

WHY THE LIBRARY AND COMPUTING CENTER DIVORCE? A PROPOSAL FOR CONSTRUCTING A COMMUNICATION PATTERN

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ABSTRACT

This proposal is to form an efficient communication pattern, which may be tested and modified in the future by investigating the librarians and information technicians who had been worked together in the mergers of the library and computing center and separated later. Because the development of information technology has greatly changed the pattern of accessibility and delivery of information, most of people see the commonalities for bringing the two units together. Indeed, in one form of service or another, storage, retrieval, input, and output of information are common to both. Therefore, there are 16% mergers of Taiwanese higher education campuses; however, the two units do not usually communicate well. Actually, there are almost 3% of mergers separated after merging for a period of time-so called as a divorce. Maybe the two units are not prepared for their charge and co-exist in the uneasy juxtaposition. It does not matter if merging or being independent, the efficient communication between the librarians and information technicians is the key for offering a qualitative information service. Therefore, the communication pattern is anticipated to create an efficient communication, to firm the two units and the mergers, to offer a qualitative service, and to benefit all information users.

INTRODUCTION

This study proposes the existence of a communication pattern, which will be tested and modified in the future research. In this digital age, the common goals and missions of libraries and computing centers are to offer quality services for all sectors of their institution. To achieve the common goals and missions of libraries and computing centers throughout Taiwan, there were 26 mergers of library and computing centers (hereafter referred as MLCC) on Taiwanese campus in 2005 and there were an additional 34 MLCC in 2008. However, many of the two units did not communicate well resulting in 5 merger breakups, hereafter called a divorce. This study assumes that efficient communication between the librarians and information technology (hereafter referred as IT) specialist is the key for offering quality information service to benefit all information users involved no matter if the units are merged or separated. This study will investigate the benefits to the librarianship and the future professionalism of Library and Information Study (LIS), the interaction between the librarians and IT specialists, which will aid to improve the inter-communication between the librarians, IT specialists, and campus administrators.

COMMUNICATION

Definition

Communication is defined as a process by which one assigns and conveys meaning in an attempt to share understanding. In other words, it is an act of passing on information and processing it by which meanings are exchanged as to produce understanding. This act may include auditory means, such as speaking, singing and voice tone. It may also include physical means, such as body language, gesticulation, physical touch, eye contact, and of course, written. It's very important that what is to be shared and to be understood must hold a common purpose, must be commonly known, and must be in some way communicated.

Communication is also a social interaction, which happens within a context with at least two interacting agents called a sender and receiver, an encoder and decoder, or codifier and de-codifier. The agents can involve human beings, or machines, such as computers or phones. When a machine interface is involved in the communication process, it serves a two-way role communicational channel. In most cases channels are defined as optic, acoustic or electronic, and work with different carriers of information.

To sum it up, the purpose of communication is to achieve goals of individuals or organizations by sending and digesting information, ideas, attitudes, knowledge and meanings via tools, which may be human beings and or organizations or external machine-interfaces. The accessible tools of communication include auditory and physical means, the content of communication shall be an attempt in some way communicated.

Communication Study

The study of communication processes and their effects has become an inseparable part of policy making in business, education, industry, and government. Philosophy deals with such fundamental aspects of communications as the existence of consciousness, the acquisition of representation of knowledge, the nature of the mind, and the logical organization and analysis of symbols and the way in which symbols are related to action. Therefore, according to Littlejohn (2002), "The term communication theory can refer to a single theory, or it can be used to designate the collective wisdom found in the entire body of theories related to communication (p.3)".

Therefore, a study of communication is too diverse, and its multiple definitions are unavoidable. According to the philosophical assumptions and the communicative actions of Littlejohn (2002), his relative communication study separated communication into the two types. There are eight clusters of theories in the first type, and every cluster shares a similar philosophical assumptions. They are:

1. System Theory
2. Theories of Signs and Language
3. Theories of Discourse
4. Theories of Message Production
5. Theories of Message Reception and Processing, Theories

6. Theories of Symbolic Interaction, Structuralism, and Convergence

7. Theories of Social and Cultural Reality, and

8. Theories of Experience and Interpretation

In view of real communicative actions, the relationship within those communicative subjects, and the contextual themes, according to researcher Littlejohn's book (2002), there are three communicative relations in the second type of communication study. They are communication within group decision-making, communication within organizational networks, and communication via media. Since this study focuses on the organizational communication between libraries and computing centers, communication within organizational networks will be discussed in depth in the following paragraphs.

COMMUNICATION AND ORGANIZATION

Communication in Organization

An organization is "a systematic arrangement of people brought together to accomplish some specific purpose" (Robbins & DeCenzo, 2005, p. 4). There are diverse viewpoints to explain an organization: a machine, an organism, a brain, or a political system. An important concept existing within organizations is connectedness or cohesiveness. That is why effective communication is needed in organizations. Organizational communication occurs whenever at least one person who occupies a position in an organization interprets a message from another source. A library is an organization and a computing center is an organization as well. Both of these two organizations need to communicate with each other to satisfy the information needs of campus users. It does not matter whether these two organizations are merged or separated.

However, there is a different organizational culture within each different organization. So, both organizations thinking, decision making, and behaviours are governed by their professional fields and trainings. In other words, what communication occurs within each organization and what the communication means depends on the receptors within the individual organizational cultures.

Pace and Faules (1994) described an organization as a preexisting structure or machine, and communication may be conceived of as "a tangible substance that flows upward, downward, and laterally within the container" (Putnam, 1983, p. 39). Then, the organization only needs communication to achieve a particular goal and the communication just an objective within an organization system. But if the organization is conceived of as people interacting and giving meaning to those interactions, then communication is the organization. In other words, communication becomes an organization-making tool.

The above two opposing organizational communication positions are the bases for constructing the communicative patterns between librarians and IT specialists.

Barriers in Organizational Communication

Any number of barriers can retard or distort effective communication. In this section, according to Robbins and DeCenzo (2005), the researcher highlights the six significant barriers to communication.

Filtering refers to a sender purposely manipulating information so it will be received and interpreted more favorably by the receiver. *Selective perception* impacts receivers in the communication process. The receiver selectively sees and or hears information based on their needs, motivations, experience, background, and other personal characteristics as they decode the message. *Information overload* makes people tend to be selective, ignore, pass over, or forget information. They may put off further processing until the over-load situation is over. *Emotions* refer to how the receiver feels at the time of receipt of a communication and emotions influence how he or she interprets it. Extreme emotions such as euphoria or depression are most likely to get in the way of effective communication.

Specialized words or jargon mean different things in different professional fields. Age, education, and cultural background are just three of the more simple variables that can influence the language a person uses and the meaning he or she gives to a word. These words may also be called “buzzwords” or technical jargon. The point is that although both sides probably speak a common language-Chinese—their use of that language is far from being uniform. A good example is husbands and wives, if they both tend to assume that the words and terms they used mean the same to each other, sooner or latter, they may end up divorced because this assumption is incorrect. *Communication apprehension (CA)* is when a person suffers some form of debilitating communication apprehension or anxiety. CA can be a serious problem because it can affect a whole category of communication techniques. People who suffer from CA experience higher levels of tension and anxiety when communicating either orally or in written form, or both. So, there is a need to be aware that there are some fields of people with limited oral communicative training to do their job effectively, and these barriers may occur in personal and organizational communication.

Communication and Organizational Culture

Organizational culture is probably one of the most difficult concepts to define for all organizational relative theories, and it may be proposed as one way to answer the question: What makes librarians or IT specialists? Thus most organization theorists define the meaning of culture as a particular way of life among a group of people or a professional field whose people have a similar or shared meanings, understandings, values, belief systems, and knowledge.

Social psychologist, Schein (2004) described organizational culture as existing on three levels: on the surface we find artifacts, underneath artifacts lie values and behavioral norms, and at the deepest level there lies a core of beliefs and assumptions.

Organizational cultures tend to differ on the importance of contextual influences and the meaning that individuals interpret what is an actually said or written in light of who the sender is. Some countries, like China, Korea, Japan, and Vietnam are high-context cultures. They rely heavily on nonverbal and subtle situational cues when communicating with others. What is not said may be more significant than what is said.

For example, a communicator's official status, place in society, and reputation carry considerable weight in communications. In contrast, people from Europe and North America echo a low-context culture. Westerners, in general, rely essentially on words to convey meaning and body language or formal titles are secondary to spoken and written words. It is not easy to determine whether librarians work in high cultural context and that IT specialists work in low cultural context, but there are definitely communication differences between the two professional cultures.

Libraries and Computing Centers

The history of academic libraries is as long as the history of universities. A library is seen as the heart of the university. In contrast to library history, the age of the academic computing centers is roughly 40 years old. Their history started around the late 1960s when academic libraries began to apply computer technology to their operations (Hsueh, 1997, pp. 4-5).

According to "The Decree of Establishment and Management of the University Library (DEMUL)", in Taiwan, a library must be established on every campus, but the computing center is not required. In other words, every campus must have a library, but not every campus must have a computing center. Therefore, librarians have a more lawful and traditional status within the academic environment than computing center specialists. In many ways, the two units are not parallel (see Tab.1).

Tab.1: The Status of Librarians and IT specialists on Taiwanese Campuses

	Librarians	IT Specialists
<i>Legal Status</i>	Essential unit	Dependent unit
<i>Organizational Hierarchy Status</i>	Highest unit	Second-layered unit
<i>Personnel</i>	National examination and LIS degree required	IT background and experience required
<i>Establishment Law</i>	Must follow the "DEMUL"	Depends on individual campus
<i>Characteristics</i>	Unique and academic value	Mostly Administrative value
<i>Director Requirement</i>	Faculty who is assigned by the president	Hired from related professionals
<i>Mission Statement</i>	Proclamation on the "DEMUL"	No formal proclamation
<i>Salary</i>	Higher	Lower
<i>Position Status</i>	Tenure	By yearly contract

Note. Translated by the researcher from, "An Investigation into the Issue of the Merging or Dividing of Library and Computer Center in Universities", by Liao, Yu-sheng(1996), Bulletin of the Library Association of China, 56, p.5.

Merger of Libraries and Computing Centers

In business or economics, a merger is a combination of two companies into one larger company. Most business enterprises refer to mergers as "M & As" (mergers and acquisitions), a concept or activity that involves the marriage or coming together of two or more organizations into the same area of business.

According to Battin (1984), the trend of libraries and computing centers in terms of mission and function has been one of convergence since the early 1980s. Information technology (IT) has had a great impact on libraries. Not only has it changed the way libraries have functioned, but also forced organizational restructuring.

Yang (2004) research may present the most current and accurate state of organizational communication affairs of MLCC in Taiwan. She found the internal operation procedures and work assignments were usually not efficiently reorganized and in sync before merging. Generally speaking, the middle managers involved in the mergers did not see the mergers as being as successful as the decision-makers did. In communication and negotiation, the relationship among staff of the two units is going fairly well, but the understanding of each side's professionals does not show much improvement (p.30-32).

Based on the researcher's investigation (2005), there were 26 MLCC completed within Taiwan from 1997 to 2005. This most current information shows there were 34 MLCC in Taiwan in 2008, but there were 5 MLCC separated mergers. The MLCC rate increase was 3.8%, but the divorce rate was 19.2%.

According to the above statistics and comparison, which presents the divorce rate of MLCC, people may ask: Why divorce? Is something wrong? Are there organizational communications barriers existing in the MLCC?

In general, there are significant cultural differences that exist between the two the two professional environments. Academic librarianship was defined as having stability, conservatism, and resistance to change and its administrative structure characterized by hierarchy, authority, and bureaucracy. According to Pitter and Oberg (1994, ¶10), "the individuals attracted to librarianship, by and large, have been motivated by altruism and a desire to improve society". On other hand, the IT specialists in computing centers have been defined from their inception as having flexibility, innovation, and responsiveness to change. Pitter and Oberg (1994, ¶17) mentioned that "computing has attracted entrepreneurial individuals who demand flexibility in their work schedules and exercise a considerable degree of independence in their functioning".

To sum it up, the values of librarianship place and emphasis on service orientation, group-oriented work, a high use of training and standardization. Whereas the values of IT professionals place an emphasis on technology orientation, independent work, aggressiveness, and decisiveness.

COMMUNICATIVE PATTERN

Decision making has a different impact on the day-to-day operations of the two departments and the work-life of librarians and IT specialists, so that there are a lot of challenges involved in an MLCC, such as redefining the professional roles for the librarians and information technical IT specialists, re-allocating existing personnel, and re-conceptualizing the organizational culture (Fulton, 2001). Therefore, no matter what is the reason for causing the divorce of the MLCC, and no matter the two units will keep separating or merger, there are three proposed reasons for this pattern.

First, the leaders of the MLCC are from two different organizational cultures, through this communication pattern, leaders can have organizational foresight and vision that

produces a congruous workplace. Secondly, the study concerns with the incongruent voices from both librarians and information technology (IT) specialists of both the merged and non-merged campuses (Yang, 2004). The two units often consider themselves to be culturally and fundamentally different. Therefore, it is not difficult to feel the incongruent voices after merging, and the incongruent voices may impact the efficiency of the new merger. Third, the study also considers the cooperation of the libraries and computing-centers, no matter formal or informal, no matter merged or not merged, they still need to communicate and collaborate to serve the campus users.

A communication pattern is performed by relying on communication flow, and, considering the common communicative barriers and the different professional and organizational cultures of the two units, it is no wonder that problematic communication exists.

To distinguish the differences between libraries and computing centers, professionals and organizational culture categories have been developed. In the professional category, IT workers differ from librarians in their use of terminology (jargon), selective filtering, communication techniques, and orientation training. IT workers culture category differs from the librarians' culture category, because of the emotional characteristics, workplace environment/atmosphere, individuals, and administrative structure.

Neff (1985) saw the similarities between the two units. For example, the library is a repository and acquires and borrows packaged information, and the computing center stores, retrieves, inputs, and distributes digital information, and so do most of the administrators on campuses. They saw the commonalities for bringing the two units together and ignored their differences (at least 8 aspects). In one form or another, service, storage, retrieval, input, and output of information are common to both units. Why has the trend for divorce existed? According to Shapiro and Long (1994), "... The transition will not be smooth because there are enormous cultural differences and mistrust between library and computing organizations that must be bridged" (p. 290). The two units have a lot in common as they are both concerned with tools and information, but they both have the same fears of takeover, replacement, and competition. The similarities between the two units are not the only reasons for mergers, but they are also the reasons for mistrust and miscommunication. Therefore, the eight one-way arrow diagrams in the figure 1 below show the eight main keys for building better communication to achieve an improved cooperation. To sum it up, the researcher designed this communicative pattern from gaining a better understanding of the organizational differences and using these 8 differences as a bridge for conquering communicative barriers. When the two units communicate, they must keep the 8 facets in minds, and respect these 8 aspects. Please refer to the following figure 1 to get more understanding regarding the above description. This pattern may be used to explore the opinions both of the librarians and IT specialists, and the implication towards communications patterns may be used a combination of qualitative and quantitative research for the future. After investigating, the results are expected to improve the cooperation between librarians, IT specialists, and campuses administrators.

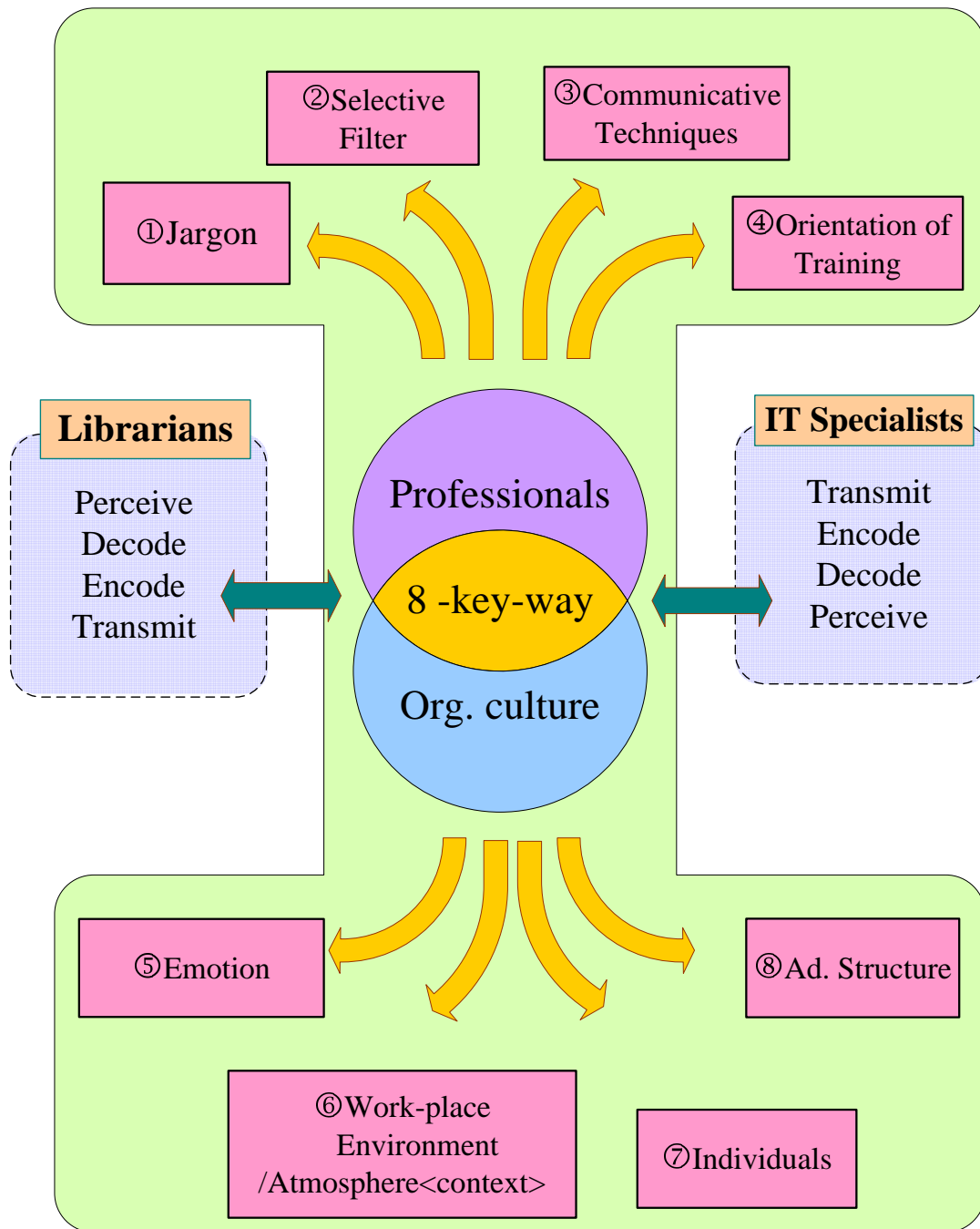


Fig. 1: Communicative Patter

Conducted by the researcher

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BRIEF BIOGRAPHY

Dr. Chiou-shu J. Hwang is an assistant professor of Graduate School of Business and Management, and works as the library dean of Meiho Institute of Technology, which locates in the most southern county of Taiwan island. Changing the *library management model* in order to offer more efficient and practical service to stimulate the willingness of researching, teaching, and studying on campuses is her dream, and the dream has no way to come true except being a dean of a library. Therefore, she became the rare dean with a doctoral degree of LIS in Taiwanese academic libraries in 2006.