Willingness to Communicate and Employee Success in U.S. Organizations

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ABSTRACT This article presents a view of the influence and effects of individuals' willingness to communicate in an organizational setting. Definitional explanations of the willingness to communicate construct are provided along with an extensive review of the relevant research and theory in this area. Communication apprehension is explicated and considered in context of willingness to communicate. The manner in which low willingness to communicate affects individuals and fosters specific organizational outcomes is explored. In general, research indicates negative results from low willingness to communicate, both on individual and organizational levels. Appropriate organizational responses to "at risk individuals" are explored in terms of diagnosis and remediation.

Consistent behavioral tendencies of individuals' frequency and amount of talk have been reported in the research in the social sciences for over half a century (for some early work see Chapple & Arensberg, 1940; Borgatta & Bales, 1953; and Goldman-Eisler, 1951). The presence of these consistent patterns of behavior in the face of variable contextual influences is suggestive of an underlying predisposition toward communication. In recent years, this personality-based orientation has come to be known as "Willingness to Communicate" (WTC: McCroskey & Richmond, 1987).

WTC: TRAIT AND SITUATIONAL

Underlying the WTC construct is the assumption that it is a personality-based, trait-like predisposition which is relatively consistent across a variety of communication contexts and types of receivers. Thus, it is presumed that the level of a person's willing-

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ness to communicate in one communication context (like talking in a small group) is correlated with the person's willingness to communicate in other communication contexts (such as giving a speech, talking in meetings, and talking in dyads). It is also presumed that the level of a person's willingness to communicate with one type of receiver (like friends) is correlated with the person's willingness to communicate with other types of receivers (such as acquaintances and strangers). These assumptions have been strongly supported by research designed to test them directly (Chan, 1988; Combs, 1990; McCroskey & Baer, 1985; McCroskey & Richmond, 1985; McCroskey & Richmond, 1991; Richmond & McCroskey, 1989a).

The fact that a person's WTC level is quite consistent across contexts does not mean, however, that communication context or the type of receiver are irrelevant to that person's WTC level in a given situation. An individual certainly will not be equally willing to communicate in every situation. However, if Person A is generally more willing to communicate than Person B, were we to predict that Person A would be more willing to communicate in any given situation than would Person B, we would be right more often than we would be wrong. In fact, the research indicates we would be right much more often than we would be wrong.

Research on WTC: Seminal Efforts

Although research employing the formal WTC label is of recent vintage, research related to the development of the WTC construct traces back to the early days of social science research. Within the field of personality psychology, for example, the personality dimension of "extraversion-introversion" was one of the earliest to be isolated and remains a central element in most general personality theories. Similarly, within the field of speech one of the early concerns of scholars employing social science methodology was the problem of "stage fright" and the inappropriate communication behaviors believed to be the result of that fear. To understand contemporary theory and research relating to WTC and how these may be applied in the context of contemporary organizations, it is useful to briefly examine some of the related constructs which have drawn the attention of recent scholarly efforts.

**Introversion.** The construct of extraversion-introversion postulates a continuum between extremes (Eysenck, 1970; 1971). The nearer the individual is to the extraversion extreme, the more "people oriented" the person is likely to be, hence the more likely the person will be willing to communicate. In contrast, the nearer the individual is to the introversion extreme, the less the person desires contact with other human beings, hence the less likely the person will be willing to communicate. Introverts often are charac-
terized as quiet, timid, and shy. They appreciate the pleasure of their own company. Research consistently has found introverts to be less willing to communicate than other people (e.g., Borg & Tuples, 1968; Carment, Miles & Cervin, 1965).

Reticence. Possibly the most catalytic of the related scholarly efforts has been the work of Phillips and his colleagues (1968, 1984) on reticence. Dictionary definitions of the term “reticent” center on quietness and the tendency to be reserved in speaking. In short, reticence is a behavioral construct. Although Phillips is a behaviorist by inclination, he initially centered his attention on fear and anxiety which were seen as the causes of reticent behavior. In later work Phillips shifted his attention to skills deficits which he believed to be the more likely cause of reticent behavior. He proposed a form of skills training (rhetoritherapy) to help people overcome their skills deficits. Possibly the most significant impact of Phillips’ work was that it redirected the attention of people in the Communication field from their previous almost exclusive attention on fear of public speaking to a more general concern about fear or anxiety about communicating in a wide variety of contexts. We will look at this concern a bit later.

Recently, McCroskey and McCroskey (1986c) proposed an extension of reticence theory. They speculated that it may not be necessary that a person actually have a skills deficit to be reticent; it may be sufficient that the person perceives such a deficit to exist. Their research indicated a substantial relationship between their self-perceived communication competence measure and the Willingness to Communicate Scale. The bottom line at this point, then, is that people who lack communication competence, or at least perceive that to be the case, will be less willing to communicate than those who see their communication competence to be higher.

Anomie and Alienation. Anomie refers to a state of an individual in which normative standards are severely reduced or lost. Anomics do not value communication. Alienation, an extreme manifestation of anomie, is a feeling of estrangement, of being apart and separate from other humans and society in general. Both anomie and alienation have been found to be associated with communication avoidance and withdrawal (Giffin, 1970; Giffin & Groginsky, 1970; Heston & Andersen, 1972). Both also have been found to be negatively correlated with willingness to communicate (McCroskey and McCroskey, 1986a).

Self-Esteem. A person’s self-esteem is that person’s evaluation of her/his own worth. If a person has low self-esteem, it might be expected the person would be less willing to communicate because the person may feel that what he/she would have to say would be of little value. The person might also be concerned that, by communi-
cating, more of her/his inadequacies would become obvious to others. Only limited research is available in this area, but it does point to a positive relationship between self-esteem and willingness to communicate (McCroskey & McCroskey, 1986a,b).

Communication Apprehension. Communication apprehension (CA) is "an individual's level of fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated communication with another person or persons" (McCroskey, 1977; 1984; Richmond & McCroskey, 1992). The relationship between CA and WTC is direct: the more apprehensive the individual is, the less willing he/she is to communicate. This relationship is substantial (-.44 to -.52, depending on culture; McCroskey & Richmond, 1990), but certainly not perfect. Thus, it is important to understand that even though it is correct to suggest that when people are highly apprehensive about communication they are less likely to communicate, it does not follow that if a person is quiet it necessarily means that person is apprehensive. As we have noted above, people may be quiet for a number of reasons, not just because of fear or anxiety. The impact of quietness, however, should be the same regardless of why the person is quiet.

Other Constructs. Two other constructs have been advanced which are very similar to the WTC construct: Unwillingness To Communicate (UTC: Burgoon, 1976) and Predisposition toward Verbal Behavior (PVB: Mortensen, Arnston, & Lusting, 1977). These constructs were very influential in the development of the WTC construct, but will not be considered here because the measures developed for those constructs have since been found to be primarily measures of communication apprehension. Social Anxiety (Leary, 1983) and Shyness (Buss, 1980; Zimbardo, 1977) are constructs which have been advanced in the field of psychology. They will be referenced below but research based on them will not be reviewed since measures of these constructs sometimes reflect the CA construct discussed above and sometimes confound anxiety and behavior.

Separating Apprehension and Behavior

The advancement of theory and application in this area has been impeded by confusion among constructs. In attempting to synthesize research stemming from the various conceptual orientations, authors have gone so far as to suggest all of the researchers are talking about the same thing (Glaser, 1981; Kelly, 1982). This conclusion definitely is incorrect and has led to oversimplification and serious error. It would be easy to blame these writers for their mistakes and suggest they "should have known better." However, some of the researchers made the same mistakes (Daly, 1978; Daly &
Stafford, 1984; McCroskey, 1977; McCroskey, Daly, Richmond & Cox, 1975), so there is plenty of blame to be shared!

The central problem has been the lack of separation of behavior from the causes of behavior. Being afraid to talk, not being willing to talk, and not talking are three different things, albeit not unrelated to one another: 1) Being afraid to talk is represented by the communication apprehension construct. It is one of many reasons that a person may be more or less willing to talk (along with self-perceived competence, level of introversion, etc.). 2) Being disinclined to talk is a behavioral intention (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975) which is represented by the willingness to communicate construct. We cannot always control whether we can talk or not, regardless of our general willingness. Our initiation of communication is most under our control. However, if someone else initiates interaction, we may talk whether we intended to or not. 3) Talking is an actual, observable behavior; likewise, not talking.

These conceptual distinctions appear in the literatures of both psychology and communication (Leary, 1983; McCroskey, 1982; 1984) and have been established empirically as well (e.g., McCroskey & Richmond, 1982). In the following sections we will attempt to keep these things separated as much as possible and focus most of our attention on willingness to communicate and its effects. Much of the research on willingness to communicate conducted between 1970 and 1985 was conducted under the communication apprehension label. For broad reviews of this work, refer to Daly and Stafford (1984), McCroskey (1977), and Richmond (1984).

RESEARCH ON WILLINGNESS TO COMMUNICATE

While the research on willingness to communicate has been clouded with other constructs, there is empirical data which strongly indicates that WTC is a potentially debilitating, personality-type characteristic which often has a major impact on interpersonal communication in a wide variety of environments. High willingness to communicate is associated with increased frequency and amount of communication which are, in turn, associated with a wide variety of positive communication outcomes. Low willingness is associated with decreased frequency and amount of communication, which are then associated with a wide variety of negative communication outcomes. Some of the outcomes (both positive and negative) will be examined below.

A four-part, landmark study conducted by Hayes and Meltzer (1972) compared interpersonal evaluations based on a full knowledge of all verbal, vocal, and nonverbal cues with those based strictly on knowledge of vocal activity. In the first study, observers watched either a video-tape of a small group interaction or a panel
of lights which represented the conversational patterns of the group members. In this latter condition, a light flashed every time a group member talked. The researchers found virtually no differences between the rankings of the individual group members made by observers in the video-tape condition and the light-board condition. The second study utilized a different, more salient topic and different rating scales. The results were quite similar to those obtained in the first study. The correlation between rankings of small group members made by video-tape observers and light-board observers was extremely high. The third study had the same observers watch both the video-tape and light boards. Again the correlation between actually observing a group discussion with all the verbal and nonverbal cues and watching a light board that represented purely the amount of vocal activity was extremely high. The fourth and final study compared rankings made from the light-board flashes and descriptions of the relative amount of talk in which each group member engaged. The correlations between these two types of stimuli, in terms of the interpersonal judgments made, were again very high. In all studies, the persons who talked more were perceived as more likely to hold leadership positions than persons who talked less.

Allgeier (1974) replicated much of the Hayes and Meltzer research, extending their efforts to interpersonal attraction ratings and measures of perceived adjustment. In addition, while Hayes and Meltzer utilized male subjects, Allgeier chose to use females. His conclusions were similar to those of Hayes and Meltzer. Allgeier found that persons who talked more were perceived as more attractive and more well-adjusted than persons who talked less.

Hayes and Sievers (1972) utilized the Hayes and Meltzer findings to determine the traits associated with varying levels of vocal activity. Descriptions consisted of the percentages of time individuals characteristically spent talking. Significant positive correlations were found between vocal activity and perceived leadership. Again, the persons who talked more were perceived more likely to be leaders than persons who talked less.

McCroskey and Richmond (1976) postulated that a person's communication behavior has a major impact on the way that person is perceived by the other communicators involved. The amount of participation in which a person engages, a very basic element of communication behavior, has been found to have a major impact on perceived credibility, homophily, attraction, and perceived status and leadership (Daly, McCroskey & Richmond, 1974). On the basis of the previous research of Hayes and his colleagues, McCroskey and Richmond (1976) hypothesized that people exhibiting typical behaviors of low willingness to communicate would be perceived less positively than people exhibiting behaviors.
typical of high willingness to communicate persons. Subjects were asked to read a description of another student at the same university (in one condition the student was described as “very verbal and participates a lot” and in the other condition the student was described as “very quiet and participates little”; the gender of the target person was undeterminable). The perceptions of the target person that were selected for measurement in this study were source credibility, interpersonal attraction, homophily, probable academic success, and desirability as an opinion leader. The results indicated that low willingness to communicate target persons were perceived less positively than target persons exhibiting high willingness behaviors in terms of sociability, composure, competence, extraversion, social attraction, desirability as an opinion leader, and projection of academic success in the humanities, public speaking, and business. However, an opposite pattern was observed for perceived character and projection of academic success in math, lab sciences, and agriculture.

It appears that if a person wants to be evaluated more positively on most dimensions, it would be wise to engage in the behaviors typical of the high willingness to communicate person. Generally, high WTCs are perceived as more credible, more attractive, and more likely to be potential opinion leaders. Hence, high WTCs are much more influential in their environment than are low WTCs. Other results suggested that even low WTCs perceive other low WTCs as less effective and less attractive. Simply put, the results indicated that low WTCs are not as positively perceived or as well liked by anyone, even other low WTCs.

In a follow-up study, Daly, McCroskey and Richmond (1977) suggested that the degree of an individual’s vocal activity, the frequency and duration of an individual’s interaction, is an important mediating factor in dyadic and small group interaction. They investigated the relationships between vocal activity level and perceived attraction, credibility, homophily, and ability to influence in a five-person group. The subjects were asked to evaluate the man or woman who talked a given percentage of the time in a group. Percentages of vocal activity were systematically varied in five-step intervals from 0 percent to 95 percent, with no subject asked to evaluate two people with less than a 15 percent differential. Each subject evaluated four people with varying vocal activity, but with no other information about the individual except the person’s gender.

When all of the results were considered, it was possible to extract two general conclusions. First, communicators are generally perceived in an “increasingly positive manner as their vocal activity level increases up to a point of moderately high vocal activity (50%–60% of the total time in the group)” (p. 186). Thus, it seems it is possible for a person to engage in too much vocal activity, and
thus be perceived less positively than if he or she had engaged in less vocal activity. It is also probable that the optimal level is seldom exceeded in a real communication environment. Hence, the results suggest that in general there is a positive, linear relationship between vocal activity and desirable perceptions of communicators in small group interaction. Secondly, while there is a positive, linear relationship between willingness to communicate and credibility, attraction, and power, this relationship does not hold true for the attitude dimension of homophily. People appear to perceive other communicators as most homophilous if their level of willingness to communicate is similar to their own. Hence, the results of this research suggested that the optimal willingness to communicate level for interpersonal influence is a point slightly above the vocal activity of the other communicators in a group. Such a level should provide a more positive perception of credibility, attraction, and power influence than would a low level, while at the same time providing a more positive perception of homophily than would a higher level of talk.

While the previous studies were being conducted and published, McCroskey, Daly, Richmond and others were conducting and publishing other related studies. McCroskey, Hamilton and Weiner (1974) focused on credibility, homophily, and interpersonal attraction as outcomes of communication. They hypothesized that interaction behavior of communicators in a small group would predict the degree of source credibility, homophily, and interpersonal attraction attributed to those communicators by other members of their group. The research was concerned with the extent to which observable interaction behaviors serve as predictors of a communicator’s perceived source credibility, homophily and interpersonal attraction. In the two-part investigation (a pilot and main study) subjects were randomly assigned to groups. The groups’ size varied from four to six, depending on the class enrollment. In the main study, there were five students in each of the 23 groups. At different times throughout the semester, students were asked to serve as observers, rating each person’s interaction behavior once during every five minute period using the Interaction Behavior Measure developed by McCroskey and Wright (1971). Lastly, toward the end of the term, after the groups had engaged in a number of small group task related activities and projects, subjects were asked to complete the credibility, attraction and homophily measures for each member of their group. The results of studies clearly indicated that observable interaction behaviors (willingness to communicate or not to communicate) are predictors of attraction, credibility, and homophily. Generalizability was limited because the study only examined college students in specific task-involved group interactions. However, some conclusions can be drawn. First, interaction behavior may increase rating on one dimension of
attraction, credibility, and homophily, while at the same time contributing to a decrease in another dimension. For example, high interest was observed to be associated positively with task attraction and verbosity but negatively associated with social attraction. Similarly, high relevance was associated positively with physical attraction, sociability, task attraction, and composure. High verbosity was positively associated with social attraction, composure, extroversion, and homophily, but negatively associated with physical attraction, task attraction, and sociability and character. Researchers concluded that “the way people interact in a small group and the way they will be perceived in terms of attraction, homophily, and credibility are very complex” (pp. 50–51). However, the interaction factor (WTC) can definitely impact perceptions of individual differences.

McCroskey, Daly, Richmond and Cox (1975) examined the impact of high and low verbal behavior on interpersonal attraction, desirability as a communication partner, desirability as a sexual partner, and attitude similarity. A description of a person associated with high willingness to communicate (very verbal, participates a lot, etc.) versus a description associated with low willingness to communicate (very quiet person, seldom participates, etc.) In one study, photos of attractive or unattractive people were given along with the descriptions. In the second study, no photos were attached to the descriptions. The results revealed that behaviors characteristic of the low WTC person had a significant negative impact on a person’s perceived social attractiveness by the opposite gender. The behaviors characteristic of the low WTC person also had a significant, negative impact on a person’s perceived task attractiveness by the opposite gender. Behaviors of the low WTCs have a significant negative impact on the degree to which a person is perceived by the opposite gender as an attractive potential communication partner. Behaviors characteristic of the low WTC had a significant negative impact on a person’s perceived sexual attractiveness by members of the opposite gender. In conclusion, it is apparent once more that low willingness to communicate can interfere with interpersonal perceptions and will probably lead to negative perceptions on the part of others.

McCroskey and Daly (1976) completed two studies in which they examined teachers’ perceptions of two hypothetical elementary school children. One student was willing to communicate and one was the unwilling to communicate (both descriptions were of males: Jimmy was the low WTC and Billy was the high WTC). The teachers were randomly assigned the descriptions and asked to estimate the child’s success in nine areas on a 10-point scale (ranging from 0 to 9) and bound at the extremes by very poorly to very well. The success variables to which the teachers responded were as follows: reading, arithmetic, social studies, science, art.
deportment, relationships with other students, overall achievement, and success in future education. The results indicated that "Billy (the high WTC) may have more success in school (both academic and social) than Jimmy" (p. 71). It was clear that low willingness to communicate among elementary school students can result in negative teacher expectations. Jimmy was perceived to have much poorer class participation than Billy and to have much more anxiety about communication. In addition, teachers' expectations reflected that the high willing to communicate child (Billy) would do better in "all" academic areas than the low willing to communicate child (Jimmy). Lastly, the high willingness to communicate child (Billy) was seen to have much greater likelihood of positive relationships with other students than Jimmy. In conclusion, this study suggests that the low willing to communicate student is stereotyped negatively at an early age and teachers have negative perceptions about the social and academic success of such a student.

Richmond, Beatty and Dyba (1985) studied the perceptions that 1,529 children in grades 3–12 had of the students described as talkative versus quiet. They hypothesized that students who were described as talkative (regardless of gender) would be perceived more positively than students who were described as quiet. The results of the study were consistent with results of previous studies involving older adults and college students concerning perceptions of the low willing-to-communicate individual. Regardless of grade level (3–12) of the target student or gender, the quiet child was generally rejected as part of the peer group. The quiet child was seen as less popular and less likely to be socialized into the school environment by her/his peers. The talkative student was perceived to be more approachable by students at all grade levels and more likely to be socialized. The problem of low willingness to communicate can impede a child in developing good social relationships with her/his peer group. In fact, this study suggested that the "young person with good communication skills who remains quiet will be perceived negatively, just as if the skills were inadequate" (p. 124). Once again, regardless of gender or age, the talkative, willing to communicate person was perceived more positively by others than the quiet, less willing to communicate person.

It is clear from the last two decades of research that willingness to communicate plays a central role in determining an individual's communicative impact in school, on a social level and most certainly in the organizational environment. Willingness to communicate is the one, overwhelming communication personality construct which permeates every facet of an individual's life and contributes significantly to the social, educational, and organizational achievements of the individual. The impact of willingness to communicate in the organizational environment is no less than that
in the social and educational realms. Below is a discussion of willingness to communicate and its impact in the organizational environment.

**WILLINGNESS TO COMMUNICATE AND ORGANIZATIONAL OUTCOMES**

In the organizational context, the behavior of quietness or low willingness to communicate has generally negative outcomes for the individual and for the organization. However, to begin in a more positive light, we should note that the low WTC individual will be much less likely to start, continue, or amplify rumors through the grapevine. Rumors of layoffs, management injustice, and/or personal character assassinations have a cancerous impact on organization unity, morals, and ultimately, productivity; hence, the low WTC individual could be seen as an organizational plus in this regard.

A second positive factor of low WTC, closely related to the first, is seen in individual productivity. Employees who take thirty or forty minute coffee breaks several times a day, make frequent bathroom trips for visiting purposes, loiter around the water fountain, call other employees on the phone, take extended lunch hours, etc., have little time to accomplish the tasks for which they are being paid. A quiet employee who steadily and diligently approaches task activities is indeed an asset to the organization. Communication is an imperative for organizational success, but so is task accomplishment.

A third organizational plus for quiet behavioral dispositions would manifest itself in the "squeaky wheel" factor. It is generally accepted that "the squeaky wheel gets the grease" but one will quickly note that an entire organizational department of "wheels" constantly making this kind of audible contribution to organizational processes can become a substantial problem, or at least a source of irritation for management. Individuals who bring critical organizational problems to the forefront or who serve as whistle blowers for unethical/unsafe behaviors by organizational members serve a valuable function in the ongoing of the institution. But individuals who constantly gripe and complain do not. The "overly squeaky" wheels run the risk of being replaced with wheels that run more productively and with less friction. Individuals who more quietly complete their work at a steady pace and who calmly approach job irritants/obstacles in a logical, nonvolatile manner are held in high esteem by fellow employees and management as well.

A fourth positive attribute of low WTC individuals in an organizational setting is that of discretion and security. In a business arena, new technologies and/or products, news of mergers or
hostile takeovers, marketing strategies, and even personnel decisions are extremely sensitive issues that most organizations wish to handle delicately. Quiet employees are less likely than talkative employees to have a slip of the tongue that inadvertently publicizes inappropriate information.

All of these potential positive outcomes notwithstanding, many negative organizational outcomes stem from individuals with extremely retiring communication dispositions. These negative outcomes have serious consequences not only for the organizations but also for the individuals themselves and thus potentially outweigh any of the positive outcomes mentioned earlier. Hence, individuals with low willingness to communicate are considered “at risk” in an organizational setting.

A major component classifying these types of people as “at risk” is the role of perception. Though organizational members who are extremely quiet may have the same level of talents, intellect, etc., as those members who are more willing to communicate, the lack of oral manifestation of these skills causes others, particularly supervisors, to perceive silent people more negatively. As noted in the preceding section, people who are less willing to communicate have been found to be perceived as less socially attractive, less task attractive, less competent, less sociable, less composed, less extraverted, and less desirable as a leader. McCroskey and Richmond (1988) suggest there is a social bias toward high verbalization and high WTC and posit, with respect to social and task attraction, that people who are less willing to communicate are considered less attractive than people more willing to communicate.

It should be pointed out that the concept of perception is key here. Regarding individuals who are extremely quiet, McCroskey and Richmond (1988) state that “such individuals typically are not skill deficient. . . .” (p. 409). Though “researchers have attempted to demonstrate that there is a positive relationship between intelligence and the amount a person talks. . . . No meaningful relationship has been found. Nevertheless, quiet people may be perceived as less competent and less intelligent than their counterparts—the talkative individuals” (Richmond & McCroskey, 1989b, p. 66). Willingness to communicate may even affect perceptions of credibility and participation in organizational group settings. Notably, in terms of information sharing in group settings, contributions of people who are less willing to communicate are seen to be less valuable than the contributions of people very willing to communicate (McCroskey & Richmond, 1988). In an organizational context especially, how a person is perceived may be more influential than actual levels of intelligence, skill, and performance.

From a management perspective, quiet employees run the risk of being perceived in a negative light as well. Daly and McCroskey (1975) note that low willingness to communicate is associated with
negative predictions of future success and achievement. Daly, Richmond and Leth (1979) found that people who are characterized by low willingness to communicate are projected to be associated with lower productivity. Additionally, it was noted that people more willing to communicate are perceived to need less training than individuals less willing to communicate. All of these negative perceptions regarding low willingness to communicate may easily be perceived as financial liabilities by managers, thus damaging supervisor’s relationships with and evaluations of individuals who are extremely quiet. With these perceptions, managers are most likely to view these quiet people as organizational risks.

Overall, low willingness to communicate in its various forms causes the quiet individual to be perceived negatively by others. These negative perceptions will affect not only how quiet people are treated by others but will also ultimately impact their organizational success. McCroskey (1977) states that “as a result of their withdrawal and avoidance behaviors, and in conjunction with the negative perceptions fostered by those behaviors,” people who are less willing to communicate “will be negatively impacted in terms of their economic, academic, political, and social lives” (p. 85).

Extremely quiet individuals tend to have trouble getting into organizations and remaining a member of the organization. Richmond and McCroskey (1989b) note that “quiet people are less likely to be offered an interview for a position than are talkative people” (p. 73). They observe that even if applicants are equal in terms of experience and qualifications, “quietness” will often put an individual at a disadvantage. Daly, et al. (1979) note that just the mention of the job applicant as being a bit “quiet or reserved” in the recommendation letters will tend to give high verballs a distinct edge over quiet individuals, other things being equal. Even if these individuals manage to obtain an interview, research indicates that job offers for high verballs will be more likely than for those with a low willingness to communicate. These and other studies indicate the strong positive social and organizational evaluation of individuals who can and are willing to express themselves effectively and to interact freely/openly with other individuals. They also reflect negative perceptions, societally and in organizations, of quiet people. As a result, the person who has low WTC or is unable to communicate will be more likely to be plagued with the “last hired, first fired” syndrome.

In addition to the difficulties extremely quiet people have in interviewing and being hired by an organization, the low willingness to communicate also affects their length of organizational tenure. Research (e.g., Scott, McCroskey, & Sheahan, 1978) indicates that people who have low WTC have fewer years of service to an organization than do people who are very willing to communicate. Obviously, this trend would significantly affect the hiring
practices of an organization; because of the costs of training and down time, most businesses are looking for employees who will be with the company for a while. However, once individuals are hired, it is the verbals who exhibit the longer organizational tenure.

Explanations for the short organizational tenure of very quiet individuals are many. First, the old principle of “up or out” puts the pressure of promotion on these individuals. The longer a person stays with an organization, the more he/she is expected to advance up the corporate ladder. Top management and leadership positions in an organization place rigorous communication demands on an individual. Because of these demands and the knowledge of these demands, it is much less likely that one will find extremely quiet people in or advancing toward top organizational positions. McCroskey and Richmond (1979) note accordingly that “each advancement requires more administrative and/or supervisory activity and an accompanying increase in communication” (p. 59). Sadly, those quiet people who are “promoted beyond their level of competency” (especially their level of communication competency) find themselves in an extremely uncomfortable position with an almost certain probability for dismal failure. McCroskey and Richmond (1979) posit that “the cost of poor, absent, or ineffective communication becomes higher at each step in most organizations” (p. 59). With these increases in cost, the person who is less WTC has much more likely to fail in such situations and thus be removed, demoted, replaced, and/or fired. Such traumatic failure has serious consequences for the organization and the individual as well. On the organizational level, for instance, sales may suffer, ambiguous directives may be given with disastrous results, small problems may not be addressed until they reach cataclysmic proportions, etc.

On an individual level, quiet people not only suffer agonizing stress as they try frantically to cope with the massive communication demands, but also undergo the devastating feelings of inadequacy, rejection, and hurt. In addition, many quiet people may be forced to face the inevitable hurt when the inability to handle or cope with massive communication demands brings about demotion or dismissal.

With such great potential for organizational failure and for mortal blows to the individual’s self-concept and self-esteem, most quiet individuals structure their environments and jobs such that these negative experiences are less probable (McCroskey, Daly, Richmond & Falcione, 1977). Knowing the communicative dangers and demands of leadership positions, these individuals are much less likely to want to be promoted (Scott, et al., 1978). Such elevation of position puts them in increasingly pressured and uncomfortable situations. Given the problems associated with promotion, extremely quiet individuals may choose the “out” option. Choosing

most quiet individuals structure their environments and jobs such that these negative experiences are less probable
this option allows the quiet person to avoid the communication rigors of upper level organizational positions.

A second major reason for short job tenure may be associated with the types of jobs quiet people choose. These individuals will deliberately avoid jobs that require advanced communication skills and/or more frequent communicative interactions (Daly & McCroskey, 1975). Societally, these types of jobs are lower in pay than those requiring effective frequent communication skills. An employee who spends all day quietly punching a ten-key in some obscure office will not have a salary equivalent to the company’s executive CEO who spends her/his time performing such activities as traveling to meetings, making impassioned pleas to investors, dealing with governmental agencies, and coordinating organizational planning sessions. People who are unwilling/unable to communicate gravitate to lower status and lower paying jobs. Inasmuch as some people fear public speaking worse than death (McCroskey & Richmond, 1988, p. 403), extremely quiet individuals prefer obscurity and a lower financial rewards to positions in the organization characterized by high communication demands.

Lower pay and lower status, in and of itself, would not seem necessarily to be related to length of organizational tenure necessarily, unless one considers the influence stemming from such job conditions. The key problem may reside in the areas of motivation and job satisfaction. Talented people who are given little recognition, little opportunity for successful promotion, and who are forced to constrict their career focus to menial, repetitive tasks below their level of competence are very likely to be unhappy and unmotivated with their jobs. McCroskey and Daly (1977) note that people who are less willing to communicate have lower levels of job satisfaction. Falcione, McCroskey, and Daly’s (1977) findings support this as well. Though many factors affect job satisfaction, low willingness to communicate may serve as a primary influence on extremely quiet individuals. In response to lack of motivation, lack of recognition, lack of personal growth and achievement, and lack of satisfaction with the job (including the work, supervisors, and peers), individuals who have are low WTC may overcome their fears of interviewing for new organizations just enough to change employment from a noncommunicative position in one organization to a noncommunicative position in another organization. Such a practice would definitely lead to shorter organizational tenure for these individuals.

A third explanation of shorter organizational tenure may stem from the negative perceptions associated with individuals who are less willing to communicate. The major avenue by which one gets to know the personality, intelligence, attitudes, beliefs, etc. of another person is communication. When an individual does not communicate, others feel a great deal of uncertainty toward that
individuals; because of this, suspicion, distrust, dislike, fear, and/or hostility often develop. A strange phenomenon associated with human nature is that great uncertainty toward things or people often arouse negative attitudes and emotions. Daly, et al., (1979) note that individuals who are not willing to communicate have greater difficulty in fostering relationships with their peers and supervisors. In an organizational context, these difficulties and negative feelings from peers and supervisors could cause quiet individuals to quit simply because they feel disliked. From a supervisory perspective, quiet individuals may be dismissed because of managerial distrust or dislike, or simply because the supervisors feel these people are expendable. Lack of relationship is the critical factor in this explanation of short tenure.

**Appropriate Organizational Responses**

With the multiplicity of organizational problems associated with low willingness to communicate, the obvious question which comes to mind is “what should be done?” The approach which many quiet people prefer would be to leave these people alone—to allow them to continue with whatever communication patterns they desire. This is the approach taken by many organizations.

While this approach is the easy response, it opens the organization to major problems. An organization may be defined as “a group of people working together to achieve common goal(s)” (Richmond & McCroskey, 1990). Working together and achieving common goals requires the coordination of activities, the building of individual and group relationships, and adapting to the needs and behaviors of others. All of these depend on effective communication. “Communication provides the connections which keep the organization together” (Richmond & McCroskey, 1990, p. 1). Organizations depend heavily on effective communication to process information from internal and external sources. Without this ability, organizations cease to exist. From this organizational perspective, the person who is not willing to communicate is a weak link in the organizational structure and is contributing to organizational entropy.

Since a significant proportion (over 40% by some estimates. Zimbardo, 1977) of the employees in any population is likely to be low in willingness to communicate, it is in an organization’s best interest to try to deal with this problem “in house” rather than simply dismissing these individuals and hiring new people. Let us review some approaches which should be considered:

1. **Look for willingness to communicate in hiring decisions.** Whether a person is willing to communicate should not be something an employer determines during the first six-month review of the new employee! Letters of recommendation...
should be read carefully to see if they provide information in this regard. While talking to previous employers, appropriate questions can be asked directly. Judgements can also be made during interviews, although anxiety specific to the interview process can make most people less willing to communicate than normal in this context. Finally, an applicant's willingness to communicate can be measured directly. This can be accomplished by administering the WTC scale developed by McCroskey (Richmond & McCroskey, 1989b). When people are determined to be less willing to communicate than others, these people should be recognized as being "at risk" in the organizational environment. If they are hired and placed in a position requiring extensive communication for success, they are probably going to fail.

2. *Match people with positions.* As we noted previously, not all positions in most organizations have high communication demands. Whenever possible, therefore, people who are less willing to communicate should be placed in positions which have fewer communication demands. If no such positions are available, the person should not be hired. It is not a favor to hire people to do jobs they cannot perform successfully. Managers are only setting people up to fail when such "kindnesses" are performed. Management is also placing an unfair burden on other employees who must cope with the doomed employees. Their supervisors will have problems. Their subordinates will have problems. Their peers will have problems. The "kind" thing to do is to avoid all these problems by not inserting the square peg into the round hole.

3. *Diagnose current problems.* Most organizations have ongoing problems with people who are less willing to communicate holding positions with high communication demands or highly willing to communicate people holding positions with low communication demands. These problems should be identified so appropriate action can be taken. The initial step might be to screen current employees on willingness to communicate. The procedures suggested under number one above can also be employed here. Talk with supervisors, read performance evaluations, talk with the employee, and/or administer the WTC scale. When possible, (and with the employee's cooperation and consent) reassign people to match positions, as suggested in number two above. Such shifts may not be able to made immediately in all cases. of course. However, even if done over a substantial period of time, the result should be a more productive, successful, and satisfied workforce. Odds are, the organization will benefit too!

4. *Help apprehensive employees.* As we noted earlier, one of the primary reasons that some people are less willing to communi-
people with high communication apprehension should be offered the opportunity to receive help to reduce their apprehension.

those who feel they have insufficient skills should be offered communication skills training to help them improve.

cate than others is that they experience very high communication apprehension. Such people can be identified by having them complete the Personal Report of Communication Apprehension developed by McCroskey (PRCA: McCroskey, 1982: Richmond & McCroskey, 1989b). Once identified, people with high communication apprehension should be offered the opportunity to receive help to reduce their apprehension. Behavioral therapy techniques such as systematic desensitization (McCroskey, 1972) and cognitive restructuring (Fremouw, 1984) have been found to be very effective (and inexpensive) for helping these individuals. Such methods can take only a few hours of the employee’s time and may pay off handsomely for both the employee and the organization. Behavioral psychologists in most areas are well aware of these techniques and the methods can be administered in small groups (4-7 people) in order to reduce costs of providing help. One word of caution: People should be offered help, they should not be forced to accept help. These methods require the willing cooperation of the people being helped, or they will not work.

5. Help those with deficient communication skills. Another reason some people are less willing to communicate than others is they perceive they have inadequate communication skills. Simply put, they see themselves as incompetent communicators. While not everyone who has this self-image really is incompetent, the self-perception leads to reduced willingness whether the person is or is not competent. People who see themselves as incompetent communicators can be identified by having them complete the Self-Perceived Communication Competence scale developed by McCroskey (Richmond & McCroskey, 1989b). Those who feel they have insufficient skills should be offered communication skills training to help them improve. Many organizations have training programs in place into which such training can be added. If not, area colleges are very likely to have Communication Departments which offer such training on either a credit or non-credit basis.

6. Dismiss or discharge the employee from her/his position. Organizations should take this approach only as a last resort. If none of the previous suggestions alleviate the problem of the uncommunicative employee, the problem continues. Low willingness to communicate on the part of an employee can cost the organization untold amounts of time, money, and effort. In addition, low willingness to communicate disrupts the productivity of not only the quiet individual, but also those employees who must depend on that individual. While not the preferred option, in some cases, it may be in organiza-
tion's best interest, including the quiet employee's, that the person be encouraged to seek employment which more nearly meets the individual's communication abilities and orientations.

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