Although several factors are related to employee morale in organizational settings, the single most influential factor in enhancing job satisfaction and group cohesiveness is superior-subordinate communication. Yet, while a great deal of speculation exists concerning the sorts of communication behaviors most conducive to employee satisfaction, no empirical test has been conducted to assess specifically the relationship between communication and morale. This study undertakes such an investigation.

COMMUNICATION CORRELATES
OF EMPLOYEE MORALE

John E. Baird, University of Michigan
Patricia H. Bradley, Indiana University

Studies of employee morale in organizational settings have shown several factors to contribute to the development of worker satisfaction and group cohesiveness. Miles, Porter, and Craft, for example, observed that satisfaction may improve simply as a byproduct of workers making full use of their own potential.[1] Research by Shaw and Rothschild additionally suggested that one's position in a communication network determines satisfaction: people located at the center of a centralized network expressed greater satisfaction than did people located in any other position of any other network.[2] Finally, Gouran determined that a worker's satisfaction is influenced primarily by his perceptions of the quality of other group members' performances and, to a lesser degree, his perceptions of the quality of his own performance.[3]

Although each of the preceding factors is influential in molding worker morale, the single most important factor seems to be managerial behavior. In studies of managerial style, for example, Shaw discovered that nonauthoritarian leaders produced greater satisfaction ratings among their subordinates than did authoritarian leaders, and Morse and Reimer observed satisfaction to be higher in autonomous groups than in those which were hierarchically controlled.[4] Greenfeld and Kassum found higher levels of satisfaction to be associated with

leaders who were oriented toward both task and social matters. Lastly, Falcione noted that participative management increased subordinate satisfaction provided that their participation had a real effect upon decision-making.[5]

Closely related to these studies are investigations of managerial communication behaviors, many of which have found morale to be closely related to the ways in which a boss communicates with his workers. Downs *et al.* determined by means of factors analytic procedures that "communication climate" and "communication with superiors" are of utmost importance in determining satisfaction among employees, and Baird and Diebolt found satisfaction to be related to frequency of communication with supervisor, quality of relationship with company, and quality of relationship with supervisor.[6] Maher and Pierson obtained results indicating that managerial communication which clarifies job objectives increases satisfaction. Tosi; Ivancevich and Donnelly; and Hamner and Tosi all found communication which clarifies subordinates' roles to enhance morale. Johnson and Bledsoe, and Fleishman and Harris observed a leader's consideration for his subordinates to improve morale.[7] Taken together, these findings lend credence to Hatch's speculation that improved superior-subordinate communication will lead to improved job satisfaction.[8]

Despite the plethora of evidence suggesting a relationship between managerial communication and employee morale, and despite the speculation of organizational communication practitioners that improved communication will lead to improved satisfaction, no attempt yet has been made to assess comprehensively the sorts of communication most related to workers' spirit. Bormann, Howell, Nichols, and Shapiro, drawing upon their own experiences in organizations, suggest eight actions through which leaders may increase group cohesiveness: give the group an identity, build group tradition, stress teamwork, recognize good work, set clear goals, give group rewards, keep psychologically close to the members, and treat the members like people.[9] They did not, however, empirically test these techniques. Therefore, to develop a more specific, comprehensive picture of the sorts of managerial communication which increase worker morale, this study set out to determine the relationships among dimensions of managerial communication and employee satisfaction.

METHOD

A 25-item questionnaire was developed to survey managerial communication behaviors and employee morale. The first 20 items were measures of communication behavior, with the first 10 assessing communication content, or the sorts of functions played by managerial communication, and the second 10 exploring communication style, or the manner in which the content was conveyed. The "content" items asked the subordinates to rate the extent to which their superiors: told them what to do, solicited their input in decision-making, gave them information concerning other organizational departments, stressed happy interpersonal relationships, stressed company goals, stressed avoidance of conflict, allowed them to work unsupervised, emphasized teamwork, encouraged effort, and reinforced good performance. These items were drawn from the suggestions by Bormann *et al.* listed above and the lists of managerial behaviors described as desirable by such management theorists as McGregor, Likert, and Blake and Mouton.[10] The "style" items similarly asked the subordinates to rate the extent to which their supervisors: "came on strong" when communicating with them, showed concern for them, were comfortable with them, were quick to express disagreement, were attentive, communicated actively, were open and willing to reveal relatively personal things about themselves, listened carefully, were friendly, and communicated dramatically. These items represent dimensions of "communicator style" constructed by Morton and Miller.[11] Finally, the remaining five questions asked the respondents to rate the quality of their relationship with their immediate supervisor, the quality of their communication with their supervisor, their overall job satisfaction, their willingness to move to another department or work group, and the extent to which they feel a part of their present work group. All items were rated on five-point scales.

The questionnaire was administered to 150 workers randomly drawn from 20 departments of 2 medium-sized organizations. Confederates working within the corporations distributed the surveys, explaining that they were a part of a study of managerial communication techniques and asking the respondents to rate their own manager's behaviors. The respondents were assured that all responses would be kept strictly confidential. When the surveys had been collected, the responses were ana-

lyzed by means of Pearson product-moment correlations among the communication and morale variables.

RESULTS

Table 1 (page 49) presents the intercorrelations among the investigated variables. Of the 100 correlations calculated, 67 were statistically significant ($p < .05$). Ratings of quality of relationship with supervisor were positively correlated with all 10 content variables and 6 style variables, and negatively correlated with 2 stylistic variables. Similarly, ratings of quality of communication with supervisor were positively correlated with 9 content and 6 stylistic variables. Employee satisfaction was positively correlated with 9 content and 5 stylistic variables, and negatively related to 2 stylistic factors. The respondents' willingness to move, essentially a measure of low group cohesiveness, was negatively correlated with 8 content and 3 stylistic measures; that is, the greater the frequency with which a supervisor displayed these behaviors, the less willing to move to another department the employees became. Finally, identification with work group, a positive measure of cohesiveness, was correlated with 6 content variables and 1 stylistic factor. Clearly, the content and style of a manager's communication with his employees are closely related to the ways in which those employees respond to him specifically, to their jobs generally, and to their work group.

DISCUSSION

Although managerial communication and employee morale obviously are related, precise analysis of that relationship requires consideration of each morale variable individually. Thus, we shall discuss in turn each of the employee response variables.

Quality of Relationship

As one might expect, the variable most closely related to managerial communication behaviors is the quality of the subordinate's relationship with his supervisor. It is somewhat surprising, however, to discover that all 10 content variables are positively

Table 1
Intercorrelations Among the Investigated Variables

	Quality of Relationship	Quality of Communication	Job Satisfaction	Willingness to Move	Identification with Group
Communication Content					
Tells workers what to do. . .	.230*	.198*	.027	-.143	.010
Solicits input from employees	.260*	.218*	.159*	-.309*	.187*
Gives information	.337*	.356*	.182*	-.174*	.006
Stresses happy relationships.	.533*	.562*	.421*	-.334*	.237*
Stresses company goals. . . .	.315*	.353*	.352*	-.279*	.246*
Stresses conflict avoidance .	.362*	.382*	.340*	-.232*	.288*
Allows unsupervised work. .	.163*	.055	.169*	-.106	.094
Emphasizes teamwork	.489*	.457*	.458*	-.469*	.301*
Encourages effort	.431*	.447*	.327*	-.388*	.157
Reinforces good performance.	.487*	.551*	.396*	-.268*	.240*
Communication Style					
Comes on strong	-.220*	-.122	-.307*	.063	-.069
Shows concern	.409*	.426*	.323*	-.140	.154
Communicates comfortably.	.304*	.236*	.215*	-.082	.105
Quick to disagree.	-.194*	-.139	-.199*	.056	-.103
Attentive to others	.372*	.415*	.329*	-.176*	.157
Communicates actively. . . .	.167*	.211*	.037	-.107	.097
Is open with others	.074	.078	-.134	.000	-.086
Listens carefully to others. .	.468*	.527*	.433*	-.242*	.176*
Friendly with others	.449*	.362*	.327*	-.205*	.134
Communicates dramatically.	.055	.033	-.087	.020	.110

*(p<.05)

related to relationship quality—that telling the subordinate what to do and allowing him to work unsupervised both are correlated with high relationship quality. Perhaps Baird and Diebolt's finding that communication frequency and relationship quality are related has been repeated in this study: it makes no difference what the supervisor says, so long as he says something.[12]

While what a superior says seems unimportant at this point, how he says it is another matter. Six stylistic variables—comfort, attentiveness, activity, listening, showing concern, and friendliness—seemed associated with good relationships, while two other factors—coming on strong and being quick to disagree—apparently led to worsened relations. Openness and dramatism were the two variables unrelated to relationship quality. These results seem to parallel those obtained in studies cited at the beginning of this investigation, and to suggest those sorts of behaviors which managers ought to develop or avoid.

Quality of Communication

Given the close association between communication and relationship development, one is not startled to observe a close parallel between the results obtained on the preceding variable and the findings for the present one. Nine content variables were positively correlated with communication quality; only allowing employees to work on their own (perhaps a form of noncommunication) failed to correlate with communication quality ratings. Moreover, the same 6 stylistic factors—concern, comfort, attentiveness, activity, listening, and friendliness—which correlated positively with relationship quality were also related to communication quality. However, no factors were negatively related to communication. Overall, then, the lessons found in the correlations reported above are repeated in the results obtained for the communication quality response variable.

Job Satisfaction

Somewhat different results were obtained for the third response variable, job satisfaction. Telling employees what to do, a communication content variable positively correlated with the two preceding response variables, had no correlation with satisfaction. On the other hand, allowing employees to work unsupervised, which was unrelated to communication quality, was

positively correlated with job satisfaction. Apparently, laissez-faire rather than authoritarian leadership seems most effective in producing high morale. When leadership is exerted, however, it should take the form of encouraging participation, providing information, stressing happy interpersonal relationships, emphasizing organizational goals, stressing conflict avoidance, encouraging teamwork, motivating the employees to give their best effort, and providing them with reinforcement when they perform well. For the most part, these behaviors reflect the techniques suggested by Bormann, Howell, Nichols, and Shapiro which were listed earlier.[13]

Five elements of managerial communication style were positively related to job satisfaction. Showing concern, communicating comfortably, being attentive, listening carefully, and being friendly all were associated with high levels of employee morale. On the other hand, managers who "came on strong" or were quick to disagree with others typically had employees who were dissatisfied with their working conditions. These results are consistent with the findings of studies cited earlier in this investigation and with the correlations noted for the other response variables.

Willingness to Move

Employees' willingness to move to new work groups or departments of the organization, the antithesis of group cohesiveness, was negatively related to 8 content factors, with only telling workers what to do and allowing them to work on their own showing no significant correlation. Apparently, the factors which contribute to good superior-subordinate relationships and communication and to job satisfaction also contribute to group cohesion. However, managerial communication style seems only marginally related to group cohesiveness, with only 3 of the 10 factors negatively correlated with willingness to move: attentiveness, listening, and friendliness. Since many of the content factors revolve around work group relations (emphasizing happy interpersonal relations, stressing goals and teamwork, and so on) while communication style focusses primarily upon one-to-one contact between superior and subordinate, the greater number of content-cohesiveness correlations seems reasonable. Yet these findings provide additional insight into the impact of managerial communication: while the relationship between a superior and

subordinate seems related to the superior's communication style, the subordinate's relations with other subordinates seems associated most closely with the superior's communication content.

Identification with Group

This last response variable serves also to measure work group cohesiveness by assessing the extent to which each employee identifies with his or her work group. Six content variables correlated positively with this measure, including soliciting input for decision-making, stressing happy interpersonal relationships, emphasizing organizational goals, stressing conflict avoidance, encouraging teamwork, and providing reinforcement. Conversely, only one stylistic factor was related to group identification, as supervisors who listened carefully typically had employees who identified strongly with one another. Again, communication content emphasizing group relations seems closely associated with group cohesiveness while communication style is almost entirely unrelated to this aspect of employee morale.

CONCLUSIONS

Two important distinctions emerged from this investigation. First, communication content and communication style seem to have distinct impact upon employee morale, and second, an employee's relationship with his or her supervisor seems to operate somewhat independently of his or her relationship with the work group. Communication content seems an important correlate of superior-subordinate relationship quality and communication quality only to the extent that some content is present. That is, content of all types correlated with these two response variables. On the other hand, communication style apparently allows discrimination among good and bad relationships and communication, as several variables correlated positively with these factors while others correlated negatively, and still others showed no significant relationship.

Conversely, communication style is only marginally related to group cohesiveness. Of the 20 correlations calculated between cohesiveness measures and communication style variables, only 4 were found to be significant. Communication content variables were closely related to group spirit, however, as managers who

communicated in ways emphasizing group goals, participation, teamwork, and intermember relations usually had highly cohesive groups working under them.

Certainly, further study of managerial communication and employee morale is warranted. It is not that content is unimportant where superior-subordinate relationships are concerned, or that content of any form enhances such relationships. Further research is needed to assess the impact of communication content upon employee perceptions of relationship and communication quality. In addition, the style with which a manager communicates with subordinates may be related to group cohesiveness in ways not tapped by the methods employed here. Through investigations such as these, a more thorough understanding of managerial communication and employee morale ultimately may be attained.

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