Chapter 2. Review of Literature

2.1. Subordinate-Superior Communication

Communication that happens between an employee and her/his superior has been argued by researchers to be the most important and crucial of all communication happening inside an organization. Studies have highlighted its important role in diverse situations like alerting decision makers to key areas of needed change, adjustment in organizational policy and strategy (Athanassiades, 1973; Glauser, 1984), and increasing productivity (Clampitt & Downs, 1993). This study deals with one crucial aspect of such communication activity: that of the upward communication originating from the subordinate and culminating with the immediate superior.

The importance of subordinate-superior communication (defined in this study as ‘upward communication from an employee to her/his immediate superior’) has been well highlighted by scholars who have underlined the importance of communication within the subordinate-superior dyad as being very important for any organization’s overall communication efficiency (ex: Schnake, Dumler, Cochran Jr, & Barnett, 1990). Studies have also found a positive link between subordinate job satisfaction and the amount of communication contact with the superior (ex: Baird & Diebolt, 1976). Scholars have also contended that this form of communication acts as the primary means for organizational members to process information, reduce ambiguity, and coordinate their actions (Johnson, 1993).

Nonetheless, despite the importance, studies have often neglected one crucial aspect of this dyadic interaction: to the best of my knowledge the willingness of subordinates to communicate with their immediate superior has not been exclusively examined. Why some subordinates prefer to keep their socialization habits with their superiors to a bare minimum is an intriguing question that would help organizational research move forward in a positive direction. Moreover, by decoding the rationales and reasons behind glitches in subordinate-superior communication, we would be able to increase organizational effectiveness and efficiency (Schnake et al., 1990).

2.1.1. Subordinate-Superior Communication: Trait Characteristics

Trait-like characteristics of a subordinate can influence the subordinate-superior dyadic relationship to a great extent. For example, if subordinate’s personality-based
dispositional character is such that she/he is an introvert, it would be challenging for any superior to make the subordinate communicate her/his thoughts and feelings. Wealth of literature in the field of personality studies have confirmed that an individual’s personality trait can affect one’s behavior at work (Barrick & Ryan, 2003; George, 1992; Schneider & Smith, 2004). Extant literature in the field of communication studies suggest that individual personality disposition can affect one’s willingness to communicate (MacIntyre, Babin, & Clement, 1999; McCroskey & Richmond, 1990).

Communication theories suggest that an employee’s willingness to communicate might be trait-like (Richmond & Roach, 1992): this way, it could be argued that there would be employees who are less willing to communicate even when the contextual factors are favorable and encouraging. Such arguments have found support in empirical studies across different disciplines, viz. communication, education and second language acquisition. Nonetheless, there have also been arguments that a person’s willingness to communicate can become state-like when the context and the receiver are kept constant.

2.1.2. Subordinate-Superior Communication: State Characteristics
As no communication happens in an excluded environment, there is always a possibility that subordinate-superior communication process would get affected by factors that are contingent on the environment. It is but natural for any person to get affected by situational concerns – the way one talks with a friend is different from the way one talks with a stranger or a senior. Moreover, how one talks on a public platform is also very different from how one talks in an interpersonal setup. This way, our communication behavior could be state-like when it is dependent on multiple factors like, size of audience (how large it is), nature of audience (whether it is receptive or not), the nature of interaction (one-to-one, or one-to-many), or say, the topic of discussion (McCroskey, 1984).

2.2. Willingness to Communicate (WTC): Construct and Measurement
As discussed in the last section, an employee’s willingness to communicate (WTC) depends on multiple factors. However, if we conceptualize WTC as a trait-like characteristic, the underlying factors for one’s willingness to communicate would be dependent on inherent characteristics unique to the individual. As inherent characteristics are those that have been instilled in the persona, more often than not,
they are reflective of personality factors. The reason behind their instillation can be attributed to causes that are either contingent on the nature or the nurture of the individual. As personality has been debated to be dependent on both nature as well as nurture, it comes as no surprise that communication theorists have quite often tried to link individual communication behavior to genetic (nature) as well as upbringing (nurture) factors.

The relationship between nature and nurture is a complex one and any discussion on that relationship would be beyond the scope of the present study. Nonetheless, it might be noted that the causes of one’s personality formation has quite often been debated to be characterizing of both nature as well as nurture factors. Studies have long evidenced strong relationship between personality and genetic similarity: Tellengen et al. (1988) found that close to fifty percent of measured personality similarity could be attributed to genetic similarity. Whatever be the case, the arguments suggest that personality is embedded deep in the persona and that only strong environmental factors can influence it, that too, for short durations.

Going back to WTC: McCroskey and Richmond (1987) noted that while the consistent behavioral tendency in terms of frequency and amount of talk which individuals exhibit had long been observed by scholars, a valid operationalization of this construct as a personality based predisposition had not been attempted. Noting that an individual’s willingness to communicate was consistent across various types of context and receivers, McCroskey and Richmond (1987) defined the construct of ‘Willingness to Communicate’ as the “behavioral intention to initiate communication when free to choose to do so”. The construct evolved from the works of Burgoon’s (1976) development of the construct of “unwillingness to communicate”, Mortensen, Arntson, and Lustig’s (1977) work on ‘predispositionnal behavior’, and MacCroskey and Richmond’s (1982b; 1982a) earlier work on ‘shyness’.

In order to operationalize the construct of willingness to communicate, the WTC scale was introduced (McCroskey & Richmond, 1987): the WTC scale tries to measure the willingness of the respondent to initiate communication. The reliability and validity of the WTC has been confirmed in a number of studies (ex: McCroskey, 1992). In the WTC scale, the respondents provide inputs to three types of receivers (viz. strangers, acquaintances, and friends), across four communication contexts (viz. public speaking,
talking in meetings, talking in small groups and talking in dyads). As WTC is conceptualized as a personality-based trait-like predisposition, an individuals’ communication willingness is supposedly correlated across the aforementioned contexts and receivers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1: WTC: Contexts and Receivers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Communication Contexts</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpersonal Communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group Discussions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meetings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Speaking</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2.3. Antecedents of WTC

Researchers have identified communication apprehension (CA) and communication competence (CC) as the two major and most immediate antecedents of WTC. Other antecedents of WTC such as alienation, self-esteem, and cultural divergence have also been underlined in research but have been found to have either negligible effect on WTC, or as in the case of self-esteem, have their effect channeled through the immediate antecedents CA and CC (McCroskey & Richmond, 1990).

2.3.1. Communication Apprehension

Communication Apprehension has been defined as “an individual’s level of fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated communication with another person or persons” (McCroskey, 1977). It has been conceptualized as both trait as well as state phenomenon. Depending on the research objectives, scholars have utilized different measures for measuring different types of communication apprehension. Putting trait
and state CA on a four point continuum, McCroskey (1984) differentiated between four
types of CA in the following way:

- **Traitlike CA**: Traitlike CA is viewed as a relatively enduring, personality-type
  orientation toward a given mode of communication across a wide variety of
  contexts.
- **Generalized-Context CA**: Generalized-context CA is viewed as a relatively
  enduring, personality-type orientation toward communication in a given type of
  context
- **Person-Group CA**: Person-group CA is viewed as a relatively enduring
  orientation toward communication with a given person or group of people.
- **Situational CA**: Situational CA is viewed as a transitory orientation toward
  communication with a given person or group of people.

As CA is an internally experience phenomenon, it is measured through self-report
measures (McCroskey & Richmond, 1987). While there have been multiple measures
of CA, the scale that has attracted the most attention is McCroskey’s Personal Report
of Communication Apprehension (PRCA). PRCA is designed to measure an
individual’s CA across a wide range of situations.

When McCroskey’s (1970) developed the first variant of PRCA in 1970, he did not
specify what kind of CA (trait-like or state-like) was PRCA designed to measure.
However, even the earliest variants seemed to be measuring trait-like CA as the scale
was designed to measure communication apprehensions across a wide range of
situations. To make it even more suitable for measuring trait-like CA, PRCA was
further modified to include items representing perceived apprehension in four identified
contexts: groups, meetings, interpersonal conversations, and public. For each context
six items were introduced, this way, the scale got a total of twenty-four items (six items
for each of the four contexts) and was renamed as PRCA-24. The PRCA-24
(McCroskey, 1982b; 1982a) has been argued to be the best measure of perceived
communication apprehension as it has been found to have excellent reliability and
validity (Levine & McCroskey, 1990; McCroskey, Beatty, Kearney, & Plax, 1985) and
has been argued to be the best measure of self-perceived communication apprehension
(Rubin, Palmgreen, & Sypher, 2009: 14).
2.3.2. Communication Competence
The construct of Communication Competence has been defined by McCroskey and McCroskey (1988) as the “adequate ability to pass along or give information; the ability to make known by talking or writing”. It might be noted that this ability is ‘perceived ability’ and is not the measurement of actual communication performance for which objective or subjective observation would be preferable. McCroskey and McCroskey (1988) note that “if the research is concerned with subjects’ perceptions of their competence, what causes such perceptions, or the outcomes of such perceptions, self-report measurement can be a useful tool”. Since the objective of the present study fits the stated criteria very well, self-report measures are appropriate measurement tools for the present study.

In response to earlier concerns regarding measurement of individual self-perceived competence, McCroskey and McCroskey (1988) advanced the Self-Perceived Communication Competence Scale (SPCC) as the most appropriate scale capable of measuring generalized communication competence perception. The SPCC is composed of 12 items with items chosen to reflect four basic communication contexts (viz. public speaking, talking in a large meeting, talking in a small group, and talking in a dyad) and three common types of receivers (viz. strangers, acquaintances, and friends). The scale has been found to have excellent reliability and validity (Chesebro et al., 1992; McCroskey, 1984), and has been argued to be the best measure of self-perceived communication competence (Daly, 1997: 14).

2.4. WTC: Trait and State Characteristics
While discussing WTC in light of second language acquisition studies, McIntyre (2007) made a differentiation between WTC in L1 (native language) and WTC in L2 (second language). He contended that L2 could be conceptualized at state-level under the ‘pyramid model of willingness to communicate in L2’: his argument got support from studies that found negative correlation between L1 and L2 (McIntyre, Dörnyei, Clément, & Noels, 1998). This way, WTC can be argued to be both trait-like as well as state-like. In fact, such a conceptualization of WTC is well supported in literature: while discussing communication apprehension (one of the major antecedents of WTC), McCroskey (1984) rejected the possibility of any trait/state dichotomy, instead arguing in favor of putting the sources of CA on a four-point continuum: the continuum ranges
from extreme trait pole to extreme state pole, with neither pure trait nor pure state existing as a meaningful consideration.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TRAIT-LIKE</th>
<th>Generalized-Context</th>
<th>Person-Group</th>
<th>STATE-LIKE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>-Context</td>
<td>+Context</td>
<td>-Context</td>
<td>+Context</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Receiver</td>
<td>-Receiver</td>
<td>+Receiver</td>
<td>+Receiver</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2.5. Trait-State Relationship: Interactionist Perspective

The Trait-State relationship can be best understood in the light of Trait and Situationist models of human behavior: while trait model of human behavior considers person factors (e.g.: personality differences) as the basic determinant of individual behavior, in the situationist model the situational factors (e.g.: environmental cues) are considered the basic determinant. It is the interaction between trait and situations that gives rise to states (Endler & Magnusson, 1976). Thus, while willingness to communicate when free to choose to do so can be considered to be trait-like, in an organizational environment where the context and receiver are fixed and where there are multiple organizational contextual factors (i.e. situations) affecting an individual’s willingness to communicate, the trait-like variable of willingness to communicate would turn into state-like variable: trait would interact with situations to evoke state in such contexts. The phenomena of traits interacting with situations to evoke states have been evidenced in many studies (ex: Endler & Magnusson, 1977; Flood & Endler, 1980; Trotter & Endler, 1999).

The rationale behind the assertion that trait-like WTC would turn into state-like rests also with arguments that have emphasized organizations as containing strong situational effects that can overshadow person level dispositions (Davis-Blake & Pfeffer, 1989). This way, it can be argued that communication behavior of an employee can be best predicted by assessing the situations that an employee faces than by her/his traits. Nonetheless, it would be beneficial to take into account the ‘strength’ of situational pressures into account: as Monson, Hesley and Chernick (1982) note, the most promising means of specifying when behavior cannot be predicted by traits is by assessing the strength of situational pressures present. Thus, if the situations are too strong, their interaction with trait would lead to a state form that has no significant relationship with the corresponding trait form. Putting it in terms of subordinate-
superior communication: if the moderating organizational contextual factors are too strong, the trait-like WTC would have a very weak relationship with state-like WTC, i.e. a person who is very willing to communicate in her/his personal life could be unwilling to communicate in the organizational space.

![Figure 2: Trait interacting with Situation to evoke State](image)

As evident from the preceding discussion, the best way to probe the trait-state relationship would be through the application of an interactionist perspective: taking into account trait factors, the state factors and their varied interactions. The interactionist perspective (of trait interacting with situations to evoke state) has got widespread acceptance in organizational behavior literature. As George (1992) notes, the interactionist perspective can help us gain a true understanding of behavior by attending to personality, situations, and their varied interactions.

2.6. **WTC in Organizational Context**

In an organizational context, one can conceptualize WTC as being both trait-like as well as state-like. Moving alongside the trait-state continuum, one can identify WTC as being trait-like when it is taken across contexts and across receivers. Thus, trait-like WTC can be conceptualized as personality based predisposition that affects an employee’s communication behavior across contexts and receivers, whether inside or outside the organization. However, when the context and the receiver are fixed, the personality based predisposition would be influenced by environmental factors: thus, in an exclusive context, where both context and receiver are fixed, an employee’s communication behavior would be best described as state-like. For sake of illustrating the trait-state relationship in an organizational space, WTC can be put on the four-point continuum in the following way:
For any employee (from employee’s side):

1) WTC Trait-Like (Across Contexts Across Receivers): All communication inside the organization or away from it.

2) WTC Generalized Context (Exclusive Context Across Receivers): All communication in a group discussion; All communication in an interpersonal context.

3) WTC Person Group (Across Contexts Exclusive Receiver): All communication with peers; All communication with superior.

4) WTC State-Like (Exclusive Context Exclusive Receiver): Group discussion with peers; Interpersonal communication with superior.

2.7. Importance of WTC in Organizational Context

In this section, I point out how WTC affects communication processes in an organizational context. The focus would be to show the importance of WTC in maintaining communication efficiency in organizations. A number of studies have pointed to the importance of WTC in business organizations. As noted by McCroskey and Richmond (1987), the impact of WTC is very much evident in organizational space with high WTC employees getting preference in hiring process, getting positions of importance, and being seen in positive light. On the contrary, employees having low WTC self-select themselves to occupational roles that have lower social status and lower economic standing. Low WTC people are seldom found in upper management positions that require a great deal of communication (Daly & McCroskey, 1975). Moreover, people having low WTC are unable to leave a strong communicative impact on others and are often rejected for leadership positions (Daley, McCroskey, & Richmond, 1977; Daly & Stafford, 1984). In western culture, especially North American culture, High WTC is seen as a positive attribute (McCroskey & Richmond, 1995). Low WTC people have also been found to have lower job satisfaction and have high level of dissatisfaction with their immediate superior (Falcione, McCroskey, & Daly, 1977).

2.8. WTC in the Indian Environment: Cultural Perspectives

Scholars have long argued that a person’s amount of talking is partly shaped by her/his cultural orientation (Barraclough, Christophel, & McCroskey, 1988). As culture affects one’s communication behavior (Samovar & Porter, 1972), researchers have
emphasized that cultural contexts must be analyzed in WTC research, especially when dealing with non-western settings (Mira & Tomoko, 2008). The argument put forward rests with the rationale that WTC research has been conducted extensively in western culture where high WTC is valued – a case that might not stand true in those cultures where high WTC is not promoted at the social level (Sallinen-Kuparinen, McCroskey, & Richmond, 1991).

Cross cultural studies, wherein data is drawn from highly different cultures, help validate the constructs and measures used in WTC studies. Such studies also help isolate those cultural factors that can affect the established models in WTC studies. For instance, Wen and Clément (2003) advocated revision of the WTC model in the Chinese context through changes to the ‘structural relationships between constructs included in the model and by reinterpreting some of the variables from a Chinese perspective’. Basing their argument on language differences, Simic and Tomoko (2008) have argued that Japanese being a contextualized language favors lower WTC: unlike English, careful listening and non-verbal factors play a primary role in Japanese language. Although the target population of the present study spoke Hindi, a language sharing close phylogenetic relationship with English language (both languages belong to the Indo-European Language Family), there is a dearth of WTC studies in the Indian context. Moreover, despite the fact that Indian organizational spaces do share many western values, partly because of its British heritage where high WTC is considered desirable, and partly because of the top-echelon of management being exposed to western theories of management, the reliability and validity of the WTC instrument in the Indian environment needed to be checked. These concerns are addressed in Phase III of the present study.

2.9. Organizational Variables: Effect on Stress

The present study till now tried emphasizing that the trait-like communication of an employee could be state-like in an organizational context. Organizational contextual factors were suggested as strong situations that influence the trait-state link. It can also be argued that apart from making an effect on trait-state link, the organizational contextual factors can also lead to other forms of individual outcomes. In terms of communication, the present study has emphasized that the organizational situational factors can affect employees’ communication efficiency. However, another strong argument could be built: the organizational variables can have an effect on other forms
of employee efficiency. It can be reasoned that those organizational variables that have the ability to turn the trait-like communication behavior into state-like form may also have an effect on the level of employee stress that could be attributed to the organization. The argument goes thus: a change of trait-like behavior to state-like behavior demands significant behavioral alterations on part of the employee. Some of these alterations could lead to positive stress (eustress) while others could lead to negative form of stress. Take for example, the possibility of a highly communicative employee working in an organization where communication is less valued. While this person would be forced to alter her/his behavior (be less communicative) to make himself a fit as per the demands of the organizational climate, the alterations in communication pattern would put the employee in a possible stressful situation. On the contrary, a person who finds a fit between her/his trait-like communication behavior and state-like communication behavior inside the organization would feel happy; the ‘stress’ that such a person would feel, out of the workplace communication requirements, could be qualified as eustress.

2.10. A Person-Environment Fit Approach to Stress

Research on person-environment (P-E) fit gives support to the arguments presented in the last section. Research on P-E fit, or what is also known person-organization (P-O) fit (when referred exclusively to the organizational context), suggests that a misfit between an individual and the work environment could lead to occupational stress that can have various behavioral, psychological, and organizational consequences (Ivancevich & Matteson, 1984). Extant literature suggests that occupational stress can be felt at the psychological as well as the physiological level; thus, stress can be primarily divided into two forms: ‘psychological stress’, which is felt at the psychological level, and ‘physiological stress’, which is felt at the physiological level (Quick, Quick, Nelson, & Hurrell Jr, 1997).

In the case of psychological stress, the stress or tension induced by the job could take its toll on one’s family and/or social life (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Jackson & Maslach, 1982). In the case of physiological stress, the outcome could be in the form of increased blood pressure and/or the pulse rate of the employees; in worst cases, this form of stress could even lead to coronary heart disease and/or mental illness (Cooper & Marshall, 1976; Melamed, Kushnir, & Shirom, 1992).
Summing it up, it can be reasoned that the analysis of the relationship between environmental factors on both willingness to communicate and personal level psychological & physical stress would help analyze how organizational contextual factors hinder the communication process by reducing employees' communicative efficiency while at the same time contributing to an increase in psychological and physical stress level of employees, in a way reducing their overall efficiency. Such a research would not only help advance research on trait-situation interactionist paradigm, but would also help underline human resource management issues related to employee communication and stress.