

## Communication and the Five Constituencies

By Colm McCormack, February 2009.

### Communication Problems at the Business Schools

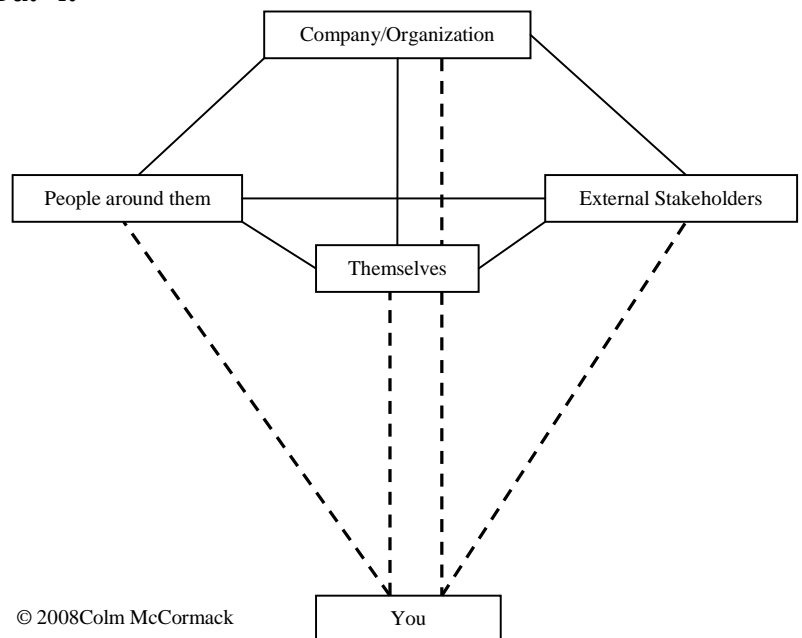
One of the things I don't like about a lot of business school subjects is the way in which communication is relegated to a position of subtlety. It is always there, lurking in the shadows, with some professors failing to bring it out into the spotlight at all. But it shouldn't be in the shadows. It is absolutely crucial to everything we do in management. Remember, organizations are simply collections of people all supposedly chasing the same organizational vision.

An absence of effective and meaningful communication can see people running in the wrong directions, pursuing the wrong things, being managed in the wrong way, and much more.

But we should not be surprised that many organizations have problems stemming from poor communication. Many of the world's business and management schools quite simply do *not* practice what they preach. Professors give lectures about the best ways to do business and yet labor under committees, councils, university rules, crippling politics, and more.

### Listen to Your Employees and Talk in a Way that Ensures *They* will Listen to *You*

The simple truth is that your employees need honest feedback if they are ever to improve or feel valued. They constitute a huge expense for your business so not listening to them, not



talking with them, makes little sense. We sometimes forget that giving feedback can be uncomfortable for employees. It is vital that fear is not a factor within your business. How can employees receive feedback effectively if they are afraid to question or comment on it? The presence of fear and the absence of trust are key barriers we must be alert to. They can prevent feedback becoming the two-way process

it should be. Not correcting such a situation means we create extra unnecessary work for ourselves by allowing such barriers to stand.

Get the communication to and from the employees right and you're well on your way toward creating a better managed business where ideas flow in more directions than in simply the old traditional top-down way.

### **Going Back to the Five Constituency Model for Observing Behavioral Impact**

This model was introduced in book one of the [“Just Manage It!”](#) series and also featured in a previous article entitled [“Management and the Five Constituencies”](#)

At this point, we have already looked at employees. We will now move on.

### **Don't Forget to Manage the Managers**

You, as manager, also require feedback. If you think general employees are expensive, you should take a look at your annual management salary figures. If employees should be developed to maximize your return on investment then so too should managers.

### **Make Sure Your Business Asks, Listens, and Welcomes Feedback and Insights**

The third constituency in all of this is the organization or business itself. It cannot implement strategies other than through people. Many strategies are executed incorrectly because they fall

down on the people issues. And a lot of the people issues center upon communication.

### **What are Those Outside the Walls Seeing and Hearing?**

We all know the adage: Listen to your customers. We often expand this to take in suppliers, distributors, our accountant, our lawyer, other businesses' sales reps, and more. In other words *External Stakeholders*. But we must also be careful to do more than listen to them: we must be aware of the communications – accurate or otherwise – that they are picking up *from* us.

Far too often the wrong message is unwittingly sent to the outside world. Our own employees chat with their family, friends, their spouses. Often, these friends and spouses work in the same industry and, just once in a while, for one of our competitors!

### **Seeing the More Complete Picture**

Employees need effective communication to know what they are doing, how they are doing, to give valuable input.

Managers require effective communication to learn about themselves, to manage employees.

The organization requires effective communication to ensure that strategies are implemented through the people working for it.

Communication to and from external stakeholders is vital and the people around the person or team you give feedback to must also be kept in contemplation.

So much information pointing to better products and services, to better

production operations, market segmentation, etc., comes from listening to our customers, listening to our distributors and sales reps, and listening to the rest of the world – including our competitors. But we must also be aware that these constituencies are also receiving communications - often of dubious quality – *from us*. An awareness

of the idea that there are Five Constituencies around you as you communicate – and not just the person or group you have at the front of your mind when communicating – should move you toward thinking in a bigger and more prudent way: manage the communication, don't let *it* manage you!



Colm McCormack has lectured in Management, Strategic Management, and Leadership on MBA and continuing education programs. He has consulted for numerous companies and Mentored business owners. He is the author of the “**Just Manage It!**” series of Business & Management books. Visit [www.ColmMcCormack.com](http://www.ColmMcCormack.com) to download FREE chapters, to view key concepts and models, and to purchase Books from the series.