

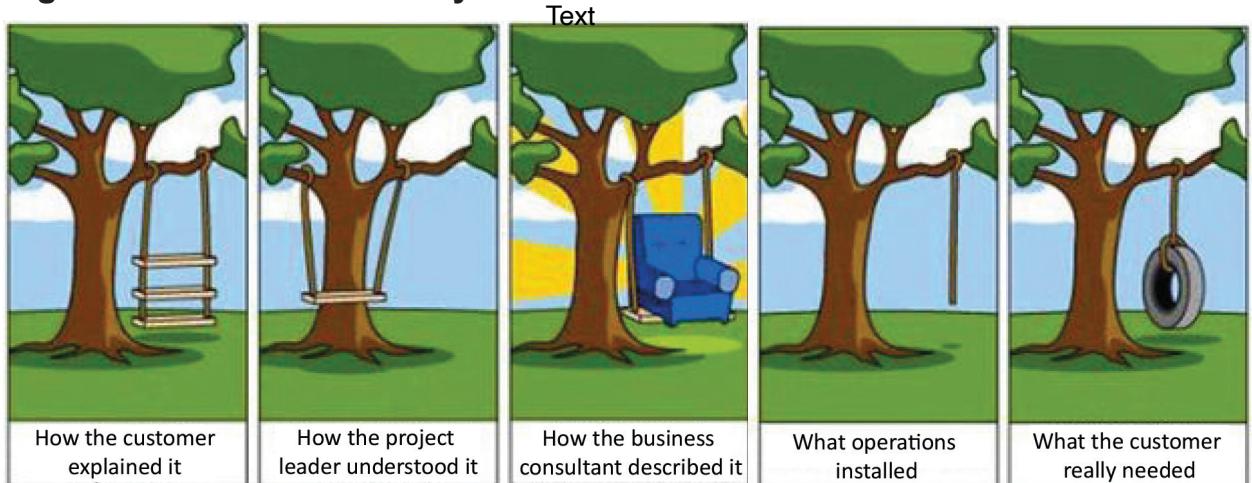
- Explain how the author combines formal features (such as image and layout) with elements of writing style to convey his ideas.

Minding¹ Gaps

Leadership | Communication | Change | Workplace Engagement

Thomas J. Lee, President of Arceil Leadership Ltd.

Eight Hallmarks of a Healthy Communication Culture



Every company has not only a corporate culture—with many subcultures—but also its own culture of communication. By culture of communication, we mean the particular way people customarily share and interpret information and ideas.

5 A healthy communication culture has eight hallmarks that just coincidentally begin with the same letter: clear, credible, compelling (or cogent), constructive, continuous, collaborative, civil, and concise.

Let's briefly explore each of those eight hallmarks.

Clear. You may think it is a simple thing to say what you mean. Unfortunately it is not. Strunk & White, the great arbiters of English composition, warned writers they were probably 10 being unclear even when they thought they were being perfectly clear. (That's why you should always let an important document or email "age" for a day before editing it and sending it.) This is especially true of corporate communication, which can be filled with jargon, spin, and arcane abbreviations.

Credible. The legendary actor George Burns once advised young actors: If you can fake 15 sincerity, you can fake anything. For many companies, credibility is something either to fake or to ignore and neglect altogether. It is one thing when the left hand doesn't know what the right hand is doing; that happens. A deliberate and coordinated sleight of both hands² is something altogether different, and not nearly so forgivable. When the deception involves employees, whose work is critical to any organization's mission, it is a self-inflicted wound.

20 **Compelling (or Cogent).** Official corporate pronouncements often strive to be inoffensive and polite. That's fine as far as it goes, but if they achieve that goal by deliberately being indirect and ambiguous, it isn't fine at all. That comes at the expense of coherence. Moreover, they frequently resort to the passive voice, which drains much of the energy out of communication. Because good communication functions as the energy of leadership, this represents a
25 huge sacrifice.

Constructive. The whole point of strategic communication is to support the execution of a strategy (or the implementation of a program, a policy, a process, or a priority). It is all about getting things done, about creating something new or bigger or better. Thus the communication should be constructive, and to do that it must be inclusive and relevant. It should have enough
30 of the big picture to be inspiring and enough detail to be instructive and helpful.

Continuous. Communication around business strategy should look, sound, and feel more like a rainforest than a cascade. It should be a steady drizzle or mist of information, punctuated by occasional thunderstorms. There should be few, if any, moments when employees feel they are kept in the dark. It is especially harmful to put front-line supervisors in a position where
35 they are learning about an impending decision or policy by the grapevine³ or from subordinate employees.

Collaborative. The best communication is a dialogue and a discussion, not a monologue or a lecture. It is an exchange of information, intuition, and ideas. Senior management in particular should be receptive to learning what employees in ground-level positions (the factory
40 floor, the retail showroom, the warehouse, the lab) are observing and experiencing. This information is gold.

Civil. People who spend so much time together, day after day and week after week, need to respect one another. There are big differences between delivering a message with an air of respect and reason and delivering the same message with disrespect and intimidation, fear, or
45 arrogance. By the same token, there is a big difference between employees who speak up and share their observations—again, with respect and reason—and those who would just as soon deny that information to management out of spite.

Concise. This is just a matter of getting to the point. Everyone is busy. Good communication respects time, so that people can meet their commitments and still get home to their families
50 and activities. That isn't to say there is no place for impromptu conversations or for non-strategic, water-cooler chit-chat about families, hobbies, and so forth; to the contrary, there is, and those conversations will properly meander. But the presentation of business information should be straightforward, timely, and compact.

So that's it: clear, credible, compelling (or cogent), constructive, continuous, collaborative, civil, and concise. Make certain your communication culture incorporates these eight hallmarks, and you will notice and like the results.

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¹ Minding: being aware of

² sleight of hand: skillful deception

³ grapevine: circulation of rumours