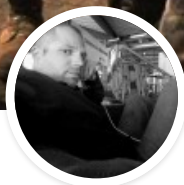


Leadership

Predispositions and Apprehension in Leadership Communication

by AJ Powell 0 Comments 7 min read

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Our personally held preferences in communications are an important and integrated part of our intrapersonal organizational experiences. How we relate to each other when speaking in conversation, how we talk to those within our inner circles and to those outside of those circles, how we communicate to small and large groups and across the organization, and even the differences, no matter how pronounced or subtle, between our communication to superiors and subordinates, are all a part of our own predispositions. Each of these exchanges are impacted by our ability to choose the right form of communication, as well as our capacity and capability to communicate effectively with others in the process, but they also have a direct relationship with our choice of occupation, job satisfaction, productivity, advancement, job retention, and most importantly of all, our leadership capabilities. It is safe to assume then, that communicational predispositions^[1] and preferences not only influence behavior, but also are an important part of an individual's organizational success.

[1] Definition: Predispositions –
 Personally held preferences for particular
 types of communication situations or
 behaviors.

Research into predispositions has found that our ability to communicate within an organizational environment is greatly affected by our own experiences. Shockley-Zalabak (2012) notes that, "...preferences are a result of intrapersonal needs (motivation), personal self-concept, past experiences, current information, and self-perception of communication competency" (p. 147). Some people find it easier to communicate with others across the organizational divides; they are capable of expressing thoughts easily to peers, seniors, and subordinates alike without hesitation. These individuals often find themselves in roles of greater responsibility, given unique or special assignments, and held in a position of trust amongst those they work with. Individuals whose predispositions allow them higher levels of organizational communication find they develop communication competency much faster as well. This in turn leads to higher levels of productivity, professional growth, and job satisfaction. As a result, we typically find that individuals with more positive predispositions end up with higher developed leadership capabilities in shorter periods of time.

However, there is also a down side. Those who find it easier to express their own thoughts comfortably are sometimes the targets of toxic managers who, for any number of reasons, finds their own values, attitudes, and even their personal beliefs at odds with their biased assessments on these capable individuals. As we all know, toxic managers are individuals who somehow managed to get placed within a position of leadership, but to whom are in no way leaders... they're managers at best, and at worst, internal destroyers of organizational process and well-being. Toxic managers often seek to create conflict with and against those able to comfortably communicate well, but who are below the toxic individual in organizational status. Even more damaging, toxic managers are the worst perpetrators of creating communication apprehension within those who maintain difficulty in communicating at better levels, because their toxicity stunts or greatly negatively impacts the growth and/or potential for growth within both developing individuals and junior leaders.

Communication apprehension[2] can become the internalized killer of potential leadership development – and career progression as a result. "...Individuals with high communication apprehension are more likely than others to be in jobs with low communication requirements, to believe themselves less competent than others, to exhibit lower job satisfaction than their counterparts, and to not advance in their organization as their technical skills might suggest they could" (Shockley-Zalabak, 2012, p. 147). Essentially, some individuals with lower levels of organizational communication competency may develop an apprehension predisposition towards attempting such communication, and as such, we find they end up spending less time interacting within the organization than others do, unable to confront problems and organizational issues, and even unable to express and/or address personal and professional issues that may affect them as well as the organization itself. Such apprehensions cause them to shy away from personal and professional opportunities due to fear or nervousness to organizational communicational requirements attached to those opportunities. This failure to develop, progress, and ultimately advance can become the downfall of personally perceived success, or even the killer of an otherwise successful career.

**[2] Definition: Communication
 Apprehension –** Predisposition for
 behavior described as an individual's
 level of fear or anxiety associated with
 either real or anticipated communication
 with others.

While it is understood that individuals with predispositions that allow them higher levels of organizational communication generally see higher levels of personal and professional success and satisfaction, there is nothing to say that individuals whose predispositions prevent them from competent organizational communication are prevented from being successful either. At the end of the day, everything amounts to the individual's willful efforts to seek each barrier as an opportunity for growth. This means that even those who maintain negative predispositions towards communication may overcome such difficulties – essentially by rewriting or recoding their old predispositions with new ones – as they work on improving their own

organizational communicational competencies. This is possible through the use of internalized self-motivation to seek out information, mentorship and guidance, and maintain a positive drive towards self-improvement.

Since communication predispositions and individual preferences are directly linked as influences on our behavior and attitudes while interacting within our organizational environments, it is an essential part of daily individual reflection as we strive towards leadership development (personal development + professional development) as a whole. Therefore we can summarize that our own personal experiences greatly affect our perception on our capacity for communication and ability to communicate well at different organizational levels, and that the improvement of our organizational communicational competencies ultimately leads to higher levels of success. Further, we fully understand how destructive toxic managers can be to the organization itself, but their toxicity can also damage the leadership development potential of the organizations future leaders. The key is understanding the relationship between toxic managers and the creation of communication apprehension so as to avoid the destruction of leadership development.

So even if you aren't the best communicator or find that you often avoid organizational communication opportunities for whatever reasons, understand that there is nothing holding you back from generating the same successes as others. Your ultimate success is yours and yours alone to make for yourself. Seek each barrier to your own personal growth as an opportunity for success, maintain high levels of positive internalized self-motivation, and before you know it, those old predispositions and apprehensions will be overridden with new, more positive ones, leading to an increased willingness to communicate, a new path for which to follow, and a new journey to embark upon.

SOUND OFF!

Have you ever experienced some from of apprehension in communicating within your organization? Have you ever felt a sense of anxiety or nervousness in the idea of giving a presentation, public speaking, or even with communicating to a superior? What did you do to overcome that apprehension? Since then, what methods have you used to improve your own self-image on your capabilities for organizational communication? (self-education, professional development courses, academic courses, mentorship and guidance, etc.) What changes in your actual communicational capabilities have resulted from your efforts towards self-improvement? What would you recommend to others who might be experiencing communication apprehension themselves?

Let's discuss our thoughts in open forum. Let us know **YOUR** thoughts in the [comments below!](#) Open discussion helps everyone learn and grow.

References:

Shockley-Zalabak, P. (2012). *Fundamentals of Organizational Communication: Knowledge, Sensitivity, Skills, Values*. Eighth Edition. Allyn & Bacon – Pearson, New York, London, Tokyo.

[Communication Apprehension](#) [Communication Competency](#) [Communication Predispositions](#) [Leadership](#) [Leadership Development](#) [Organizational Communication](#) [Toxic Managers](#)

About the author



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AJ is a retired U.S. Army NCO who served in both the U.S. Navy and U.S. Army. He is a combat veteran, and has participated in contingency operations around the world. AJ is the Owner of Veteran Leadership Solutions, the Founder and Editor in Chief of The Warfighter Journal, and is a published Sociological Analyst, Researcher, Guest Lecturer, and Public Speaker. He is a graduate of Pennsylvania State University with a focus on Sociology and a science degree in Organizational Leadership, and is published in the field of sociology. AJ is an inductive analyst; public figure; researcher/writer; aviator; a certified advanced operational diver; professional instructor, trainer, mentor, and adviser; snowboarder; motorcycle rider; world traveler; he enjoys long distance endurance events, and much more.