

A Stakeholder Communication Model of Change

People do not always argue because they misunderstand one another, they argue because they hold different goals

William H. Shyte, Jr.

Would you persuade, speak of interest, not of reason

Benjamin Franklin

If you would win a man to your cause, first convince him that you are his sincere friend

Abraham Lincoln

We all have stakes in organizations. Only someone living a Thoreau-like existence on Walden's Pond with no contact with resource providers, social groups, political affiliations, or proximity to government, business or any vestige of society could claim no stakes in organizations. As shown in the examples already presented in this book, organizations often have diverse stakeholders both within and without the identifiable

boundary of operation. Employees, customers, suppliers, governments, competitors are obvious types of stakeholders who demand things from organizations; depend on or are effected by organizational operations; and often provide comment on what organizations do. However, the picture of a given organization's stakeholders can be much more complex than this since stakeholders are not always obvious to or acknowledged by organizations. Further, how we are perceived or self-perceive our stakes and stakeholder status for a given organization can be complex. We may play more than one role in an organization simultaneously (e.g., customer and employee; community member and volunteer) making the relative demands of groups of stakeholders quite dynamic and potentially difficult to manage both for organizations and for stakeholders.

In this chapter we will explore a model (see Figure 3.1) of change processes in the context of stakeholder communication that frames this book. We will first discuss the importance of Stakeholder Theory and introduce its basic tenets as well as some novel ways to view the "map" of stakeholders relevant to any given change effort. Second, we will explore key roles that stakeholders play during change, pointing to both formal and informal roles that stakeholders may play in the processes of change. Third, we will briefly tour the model. Each of the major parts of the model including components and relationships among the components will be developed in later chapters.

Stakeholder Theory

Stakeholder Theory is aimed at explaining how organizations map the field of potential stakeholders and then decide strategic action in managing relationships with various groups of stakeholders. These relationships are usually conceptualized as a hub and spokes (see Figure 3.2). Organizations are portrayed as having independent relationships with each of a set of definable stakeholder groups. Stakeholder Theory can be thought of as a family of perspectives launched by Edward Freeman in his now classic book, *Strategic Management: A Stakeholder Approach* (1984). Three main branches of this perspective have developed in the literature. The *descriptive approach* depicts existing relationships with stakeholders. In the *instrumental approach* scholars test claims about how organizational actions shape stakeholder relationships (e.g., certain strategies with stakeholders are associated with certain outcomes: Jones and Wicks, 1999). In the *normative approach*, scholars focus on

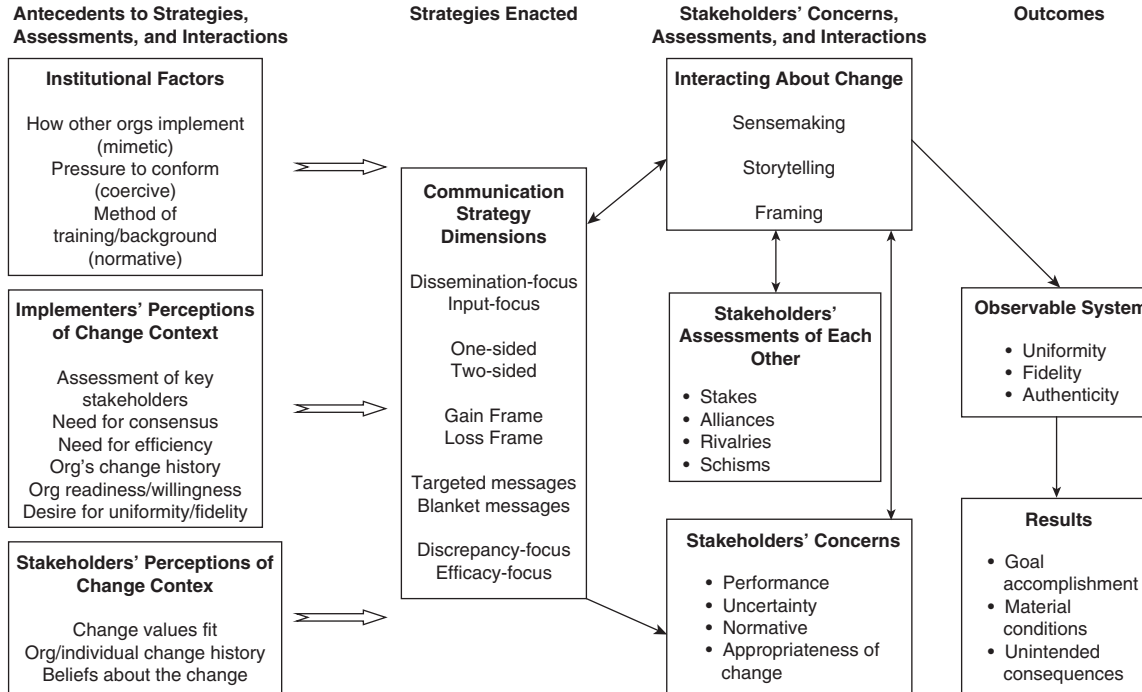


Figure 3.1 Change process in context of stakeholder communication

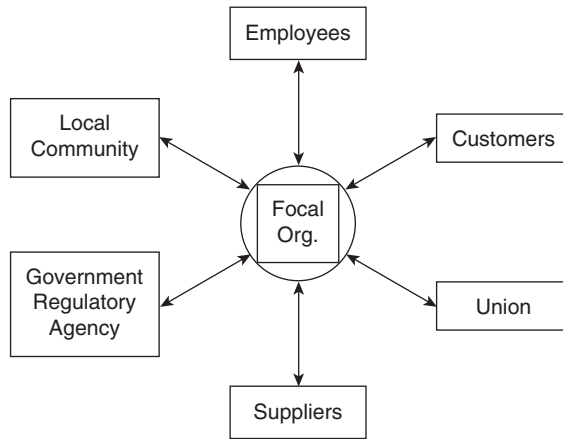


Figure 3.2 Hub and spokes model of stakeholder relationships

moral and ethical obligations of managers to various stakeholders. Scholarship in this vein is exemplified in **corporate social responsibility** (CSR) literature (cf. Donaldson and Preston, 1995; Jennings and Zandbergen, 1995).

Stakeholder Theory is centrally concerned with how organizations allocate stakes and attention to various recognized stakeholders. Identifying “important” or “critical” stakeholders is an important part of that calculus. Theorizing from an instrumental perspective of Stakeholder Theory, Mitchell, Agle, and Wood (1997) suggest that stakeholders be defined according to three attributes: (a) power (ability of a stakeholder to impose will), (b) legitimacy (generalized assessment that a stakeholder’s actions are desirable, proper, or appropriate), and (c) urgency (degree to which a stakeholder’s claims are time-sensitive, pressing, and/or critical to the stakeholder). Those stakeholder groups that are perceived to possess all three characteristics are labeled “**definitive stakeholders**.” These authors argue that organizational leaders have a clear and immediate requirement to focus their attention and resources on definitive stakeholders’ needs. An example of a definitive stakeholder for those organizations that are part of Homeless Net might be the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) (see Highlight Box 3.1). HUD provides a large amount of funding for municipalities to spend on affordable housing and shelter. Without HUD funding, many cities and counties could not afford to execute their missions to serve homeless persons. In order to secure the funding, applicants must abide

Highlight Box 3.1: HUD as a Definitive Stakeholder for Agencies Serving Homeless Populations

Created in 1965, HUD's mission is to increase homeownership, support community development, and increase access to affordable housing free from discrimination. To fulfill this mission, HUD will embrace high standards of ethics, management, and accountability and forge new partnerships – particularly with faith-based and community organizations – that leverage resources and improve HUD's ability to be effective on the community level.

When HUD publishes a Notice of Funding Availability (NOFA) for Continuum of Care Homeless Assistance in the Federal Register, applicants must submit specific information about a proposed project, along with their Continuum of Care application. Each application must include a certification that the project is consistent with the Consolidated Plan of the jurisdiction where each proposed project is found.

Eligible applicants include States, local governments, other government agencies (such as public housing agencies), private nonprofit organizations, and community mental health associations that are public nonprofit organizations.

Source: www.hud.gov.

by the time schedule, eligibility requirements, reporting requirements, guidelines, and procedures that HUD lays out. HUD fulfills all of Mitchell *et al.*'s requirements to be a definitive stakeholder for this group of agencies because it has legitimacy as a federal agency; power, as a major source of funding; and urgency, in that it demands timely application and reporting in order for the provider agencies to earn funding. HUD cannot be ignored or put off, given this status.

Stakeholders may also possess only one or two of Mitchell *et al.*'s attributes. So, they may be perceived to have legitimacy but not urgency or power; or power and urgency but not legitimacy. Lacking one or two of the critical attributes of definitive stakeholders in the eyes of organizational leaders may make them less “important” in the assessment of stakes or the attention paid by organizational decision-makers. However, stakeholders who hold even one of these characteristics might make it

hard for organizations to ignore them. For example, even if a stakeholder lacks legitimacy and urgency, organizations may have to attend to them if they have significant power. A prime example is the power of unions to strike. Even if organizations consider employee complaints to be illegitimate, the power of striking the company and ceasing operation is one that is hard to ignore. Mitchell *et al.*'s approach to determining more or less important stakeholders puts organizational decision-makers at the center of the picture. Managers of organizations survey stakeholders that they perceive, and rely upon their own perspectives to determine stakeholders' claims on the organization.

As we have observed in earlier examples, stakeholders do not always reside outside of an organization. Employees, volunteers, members, etc. are part of "focal organizations" and are also important stakeholders. Not all stakeholder groups are easy for organizations to identify and in some cases, the introduction of change makes some stakeholders more obvious. Homeless Net provides a good example of how the introduction of change can actually alter the visible landscape of important stakeholders (see Case Box 3.1). As the network participants increased their use of the listserv set for the community of providers they discovered a widening of the boundary of who was part of the community. New agencies were discovered by members of the listserv that were previously unknown to many of the organizations in the network. The active use of and participation in the listserv actually elevated the status of some agencies in the network as it increased their profile among other stakeholders.

In the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) approach, which operates from a normative perspective of Stakeholder Theory, scholars are concerned with describing how organizations attend to stakes of stakeholders who have claims on the organization that are not related to the bottom line. McWilliams and Siegel (2001) define CSR as "actions that appear to further some social good beyond the interests of the firm and that which is required by law" (p. 117). Examples of CSR include creation of environmentally friendly products and processes; adoption of progressive human resource management practices; and aiding the advancement of community goals and those of community-serving nonprofits. Some scholars argue that these activities ought to be engaged in for the good of the organization and others argue they should be entered into because it is right to do so. A number of companies have extensive records in CSR including General Electric, Target, Starbucks, UPS, Walt Disney, Johnson and Johnson, and Whole Foods. For example, the Starbucks website claims the following:

Case Box 3.1: Homeless Net Implementation of Listserv Increases Awareness of Stakeholders

Some CTOSH organizations benefited from CTOSH tools by creating more of a presence in the network. The email list usage grew over the three years in which the consultants were formally involved with this project. Even though the list was started with approximately 60 individuals it eventually grew to twice that size, incorporating a much wider range of organizations and concerned individuals. Over the course of the project there was a clear growth in the number of posts: 234 in the first year, 314 in the second year, and 438 in the third year.

In an interview, a participant indicated that he learned about a lot of the “little small niche mom and pop” organizations and programs. He said, “they offer something and you want to know about those, and so that has been good.” One interviewee speculated that the smaller providers might not have been noticed without CTOSH’s attention, “maybe those would have been found other ways, maybe not.” CTOSH tools defined the boundaries of the network in new ways and the feeling of being included appears to have expanded as a result.

Other interviewees made similar comments. “People are more connected. There is probably much more understanding of what is happening on a macro level. Before people operated more in their silos. So CTOSH has brought people together.” “It [the listserv] provides more cohesion to our community of service providers.” “When I open up an email and it is from CTOSH partners, there is no question that I found it valuable. Whether it is going to work for me or not, I have a lot of respect and value for it coming through CTOSH.”

Source: Adapted from Scott, Lewis, and D’Urso (2010) and Lewis, Scott, and D’Urso (unpublished).

Our Commitment to Being a Deeply Responsible Company. Contributing positively to our communities and environment is so important to Starbucks that it’s one of the six guiding principles of our mission statement. We work together on a daily basis with partners (employees), suppliers, farmers and others to help create a more sustainable approach to high-quality coffee

production, to help build stronger local communities, to minimize our environmental footprint, to create a great workplace, to promote diversity and to be responsive to our customers' health and wellness needs.

Whole Foods' website describes their efforts to increase accountability with involvement of stakeholders:

In conjunction to working with farmers on alternatives and educating our consumers about the harmful effects of some pesticides, we are the only retailer that participated in the joint EPA/USDA Tolerance Reassessment Advisory Committee. The task of this multi-stakeholder advisory board was to advise those agencies how they should fairly reassess all the pesticides that had previously been approved, taking into consideration their effect on the delicate immune systems of infants and children, as well as cumulative effects of their use.

Some scholars have been critical of the CSR branch of scholarship as it may obscure an understanding of the value-laden decisional processes of organizations that have important repercussions for many stakeholders regardless of attempts to appear inclusive and responsive. In other words, organizations may engage in CSR activities in order to create an impression of listening to and engaging stakeholders who have little impact on the bottom line. As Kuhn and Deetz (2008) argue, such practices "actually prevent the creation of a democratic society because they mollify citizens who might otherwise demand systemic change" (p. 174). Further, some CSR strategies are used in order to attract socially responsible consumers (Barron, 2001), or build employee loyalty. In such cases, the organization's strategic goals supersede any direct benefits of actions to community or other stakeholders.

Complicating Stakeholder Relationships

There has been scant acknowledgment of the relationships that stakeholders have with one another in the Stakeholder Theory literature. However, a few scholars (Hendry, 2005; Post, Preston, and Sachs, 2002; Rowley, 1997) have argued that not only do stakeholders recognize one another; they also assess the degree to which their stakes are competitive or complimentary with other stakeholders. For example, Mitchell *et al.* (1997) have noted that stakeholders who form alliances in advocating some stake or preferred action on the part of a focal organization can increase chances of the focal organization's compliance. Thus, a

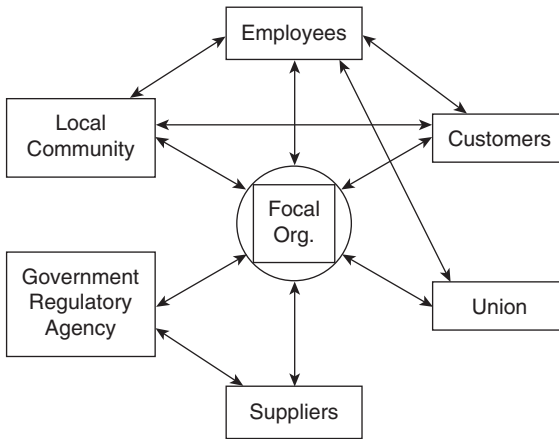


Figure 3.3 Complex stakeholder relationships

union might seek the sympathies of the community at large and/or specific customers of an organization in order to have greater leverage over the organization. Given this more complex picture, Figure 3.3 is a better representation of the actual map of such relationships in that it illustrates the reality that stakeholder groups have awareness of and relationships with each other.

Rowley (1997) argues that *dense networks* (where there are many shared norms, values, information, and agreed behavioral constraints) of stakeholders will create a challenging environment for a given focal organization to force its will. In such cases an organization would have “more difficulty playing one group against another or finding a sympathetic group of stakeholders with whom it could form an alliance” (p. 897). Rowley also argues that *centrality* is another essential characteristic of the focal organization’s network position. If for example the focal organization played a very critical gatekeeper role, influencing behavior expectations and managing information flows, it would have a better power resource to manage stakeholders. In Rowley’s conceptualization, being highly centralized in a less dense network is the ideal situation to exert maximum influence. As one’s own centrality decreases or the density of the stakeholder network increases, more compromising or subordinate roles must be adopted.

Some scholars (Rowley and Moldoveanu, 2003) have also argued that mere identification among stakeholder groups will motivate

reaction related to an organization's actions. A feeling of solidarity may act as a powerful catalyst for collective action. As Fireman and Gamson (1979) argue, groups may participate in group action because they become "linked together in a number of ways that generate a sense of common identity, shared fate, and general commitment to defend the group" (p. 21).

Another important concept related to the network relationships within stakeholder networks concerns the gaps between stakeholders. These "structural holes" (Burt, 1992) where stakeholders are not connected directly open up opportunities to those who "broker" the different parties. Spanners who bridge these gaps are well positioned to hold a good deal of power since the separated parties need to go through the middle node in order to effectively interact, share information, and share resources. When links between the parties form directly, the spanner is not as necessary or powerful.

We can translate these predictions into a simple personal example if we consider the same principles in a friendship network. If Sally has ten close friends and wants to have a good deal of influence with each of them, she will probably have the best luck if she is the one with lots of "between links" in the network. That is, if the friends mostly only know one another through her (and don't directly interact without Sally), she will have the most influence. If the friends start having lots of social ties directly with one another without Sally, that equalizes or minimizes Sally's influence with the other people in the network. Sally would be less able to manipulate opinions, control gossip, influence decision-making in such a situation.

We can complicate this model even further if we acknowledge that organizations do not speak with one disembodied voice. In fact, stakeholders interact with various boundary-spanners that represent organizations (e.g., customer service representatives, immediate supervisors, salespersons, lawyers). **Boundary-spanners** are individuals who connect an organization with external environments (Adams, 1980; Leifer and Delbecq, 1978). Boundary-spanners don't always present the same "face" to stakeholders, aren't always consistent with one another, and may create widely varying levels of trust, credibility, and integrity with different stakeholders. Figure 3.4 is an even better depiction of stakeholder relationships in acknowledging this multi-voice aspect of boundary interactions. An even truer representation of these relationships would include the same level of complexity for each stakeholder group (depicting multiple boundary-spanners within each of the stakeholder groups).

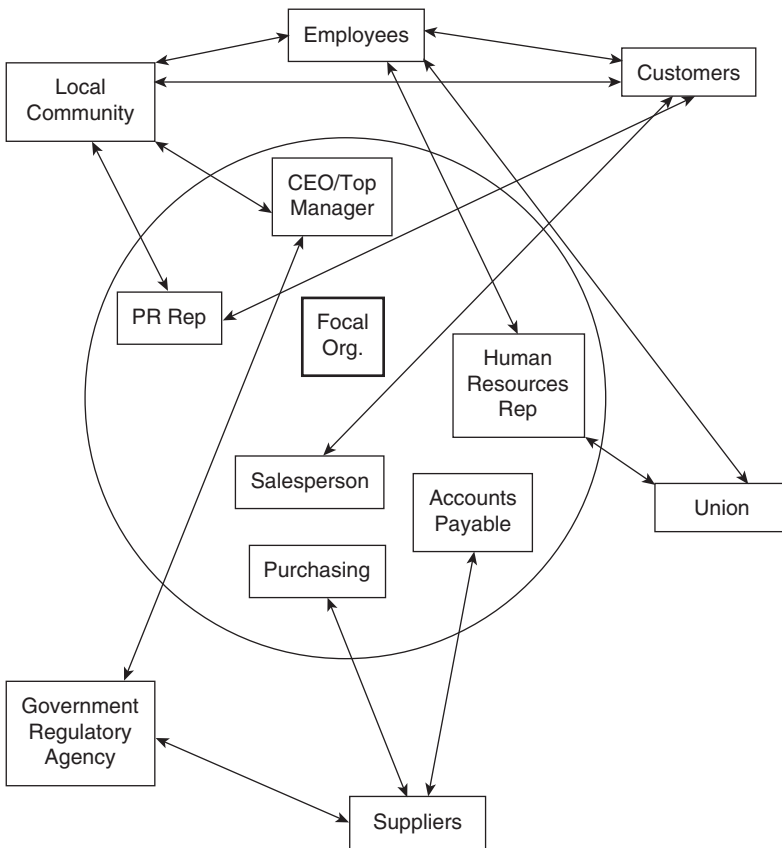


Figure 3.4 Complex stakeholder relationships with multiple boundary-spanners

Multiple Stakeholder Identities

Stakeholders do not always have singular identities with regard to a focal organization. That is, some stakeholders play multiple roles regarding the organization and therefore may occupy overlapping stakeholder identities (Rowley and Moldoveanu, 2003). A customer might be an employee (e.g., I might take an evening course at the university where I am on faculty); a volunteer may also be a client (e.g., Red Cross volunteers may find themselves in need of emergency aid during a disaster); a community member may also be an employee, and so forth. There

are many such overlapping stakeholder identities. We can also see that individuals may identify with various subgroups within or relative to an organization. Scott (1997; 1999) refers to these as multiple **targets of identification**. Our targets can include multitudes of identities that are salient for us including: cohorts (e.g., employees who were hired at the same time; groups of clients in the same age range; volunteers who were trained together), workgroups, professional affiliations, and areas of expertise among many others. This makes the mapping of stakeholders during change a much more challenging task because you cannot necessarily peg any one individual or group to a single perspective that they represent or with which they affiliate.

Targets of identification for stakeholders may be altered or highlighted by the nature of the change being undertaken. This is true because change often makes some identities more salient. Introduction of a parental leave policy will make our status as parents or potential parents more salient. For the childless person, it may highlight that status and raise issues of fairness. The implementation of an idea that an individual helped create would likely make salient her identity as part of the design team. The introduction of complex new technologies in a workplace previously lacking such an innovation, might raise salience of identities related to expertise or technological qualifications (e.g., those who self-perceive as “techies” versus those who are uncomfortable with technology).

Our connections and identifications with different “targets” within and around organizations may have a profound influence on how we view any given change initiative and the likelihood we will join efforts to act in support or against a change. In an effort to examine these sorts of influences, Michael Gallivan (2001) examined how different stakeholder groups viewed a technology change in different ways. He uses Orlikowski and Gash’s (1994) definition of “technology frames” as “the assumptions, expectations, and knowledge [that people] use to understand technology in organizations” (p. 178). Gallivan examined a company’s efforts in reskilling (upgrading employee skills in replacement of outmoded practices and equipment) of computer programmers, systems analysts, and other IT professionals in the 1990s. Gallivan suspected that various stakeholders by virtue of different memberships in occupational groups, hierarchical levels, and socialization into specific jobs would have different bases of experience and awareness that would shape their assumptions about organizational change and cause them to observe the same events or receive the same messages about change in

very different and even contradictory ways. He observed three groups of stakeholders – change managers; IT managers and employees; those who interacted with IT but who were not target of reskilling – all making sense of the size, scope, and purpose of the change in vastly different ways (see Highlight Box 3.2). We will return to this discussion in Chapter 8 where we consider how the interaction among stakeholders further complicates this picture. That is, even though stakeholders share interests and stakes, they may not hold the same understanding of a change effort. Their interactions with other stakeholders will be a major determinant of how they view it. For now, it is important to recognize that identification with a specific group of stakeholders can influence our initial read on a change as well as our motivation to act in support or against the change.

Highlight Box 3.2: IT Reskilling Case Study – How Stakeholder Groups View Change Differently

The change managers – described a vision for reskilling that relied on a partnership among themselves, the IT managers, and the IT employees. This vision implied major transformation in programmers' roles and skill sets, and significant change in the organizational culture. This group envisioned mentoring and career development as key as well.

The IT managers and IT Employees – viewed the goals of the change as a narrow focus on updating technical skills of IT employees and did not acknowledge or recognize any broad change to their level of business knowledge, job roles, culture, or interaction with customers. These stakeholders expected incremental and mostly autonomous change efforts that would be conducted through trial and error experiments to reskill.

Those who worked with IT – viewed the change as a radical one that would be achieved mostly through the efforts of outside consultants. They expected dramatic layoffs and new deskilled IT roles.

Source: Adapted from Gallivan (2001).

The possibility that multiple targets of identification are simultaneously salient for any given individual raises the possibility that our different “selves” will have conflicting points of view on a change. As a parent, I may really like the new parental leave policy since it provides a means for me to take time off with my newborn. As a supervisor, I may think the policy is overly generous in that it will create havoc for me when my subordinates begin to disappear for months at a time to have their children. The push and pull of our various salient targets of identification can create internal turmoil as we consider change. It also creates a more challenging picture for implementers of change to manage since it may be hard to predict which of stakeholders’ multiple “identities” will have more influence in their reactions.

Identification with different stakeholder groups with different positions on a change initiative can also drive us to debate our viewpoint. For example, friendship with a group of workers who are being laid off during a merger may get in the way of support for a change that otherwise may be acceptable to an individual. Implementers who are strategic in their approach to communication will likely attempt to make certain identities more salient if they think it will result in stronger compliance and cooperation from stakeholders. For example, a manager in the case of a layoff might appeal to the “good of the company,” heightening identification with the survival of the company over identification with friends who have to go. Similarly, those opposed to the change may highlight other stakeholder identities to urge individuals to make different commitments.

In my own university, there are currently some dire budgetary discussions. The president sent an email to all employees highlighting the “university community” as a target of identification. On the heels of that email I received one from the union leadership reminding its membership of union loyalties – highlighting that community as a target of identification. Neither email specifically requested anything at this point, but clearly both are attempting to make some targets of identification more salient than others. We will return to the topic of strategic communication in Chapter 5.

Stakeholder Interactions

Partly as a result of attempts to highlight or make some identities more salient, stakeholders negotiate with one another (Allen and Callouet, 1994; Kuhn, 2008). Stakeholders may spend as much time and energy

Highlight Box 3.3: Upton Sinclair Sets Off Stakeholder Advocacy to Clean Up Meat Packing Factories

Upton Sinclair became involved in the growing socialist movement in America and wrote books advocating change through investigative journalism; this practice was called “muckraking.” Sinclair moved to Chicago to investigate the meat-packing industry in order to document the poor conditions of workers. His findings were published in *The Jungle*, a novel depicting an immigrant who worked in one of plants.

An instant best-seller, Sinclair’s book exposed sickening practices in the meat-packing industry. He told how dead rats were shoveled into sausage-grinding machines, how bribed inspectors looked the other way when diseased cows were slaughtered for beef, and how filth and guts were swept off the floor and packaged as “potted ham.” In short, *The Jungle* came close to converting a lot of readers into vegetarians! When it was published, the public reaction was instantaneous.

Working from a New York City hotel room Sinclair launched a publicity campaign. He wrote articles with titles like “Campaign against the wholesale poisoners of the nation’s food,” and released more stomach-churning details. He claimed that Armour made its potted hams by taking nubs of smoked beef, “moldy and full of maggots,” and grinding them with ham trimmings. In a newspaper letter, he dared J. Ogden Armour, the meat-packing magnate, to sue for libel.

Within months, the aroused public demanded sweeping reforms in the meat industry and deluged President Theodore Roosevelt with letters. The President sent his own agents to Chicago to investigate whether meat-packing was as bad as Sinclair described. He also invited Sinclair to the White House and solicited his advice on how to make inspections safer. As a result of Sinclair’s crusade, Congress passed the Pure Food and Drug Act, which up to that point had been effectively blocked by industry. To this day, our hamburgers, chicken patties, and other meats are safeguarded by the same law.

Source: Adapted from <http://teachingamericanhistorymd.net/000001/000000/000167/html/t167.html>, <http://www.capitalcentury.com/1906.html>, and <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/01/02/opinion/02tue4.html> (A. Cohen, “100 years later, the food industry is still ‘the jungle’”).

negotiating stakes with one another as they do with the organization. As Deetz (2001) argues, “interaction among stakeholders can be conceived as a negotiative process aiding mutual goal accomplishment. Communication is the means by which such negotiation takes place” (p. 39). As stakeholders become aware of mutual and competing stakes and the potential for identification to sway one way or the other during change, they lobby one another for support of proposed actions and/or sympathies to specific viewpoints. Powerful combinations of stakeholders can result from this lobbying. Pfarrer, Decelles, Smith, and Taylor (2008) describe the role of “elite stakeholders” as facilitators of interaction between the organization and its other stakeholders and also as facilitators of discourse among stakeholder groups. They cite the example of Texaco’s 1994 discrimination scandal where “elites such as print and TV media outlets disseminated information to the organization’s other stakeholders, helping shape their opinions and perhaps galvanizing them into action” (p. 732).

Another great example of this can be found in the “muckraking” of early American socialist writers in the 1900s. The story of Upton Sinclair’s book *The Jungle* about the meat-packing industry is a provocative example of how stakeholders can discover joint concerns (see Highlight Box 3.3). Neither Sinclair, the American socialists he was associated with, sympathetic congressmen, nor any single advocacy group could have accomplished the Food and Drug Administration Act alone. It was the powerful combination of Sinclair’s call for attention, the public’s outrage and lobbying of the President, and the reactions of Congress to the President’s bid for reform that created the political climate to pass this law. The ways in which stakeholders interacted and came to bond around a common conclusion had a great deal of influence in creating change. Further, the combination of the public, the President, and Congress coming together as stakeholders was enough to overcome the lobbying efforts of industry stakeholders.

Roles Stakeholders Play in Change

Individuals, groups, and whole organizations can serve specific roles during change that may exert influence and impact the way implementation unfolds. I briefly describe four specific stakeholder roles here: opinion leaders, connectors, counselors, and journalists.

Opinion leaders have been discussed in the change literature for many years (cf. Kanter, 1983; Leonard-Barton and Kraus, 1985). Opinion

leadership involves individuals or groups of stakeholders whose opinions tend to lead rather than follow other stakeholders. An innovation champion, a type of opinion leader, is said to be a leader, a sponsor, a diplomat, a salesperson, a risk-taker, and a problem-solver. In the opposite vein, the *innovation assassin* (Leonard-Barton and Kraus, 1985) (don't you love the metaphor!) advises people not to use the new change. Further, Zoller and Fairhurst (2007) describe resistance leaders as emergent and informal spokespersons who present dissent messages to those in power. In another example, Armenakis, Bernerth, Pitts, and Walker (2007), based on research in diffusion, argue that opinion leaders' adoption of new technologies and methodologies speeds up diffusion.

Scholars have studied social influence processes within organizational settings (Ibarra and Andrews, 1993; Zagenczky, Gibney, Murrell, and Boxx, 2008) and have examined cases of how innovations spread within networks due to social influence processes (Fulk, 1993; Kraut, Rice, Cool, and Fish, 1998; Timmerman, 2002). Additionally, they have studied the influence of change agents in the context of implementation of change. In a review of literature related to change agents (Lewis and Seibold, 1998), my colleague David Seibold and I make several observations about what is known about change agents in terms of their significance, common characteristics, and differences between internal change agents and external (e.g., consultants).

Just how opinion leadership plays a role in fostering attitudes about change, methods of implementation, or organizing resistance or advocacy of change is unclear. We do know that in organizations in general social influence is exerted through (a) overt statements made by others, (b) vicarious learning from observations of the experiences of others, and (c) normative group influence (Fulk, Schmitz, and Steinfield, 1990; Salancik and Pfeffer, 1978). It is likely that most social influence will travel through the pathways established in knowledge-sharing networks in organizations. We discussed in the last chapter how stakeholders tend to turn to sources of information considered knowledgeable, with whom they can exchange information and are in close proximity.

Malcolm Gladwell (2000) writes in his book *The Tipping Point* about opinion leaders he terms "salesmen" who have:

a kind of indefinable trait, something powerful and contagious and irresistible that goes beyond what comes out of his mouth, that makes people who meet him want to agree with him. It's energy. It's enthusiasm. It's charm. It's likability. It's all those things and yet something more. (p. 73)

This sort of persuasive individual, if found within a given stakeholder's information knowledge network, might wield a good deal of influence on attitudes and action.

Connectors are another important role played by stakeholders during change. Connectors are those who help bridge gaps between different types of stakeholders. Gladwell's *Tipping Point* describes "connectors" as people who hold membership in many different social worlds, subcultures, and niches. Gladwell says of these people, "[their] ability to span many different worlds is a function of something intrinsic to their personality, some combination of curiosity, self-confidence, sociability, and energy" (p. 49). Because connectors have their "feet" in many different social worlds simultaneously, they are able to link those worlds together. They are fluent in many different value systems, languages, ideologies. The importance of connectors in change is then in (a) spreading knowledge and counter-knowledge about change initiatives, (b) bringing together diverse points of view on change from diverse stakeholder groups, and (c) brokering alliances among stakeholders that may create aligned goals for the change.

Several scholars discuss the importance of front-line or middle-level managers in connecting roles (cf. Coyle-Shapiro, 1999; Gallivan, 2001; Luscher and Lewis, 2008). Line supervisors have the potential to be effective translators of large-scale organizational change initiatives. They can provide the top manager perspectives to front-line employees and to outside stakeholders. They are uniquely suited to translate the vision of a change as well as important details of how implementation will take place. Further, front-line supervisors, and others in middle management roles, can translate front-line and other stakeholder concerns to decision-makers. Middle managers who interact with one another can also as serve as internal boundary-spanners across different functions and lines within an organization.

Christine Meyer (2006) has argued that middle managers are often derided as "foot-draggers" during change. However, her study of an international (Finnish, Swedish, Danish, and Norwegian) merger that resulted in the creation of Nordea – a large financial organization – illustrates how middle-level managers can play both destructive and constructive roles in change. The Nordea merger was described as an implementation "failure" due, in part, to the misalignment among middle-level managers and the absence of leadership and involvement from top managers. These critical connectors essentially pulled the organization in different directions simultaneously. Meyer proposed "whether middle

management intervention is constructive or destructive in the process of operationalizing strategic intent [of change] depends on how the interests of the different groups of middle management are aligned” (p. 415).

Counselors are those in the organization who provide social support to other stakeholders during change. Several scholars have noted the importance of emotion and social support in the context of organizational change (Ashford, 1988; Miller and Monge, 1985; Zorn, 2002). Zorn provides several examples of the functions of emotion during organizational change, including “to signal engagement, disengagement, satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the change” (p. 161). Counselors are those in and around organizations who are best suited and most actively engaged in dealing with these emotions. Some emotions can be so raw and potentially destructive as to be “toxic.” Peter Frost (2004) discusses the important role of “toxin handlers” in providing empathetic capacity to notice when and how painful situations turn toxic. Frost argues that toxin handlers “step into situations at work to dissipate or to buffer the toxins so that those who are in harm’s way are rescued or protected and can get on with doing their organizational work” (p. 115).

Napier, Simmons, and Stratton (1989) describe how employees provided mutual social support during a merger of banks, “instead of just sitting in my corner and dealing with where *my* life was headed, we took more time [as a unit] to just talk about our feelings” (p. 115). One bank teller reported, “we got together on Friday after work for a bottle of wine and a good cry” (p. 116). One form of Social support can take the form of **emotional support** (providing a channel for venting emotions), **informational support** (providing answers to questions that are source of stress), and **instrumental support** (taking on some task for another person) (Miller, 1995). Ashford (1988) found that “sharing worries and concerns” was one of the most effective strategies to buffer against stress. Although a number of studies have been conducted suggesting the importance of social support during change and exploring the use of various coping strategies during change, we know very little about the sorts of individuals who are commonly cast in the “counselor” role.

Journalists serve the function of investigators and reporters during change. They may gather information from inside and outside the organization and are prone to share what they learn widely with other stakeholders. These stakeholders are not only high information seekers, they are high promoters of using data, sharing experiences, and opinion

swapping. Most of the current change literature has focused only on information seeking as it relates to personal use. High information seekers, in that context, may use information to reduce uncertainty for themselves. In the context of the journalist role, information seeking is done as a service to the community of stakeholders. This is a role that has yet to show up in the change literature but nonetheless is a key one.

Journalists are not necessarily non-partisan. However, their function in this role is to gather and disseminate information, commentary, and opinion. They “report” on what is working; not working; what rumors are confirmed or debunked; how stakeholders of various types are reacting to change; and who is supportive or negative. They might also report on information gathered outside the organization or speculate on future plans for the change effort or reasons for why decision-makers selected it. The influence of opinion leaders may be heightened once a journalist reports on them. Journalists may spread information at the water-cooler, over drinks at the local watering hole, or do things akin to professional journalists like create or contribute to websites, blogs, wikis, and the like that describe the change process for others. They may also operate like roving reporters who pick up and then share the opinions of a wide array of stakeholders. Examples of journalists abound in the online world. “Sucks.com” sites (Gossett and Kilker, 2006) are one venue as are YouTube videos, and Facebook pages submitted by organizational stakeholders. “Sucks.com” catalogs a comprehensive list of corporate American “suck” sites (see Highlight Box 3.4) as well as more for government, universities, and even whole States and cities. These sites provide forums for stakeholders (e.g., consumers, employees, ex-employees) to complain about or discuss current operations in organizations, including change efforts.

Highlight Box 3.4: Sample of Sucks.com Sites

3M Sucks	Federal Express Sucks	Pepsi Sucks
Anheuser Busch Sucks	Hilton Sucks	Pfizer Sucks
AT&T Sucks	Kraft Food Sucks	RJR Nabisco Sucks
Boeing Sucks	Merck Sucks	Safeway Sucks
Cigna Sucks	Microsoft Sucks	Time Warner Sucks
Comcast Sucks	Nike Sucks	Xerox Sucks

In sum, the four stakeholder roles here, opinion leaders, connectors, counselors, and journalists can have tremendous impact on how change progresses in organizations. All of these are very social roles. In one way or another stakeholders who play out these roles help in interpretation, meaning-making, sense-making, and spread of information and opinion about change programs.

Stakeholder Model of Implementation of Change

A theoretical model (Lewis, 2007) I formulated helps to conceptualize the important factors that account for selections of communication strategies and the relationships that those strategies, once enacted, have with stakeholders' concerns, their interactions, and ultimately, their effects on outcomes for change. An updated version of the model is presented here (Figure 3.1) to help guide our discussion of the role of stakeholder interactions in the context of implementation of organizational change. This version of the model is somewhat different from the earlier version in the sense that it includes a variety of actors in the strategic communication portion of the model. In the earlier version, only implementers were treated as strategic communicators who design messages and communicative strategies to influence stakeholders. Consistent with Stakeholder Theory and the development in this book, I have altered the model to reflect the more accurate depiction of many possible communicators acting strategically during implementation of change. Not all stakeholder communication is reactionary.

Models are depictions of sets of important components of organizational (or other) life. In the most basic form they include components (usually in boxes or circles) and relationships (usually marked by arrows that illustrate direction of influence). Models are always oversimplifications of real life, but they are one tool to help us map out how important features of our social worlds impact one another. They also aid in the development of hypotheses that can be tested in research, which is one valuable pathway to furthering understanding.

We can start our tour of this model from the “back side” or the right side of the model – outcomes. Outcomes of implementation of change concern both what the model terms “observable system” and “results.” These are topics that are discussed in detail in the next chapter. For now we can define the important differences between these two concepts. The **observable system** concerns what it is possible to notice

through participation and observation. Observables in change implementation include the number of users of a new technology, the frequency of errors in use of a new procedure, the degree to which all expected users are all following a new policy, and the like. **Results**, on the other hand, concern whether the implementation effort achieves intended or unintended, desired or undesired consequences. Usually change programs are not initiated in order to alter processes, behaviors, and attitudes alone. Those outcomes are intended as precursors to some stated or unstated goal of the implementers or sponsors of change programs. Thus, change initiatives are intended to raise revenue, increase market share, increase productivity, reduce numbers of consumer complaints, etc. Although the outcomes of participation, implementation rate, appropriate user response may be achieved, results may not be always achieved. Typically, it is results that are ultimately used to judge the success or failure of change initiatives.

Unintended consequences of change programs are also part of results. If all the desired results are achieved but the company suffers some major embarrassment or injury as an additional result of a change, the ultimate judgment may be failure. Organizations sometimes pay dearly for unintended consequences of major change programs, including reputation damage; breakdowns in relationships with employees, customers, suppliers, or other important stakeholders; lost revenue during transition periods, among others.

The rest of the model is intended to account for major features of organizational and stakeholder activities during implementation that give rise to the observable system and results. The general perspective that frames this book, and is embraced by this model, concerns the critical contribution of stakeholder interactions as an important engine for the outcomes of change. Thus, in the next section of the model, moving left across the page, I have depicted stakeholders' concerns, assessments of each other, and interactions about change in and around the organization. We will discuss these critical components in detail in Chapter 8. You will notice that these various components of the change situation are depicted as having influence on one another in complex ways. Interactions among stakeholders and implementers may influence, and are influenced by, stakeholders' assessments of each other and stakeholders concerns about the change. As I have argued throughout this book, stakeholders make sense collectively in highly social ways. As Weick (1995) points out, "sense-making is never solitary because what a person does internally is contingent on others" (p. 40). Stakeholders consider and may be

influenced by the stakes others have in the organization and in the change, and the sensegiving attempts of others who attempt to frame the change in specific ways.

Sensemaking among stakeholders during change processes often leads to the construction of concerns about the impact of change. For example, even if the change may seem to support my values, it may threaten the values of a stakeholder group with which I identify. Such identifications as well as interactions with members of those stakeholder groups may lead to increased concerns about the change. In turn, as concerns rise or fall, my interactions regarding the change may lead to decreased support for the change and lack of enthusiastic participation in the change initiative. Of course positive reactions or conflicted reactions can be built through the same sort of process. I might start out negative but after interacting with other stakeholders come to hold a more positive outlook on the change or simply be more confused about what I think.

Working a layer back in the model to the communication strategies enacted by implementers and others, the model depicts how communication strategies (e.g., messages and styles of interactions) can serve as triggers for stakeholders' concerns and stakeholders' interactions with each other. As we discussed in Chapter 2, implementers, as well as other stakeholders, use different strategies to disseminate information and solicit input. For example, we noted that in some cases, implementers' attempts to involve stakeholders are widespread and in others they may be fairly limited. These and other dimensions of communication strategies, discussed in Chapter 5, prompt many stakeholder reactions to change programs.

The model predicts that both implementers' and stakeholders' communicative strategies, once enacted, will create opportunities for stakeholders to construct concerns about the change. For example, communication between stakeholders and implementers creates a frame that change is necessary, stakeholders may perceive even difficult changes (involving high demands on them, layoffs, painful or drawn-out transition periods) as ones they must endure. Where implementers' attempts to communicate the necessity of change do not result in stakeholders perceiving such a need, this may lead to an increase in stakeholders' uncertainty about going through painful change.

The model also depicts a link between stakeholders' interactions and communication strategy directions. This link is referencing, in part, that implementers monitor stakeholder interactions and make course corrections in their own communicative strategies to provoke the desired

results. For example, implementers may observe the interactions of employees who are strongly opposed to a change effort and conclude that resistance is likely. One possible reaction to perceived employee resistance would be to reshape communication efforts to address the reasons employees are giving for their negative reactions to the change. This might involve soliciting further input from employees; providing extra incentives for enthusiastic participation; or threats for those who are noncompliant. Of course this is a process involving sensemaking and interpreting “what is going on” with stakeholders that may not accurately reflect stakeholders’ view of things. Implementers may read things one way and stakeholders may read them in distinctly different ways. Communication among implementers and stakeholders may enable a construction of reaction to change that is common or may result in many disparate views that are only partially observed by the various communicators.

This link between stakeholders’ interactions and communication strategy also suggests that stakeholders’ interactions are, in part, triggered by their sensemaking of the strategic communication attempts by implementers. In a similar way as just described, stakeholders independently and socially make sense of the messages and communicative processes engaged in by implementers, and that sensemaking is part of the determination of their own further interactions with one another. If for example a stakeholder group perceives implementers focused more on another stakeholder group’s input than their own, this may encourage them to engage with one another about ways to become more visible and important in the eyes of implementers. It might also suggest to them that their concerns aren’t considered relevant and decrease their desire to provide input.

The model also predicts that communicator strategy choices are conditioned by important perceptions and strategic choices made at a more general level. Implementers and stakeholders alike base strategic communication choices on institutional factors that shape the organizational environment as well as their own perceptions of the change context.

As various individuals assess the situation of change in terms of important stakeholders; how the organization has typically changed in its history; the readiness or willingness of the organization to change; and the goals and needs of the organization in implementing the change, they select, create, and enact communication strategies. Institutional factors often act as constraints on communicators’ strategy choices. Some practices of communication may be impossible to pull off given

certain constraints and some may be promoted through the existence of strongly normative ways to do things.

For example, in the earlier example of the drive-thru pharmacy window, pharmacists might wish to end the practice. In order to speak out in an influential and strategic way against it, the pharmacists could have chosen any number of communicative strategies. They could have gone to the newspapers with a protest editorial; picketed in front of drive-thru pharmacies; asked all pharmacists to complain to their own companies through a letter-writing campaign. However, they decided to protest the practice through passing a resolution in their professional association. They may have made this choice because it is more professionally normative to do so. That is, it is a more usual way of lodging the opinions of their professional members.

The model provides a way to map out the strategic communication of implementers and stakeholders of change initiatives. It illustrates how antecedent factors encourage and constrain some strategic communication strategies; how those strategies once enacted lead to stakeholders' concerns, assessments, and interactions; and how those interactions, in turn, influence outcomes in the observable system and results of change. This process is fluid and complex and as discussed in Chapter 1, does not happen in isolation of events in the organization's larger environment. Stakeholders exist in all facets of an organization's world. Stakeholders' identifications, and various understandings of their own and others' stakes in the change and in the organization are constantly in flux. Multiple communicators in various stakeholder roles are operating simultaneously and as we have observed in an earlier discussion, multiple change efforts can be underway simultaneously. Further, the ways in which communication is enacted creates multiple forums for socially making sense of the change, messages, and the stories told about what is "really going on."

Conclusion

In summary, this chapter has provided an overview of Stakeholder Theory and how it applies to the implementation of organizational change. We have examined the important branches of Stakeholder Theory and noted that a complete understanding of any given organization's stakeholders can be a very complex matter. How individual stakeholders and stakeholder groups perceive themselves in relation to an organization can be complex, can change over time, and can sometimes

lead to self-contradictory interests. The salience of identifications of individuals during change events can make mapping the stakeholder terrain very dynamic. Communication about change highlights different targets of identification, various perceptions of loyalties to different stakeholder groups, and the importance of change from different perspectives. This chapter has also provided an overview of four important roles performed by stakeholders during change and toured the model of implementation that frames this book. In subsequent chapters, the major areas of the model are further explored. We focus first, in Chapter 4, on the outcomes of change, understanding more about the importance of assessing outcomes as well as the difficulty of doing so. Chapter 5 describes five key strategy dimensions of implementer and stakeholder communication during change. Chapter 6 provides an important backdrop discussion of power and resistance in organizations, especially during change. In Chapter 7 we explore the important antecedents to implementers' and stakeholders' selection of strategies they enact. Chapter 8 focuses on interactions during change in highlighting how their storytelling, framing, and sensemaking are drivers of and result in communication and change outcomes. Chapter 9 completes our discussion of change in the context of stakeholder communication with a focus on practice.

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