II. Problem analysis</b>	
Clear, coherent reasons/causes of the problem are stated.	3 points _____
Explanation of reasons/causes using:	
Class discussion, lectures, visits and videos are included	10 points _____
Assigned readings are integrated.	10 points _____
Previous class material is integrated.	2 points _____
<b>III. Possible Solutions</b>	5 points _____
Several options for addressing the problem are described.	
<b>IV. Criteria and Solution Selection</b>	5 points _____
Criteria for selecting a solution are articulated.	
Criteria are applied to the selection of the best solution.	
<b>V. Solution Implementation</b>	5 points _____
Who is responsible for overseeing the solution?	
What is the time line for implementation?	
How will success be evaluated?	
<b>VI. Writing</b>	
Freedom from mechanical errors	2 points _____
Bibliography	2 points _____
<b>VII. Supplemental comments</b>	1 points _____

## Organizational Ethnography

For the final project in COMM 402, you will work in a team to prepare a slide show (with embedded narration) on a particular organization that you have researched throughout the term.

Once your team has selected your organization, you should plan to:

- Visit site(s) and observe as much as possible.
- Conduct interviews with personnel and other continuants.
- Review organizational documents, websites etc.
- Research published information about the organization.

Throughout this research, you should keep very carefully field notes. Try to describe what you are experiencing with as much detail as possible.

### Project description

The slide show should be 8-10 minutes in length and should integrate your observations of the organization with your understanding of the theories and concepts that we have studied during the term. Specifically, you should discuss the:

- Culture-What type of culture is it? What performances support this judgment?
- Structural characteristics-What type of structure has evolved? How is the structure evident?
- Flow of communication-What types of upward and downward, horizontal and vertical communication occurs? What networks have emerged?
- Handling of conflict and crisis-What types of conflicts and crises are prevalent? How are these anticipated? How are they handled?
- Change strategies-What forces have caused the organization to change? How has the organization assimilated or resisted these changes?

Once you have made your observations about the organization, you should discuss two to three conclusions you have drawn from this information. For example, given what you've learned, what challenges might this organization face in the future? Or why has this organization been in existence for so long? Or why would this be a good place to work?

### Paper evaluation

- Application of appropriate theories & concepts 10 pts.
- Rich examples and details to support observations 10 pts.
- Scrum planning (checked throughout course) 10 pts.
- Organization and cohesion 5 pts.
- Mechanics/Slide preparation 5 pts.

## MODIFIED SCRUM FOR ETHNOGRAPHY PLANNING

SCRUM is a procedure that many organizations use to allow talented individuals to work independently but still collaboratively. Your group will be adopting a modified SCRUM process so that you have experience in this approach to team work.

**Goal:** Create a 10-12 minute narrated slide show on your chosen organization, noting aspects of its culture, structure, communication patterns and networks, conflicts and crises, and management of change.

Task 1:

- Meet with your group and develop norms/rules of behavior to help your group avoid some of the problems that groups typically confront.
- Brainstorm on possible organizations that you are interested in learning more about and then select one that you will study.
- On \_\_\_\_\_, submit your rules and organization.

Task 2: Develop a timeline for your project, noting points of feedback on tasks and deadlines.

- You have five major parts to complete (listed above) and four major processes: research, script writing, slide production, show preparation
- Suggestions:
  - Set big deadlines first-“Have organizational culture script written and slides planned.” “Slide show preparation”
  - Break tasks to complete the big deadlines manageable parts-something that can be done in 30-60 minutes. “Research organization’s history” “Write script for organization’s history” “Identify or create slides for organization’s history” “Research a crisis that the organization has/may face” “Interview the human resources manager”
  - Tasks will become clearer as we progress through the class so you may need to tweek your plans every week or so. Your final chart will be due with your show.
  - Assign tasks equally.
  - Hold each other accountable for completing each task. We will have some time in class for you to check your progress but you should also plan weekly meetings. You will be evaluating each other’s contributions at the end so it is important that you note who has and has not fulfilled their obligations.
  - Start your planning with sticky notes and then convert it to the attached chart.