

Boundary Spanners As Organizational Communicators: An Empirically and Theoretically Suggested Competency Model and Curriculum

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Introduction. In discussing the management of information Shapero (1985) made the following claim:

A strong case can be made that anything that improves the quality and quantity of information available to a professional and/or improves the professional's ability to receive, process, apply, and transmit information will improve that professional's productivity.

This description of the dependent relationship between productivity and organizational communication generates an interest in boundary spanning activities (BSA) and boundary spanning personnel (BSP) within and among organizations. The literature indicates that without boundary spanning communication the ability of an organization to receive, process, apply, and transmit information suffers. The organization becomes vulnerable to its environment because it lacks information needed for strategic decision making.

This article examines, therefore, the nature and functions of BSA and BSP within American organizations, especially organizations concerned with rapidly changing technology. The discussion includes a review of literature germane to this topic, followed by a statement of generalizations about BSA and BSP. Using these generalizations to describe a possible competency model for BSA and BSP, this paper concludes with a tentative proposal for preparing boundary spanners educationally.

Literature Review. Keller and Holland (1975) studied boundary spanning roles in a research and development organization. They discovered that BSA differ substantially depending on the interorganizational relations and context. When the organizations which are spanned have conflicting goals the boundary spanners can experience strong role pressures and tensions due to conflicting expectations for performance.

Adams (1976) presented an overview of BSA that emphasized negotiation, persuasion, and conflict resolution. He recognized that organizations need to communicate with other systems to receive input and to dispose of their output, and that this need requires specialized boundary spanning roles.

He emphasized the psychological problems BSP may encounter in their roles. Their distance psychologically and geographically from their parent organization, their need to be sensitive to the preferences, needs, beliefs, attitudes, and norms of external organizations may create suspicion toward them, and a desire to monitor closely their behaviour by the parent organizations. BSP must reflect their own system to the outside and reflect the outside to their system. These activities open the door to suspicion toward themselves from inside and outside. Role conflict, therefore, may characterize BSA, to which boundary spanners must adjust.

Adams discussed at length the problems BSP encounter as negotiators. He observed that the success of BSP required skills in human relations. BSP must neutralize their perceived low trustworthiness and loyalty from within and their perceived low credibility from without.

Aldrich and Herker (1977) examined the functions served by boundary roles, the generation of boundary units and roles relating organizations to their environments, and the environmental and organizational sources of variation in the structure of boundary roles.

They reported that BSA include information processing and external representation. First, boundary roles serve as a main line of organizational defense against information overload. BSP may serve as information transmitters, filtering incoming information and facilitating information communication into their organizations. BSP act selectively on relevant information, summarizing it and then directing it to the units that need it. When the information is complex and cannot be quantified easily BSP must engage in "uncertainty absorption." They must draw inferences from perceived facts and communicate to insiders only the inferences.

Second, BSP act to counter the tendency of organizations to move toward a state of internal compatibility and compromise. Internal pacifism, if prolonged and hallowed as corporate culture, can isolate the units of organizations from important external influences. Left unchecked this isolation can jeopardize the effectiveness and threaten the survival of the organization. BSP may counter this trend by continuously scanning the environment for new technological developments, innovations in organizational design, and relevant trends in related fields. This role prevents the organization from premature ossification and from becoming mismatched with its environments. Aldrich and Herker suggested, therefore, that an organization's ability to adapt to environmental contingencies depends in part on the expertise of boundary role incumbents in selecting, transmitting, and interpreting information originating in the environment.

The authors also recognized that much of the information to which BSP must attend comes from the outside, and that the directives given from the core of their parent organization may be no longer relevant in light of their most recently received information. BSP will inadequately perform their responsibilities, therefore, if they only receive information and follow policy. They must go beyond policy and respond situationally in order to keep their organization adequately informed and adapting to changing environments. Aldrich and Herker hypothesize, therefore, that an organization's ability to cope with environmental constraints depends in part on the ability of BSP to achieve a compromise between organizational policy and environmental constraints, and to choose strategic moves to overcome constraints.

Third, Aldrich and Herker argue that as organizational complexity increases and as technology requires increased internal differentiation the organization will be unable to depend upon informal BSA, and will formalize the position and the functions. They suggest that organizations with mediating technology, such that link clients or customers with each other, should have the highest proportion of boundary roles. Organizations with long-linked technology (food processing) will attempt to buffer most of their units from the environment, and will have a lower proportion of boundary roles. Organizations with intensive technology, which depend upon the object being worked on (a hospital) will also buffer most of their units and roles from the environment. They should also have a lower proportion of BSA, except that the high degree of professionalism their staff members practice includes a great deal of boundary spanning in order to keep abreast of changing technology.

Concerning the power bases upon which BSP may draw, the authors suggest that expertise probably is their primary power base. BSP are expected to exercise discretion and to be able to recognize contingencies. The information that filters into an organization from BSP is often their inferences from raw data they have received. They create, in fact, organizational intelligence, and once created intelligence tends to be accepted. To the extent that their created intelligence enhances their organization's ability to adapt adequately, they will be able to exercise power based on their expertise.

Aldrich and Herker conclude from their analysis that boundary spanning roles link environmental characteristics and organizational structure, with the further stipulation that organizations face multiple environments and can have a variety of boundary roles for units with different structural characteristics.

Schwartz and Jacobson (1977) examined the place and function of the liaison person (boundary spanner) within an organization. They classified all members of the organization into three roles: group members, liaison, and isolate. They obtained a record of the regular dyadic linkages that occurred during a given time within the organization, and graphically illustrated these linkages. Then they removed from the illustration those linkages that involved the liaison persons within the formal structure of the organization. After removing the liaison linkages the remaining communication pattern demonstrated visually the critical location of liaisons within the static picture of the network. With the exception of a few bridge contacts there were no regular working relationships among the separate extant groups. They concluded that liaisons are essential to creating the total organizational structure, and that their removal destroys the connected unity of the organization.

Next, they executed a field study to discover the demographic, interactional, and functional characteristics of the liaisons within the organization. They found that promotion into a managerial or administrative position increased liaison activity, but that such a position is not a necessary condition for assuming a liaison communication role. Liaisons also had a broader span of contact than nonliaisons, and liaisons were early knowers who provided early dissemination of information through the organizational network. They also concluded that the liaison functioned as a dyadic opinion leader for nonliaison group members, and in this role they influenced the formation and change of attitudes.

Tushman (1977) studied the existence and the characteristics of special boundary roles as one means for innovating organizations to accomplish cross-boundary communication. Tushman argued that the innovation process demands information flow across organizational boundaries, but because each organization and even each subunit within an organization generates its own idiosyncratic norms, values, time frame, and coding scheme, communication impedance builds up. To deal with this impedance organizations develop special boundary roles—individuals who translate contrasting coding schemes. They mediate the transfer of information from external information areas into the organization's communication network.

Tushman separated the organization into intra-department, intra-laboratory, and extra-organizational communication domains. He defined communication stars as those individuals in the top fifth of the intra-department communication distribution. He divided project tasks into four categories: basic research, applied research, development, and technical service. For each task he also considered the stability of its environment and the extent of its interdependence with other areas of the organization.

He discovered that the communication needed for organizational innovation and productivity occurred in a two-step process. The majority of the technical staff received the information by speaking with the internal communication stars who in turn were strongly linked to other areas in the larger organization. This indicates that BSP contribute to the innovation process by linking their work areas to external information domains.

Tushman found that projects with more complex information processing requirements consistently have more boundary roles than projects with less complex information processing requirements. For example, research projects have more boundary spanning roles than technical service projects. Projects facing a changing

environment have significantly more roles per project than projects facing a stable environment. Projects with substantial task interdependence have significantly more roles per project than projects with little task interdependence. Thus, BSA seem to be a way of dealing with work-related uncertainty.

Leifer and Delbeoq (1978) developed a theoretical framework for analyzing determinants and functions of activity at the boundaries of organizations. They assumed that information about environmental contingencies must reach organizational decision makers in order that they may decide appropriately, relevant to environmental conditions and contingencies. This perspective identifies boundary spanning as an essential activity within the adaptation process. They defined an organizational boundary as the demarcation line or region between two systems that protects their members from extra systemic influences and that regulates the flow of information, material, and people into or out of each system. With this definition and assumption the authors arrived at several conclusions about the functions of BSP in organizations.

First, they described BSP as exchange agents between the organization and its environment and as advocates of change, responsible for changing the attitudes, perceptions, and values of organizational members. Second, they argued that BSP must reduce the stimuli emerging from technological, economic, demographic, and cultural conditions, and compose it into information relevant for the organization's goal attainment.

Leifer and Delbeoq described their theoretical model of BSA at the organizational/environmental interchange in terms of two major areas of activities. First, boundary spanners attend to aspects of the environment as a function of: 1) what they are told to pay attention to, 2) their own wants, needs, and personalities, 3) some attention cues based on past experience, 4) how and in what context they expect that information to be utilized, and 5) cues based on whether or not the information is redundant. Second, boundary spanners select out of the total perceived environment some subset for transmission internally to the organization.

Spekman (1979) investigated the power base of BSP. He hypothesized that the potential dependency relationships, growing from the ability of BSP to absorb uncertainty for others, would provide a power base for BSP. He examined BSP as influence agents and he focused on their relationships with those constituents with whom they regularly interact during the performance of their jobs.

He described the organization as an interdependent, decision making system with the primary goal of reducing the degree of uncertainty with which it contends. Organizations consist of specialized units, each contributing toward the organization's mission, but also creating communication impedance boundaries. Boundary spanners function as information transfer agents, keeping units in contact and integrated with the organization and its environment. It is not, however, uncertainty per se that confers power, but rather it is the ability of the boundary spanner to cope with uncertainty that determines the degree of power achieved.

Spekman found a positive correlation that suggests coping with uncertainty fosters a greater dependency as the perceived level of uncertainty increases. He also found that the power base of BSP results primarily from their ability to gather and filter information considered crucial by their constituents. This study indicated, however, that while expert power emerged as the dominant power base, its effective utilization may be tied to a combination of noncoercive power bases by BSP.

Tushman and Katz (1980) examined the gatekeeping function within communication networks. They defined gatekeepers as those key individuals who are both strongly connected to internal colleagues and strongly linked to external domains. They investigated the relationships between the existence of gatekeepers and subunit performance for different types of tasks, and the role played by gatekeepers in mediating external information.

The authors argued that communication difficulties facing organizations directly relate to organizational differentiation. Organizations and their subunits develop local languages and orientations, a locally shared semantic and cognitive field to define, label, and organize a complex reality. This local orientation and coding scheme permits those who share them to operate efficiently within their immediate spheres. When communicating with those who do not share their coding scheme and technical language, however, work related communication becomes less efficient and more costly. Lack of linguistic commonality functions as a communication impedance. Organizations face, therefore, a paradox. The local languages and coding schemes facilitate the achievement of immediate goals, but at the same time obstruct the acquisition and interpretation of needed information from external areas.

Tushman and Katz suggest that gatekeeping may handle this paradoxical situation. Gatekeepers belong to an organizational communication network and can understand and translate contrasting coding schemes. They can gather and understand external information, then translate this information into meaningful, useful terms to their parent organization. They hypothesized, therefore, that gatekeepers function as primary liaisons of information for an organization. The authors conducted this investigation within a research and development facility, and defined gatekeepers as those individuals who were in the top fifth of their intra-department communication distribution. They categorized the organizational tasks as basic research, applied research, development, and technical service.

The data supported the idea that gatekeepers may act to reduce the communication impedance between local and external areas by training, directing, and socializing their fellow colleagues. It appears that gatekeepers enhance project members' ability to communicate with external areas. The gatekeeping role also became more vital when the tasks were the more local development and technical service projects.

The data also indicated that supervisors are not necessarily effective linking mechanisms to external domains. The relationship between external communication and project performance, however, differs for those supervisors who are also gatekeepers as contrasted with those supervisors who are not gatekeepers. The performance is highest when the supervisor is also a gatekeeper. Gatekeepers, therefore, play a key role in communication networks, a role that differs from but complements the supervisory role.

Tushman and Scanlon (1981) investigated the characteristics of boundary spanners and the extent to which they link their subunits to more than one external area. They described BSP as internal communication stars, frequently consulted on work related matters and with substantial communication with areas outside their unit. These individuals have necessarily strong external and internal links in order to gather and transfer information from outside their subunit.

This study focused on a research and development facility that performed basic research, general research, development, and technical service tasks. The authors discovered that stars had more lab experience and were located at higher levels in the organization than were nonstars. Stars were more externally oriented than nonstars and their internal linkages were based on both formal and informal mechanisms.

They also found significant differences by task category. There are more stars as supervisors in technical service projects than in research or development projects. Supervisors in the more organizationally defined and routine technical service projects are more likely to have requisite task information than are supervisors in the more universally defined and more complex research or development projects.

Stars in research projects are significantly more professionally oriented than are stars in the other categories, while stars in technical service projects are more strongly oriented toward operations. A professional orientation refers to gathering general technical/scientific information, and an operational orientation refers to information gathering focused on more specific organizational objectives. Stars seem to be oriented toward information areas that are most crucial to their project's work requirements.

Tushman and Scanlon (Antecedents, 1981) asked, how are decision makers in organizations linked with external information areas, and what are the antecedents of boundary role status? They argued that specialized units are created within organizations to deal with homogenous tasks, that boundaries are erected to separate subunits from external areas, that local norms, values, and languages evolve in order to facilitate the specialized unit's work, and that this specialization creates obstacles to information processing between a unit and external areas. Communication boundaries are created by the idiosyncratic language/coding schemes, and by the development of local conceptual frameworks. Units create their own specialized semantics, and it becomes necessary to recode at boundaries between units if extra-unit communication is to occur. Someone must convert words into the second semantic space while retaining meanings held in the first semantic space.

Boundaries can be spanned effectively, therefore, only by individuals who understand the coding schemes and are attuned to the contextual information on both sides of the boundary, enabling them to search out relevant information on one side and disseminate it to the other. This process includes: 1) obtaining information from outside units, and 2) disseminating this information to internal users.

The authors identified three communication roles: internal stars, external stars, and boundary spanning individuals. Internal communication stars engage in more than one standard deviation above the mean number of intra-department communications. External stars are individuals in the top fifth of the extra-department communication distribution. Boundary spanning individuals are both internal and external communication stars.

The data indicated strong support for the hypothesis that those nominated as valuable sources of new information and ideas are BSP. There was also strong support for the hypothesis that boundary spanning is more than a function of formal position in the hierarchy. Also, internal stars were those perceived as technically competent by their peers, and perceived competence was more significant than position in the hierarchy. Finally, this study supported the hypothesis that individuals who are strongly linked to professional areas are more professionally oriented, while those linked to operational areas are more locally linked, receiving their major input through formal channels of the organization.

This study supported the conclusion that BSP must be able to translate across communication boundaries and be aware of contextual information on both sides of the boundary. Second, the data strongly supported the claim that extensive internal and external communication are necessary conditions for information boundary spanning, but not sufficient conditions.

As to the antecedents of boundary spanning roles, the authors found only that perceived work related competence was a basic determinant of informational boundary spanning.

Katz and Tushman (1983) investigated the influence of boundary spanning supervisors on the turnover and promotion of their project subordinates in an engineering firm. They identified and defined two boundary spanning communication roles: 1) gatekeepers link project colleagues to key sources of information both inside and outside the organization, and 2) internal liaisons link project colleagues only to sources of information within the organization.

They tested two hypotheses: 1) project members working for boundary spanning supervisors are more likely to remain with the organization than are project members working for supervisors who are not boundary spanners, and 2) project members working for boundary spanning supervisors are more likely to receive promotions to

management than are members working for supervisors who are not boundary spanners.

The data failed to support the second hypothesis, but the first received strong support. Project members reporting to gatekeeping supervisors had a significantly lower rate of turnover than did engineers assigned to supervisors who were either nonboundary spanners or only internal liaisons. They found that 80% of subordinates, twenty-five years of age or less, remained with the company if they reported to a gatekeeper, but only 33% remained who reported to a nongatekeeping supervisor. Apparently only a gatekeeping supervisor has strong positive effects on the early socialization and development of young employees. What differentiated young stayers from leavers was their level of contact with their project and departmental supervisors; that is, their degree of vertical communication and integration. What really made the difference was the high level of vertical interaction between the gatekeeping supervisors and their young engineering subordinates.

The authors concluded that because they are well connected professionally and organizationally, gatekeepers are particularly qualified to meet the breaking-in concerns of young professionals. The high levels of interpersonal contact between gatekeeping supervisors and young project engineers facilitates socialization and results in more accurate expectations, perceptions, and understanding about one's role in the project and in the larger organization.

Summary/Competency Model. The foregoing literature review provides an empirical and theoretical foundation for making several generalizations about the person who is or would be a boundary spanner. The critical communication roles of boundary spanners for keeping organizations adaptive indicate the need to have an operational definition of boundary spanning from a communication perspective. Specifically needed is a competency model description to guide in developing educational and training programs that will prepare individuals to function as boundary spanners. The following discussion provides a first step toward these goals.

The literature suggests that we may describe the competencies of boundary spanners in four general areas: interpersonal skills, general communication skills, perceptual skills, and personality strengths (see Figure 1).

Interpersonal skills of the boundary spanners must meet certain minimum requirements. BSP must excel in dyadic communication, where communication flow is one-to-one in a mutually reciprocal exchange of information, questions, feelings, disagreements, and nonverbal messages. Second, BSP must understand the techniques of conflict resolution and be able to use them in the dyadic, group, and public communication situations. BSA, as the research indicates, bring together people and perspectives with differing and disagreeing coding schemes and semantic references. Out of such clashing encounters BSP must synthesize the information needed to resolve conflict in such a way that the parent organization adapts successfully. Third, BSP must understand and employ the techniques of productive human relations. BSP must behave toward others as facilitators, not irritators or dictators. BSP lack a coercive power base, and they must rely heavily on the credibility they possess, as perceived by both insiders and outsiders.

General communication skills include those behaviors and concepts that we associate with public speaking. BSA inherently include persuasion. The research indicates that advocating policy, attitude, belief, and perspective modification to insiders and outsiders constitutes a major and critical role for BSP. Boundary spanners, therefore, must understand and apply skillfully the theories and techniques of persuasion through public address. Second, BSP contribute significantly to their colleagues as professional mentors, corporate socializers, and skills trainers. These roles require an understanding and skillful application of teaching techniques, especially techniques proved effective in technical and adult education. Third, the research indicates that BSP communicate data from the macro environment into the parent organization, and that the data must be made relevant. This role demands the employment of skills that produce successful technical speechmaking, skills that BSP must understand and master. BSP have to communicate from the outside to the inside with accuracy, clarity, interest, and relevancy of information. Fourth, BSP must possess a rich vocabulary. Although not a specific communication skill, it belongs here because the above listed communication skills and most of the skills remaining for discussion can only be performed by a person with a depth and breadth of words, concepts, and images with which to conceptualize, translate, and communicate.

The research suggests that successful BSA depend upon the perceptual skills of BSP. When personnel predictably "see" things alike, then the organization that must innovate and adapt in a turbulent environment faces an intolerable situation. Comfort, complacency, and predictability reduce personal and organizational stress in the short run, but may kill the organization in the long run. Organizations need "seers" who understand conventional wisdom and the "way things are," but who "see" what should be and can be in spite of organizational parochialism and groupthink.

BSP must, first of all, understand the concept of corporate culture, and then understand the cultures of both their parent organizations and the outside organization into which they span at any given time. Without this understanding data will remain just data. The role of BSP requires taking data and translating it into new configurations that might not and probably should not fit comfortably into the corporate culture of their parent organizations. Creating and communicating new configurations from existing data requires the ability to translate the coding scheme of an outside organization into the coding scheme of a parent organization (see Figure 2). These skills indicate a need for BSP to understand and apply the insights and techniques of semantics, general semantics, and cross-cultural communication.

Areas of Boundary Spanning Competencies

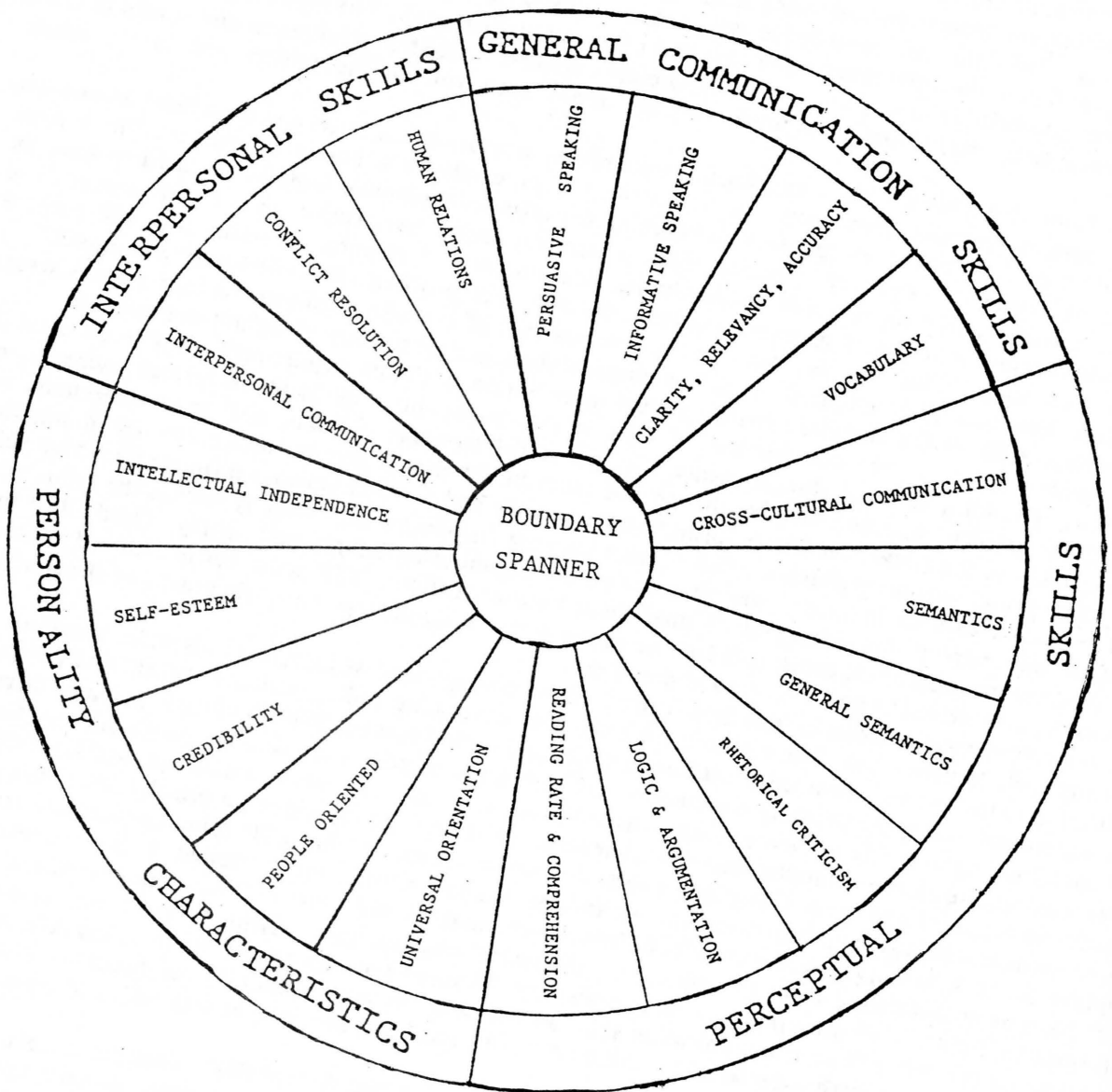


Figure 1

The Boundary Spanning Communication Process

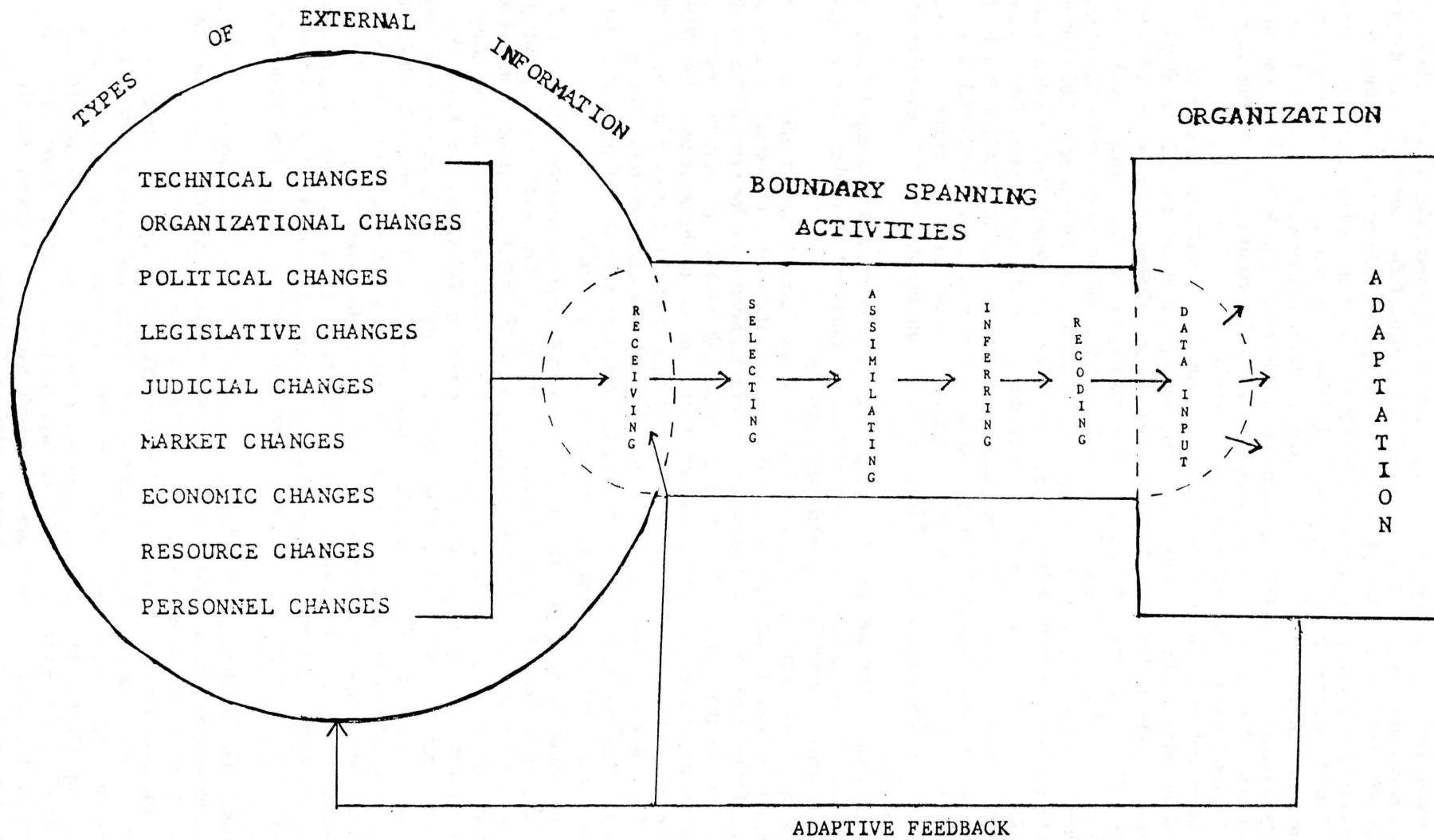


Figure 2

The perceptual skills of competent BSP must also prepare them to discriminate between the essential, the important, and the trivial as it comes to them in the flow of information input. They must filter the input, absorb its uncertainty, and then create from the essential and the important that intelligence their parent organizations need for survival. This function suggests that competent BSP will possess a clear understanding of the deductive and inductive reasoning processes, practice both, and be able to detect fallacies created by their inappropriate use.

Competent BSP will also have a high reading rate and a high comprehension and retention rate of what they read. Many of the studies reviewed here revealed that boundary spanners read widely, that this reading kept them partially informed, and therefore prepared to provide input where and when their colleagues needed it. The problem competent BSP must resolve is to use at maximum efficiency their time for reading and for reflecting upon their reading in order to "see" its implications and to recode it for input. Related to reading professional and technical materials is the matter of professional linkages. Research suggests that membership and participation in professional associations encourage and prepare competent BSP.

Finally, the research implies that BSP should possess certain personality characteristics. Because they operate on the fringes of organizations they live with uncertainty, conflicting demands, and the possibility of being held in suspicion by both insiders and outsiders. Sometimes they must act independently in violation of current policy and precedent when the most current information indicates that they should. Competency in such situations requires people with a well developed sense of self-esteem, self-confidence, and the courage and independence of mind to act upon their convictions. The research also argues for the essentiality of perceived credibility within BSP, and that without credibility all other boundary spanning faculties become impotent. BSP must understand, therefore, the components of perceived credibility and consciously develop those components in their behavior and person.

BSP link individuals, subunits, and organizations, and they do this through people. BSP must, therefore, be people oriented. They must genuinely like people and like working with people. The research may imply that they should be more people oriented than task oriented. They achieve their goals and the goals of their organization through people, both inside and outside. This implies that the linkage function demands competence in human relations skills.

BSP must also have a high tolerance for ambiguity and uncertainty, and must enjoy change. The research demonstrates that BSP assimilate the ambiguous and the uncertain, and out of this create intelligence for their parent organizations that hopefully will produce healthy change.

Finally, although not stated explicitly in the research reviewed here, competent BSP must have a universal orientation, not just a local orientation. While BSP need a local orientation to get the job done for the home office, such a limited perspective will ill serve the parent organization in the long run. BSP must always see the universal and not just the particular. They must ask the difficult, irritating questions that involve the long term perspective, not just passively accept the easy, comforting answers of the short term view. While they find themselves employed by a particular corporation, they must reserve a significant amount of themselves as employees of humanity, whose goal transcends current production and quarterly profits. They must, in behavioral terms, hold world citizenship, acting upon trans-cultural and trans-organizational perspectives, but using those perspectives to keep the parent organization economically and ethically viable.

Educating Boundary Spanning Personnel. The boundary spanning communication model and the competencies model emerging from this discussion (See Figures 1 and 2) indicate that organizational growth and technical innovativeness are not functions of technical competency alone. While BSP must possess technical competence in their specialty, they must also possess skills, understandings, and characteristics that come from nontechnical studies and experiences. The four general areas of competency for BSA suggest that university personnel from many different departments can contribute to the education of BSP (See List 1). Faculty from every department listed already teach concepts, skills, and develop personality characteristics needed by BSP. Developing an educational program for BSP, therefore, requires some boundary spanning activity among selected members of those listed university departments. They should produce a more refined competency statement for BSP and a more accurate model of the BSA communication process. Then they should integrate existing courses and new courses into a curriculum of study and development to match the communication model and to produce the competencies. As a first step in this direction the following discussion points out some possibilities within existing courses of study.

Interpersonal skills development exists already in several disciplines. Departments of Speech offer courses developing interpersonal communication and conflict resolution skills. Departments of Psychology offer courses with laboratory experiences to develop productive human relations skills.

General communication skills development may be obtained in the current offerings of several university departments. Persuasive and informative speechmaking and persuasion are standard course offerings by Departments of Speech. Speech Departments also offer experiences in argumentation, debate, and group discussion through intercollegiate forensic programs. Skills development in the techniques of technical and adult education are offered through Departments of Technical and Adult Education. If vocabulary building courses do not exist they can be developed in consultation with English Departments. In this area there is the need for numbers of words and the need to think and to perceive in images. English Department courses in world literature, studying the classics of western and non-western cultures can significantly contribute here.

Boundary Spanning Qualifications and Academic Departments Offering Courses Toward Qualification

Skills, Characteristics, Education

I. Interpersonal Skills

1. Interpersonal Communication
2. Conflict resolution
3. Human relations

II. General Communication Skills

1. Persuasive speaking
2. Informative speaking
3. Clarity, accuracy, relevancy

III. Perceptual Skills

1. Cross-cultural communication
2. Semantics
3. General semantics
4. Enthymeme
5. Logic & reasoning
6. Reading rate & comprehension

IV. Personality Characteristics

1. Independence of mind
2. Self-esteem
3. Credibility
4. People oriented
5. Universal orientation

University Department

I. Interpersonal Skills

1. Speech
2. Speech
3. I/O Psychology

II. General Communication Skills

1. Speech
2. Speech/Adult Education
3. Speech/English

III. Perceptual Skills

1. Speech/Anthropology
2. Speech/English
3. Speech/English
4. Speech
5. Speech/Philosophy
6. English

IV. Personality Characteristics

1. Psychology
2. Psychology
3. Speech
4. I/O Psychology
5. Philosophy/Anthropology

List 1

Perceptual skills are somewhat intangible and undefinable, making it difficult to relate such skills to specific courses. It seems, however, that Departments of Anthropology offerings in cultural anthropology will develop the ability to "see" new worlds as the student perceives how other societies perceive their worlds. Courses in world religions, offered through Departments of Religious Studies also develop the ability to "see" and to understand entire universes differing from the perspective of the American student. Study in semantics and general semantics will provide an understanding into the nature of words and how we use them, and more importantly, how words use us. Departments of English may offer such courses. Departments of Philosophy offer courses that develop understanding and skill in using inductive and deductive logic and in detecting fallacies of reasoning. A Speech Department can develop the student's ability to become a rhetorical critic of communication content. Critical analysis of the communication created by a society constitutes an effective approach to discovering and understanding the culture of that society. The classical concept of the "enthymeme," a deductive argument based on the listeners' conceptions of the "good," the "desirable," and the "expedient," provides a powerful construct for discovering the culture of any corporate group.

The least open to curricular planning and development of boundary spanning competency are the personality characteristics. Many, if not all, personality characteristics are set by home and early experiences, long before the student enrolls in the university, or even in high school. Some possibilities exist, however. Many studies done by rhetorical scholars have established clearly the nature of source credibility. A person can understand and develop this essential characteristic through special topics courses offered by Departments of Speech. Departments of English can assist in developing increased reading rate, comprehension, and retention. Professional linkages could be greatly promoted by the advisors and departments of the students' technical majors. Upper division students could be required to join the major professional association related to his or her major, read extensively in the professional literature during undergraduate as well as graduate study, and be encouraged and subsidized to attend the annual meetings of the national or regional professional association representing the students' major.

Developing a universal perspective is a matter that is problematic, because that is supposedly why general education courses exist as graduation requirements. There is, however, abundant evidence to indicate that students politely tolerate (sometime not so politely) such courses, and "get them out of the way" in order to get on with their technical major. This value orientation toward the immediately pragmatic may be the major obstacle to producing boundary spanners in adequate numbers and skills for our industrial and technical health. On this point, no suggestion is forthcoming here.

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