

COLLABORATION, CONTINUITY AND EMERGENCE: CHANGE-ORIENTATED COMMUNICATION FROM A POSTMODERN STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION PERSPECTIVE

ABSTRACT

The pressure on organisations to become more global and information intensive and the increasing uncertainty and complexity of the organisational environment have increased the convulsion of organisational change. Globalisation and interactive technologies such as Web 2.0 have transformed traditional media and created a communication environment of connection, convergence, and collaboration which is labelled as the ‘collaborative turn’. This changing communication landscape has stimulated postmodern thought in the field of strategic communication and emphasises purposeful communication of the communication agent on behalf of the communicative entity in the public sphere. As a starting point towards developing the concept of change-orientated communication from a postmodern strategic communication perspective (termed as ‘strategic change-orientated communication’), this literature paper aims to provide a contextualisation of this conceptual problem. Furthermore, since communication professionals are ostensibly slow in the uptake of postmodern developments in communication, this paper aims to expand the body of knowledge on the changing communication landscape with specific focus on change orientated-communication. By doing so, the paper provides an elaboration on the changes in the field of strategic communication with an emphasis on contemporary postmodern thought which serves as basis to emphasise the necessity for change-orientated communication from an emergent change context and, most importantly, the subsequent conceptual development thereof. This paper will conclude with a proposition of preliminary attributes of ‘strategic change-orientated communication’ which not only serve as one of the first steps in the concept development process, but also a heuristic for future research.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The pace and intensity of organisational change have never been greater than in the current business environment (Todnem By 2015:28). The refined, stable oligopolies that shaped competition in the 20th century have been replaced by “emerging markets that are fraught with uncertainty, diverse global players, rapid technological change, widespread price wars, and seemingly endless reorganization” (Sharma & Sahoo 2014:174). Web 2.0 technologies have brought about a “collaborative turn” that allows two-way conversations; opportunities to listen to stakeholders and; innovative and engaging opportunities to obtain valuable information from stakeholders (Verwey 2015:324). These unprecedented changes in the organisational environment, largely brought about by advances in communication technology, stimulated a shift from modernistic to postmodernist ideology (Overton-de Klerk & Verwey 2013:362). A postmodern perspective in the context of organisational change is built on the notion that change is best understood through the manner in which members of the organisation construct their social reality (Graetz, Rimmer, Lawrence & Smith 2006:18). It is a perspective that is content with ephemeral conditions, discontinuity and non-casual explanations (Graetz et al 2006:18) where innovation is encouraged and novel ways of doing things are welcomed. A shift to postmodern thinking is also evident in the field of strategic communication. In this context, strategic communication professionals assist members of the communicative entity to obtain access to the public sphere through purposeful arguments with the aim of advancing the interests of the communicative entity while at the same time contributing towards society (Holtzhausen & Zerfass 2015:6). Strategic communication professionals’ main role is to maintain the reputation of the organisation in the public sphere by means contributing towards solving societal issues and public debate (Holtzhausen & Zerfass 2015:4). The changing strategic communication landscape towards postmodern thought arguably yields an emergent change focus in the organisation. This literature paper specifically aims to explore the nature of change-orientated communication within an emergent change context and the conceptual development thereof.

The paper will firstly highlight the research objectives with specific reference to the proposed conceptual development process. An overview on modernism and postmodernism will be provided with an emphasis on some paradigmatic differences within an organisational communication context. This will be followed by a discussion on strategic communication from postmodern perspective and an elaboration on organisational change and change-orientated communication. This literature exploration will give way to the proposition of preliminary attributes for ‘strategic change-orientated communication’ (SCOC) to serve as starting point for the conceptual development thereof. As part of this proposition, some implications for implementation will be highlighted. This paper will conclude with limitations, contributions and opportunities for future research.

2. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The need for organisations to change to the demands of the external environment in order to survive is indispensable and communication plays a central role in ensuring the successful implementation and management of organisational change (Christensen 2014:359). Since strategic communication professionals are seemingly slow in the uptake of postmodern developments in the field of communication, this paper aims to address the need to develop theoretical approaches beyond traditional, modernistic assumptions (Overton-de Klerk

2013:377). Moreover, it is critical to develop a change communication approach in line with the latest developments in the field (Appelbaum, St-Pierre & Glavas 1998:292). This will be done by means of drawing from postmodern developments in strategic communication literature to emphasise the need for an emergent approach to organisational change through the proposition of preliminary attributes for the conceptual development of SCOC. These attributes will not only serve as a starting point in the conceptual development process but could also serve as a heuristic for future research. Moreover, this paper aims to make a contribution towards the body of knowledge in postmodern strategic communication literature in terms of the domains of practice, specifically organisational change.

‘Concept development’, also known as ‘concept analysis’ plays a significant role in the development of the knowledge foundation (Rodgers 2000:99) in strategic communication. The goal of concept development is to define the concept of interest in terms of its core attributes or essence. A concept is a “cluster of attributes”, and conceptual development will therefore always involve the identification of key attributes (Rodgers 2000:83). For the purpose of this study, Rodgers’ (1989) evolutionary approach to conceptual development will be used, as it is an approach to conceptual development that recognises the context of the proposed concept (in this case postmodern strategic communication within an organisational context). This approach therefore moves away from the assumption that a concept is universal and unchanging (Rodgers 2000:78). An evolutionary approach also implies that the steps in the process could be followed simultaneously and do not necessarily have to be followed chronologically. Various data sources could also be used in concept development, of which existing literature is the most prominent (Rodgers 2000:84) and the selected data source for this study. This paper will specifically provide a contextualisation of the conceptual problem, which serves as the starting point in concept development (Rodgers 2000:84). Furthermore, the proposition of the new SCOC concept and preliminary attributes form part of the first and third steps in Rodgers’s evolutionary approach to conceptual development, namely 1) the identification of the concept of interest and associated expressions and 2) the collection of data relevant to the attributes of the concept and contextual basis of the concept (which is preceded by the development of a definition for the concept).

3. MODERNISM AND POSTMODERNISM: PARADIGMATIC DIFFERENCES

Modernism, regarded as a positivistic, functionalist perspective, is based on the notion that individuals are not influenced by external factors (Toth 2002:245). Modernism focuses on single truths and objective knowledge (Holtzhausen 2002:253) and is regarded as a rational approach. It is associated with linearity, moving from one phase to the next (Toth 2002:245). In contrast, postmodernism is regarded as a critical perspective that moves away from idealism and is characterised by “pluralism, temporality, fragmentation, de-differentiation and ambiguity – all of which defy attempts to generalise and extrapolate from past experience” (Overton-de Klerk & Verwey 2013:364). Discourse is one of the basic tenants of postmodernism and focuses on the use of language which could only be understood in a broader social environment (Holtzhausen 2002:254). Postmodernism supports the notion of an ethically responsible society; moves away from dominating ideologies or meta-narratives due to its controlling natures and resists positivism (Toth 2002:246).

Since this paper is specifically built from a strategic communication perspective, Table 1 will provide a summary of the most prominent paradigmatic differences between modernism and postmodernism as it pertains to communication within an organisational environment (Holtzhausen 2002; Hallahan, Holtzhausen, van Ruler, Vercic & Sriramesh 2007).

Table 1: Paradigmatic differences between modernism and postmodernism in communication

Modernism	Postmodernism
Strategic management in communication	
Communication is guided by the voice of management and is aligned with management's goals for the organisation.	Deconstruction of management's language that has led to the exploitation of organisational participants by means of discourse analysis and affirmative action.
Communication professionals are regarded as tools of organisational management and are accepted as part of the dominant coalition (decision makers) of the organisation.	The communication function should ensure 'inclusiveness of all voices' that are affected by the organisation to the benefit of both the stakeholders and the organisation.
The focus is on strategies to wield power and control over the organisational environment.	All strategies are futile exercises (it is regarded as a representation of management's personal agenda on how to move forward in a particular fashion). Strategies are regarded as irrational and not representative of organisational viewpoints.
Binary oppositions to create dominance and superiority of one term (in an attempt to legitimise the communication and public relations field) for e.g. manager vs technician.	Managers and technicians all contribute to an org's communication agenda on a continuous basis.
Universal explanations or meta-narratives that could approach the status of natural laws. Grunig's (1984) excellence theory has been accepted as the meta-theory in public relations and communication management literature that drowned out other equally valid theories and approaches.	A broad theoretical approach is accepted; postmodernists even question their own theories (reflexivity).
Planning orientated.	Planning should be condensed to reclaim control of the bureaucracy. Becoming more career-centered than organisation centered; flatter network-type organisational structures are essential; diversity; entrepreneurship and innovation is favoured.
Power and the agency of communication	
The agent's actions are based on a framework of a personal, subjective core of awareness.	Agency is regarded as a system of relations between echelons and the agent. In this regard the agent acts as a platform for the throughput of discourses.
Communication is an approach based on consensus determined by organisational management. Communication professionals act as agents used to establish corporate ideologies; a process that is simply the creation of meaning in the service of power.	Communication becomes a process that legitimises diverse forms of meaning and understanding.

From Table 1 it could be deduced that postmodernists are against organisational management. Postmodernists are however not against management per se, but more on the concept of managerialism where managers assign workers to authoritarian workplace activities to predominantly benefit themselves (Holtzhausen 2002:256). On the contrary, Toth (2002:243) argues that a "cash value" must be added in order for modernistic orientated communication professionals to accept postmodern ideas. Furthermore, Grunig (2009:10) specifically underlines the necessity of a modernistic approach to communication and public relations by stating that

“public relations practitioners and scholars must minimise the extent to which the symbolic, interactive paradigm of public relations affects their thinking and institutionalize public relations as a strategic management, behavioural paradigm.” Although some modernistic elements will always form part of the communication function in the organisation, such as the management of communication programmes, the contemporary developments in the organisational environment, predominantly brought about by interactive communication technologies, has caused communication professionals to “increasingly find themselves at points of inflection” (Overtonde Kerk & Verwey 2013:363). The changing communication landscape cannot be ignored. The communication field “faces a challenge in coordinating and integrating the communication activities of organisations and in creating a multidisciplinary but unified body of knowledge that better serves communication entities in a society consisting of fragmented audiences and message delivery platforms” (Tindall & Holtzhausen 2011:75). The following section will provide a contemporary outlook on strategic communication and emphasise the need towards postmodern ideology to address the interactive demands of the 21st century.

4. STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION

Strategic communication, which originated from programmes used in the governmental and military domain (Farwell 2012:2) is essentially applied to emphasise objective-driven communication in various areas such as public relations; health communication; marketing; and financial communication (Holtzhausen & Zerfass 2015:3). The traditional or modernistic definition of strategic communication as a communication process that sprouts from an organisation’s strategic plan, focused on enabling the organisation’s strategic objectives, served as platform for two-way communication models namely; Shannon and Weaver’s (1949) transmission model which eventually evolved in discussions of two-way symmetrical and two-way a-symmetrical communication in public relations literature (Holtzhausen & Zerfass 2015:4). A call for a broader acceptance of strategic communication as “the practice of deliberate and purposive communication that a communication agent enacts in the public sphere on behalf of a communicative entity to reach set goals” (Holtzhausen & Zerfass 2013:74) has since been put forward. Two proponents of postmodern thought are specifically highlighted in this contemporary definition namely; the public sphere and purposive communication.

4.1 The public sphere

Jürgen Habermas’s work on discourse, communication and argumentation gave way to the concept of the ‘public sphere’ which has been widely applied in media and communication studies (Benson 2009:176). From his perspective, the public sphere is the space where private individuals gather and compose the public (Self 2015:78). The public sphere is regarded as a “network of points of interest” and a specific topic will be in the public sphere because communicators, as points in the network, communicate about it (Bentele & Northhaft 2010:114). In later research, Bentele & Northhaft (2015:64) argue that the public sphere is in fact a type of “supra-institution” that emerges and is maintained by various individuals, organisations and institutions intermingling in a certain manner and following certain strategies with specific arguments.

Holtzhausen and Zerfass (2015:5) argue that the difference between the current public sphere and that of the 20th century is that it is more participative rather than representative. This implies that

the media was the main source to present diverse perspectives that defined society. Today a communicative spear rather than a public sphere is evident as new interactive technologies allow members of the public to directly partake in public debate without entering mediated channels (Holtzhausen & Zerfass 2015:6). In congruence, Bentele and Northhaft (2015:67) state that “public spheres are spheres of communication characterized by a high degree of density of communication and, defined by the density within the sphere as being higher than the density towards the outside of the sphere.” The role of strategic communication professionals today is to assist others to acquire access to the public sphere through purposeful arguments that could both contribute towards advancing the interests of the communicative entity and contributing towards society (Holtzhausen & Zerfass 2015:6). As participants of the public sphere, strategic communication professionals therefore play a role in solving societal issues and bringing authentic, debatable issues forward to contribute to public debate. In emphasising the importance of a democratic public sphere, Haas (2004:180) is of the opinion that the conversations within the public sphere should be focused on issues of common concern to citizens, be accessible to all concerned and based on “rational-critical deliberation and subject to normative standards of evaluation”. Strategic communication professionals should arguably become experts in managing the balance between advocacy and objectivity. Some organisational information will always remain private; but there is a need for some information to be declared and debated in the public sphere (Holtzhausen & Zerfass 2015:6). Strategic communication in the 21st century implies that your interests are also in the interests of society in general and it serves as the primary counterstrategy to privately proclaim your opponent’s interests as valid (Bentele & Northhaft 2015:68).

4.2 Purposive communication

The essence of strategic communication is to communicate purposefully to advance the mission of the organisation (Hallahan et al 2007:4). Purposive communication or conversation places emphasis on action opposed to talk (Dervitsiotis 2002:1087). It allows sharing of meaning and ideas; deepens mutual understanding and; creates purposeful action (Hodges & Gill 2015:291). Hallagan et al (2007:10) argue that strategic communication acknowledges that purposeful influence is the core objective of communication in the organisation. Strategic communication moves beyond the mere provision of information or building and maintaining mutually-beneficial relationships to the manner in which communication could contribute to an organisation’s purpose for being (Hallagen et al 2007:11). In this regard, Overton-de Klerk and Verwey (2013:370) state that strategic communication today is insentiently shaping the organisation itself and should be accepted as the “overarching, converging communication function of the organisation”.

Other characteristics of postmodern strategic communication that should be highlighted with the focus on change-orientated communication include the following: Rejection of linearity; emergence; bottoms-up communication and; collaboration. The rejection of linearity emphasises how individual and shared meaning is formed by the communication process itself. The role of the strategic communication professional is to provide information that could serve as a platform for meaning creation between the organisation and stakeholders with the purposive of social change and action (Holtzhausen & Zerfass 2015:9). An emphasis on building relationships though dialogue at the start of the 21st century influenced by postmodern thinking, has led to a focus on emergent approaches to the role of dialogue and communication (Self 2015:75).

Although there will always be room for a functionalist approach to communication planning, the focus is currently on emergent strategy aimed at continuously shaping organisational strategy through creative and innovative communication with a broad spectrum of organisational stakeholders (Holtzhausen & Zerfass 2015:9). A bottoms-up as opposed to top-down communication approach highlights organisational leaders' ability to listen to organisational stakeholders which yields strategies of stakeholder engagement and co-participation (Overton-de Klerk & Verwey 2013:371). Collaboration points to the "collaborative turn" as mentioned earlier brought about by interactive communication technologies which permits an opportunity to listen to and engage organisational stakeholders (Verwey 2015:322). Collaboration also implies that the organisation's brand is co-created in collaboration with organisational stakeholders beyond the organisation's control (Overton-de Klerk & Verwey 2013:376).

One has to obtain an overview of the various approaches to organisational change to essentially understand the nature of change-orientated communication during a specific approach to organisational change. The following section will provide an overview on organisational change, with specific emphasis on change-oriented communication.

5. ORGANISATIONAL CHANGE

Organisational change is regarded as an ongoing, multidimensional phenomenon with various outcomes ranging from increased productivity and shareholder value to better alignment with the external organisational environment (Sharma & Sahoo 2014:174). Similarly, organisational change is defined as an "ever-present element of organisational life", both on operational and strategic levels of the organisation (Burnes 2004; Todnem By 2015:27). It is further widely argued in the literature that organisational change cannot be separated from organisational strategy (Todnem By 2015; Burnes 2004; Rieley & Clarkson 2001) and that it is intrinsically linked to the culture of the organisation (Senge 1999; Balogun 2001; Smith 2014:45). Organisational change could emancipate from external environmental factors (e.g. competitive action; technological advances; government regulations or; economic conditions) or it could be brought about by internal organisational factors (Appelbaum et al 1998:291). This paper supports a broader, generic perspective to organisational change which implies that the focus will be on any change that influences the organisation's functioning whether it stems from internal or external organisational factors.

Various derivatives of organisational change have been developed over the years, of which organisational change management; organisational change process and; organisational change project are seemingly the most prominent. Organisational change management is regarded as the process of continuously revisiting the organisation's direction, structure and capabilities to address and absorb the ever-changing needs of stakeholders (Moran & Brightman 2001:111). An organisational change process is built on the notion that organisations are "emergent properties of change" while an organisational change project refers to a change initiative that necessitates either a redefinition of the organisational mission or an amendment of organisational goals to support a new direction (Jarventie-Thesleff, Moisander & Villi 2015:533).

Multiple types of organisational change could be categorised according to the rate of occurrence; how it originates; and by scale (Todnem By 2015:29). Brief reference will be only be made to organisational change types related to rate of occurrence and origin categories, as it will have

specific relevance to the focus of change-orientated communication during change in a postmodern context. Change types conceptualized within the rate of occurrence category include, deductive and inductive change (Mintzberg & Wesley 1992) and discontinuous (episodic and irregular), and continuous (evolving) change (Weick & Quinn 1999). Deductive change stems from “thought to action” and is in line with deliberate strategy of the organisation while inductive change advances from “concrete to conceptual in an emergent fashion” and is connected to emergent strategy (Jarventie-Thesleff et al 2015:535). It is important to note that continuous change is related to inductive change as minor continuous adjustments across the organisation can mount up and lead to a significant change (Jarventie-Thesleff et al 2015:535). The most prominent types of change in the category of origin are planned and emergent change (Burnes 2004; Bamford & Forrester 2003). Planned change aims to highlight the processes that have to be implemented by the organisation in order to move from an unstable, indefinite to a more favourite state (Eldrod II & Tippett 2002:274). The most prominent planned change model in the literature and grounding for various other planned models developed over the years, is Lewin’s (1951) three step model of change, namely; unfreezing the current situation; moving to the new level and; refreezing the new level to ensure that the change has been internalised (Todnem By 2015:31). Other planned change models include Kotter’s (1995) eight step model and Senge’s (1999) systems thinking model (Smith 2014:36). Planned change approaches have been severely criticised for being based on the supposition that organisations function under stable conditions and are able to move from one pre-planned stage to the next (Bamford & Forrester 2003:478). Conversely, emergent change, which are often aligned with the chaos theory (Smith 2014:67), is more inclined with the reality of the volatile organisational environment and emphasise that change cannot be regarded as series of linear events within a specific period of time, but as a “continuous, open-ended process of adaption to changing circumstances and conditions” (Todnem By 2015:33). In line with the notion of “the organisation as becoming” (Weick & Quinn 1999; Tsoukas & Chia 2002) emergent change is concerned with how organisational members construct their social reality (Graetz et al 2006:18). Organisational change therefore forms part of organisational life. Emergent approaches/models to change (such as Kanter, Stein and Jick’s (1992) ten commandments for executing change Luecke’s (2003) seven steps) are criticised for the lack in coherence and multiplicity in techniques (Bamford & Forrester 2003:550). A more practical approach for the implementation of emergent organisational change is Lawrence, Dyck, Maitlis and Mauws’ (2006) cycle of continuous change which highlights that continuous change is a four-phased process each with a specific champion, namely; champion; evangelist; autocrat; architect and; educator.

Another type of organisational change is the notion of accepting it as less calculated or intentional (Jarventie-Thesleff et al 2015:535). In this regard Tsoukas and Chia (2002:579) state that “change in organizations occurs without necessarily intentional managerial action as a result of individuals trying to accommodate new experiences and realize new possibilities.” This is specifically in line with Balogun’s (2001:2) viewpoint that change is inherent to human action. It is important to note however, that this viewpoint does not disregard the role of management. Instead, managers are in the position to provide “discursive templates” to guide organisational stakeholders to be attentive to new issues and new relations (Jarventie-Thesleff et al 2015:535).

There is a myriad of factors that could contribute towards the failure of organisational change. Todnem By (2015:27) argues that since the need for change is often capricious, it tends to be reactive and discontinuous in nature which often results in organisational crisis. Other

contributors of failure in organisational change could include employees' resistance to change (Christensen 2014:360); employees' inability to adapt to change (Sharma & Sahoo 2014:175); failure of management to empower and involve employees in the change process brought about by a fear of losing authority (Sharma & Sahoo 2014:183); uncertainty (Hodges & Gill 2015:277) and; the lack of a clear framework on how to implement and manage organisational change which could largely be ascribed to the contradictory and confusing theories and approaches available to practitioners and academics (Todnem By 2015:28). Besides the fact that communication is regarded as central to the success of organisations (Bordia, Hobman, Jones, Gallois & Callan 2004; Barrett 2002), it is also plays an instrumental role in sustaining organisational change (Christensen 2014:360; Soumyaja, Kamalanbhan & Bhattacharyya 2011:86). The contrary could also be true in that the lack of communication during change could be a key contributor towards the failure of change in the organisation (Sindhu 2014:210; Hodges & Gill 2015:274). The purpose of this paper is therefore not only to identify the preliminary attributes for the proposed concept of strategic change-orientated communication (SCOC), but also to emphasise the nature of contemporary change-orientated communication to sustain organisational change.

5.1 Change-orientated communication

'Change-oriented communication' or 'change communication' is the consistent effort to educate employees; motivate employees; encourage higher performance and discretionary effort; limit misunderstandings and; ensure employee alignment behind the strategic and overall performance improvement goals during organisational change (Barret 2002:1357). It is regarded as a "potent tool" to set direction and ensure alignment between various organisational functions during change (Sharma & Sahoo 2014:175). Most definitions of change-orientated communication often highlight that the communication process and the implementation of change are indissolubly linked (Lewis 1999:43). Conversely, change-orientated communication, in the context of this paper, is regarded as any communication related to change (Zorn, Page & Cheney 2000:516). This perspective emphasises that change-orientated communication should be regarded as *continuous* throughout the organisational change process, not just during the implementation of organisational change.

With reference to the types of organisational change provided earlier, the change-orientated communication within planned change projects is predominantly top-down in nature, whereas the change-orientated communication in emergent change is more bottoms-up and lateral in nature. The change-orientated communication in planned change serves as an "instrument of management control" aimed at ensuring the successful absorption of change projects (Jarventie-Thesleff et al 2015:536). It is focused on ensuring that messages are clear, participation is encouraged and uncertainty is reduced. Communication during emergent change implies that it is a means by which the organisation is established, composed and sustained (Cooren, Kuhn, Cornelissen & Clark 2011:1150). According to Jarventie-Thesleff et al (2015:537), change-orientated communication in the context of emergent change is about creating "practices and policies though which change can be embedded in the deep structures of the organization, and to make sure that all members of staff, on all organizational levels, are capable and motivated to make sense of the change process in the course of their daily activities, both individually and collectively." In this regard, the significance of organisational change is negotiated within communicative interactions (Thomas, Sargent & Hardy 2011:7). Change-orientated

communication during emergent change is to facilitate the social and communicative processes of organisational members in making sense of change (Javentie-Thesleff et al 2015:536).

From the above discussion it could be inferred that a modernistic approach to organisational change is more planned and discontinuous in nature which necessitates top-down change-orientated communication, while a postmodern approach to organisational change is more emergent and continuous in nature that requires bottoms-up organisational-change communication.

The following section focuses on providing a definition and preliminary attributes for SCOC as a starting point for the conceptual development thereof.

6. TOWARDS STRATEGIC CHANGE-ORIENTATED COMMUNICATION (SCOC): PRELIMINARY ATTRIBUTES

Drawing from the definitions of change-orientated communication provided earlier, strategic change-orientated communication (SCOC) could be uniquely defined as *change-orientated communication within an emergent change milieu to facilitate the social interactions and communicative processes of organisational members in continuously creating a collective understanding of change.*

Based on the exploration of the literature as outlined in this paper, four preliminary attributes for SCOC are depicted in Figure 1.

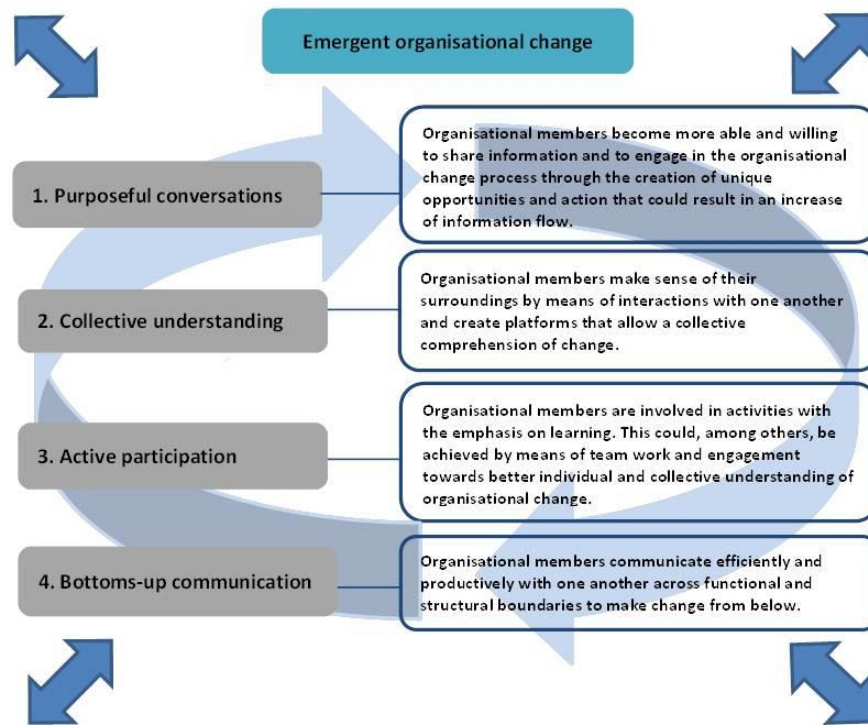


Figure 1: Preliminary attributes of SCOC

Figure 1 indicates that SCOC is evident when an organisation follows an emergent approach to organisational change. This implies that organisations should be flexible to allow for the management of organisational change as a continuous and open-ended process to enable the organisation to continuously adapt to environmental demands. Organisational change is therefore regarded as evolutionary in nature and not a linear process that could be managed in a step-by-step fashion. Four preliminary attributes of SCOC have been depicted in Figure 1, namely; purposeful conversations; collective understanding; active participation and; bottoms-up communication. *Purposeful conversations* imply that the change-orientated communication should contribute to an organisation's purpose for being (Hallagen et al 2007:11). There should be purposeful conversations across the entire organisation to allow sharing of meaning and ideas (Hodges & Gill 2015:445). Purposeful conversations serve as the platform for creating a collective understanding of organisational change and the spring board for active participation. The proposed attribute of *collective understanding* emphasise that through social interaction, organisational members establish a shared understanding of organisational change. SCOC should be positioned to promote sharing of information; serve as a platform to share ideas and; generate collective solutions to issues brought about by organisational change (Sindhu 2015:239). *Active participation* of organisational members in organisational change (which could be achieved by engagement and team work) promotes self-discovery and combined with the symbolic meaning attached to management's confidence in employees' input and participation during change, it could foster a stronger sense of partnership among organisational members (Hodges & Gill 2015:287). *Bottoms-up communication* (as opposed to top-down communication) implies that SCOC should not be focused on the mere transfer of information but on listening to organisational members (Overton-de Klerk & Verwey 2013:371) which could be encouraged by

team work and engagement as highlighted earlier. Javentie-Thesleff et al (2015:537) however emphasise that change from below requires organisational members to learn how to effectively and constructively talk with one another on all levels of the organisation during the process of building a collective understanding of change.

Although the purpose of this study is not to propose guidelines on how SCOC should be implemented in the organisation, it is however important to emphasise a few pragmatic implications that should be considered as part of the contextualisation of the proposed attributes.

7. PRAGMATIC IMPLICATIONS

As mentioned in Item 5, an organisation's culture plays a fundamental role in successfully managing organisational change. Tsoukas and Chia (2002:578) highlight that the manner in which organisations respond to change, depends on the organisation's "self-understanding – the historically created assumptions and interpretations of itself and its environment". Balogun (2001:2) argues that at the heart of successful organisational change lies a shift in the culture of the organisation. Based on the cycle of continuous change proposed by Lawrence et al (2006), Javentie-Thesleff et al (2015:540) state that a *change-affirmative culture* should be embedded in the organisation, which is an organisational culture characterised by communicative practices in support of an emergent change focus.

In order to implement SCOC, organisational management would arguably have to coordinate and manage an emergent approach to change as part of organisational life. Organisational management must create the ideal conditions to support active participation to establish a collective understanding of organisational change among organisational members. As mentioned earlier, management should arguably implement "discursive templates" and engage organisational members on all levels to enable change from below. It could also be argued that some change projects will still necessitate a planned approach within an overall emergent change context. These projects will necessitate top-down change-orientated communication. However, the emphasis here should be that organisational leaders should facilitate the change process as oppose to merely inform; follow a charismatic leadership approach as opposed to authoritative and; implement engagement in all organisational units, departments and teams on multiple levels of the organisation instead of simply enrolling collaboration among organisational members (Javentie-Thesleff et al 2015:36). From this perspective it could be inferred that there will still be some modernistic elements embedded within a postmodern, emergent approach to organisational change which Holtzhausen & Zerfass (2015:4) regard as "work outside the public sphere."

8. LIMITATIONS, CONTRIBUTIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This literature paper proposed preliminary attributes for SCOC, which could not only serve as a starting point in the conceptual development process, but as a heuristic for future research. This paper simultaneously aimed to make a contribution towards the body of knowledge in postmodern strategic communication literature in terms of the domains of practice, specifically organisational change. This is an important contribution as the current interactive society necessitates theoretical developments in line with postmodern thinking. This paper only provided a contextualisation of the conceptual problem and preliminary attributes and necessitates further exploration of SCOC to build forth towards a well-grounded concept. Furthermore, it was

seemingly evident that some managerial, modernistically inclined elements will be embedded within a postmodern approach to organisational change which necessitates further exploration. The selection of a literature exploration as data collection method for the conceptual development of SCOC could be regarded as limited. However, once the concept is fully developed by means of Rodgers' evolutionary process, the concept could further be explored at best practice organisations where the application of change-orientated communication within a post-modern milieu is evident.

As highlighted earlier, this paper served as grounding for the conceptual development of SCOC. The next step in this research project is to complete the steps in Rodger's (2000:85-99) evolutionary process to conceptual development, which broadly includes; the identification of associated expressions; identification of an appropriate realm; further expand on the attributes and contextual basis; analyse data based on identified characteristics; identification of a concept exemplar; interpreting the findings and; identify implications, especially for further conceptual development. Furthermore, the insights obtained from this paper could also be used in future research to build forth towards developing guidelines for the implementation of an emergent, continuous approach to organisational change and the subsequent application of SCOC as part of daily organisational life. Such an approach should arguably have to recognise the existence of some managerial orientated elements, derived from a modernistic context, within a postmodern approach to manage organisational change.

9. CONCLUSION

Organisations today are in a continuous state of flux and have to be able to adapt to the demands of an interactive, participatory society in order to survive. In line with this perspective, this literature paper served as starting point in addressing the need to develop theoretical approaches beyond traditional, modernistic assumptions and more importantly, to develop a change communication approach in line with the latest postmodern developments in the field of strategic communication. This was done through the proposition of four preliminary attributes for the conceptual development of 'strategic change-orientated communication' (SCOC) through a literature exploration of postmodern strategic communication and an emergent approach to organisational change. Strategic communication from a postmodern perspective "actively contributes to and shapes the processes and practices through which change emerges in the day-to-day of organisational life" (Javentie-Thesleff et al 2015:535). The need for postmodern change-orientated communication approaches to sustain the ever-changing environment, with the conceptual development of SCOC as foundation, is clearly eminent.

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