Manager communication can be fraught with diverse problems. In this article the author introduces a work formula for quickly obtaining clarity and agreement by managers and employees. Once the formula is applied to the individual’s work by co-creating a job model, managers have a scaffold on which much of their communication can hang. Do you need to review an employee’s performance? Need an employee to make improvements? Need to identify the source of a performance problem? Need to introduce process changes or a new technology? A job model based on the Language of Work™ provides a foundation for all such discussions and implementation. This removes the emotions surrounding work and lets both parties communicate on specifics, not generalities. These are not traditional job descriptions, which do nothing to aid communication. Instead, job models, as conceived by the author, vastly improve worker and manager communication on several dimensions.

A GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Even great communicators despair when communicating with employees. My own experience is that I adore my wife; I work with her, given that we are business partners, and live with her every day. Yet we sometimes find that we have communication problems. How can this be? And, more importantly, how can we fix it?

First, one has to accept that misunderstandings are a part of the human condition. When I send messages by speaking, gesturing, frowning, and so on, I send what I perceive as clear a message as I think possible. Always! Yet, others sometimes say they cannot hear me or do not understand the comment or question, or they claim to have asked me a different question from the one I answered.

Second, we need to recognize that each of us works from our own paradigm, thought pattern, brain type, or a culture that affects both what we say and what we hear. And when we add different genders and age-groups into the mix, a Tower of Babel is probably inevitable. Knowing clearly the advantages and problems associated with our own paradigm and those of others can certainly improve communication when we adjust to understand the paradigms of others.

Third, when we manage people, we add a layer of authority figure-itis that affects us as managers and our employees as well. So yet another barrier has to be overcome.

The Language of Work™ can overcome most of the barriers in business communication, although the human condition continues to exist and must be accommodated. The Language of Work provides a formula that can be applied to a series of business implementation models as well as the implementation of most of the prevailing organizational effectiveness techniques, bringing both clarity and opportunities for improved communication. Once those involved in a business learn to use the Language of Work approach, many problems fall by the wayside. People have a label to place on their experiences, problems, issues, and complaints that is better understood by the receiver of the message. When this occurs, communication improves. For example: an office manager I knew complained herself into a tizzy each Friday because
employees would not send her their timesheets. Once it became clear to everyone that their output, hours worked by project, was the input she needed to appropriately charge various clients and to create employee paychecks, they improved their on-time rate. When they faltered she just gently reminded people that their output was her input to produce what they wanted—their paychecks. Moreover, everyone appreciated the reduction in her whining.

My wife and I solve many of our communication problems using the *Language of Work*, which allows us to fix problems quickly. For example, if she has confused me by what she is talking about, I can ask for Context, which is a form of conditions. She knows what I mean and adjusts her communication accordingly. In such cases, she fills me in on the subject she is discussing. I try to do the same for her, perhaps naming the output from the process that I am describing. A manager, using the *Language of Work*—in particular using *job models*, which is one among several implementation models—can improve his or her communication with employees.

**WHAT ARE JOB MODELS?**

Job models operationally represent an individual's work, now or in the future. In the same sense that a model of a house represents what the house will be, a *job model* does the same. The result is that there is agreement on all the critical and operational elements of the job, and it can be represented on three to five pages. The anchor of a *job model* consists of the six systemic elements of the *work formula* for work, to which are added a number of work support features that constitute a complete and useful job definition. It is called a *job model* because it best represents what constitutes the job in all its features. I illustrate this with an example using the six systemic behavioral elements of the *work formula* from the *Language of Work* along with the support features of the *job model*. I include as well a number of management applications taking advantage of the *work formula* as a work-analytic tool.

One of the ways, beyond job descriptions, that businesses generally communicate job intent is through process-flow diagrams. These swim-lane charts and flowcharts articulate in detail the flow of work and are designed to principally capture the core process aspect of work rather than the job level of work. Once defined, they are often used to decide who performs which steps of the core process; they are then used to communicate to workers through orientation and training programs what their responsibilities and tasks are in the process. They are useful mechanisms for defining and changing work, but they are generally not effective in communicating job needs. I have found this to be true for two principal reasons. First, the process diagrams are often overly detailed, leading to an overdose of information paralysis such that the workers end up confused about what is and what is not their work. Second, some of the behavioral elements that constitute individual work at the job level, let alone at the core process level, are missing from a typical flow diagram. The issue here is that the job itself in relation to the core process is never defined to state what the jobholders need to perform their work. The same problem besets job descriptions in that they mostly define the desired outcomes (e.g., accountabilities and responsibilities) rather than state how the job is to be done. So then, what is a job model, and why is it better for management and worker communication?

**THE SIX SYSTEMIC ELEMENTS: THE WORK FORMULA OF THE LANGUAGE OF WORK**

According to the *Language of Work*, work is behaviorally composed of six interrelated or systemic elements. These are:

1. Work consequences
2. Work outputs
3. Work inputs
4. Work conditions
5. Work process steps
6. Work feedback
Detailed definitions and examples of this work formula are available elsewhere. For an example, see (https://youtu.be/Nn7tLm4nRLU). To understand and put these elements in relationship with one another, a job model may be operationally defined as follows:

The six work elements of the work formula are defined and exemplified in Table 1.

### JOB MODEL EXAMPLE

In Figures 1 and 2, you will find examples of the six systemic, behavioral elements of a typical job model. Figure 1 exemplifies the inputs, conditions, process steps, and two of six outputs of a representative job model using the example of a business analyst. Figure 2 illustrates the consequences and feedback for this job. Collectively, you see here an operational view of the job that can be easily understood by workers, the managers, and anyone else in the enterprise.

### SUPPORT ELEMENTS OF A JOB MODEL

A number of work-related elements are suggested to complete a full and useful definition of a job model. These work-related elements add a highly useful level of communication for worker and manager alike as well as for human resources personnel who often have the role of
helping maximize job performance through training and the like. The principal work support elements to include with a job model include

- Specification of skills and knowledge required of the job
- Job attributes
- Competencies, responsibilities or accountabilities, and statements of outcomes
- Entry-level skills
- Other requirements as may be deemed necessary for personnel in human resources

Among these, skills and knowledge are perhaps the most widely needed in most businesses. They are needed for use in hiring, but especially in determining training and other performance improvement interventions. Figure 3 displays a brief list of skills and knowledge required for the business-analyst job model.

You will note that in the Figure 3 example these are specified for the process steps. However, they should also be listed for inputs, conditions, and feedback (see Figure 4). Only these four elements of a job model require specification of skills and knowledge since these lead to the attainment of outputs and the consequences of a job. Specifying skills and knowledge (S/K) typically ensures a more complete and accurate list, given that S/K are tied directly to what workers do as their work, not just the outcomes as is typical of S/K identification. Figure 4 illustrates other skills and knowledge for the work elements of inputs, conditions, and feedback. There is also a listing for attributes.

Attributes are the innate qualities that an individual brings to the job. It has been claimed that the attributes are the greatest predictor of success in addition to the skills, knowledge, experience, and personality traits. People generally execute a job well when they possess the right attributes for that job. It therefore follows that, when we set about to hire an employee, using the job model and associated attributes to compare candidates under consideration is invaluable in selecting the right person for the job.
Competencies, the focus in recent years of what someone should be able to do to perform in a job, are much easier to identify using job models. Most often, such competencies have been identified as they relate solely to skills and knowledge. While such information is useful, remember that skills and knowledge enable success in a job, but they are not the job competencies in themselves. Another more useful set of competencies are revealed by the job model. The main competency of a job is a combination of an output and its related consequences. Thus, for our business-analyst job example, a principal competency would be the development of solution strategies that lead to attainment of all consequences of the job. Thus, the job models enhance the identification, attainment, and promotion of competencies as part of job communication and management.

Other useful support elements can be easily attached to a job model as well. Such things as entry-level skills, experience level, and so forth can all be included and, if desired, even linked to specific process steps, inputs, conditions, and feedback.

USING JOB MODELS TO ENHANCE MANAGEMENT COMMUNICATION

The various job models that apply to those working for and with a manager will greatly enhance the manager’s role in communicating with employees, let alone evaluating their performance and making improvements in the work of a team. This is made possible by the work formula, which includes the six-element work definition that is used to model the job, which in turn can then be used in many ways to communicate with job holders. (The author refers to the use of the work formula in this way as work analytics; this is further detailed in the author’s forthcoming work trilogy series that will be published in 2016.) Keep in mind that a job model of your own role as a manager will enhance communication by letting your workforce know exactly what you will be doing with and for them. Let us look at a few of the ways job models further enhance communication in your role as a manager. By the way, all the many ways are included in the Language of Work and The Managing Model and
FIGURE 3. JOB MODEL SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE

**INPUTS**
- Skills
  - Interpreting System Requirements
  - Interpreting Data
  - Tracking Organization Memory
  - Interpersonal Skills
  - Reading Instructions
  - Research and Analysis
  - Critical Thinking
- Knowledge
  - Communication Channels
  - Best Practices
  - Budgeting
  - Organization Culture
  - Organization Savvy
  - Organization Knowledge
  - Policies
  - Control Agencies
  - Public Needs
  - IT Industry
  - Networking with Peers & Mentors

**CONDITIONS**
- Skills
  - Tracking Organization Memory
- Knowledge
  - Organization Knowledge
  - Organization Savvy
  - Organization Culture
  - Budgeting
  - Best Practices

**ATTRIBUTES**
- Advocate
- Adviser
- Thinks Strategically
- Challenges mental limits
- Practical
- Resourceful
- Makes Good Guesses
- Tenacious
- Impartial
- People Person
- Problem Solver
- Negotiator

FIGURE 4. JOB MODEL ATTRIBUTES
can be read and learned through other print and online resources developed by the author.

**Performance Review**

Improved communication is made possible by *job models* along with the *work formula* for job performance review and appraisal. Managers have struggled mightily with this function. In fact, a number of companies are discontinuing the annual performance review with its attendant forced ranking in favor of feedback on work performance that is provided regularly and often. This is primarily because such annual or semiannual reviews of performance have tended to focus almost exclusively on the accountabilities or competencies of the job. Certainly such factors are important, but once one or both of these are identified as a problem that needs to be fixed, how does one go about fixing it? The *work formula* provides a framework that will improve communication with employees about their performance because it is focused on the six work elements that define that work.

Begin by discussing with each worker how well the individual has achieved the primary outputs (there are usually between four and eight). Have the connected consequences been achieved? Note those that have been done well and reinforce them to acknowledge exemplary performance. Any unattained or marginal outputs or consequences are problem areas that can then be discussed with far less emotion while hearing all sides of the story. These elements include:

- Inputs
- Conditions
- Process steps
- Feedback
- Lack of skills and knowledge
- Personal work issues with others, and so forth

This discussion of specifics that can be mutually acted upon enhances the communication of work performance. Away goes the feeling of defensiveness that comes with visions of going to the principal’s office. All parties—the performer, the manager, and the evaluator—clearly have a stake in improvements or maintenance of performance. The discussion of work performance focuses on what needs to be done. This can then be periodically reviewed in a few weeks or months to see that such improvement has been made, including what you have committed to as the manager. Of course, rather than waiting for the more formal and scheduled reviews dictated by a performance appraisal process, one can use the approach suggested here on an ongoing basis for frequent review and reinforcement of job behavior.

**Making Changes**

Job models help to improve any change process whether it is a new strategic direction, an acquisition, new technology or software, or a change in a job to name only a few that occur constantly. By comparing the *as-is* state with the *to-be* state at the job level, managers can help employees over the hump that is often associated with change. By using the *job model* as the focus of discussion, employees can see how much will remain the same in their jobs as well as what portion will change. This process of open discussion allows the manager to identify missing elements of the change and to provide service to all parties in the organization.

**Planning Work**

Anything you do as a manager or the workers do in their jobs can be monitored and communicated using the *work formula*. Sometimes new work is easy to plan, but other times there are so many elements that even thinking about it is exhausting. In addition, I have found that moving to project planning before the essence of the new work is clear often leads to tough and embarrassing failure. The *work formula* can easily be applied to any piece of work, including new work. What are the expected outputs? What are the consequences expected to be? Which inputs will be needed? Continuing through all six elements will yield a systematically built picture of the unknown. Aspects that have not been finalized can be color-coded so as not to bring the planning to a stop. Potential problems can be identified and solutions generated. The team can develop muscle through this organized and systematic planning process. Please see the *Managing Model* (e-book) for other applications that improve communication and implementation of work.

**JOB MODELS DO NOT STAND ALONE**

The *Language of Work* provides a *work formula* that can be applied to any form of work. Clarity comes when one can view all the work levels of business with the same formula. Job models depict the operational dimension of an individual’s work known as a job. Combined with business unit, core processes, and work-group models, the *work formula* allows you to align work in a business from top to bottom. The business unit model defines the *what* of work; the core process models describe the *how* of work that leads to jobs including the *who* of work; the work-group models are used to represent the *organization and management* of work. The transparency this provides leads to improved communication at every level of work, which is difficult to achieve in businesses that use the conventional methods of communication and change.
IN SUMMARY
You have probably realized that much of what has been described here is really about systems thinking to enhance work communication. If there is a formula to work—and certainly there is—it can be used to explain and operationalize much about work. For additional work communication enhancements, start to think about how you can use the work formula described here to improve work-group needs and many of the other functions that you carry out as a manager. You will learn, as I have, the many ways in which having a work formula really does enhance communication for management. When you have found some on your own, please let me know and I will pass them on to others.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES


Langdon, D.G., Langdon, K., & Whiteside, J. (Eds.). (2014). Righting the enterprise: A primer for organizing or reorganizing the right way. An eBook of Performance International that may be accessed and downloaded for free at www.performanceinternational.com

For case studies and related articles, visit www.performanceinternational.com

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