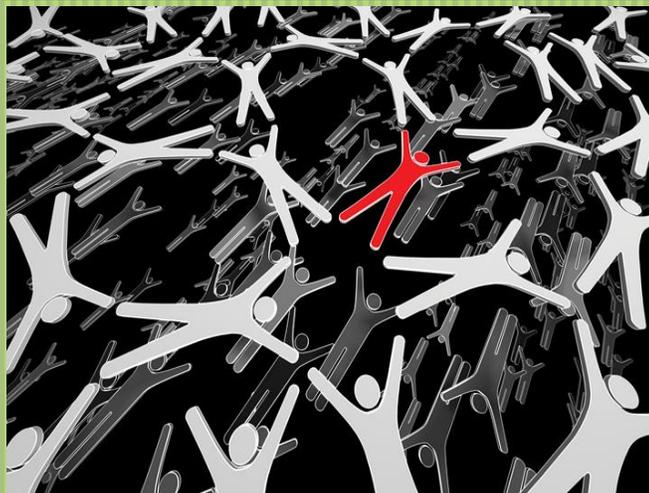


Application of systems thinking connects unconnected and creates new channels for productivity, communication and innovation.

Applying Systems Thinking to Organizational Development

Part I. Communication -
Connecting unconnected

Peter Weclaw, PhD



Part I. Communication - Connecting unconnected

We all communicate...

It is not an exaggeration to say that every live being communicates with either its external environment, other organisms, or both, which most often is the case. Communication is a critical aspect of our daily activities. We send communication signals to other drivers during our daily commute, or to our companions on the morning train. While many of these signals are subconscious, a purposeful communication is critical for achieving our personal or professional goals. Insufficient, inadequate or

mis-targeted communication always impacts our success and often results in problems or conflicts that require action to be resolved.

“WHAT NERVES ARE TO HUMAN ORGANISM, COMMUNICATIONS ARE TO AN INDUSTRIAL SYSTEM”

Smriti Chand
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The history of Korean Air in the 1990s is an excellent example of the consequences of disconnected and inadequate communication¹. In a span of less than two decades Korean Air’s planes crashed several times. In

most cases all passengers and crew died at the scene resulting in the deaths of thousands of people, and record “loss” rate (4.79 per million departures) for the airline over 20 times higher than corresponding rates of comparable airlines. This terrible record triggered action by the US Federal Aviation Authority and Canadian officials who considered revoking Korean Air’s overflight and landing privileges. It was a radical change in the internal organizational communication that allowed the airline to reverse its tragic record, provide safe quality service and saved the company’s reputation.

While several sources provide excellent tools for enhancing individual communication skills², this paper focuses on identification of common communication challenges that organizations face, their sources and recommendations for overcoming the barriers. Achieving effective communication is the first and necessary step for any organization to reach the next level of innovation and productivity.

¹ Malcolm Gladwell. 2008. *Outliers: The Story of Success*. Little, Brown and Company. New York 2011.

² David Lewis and G. Riley Mills. 2012. *The Pin Drop Principle: Captivate, Influence, and Communicate Better Using the Time-Tested Methods of Professional Performers*.



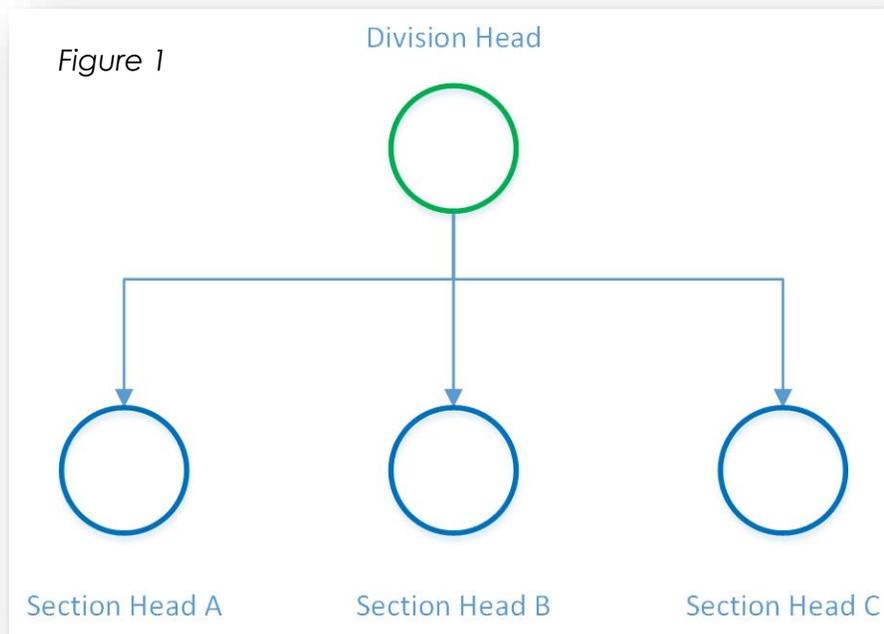
... as a system

Every organization is a system. It is an arrangement of organizational units, employees, projects, ideas, as well as internal and external relationships the organization has. To stimulate organizational growth, and to successfully transition any organization to a new level of performance and productivity, a systemic analysis of the key aspects of organization's functionality is the first step.

This is why systems thinking is such a helpful tool in strengthening and developing organizations. It allows for identification of existing and missing links in knowledge management, organizational structure and communication. Application of systems thinking connects unconnected and creates new channels for productivity, communication and innovation.

This paper outlines some principles of applying systems thinking to improving communication within an organization. First, I outline how systems thinking can be applied to analyze communication patterns in an organization. Next, I examine a number of specific patterns often encountered in organizations. Finally, the paper provides suggestions for improvement and organizational growth developed based on the systems thinking analysis.

For the purposes of this discussion, I will start my analysis by examining an organizational unit that includes a Division Head and three section heads (A, B and C) who report directly to the Division Head (Figure 1).



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