



The Impact of Organizational Design and Leadership on Strategic Communications

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Abstract: Information warfare, including strategic communications, is becoming ever more crucial in defending national interests and competing globally. Therefore, organizations are increasingly employing strategic communications within the information environment to pursue the organization's mission and goals. Unfortunately, many organizations lack strategic, structural, and environmental alignment, resulting in reduced efficiency and effectiveness of strategic communications. This article explores the current structure of many organizations defending and competing in a turbulent information environment, proposes a different configuration that balances efficiency and effectiveness, outlines the importance of innovation, and emphasizes the strategic role of leadership throughout the organization and change process.

Keywords: strategic communication, leadership, organizational design, psychological operations, Military Information Support Operations, MISO.

Introduction

Today's complex information environment finds nations and international organizations challenged to manage the information environment to support their security interests.¹ Following the description of Baptist and Gluck, the information environment is a "vector for malicious narratives in the ongoing battle

¹ Constantin Raicu, "Considerations Regarding Information Warfare and Competitions in the Current Global Security Environment," Proceedings of the 11th International Scientific Conference "Defense Resources Management in the 21st Century," Braşov, Romania, November 10-11, 2016, pp. 264-284, <http://www.codrm.eu/conferences/2016/Raicu%20Constantin.pdf>.

for global hegemony.” The United States, its allies, and partners have been “under insidious assault for years” by actors such as Russia, seen by Russian influence in US elections to military activity in Georgia and Ukraine.² Recognizing that they cannot compete with the West directly in conventional terms, such actors employ information warfare to destabilize Western societies.^{3,4} One demonstration of this is the \$1.4 billion that Russia spent on international propaganda from the fall of the Soviet Union till 2011.⁵ Russia fully embraces the idea that “[h]e who controls the trend will control the narrative – and ultimately, the narrative controls the will of the people.”⁶ As an article in Russia’s *Bulletin of the Academy of Military Sciences* states: “[t]he victim country does not even suspect that it is being subjected to information-psychological influence. This leads in turn to a paradox: the aggressor achieves his military and political aims with the active support of the population of the country that is being subjected to influence.”⁷

Information Warfare, when conducted properly, is a flexible full-spectrum capability that is adaptable according to the situation in the virtual and physical environment.⁸ Information warfare employs, among others, social education and media dissemination platforms such as “magazines, newspapers, radio, television, cinemas, schools, professional unions, public conferences, seminars, advertising leaflets, e-mail, web pages or social media.”⁹ This article does not look deeply into the impact of information warfare on the West. Instead, it reviews a challenge facing one aspect of information warfare, Strategic Communications, in competing against and shaping narratives in a turbulent information environment. It argues that without proper alignment between organizational goals, strategy, and structure, as well as human and artificial intelligence components, those charged with developing and executing Strategic Communications will face continually degraded operations. Additionally, the article discusses opportunities for organizations to align strategic communications, structure, and leadership to meet the challenges of a dynamic and continuously evolving operational environment.

² Jeffrey Baptist and Julian Gluck, “The Gray Legion: Information Warfare Within Our Gates,” *Journal of Strategic Security* 14, no. 4 (2021): 37-55, <https://doi.org/10.5038/1944-0472.14.4.1928>.

³ Media Ajir and Bethany Vaillant, “Russian Information Warfare: Implications for Deterrence Theory,” *Strategic Studies Quarterly* 12, no. 3 (Fall 2018): 70-89.

⁴ Baptist and Gluck, “The Gray Legion.”

⁵ Ajir and Vaillant, “Russian Information Warfare.”

⁶ Jarred Prier, “Commanding the Trend: Social Media as Information Warfare,” *Strategic Studies Quarterly* 11, no. 4 (Winter 2017): 50-85, https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/Portals/10/SSQ/documents/Volume-11_Issue-4/Prier.pdf.

⁷ Quoted in Ajir and Vaillant, “Russian Information Warfare,” p. 77.

⁸ Raicu, “Considerations Regarding Information Warfare and Competitions,” 267.

⁹ Raicu, “Considerations Regarding Information Warfare and Competitions,” 265.

The concept of “Strategic Communications” is looked at in two parts “communication” and “strategy,” as the combined term suggests that not all communication is strategic. Next, the article discusses the importance of strategy and organizational design with impacts on strategic communications. Lastly, it explores the role of organizational leaders in ensuring strategy implementation.

Why Change Is Important

To compete, organizations must not only get better at what they do since their competitors can also get better; instead, organizations must craft a strong strategy that ensures sustainable competitive advantage.¹⁰ Furthermore, the organization must have structure and competencies to support the strategy. Leaders must acknowledge and understand that organizational structure and control systems carry out the strategy, making it imperative to align structure to strategy. Furthermore, organizational culture modifies organizational outcomes with strategy, structure, control, and culture influencing each other.¹¹

Organizations must differentiate themselves and look for opportunities rather than playing the same game with the same tools as competitors, which may potentially only provide a limited or temporary advantage. Organizational structure should help stakeholders identify opportunities, looking beyond the conventional, toward how to do things better, quicker, cheaper, differently, more conveniently, faster, and more reliable. The organization’s posture must be on learning, continuously scanning for future change and opportunities, then responding quickly with a balance of efficiency and effectiveness.^{12,13,14} Organizational change is complex and requires time, commitment, and determination for the entire organization, but to create sustainable competitive advantage, innovation and opportunity exploitation are necessary.^{15,16}

¹⁰ Stan Abraham, “Stretching Strategic Thinking,” *Strategy & Leadership* 33, no. 5 (October 2005): 5-12, <https://doi.org/10.1108/10878570510616834>.

¹¹ Geert Hofstede, Gert Jan Hofstede, and Michael Minkov, *Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind: Intercultural Cooperation and its Importance for Survival*, 3rd ed. (New York: McCraw Hill, 2010).

¹² Abraham, “Stretching Strategic Thinking.”

¹³ Richard L. Hughes, Katherine Beatty, and David L. Dinwoodie, *Becoming a Strategic Leader: Your Role in Your Organization’s Enduring Success* (John Wiley & Sons, 2014), 21.

¹⁴ John L. Thompson and Melissa Cole, “Strategic Competency – the Learning Challenge,” *Journal of Workplace Learning* 9, no. 5 (September 1997): 153-162, <https://doi.org/10.1108/13665629710169611>.

¹⁵ Richard M. Burton, Børge Obel, and Dorthe Døjbak Håkonsson, *Organizational Design: A Step-by-Step Approach*, 4th ed. (Cambridge University Press, 2021), 7.

¹⁶ Abraham, “Stretching Strategic Thinking.”

Strategic Communication

Littlejohn defines communication theory as the body of theories that form an understanding of the communication process.¹⁷ While there has not been agreement on the definition of communication, most researchers suggest that communication is the process of creating meaning.

B. van Ruler suggests three lenses to view communication theory: communication as a one-way process, communication as a two-way process of meaning creation, and an omnidirectional diachronic process of meaning. As a one-way process, communication is a monologue in which the sender attempts to construct or reconstruct meaning developed by the receiver. As a two-way process, communication acts as a dialogue in which two or more people construct meaning together. As an omnidirectional diachronic process, communication focuses on the continuous development of meaning itself.¹⁸

Understanding the basic ideas behind each communication lens is critical because each lens has varying demands for information feedback. Wiener was the first to acknowledge that feedback mechanisms are essential to communication theory. He emphasized that purposeful behavior requires feedback, used to adjust the behavior. In this way, the behavior remains purposeful and has a specific effect. What matters is not the single communication but rather the process of meaning creation, as meaning is continuously created in an ongoing exchange process. Therefore, the greater the network of communication, the greater the demand for information processing within an organization.¹⁹

Organizations that view communication as one-directional, those that throw information into the environment without incorporating feedback or interaction will struggle to compete. Such organizations overlook that consumers continuously negotiate meaning while other actors are engaged in the information environment, complementing, competing against, or confusing communication efforts. Due to a rapidly changing technology environment, people have what seems to be endless options for accessing information.²⁰ Competing options and a high frequency of use by consumers mean that people receive continuous exposure to various messages across multiple physical and virtual mediums. Researchers suggest that consumers face more significant confusion in processing

¹⁷ Stephen W. Littlejohn, *Theories of Human Communication*, 2nd ed. (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1983).

¹⁸ Betteke van Ruler, "Communication Theory: An Underrated Pillar on Which Strategic Communication Rests," *International Journal of Strategic Communication* 12, no. 4 (August 2018): 367-381, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1553118X.2018.1452240>.

¹⁹ Norbert Wiener, *Cybernetics: Or Control and Communication in the Animal and the Machine* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1948).

²⁰ Van Thac Dang, "Information Confusion and Intention to Stop Using Social Networking Site: A Moderated Mediation Study of Psychological Distress and Perceived Novelty," *Information Technology & People* 33, no. 5 (July 2020): 1427-1452, <https://doi.org/10.1108/ITP-03-2020-0117>.

information due to the number of choices and information available to them.^{21,22} Individuals struggle to accurately interpret the information environment due to confusion related to similarity, overload, and ambiguity.²³ First, with exposure to multiple, seemingly similar messages from varying sources, consumers face similarity confusion, unable to distinguish which sources are accurate or reliable.^{24,25} Next, bombardment by a plethora of information challenge cognitive threshold, leaving people unable to process all the information, leading to confusion.^{26,27} Lastly, users face ambiguity confusion as they face incongruent, unclear, or misleading information.²⁸

Describing the information environment in such a way supports the concept that communication is an omnidirectional diachronic process of meaning development. According to van Ruler, “[t]hrough this lens of communication... interaction is seen as a dynamic interplay between actors in their roles as senders and receivers, which influences the consequences of the communicative transactions at a fundamental level.” She further defines communication not as a sequence of events but rather as a “continuous and simultaneous interaction of a large number of variables that are moving, changing, and affecting each other.”²⁹ Therefore, unlike two-way communication, which depicts communication as a conversation, the omnidirectional diachronic process reveals that those engaged in the communication are not necessarily related or in proximity to each other.³⁰

Furthermore, by studying various definitions of strategy, this article views strategy as the critical element that transforms communication from a process

²¹ Qing Wang and Paurav Shukla, “Linking Sources of Consumer Confusion to Decision Satisfaction: The Role of Choice Goals,” *Psychology & Marketing* 30, no. 4 (February 2013): 295-304, <https://doi.org/10.1002/mar.20606>.

²² Sheena S. Iyenger and Mark R. Lepper, “When Choice Is Demotivating: Can One Desire Too Much of a Good Thing?” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 79, no. 6 (2000): 995-1006, <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.79.6.995>.

²³ Dang, “Information Confusion and Intention to Stop Using Social Networking Site.”

²⁴ Wang and Shukla, “Linking Sources of Consumer Confusion to Decision Satisfaction.”

²⁵ Jasper Doomen, “Information Inflation.” *Journal of Information Ethics* 18, no. 2 (Fall 2009): 27-37.

²⁶ Angela Edmunds and Anne Morris, “The Problem of Information Overload in Business Organizations: A Review of the Literature.” *International Journal of Information Management* 20, no. 1 (February 2020): 17-28, [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0268-4012\(99\)00051-1](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0268-4012(99)00051-1).

²⁷ Quentin Jones, Gilad Ravid, and Shezaf Rafaeli, “Information Overload and the Message Dynamics of Online Interaction Spaces: A Theoretical Model and Empirical Exploration,” *Information Systems Research* 15, no. 2 (June 2004): 194-210, <https://doi.org/10.1287/isre.1040.0023>.

²⁸ Wang and Shukla, “Linking Sources of Consumer Confusion to Decision Satisfaction.”

²⁹ van Ruler, “Communication Theory.”

³⁰ van Ruler, “Communication Theory.”

into intended (strategic) communications that advance an organization's mission to ensure sustained survival and success.³¹

Organizational Design Theory

Unfortunately, as Mintzberg argues, many assume that "organizations are all alike: collections of component parts to which elements of structure can be added and deleted at will."³² Burns and Stalker rightfully presented that differing organizational structures produce varying effectiveness according to the conditions they face.³³ The success of Strategic Communications, like any other effort, is wholly contingent on the organization employing Strategic Communications while relying on the implementation of thoughtful and good strategy and organizational design. Misfits (imbalances) between strategy, structure, and environment often lead to poor performance within the organization, including degraded or confused operations within Strategic Communications.³⁴

The structural components of organizational design, which include goals, strategy, and structure, and human and Artificial Intelligence components, which include task and agents, people (leadership and employees), coordination and control, and incentive mechanisms, should be viewed holistically to ensure fit among each other.³⁵ According to Roberts, high performance within organizations results from fit among three elements: organizational strategy, organizational structure, and operational environment.³⁶ Given that structure follows strategy, leaders must first clearly outline the organization's priorities for efficiency and effectiveness according to their assessment of the organization's situation (internal and external) and their choice of achieving organizational goals. After this, leadership can determine how to structure the organization, partition tasks by work roles, and design reporting relationships according to those roles.

Using the multi-contingency model from Burton, Obel, and Håkonsson, the following section explores the current structure of most government organizations employing strategic communications and then recommends a configura-

³¹ Ansgar Zerfass, Dejan Verčič, Howard Nothhaft, and Kelly Page Werder, "Strategic Communication: Defining the Field and its Contribution to Research and Practice," *International Journal of Strategic Communication* 12, no. 4 (2018): 487-505, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1553118X.2018.1493485>.

³² Henry Mintzberg, "Organization Design: Fashion or Fit?" *Harvard Business Review* 59, no. 1 (1981): 103-116.

³³ Tom Burns and G. M. Stalker, *The Management of Innovation*, Revised ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

³⁴ Burton, Obel, and Håkonsson, *Organizational Design*, 13.

³⁵ Burton, Obel, and Håkonsson, *Organizational Design*, 7.

³⁶ John Roberts, *The Modern Firm: Organizational Design for Performance and Growth* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004): 12.

tion that better aligns components within a turbulent information environment.³⁷ The article further explores task division, task allocation, reward distribution, information flows, and decision-making.

The Current Design of Many Government Organizations

Burton, Obel, and Håkonsson emphasize that the environment impacts an organization's strategy to varying degrees. The more dynamic or turbulent an environment, the greater the need for proper alignment between the environment and business strategy.³⁸ Despite operating in a turbulent, constantly evolving information environment, many governmental organizations function according to a hierarchy (functional) system that best operates within a varied environment. The Cambridge Dictionary defines hierarchy as a "system in which people or things are arranged according to their importance."³⁹ In his book, "Flat Army: Creating a Connected and Engaged Organization," Pontefract mentions that today, many organizations are operating with twenty-first-century technology, internet-enabled business processes, twentieth-century design, and nineteenth-century management principles.⁴⁰ Such an idea reflects the many government organizations where hierarchical structures and command and control actions and attitudes are prominent.

Burton, Obel, and Håkonsson describe such organizational configurations as functional. The focus is on functional specialties rather than product, service, or customer orientation within a functional configuration. At the top of the configuration is the department manager overseeing sub-units, each with a well-defined job. The hierarchy uses rules and directives to coordinate and accomplish tasks. With executives positioned at the organization's center, information flows through them, to and from the top. Executives are also responsible for making decisions, allocating resources, and coordinating sub-unit activities.⁴¹

Research indicates that most organizations operate within functional hierarchy systems and typically employ defender strategies.⁴² Defenders often prioritize innovation less and concentrate more on maintaining their competitive position, typically measured in share or profitability.⁴³ For Strategic Communications, this is often reported as a measure of performance, with a struggle to

³⁷ Burton, Obel, and Håkonsson, *Organizational Design*, 8.

³⁸ Burton, Obel, and Håkonsson, *Organizational Design*, 57.

³⁹ "Hierarchy," Cambridge Dictionary, accessed April 23, 2022, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/hierarchy>.

⁴⁰ Dan Pontefract, *Flat Army: Creating a Connected and Engaged Organization* (Vancouver, BC: Figure 1 Publishing, 2018).

⁴¹ Burton, Obel, and Håkonsson, *Organizational Design*, 69-74.

⁴² Bindu Gupta, "A Comparative Study of Organizational Strategy and Culture Across Industry," *Benchmarking: An International Journal* 18, no. 4 (July 2011): 510-528, <https://doi.org/10.1108/14635771111147614>.

⁴³ Burton, Obel, and Håkonsson, *Organizational Design*, 32-34.

demonstrate an effect.⁴⁴ Defender organizations typically orient themselves more toward exploitation rather than exploration. Burton, Obel, and Håkonsson define exploitation as “taking advantage of current or known technologies to do things in a more efficient or refined way.” At the same time, exploration is “the process of seeking new technologies or new ways of doing things and includes search, variation, risk-taking, and innovation.” With a focus on being efficient in the utilization of resources, defender organizations focus all innovation on process innovation with the goal of efficiency.⁴⁵

Functional configurations utilizing a defender strategy best operate within varied environments. Varied environments are complex due to the many interdependent factors that influence one another, such as political and financial issues, but the environment is reasonably predictable. Organizations commonly apply forecasting and trend analysis techniques in varied environments to project future organizational actions with reasonable accuracy. The primary role of executives in a varied environment is planning and coordination, ensuring that the organization can address environmental interdependencies.⁴⁶

Functional configurations align best with a complicated task design known for high connectedness with few variations and high repetition. A high degree of coordination must be in place for this design, as a breakdown of any task can jeopardize the entire operation.⁴⁷

Management within a defender strategy often has a short-term orientation focusing on efficiency, exhibiting high uncertainty avoidance and a low preference for delegation, replacing delegation with formalized rules to manage subordinates.⁴⁸ As a result, they tend to make reactive and short-term decisions with high levels of detail, neglecting strategic and long-term decisions as they focus on operational control. Furthermore, managers within this structure often need to be kept abreast of all details of operations so they can react quickly to undesirable situations or activities.

The organizational climate of most functional configurations is termed the *internal process* by Burton, Obel, and Håkonsson and exhibits high tension and low readiness to change. The climate is associated with increased conflict, low morale, and low leadership credibility. Resistance to change is often caused by disappointments related to previous change efforts. Emotionally, staff members can be described as disappointed, tranquil, ashamed, fatigued, and less trustful, with increasing conflict and likely perceiving rewards as inequitable. Informal in-

⁴⁴ Claes Wallenius and Sofia Nilsson, “A Lack of Effect Studies and of Effects: The Use of Strategic Communication in the Military Domain,” *International Journal of Strategic Communication* 13, no. 5 (September 2019): 404-417, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1553118X.2019.1630413>.

⁴⁵ Burton, Obel, and Håkonsson, *Organizational Design*, 30.

⁴⁶ Burton, Obel, and Håkonsson, *Organizational Design*, 54-55

⁴⁷ Burton, Obel, and Håkonsson, *Organizational Design*, 123-124.

⁴⁸ Burton, Obel, and Håkonsson, *Organizational Design*, 135-136.

formation sharing is low, as sharing and openness are not the norms, with information staying within the role or specific job scope of those needing it. The organization must ensure that information processing systems are in place to ensure adequate information sharing.⁴⁹

Leaning more toward a bureaucracy, an organization employing a defender strategy often has a highly formalized and centralized machine-type coordination and control system. Rules and procedures specify work, monitoring, and feedback processes. The machine model relies on high levels of information processing to build efficiencies and adapt to change.⁵⁰

Incentives within this organization are skill-based rather than performance-based. Education, seniority, and rank typically determine pay and incentives. Such a system emphasizes the idea that people should conform to the organization's job descriptions, rules, and policies.⁵¹

Why the Defender Strategy Is a Misfit in Turbulent Environments

As seen in the 2018 National Defense Strategy, the United States and other Western countries are in long-term strategic competition that requires seamless integration of multiple elements of national power, including information.⁵² For organizations focused on competing and shaping the narrative in turbulent environments, the functionally configured defender strategy falls short of competition and is instead a defense of a position. Here signals the first misfit within the current design of some government organizations employing strategic communications.

Next, current research demonstrates that proper organizational strategy alignment becomes more imperative as the environment increases from calm to turbulent.⁵³ In the long run, due to defenders' slowness to change and limited agility, defender organizations face inevitable vulnerability and potential failure as the operational environment changes, such as the emergence of new competition or changes of rules and regulations.⁵⁴ One reason for this lies in their information processing systems. In order to make decisions and act quickly within a turbulent environment, organizations must have a large and fast information processing system. Unfortunately, organizations employing a defender strategy strap themselves to large systems that often lack creativity and flexibility, leaving

⁴⁹ Burton, Obel, and Håkonsson, *Organizational Design*, 141-142.

⁵⁰ Burton, Obel, and Håkonsson, *Organizational Design*, 161-162.

⁵¹ Burton, Obel, and Håkonsson, *Organizational Design*, 183-184.

⁵² Jim Mattis, "Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy of the United State of America: Sharpening the American Military's Competitive Edge," Department of Defense, accessed April 23, 2022, <https://dod.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2018-National-Defense-Strategy-Summary.pdf>.

⁵³ Burton, Obel, and Håkonsson, *Organizational Design*, 57.

⁵⁴ Burton, Obel, and Håkonsson, *Organizational Design*, 33.

some organizations stuck in old ways of doing things.⁵⁵ The 9/11 Commission Report, for example, pointed out that outdated information processing and sharing continued to be an obstacle to optimized operations and recommended the development of a “need-to-share” culture of integration rather than a “need-to-know.”⁵⁶

Another reason for increased vulnerability is the organization’s heavy reliance on policies and procedures. Tushman and Nadler warn organizations not to rely solely on organizational policies and practices. These two factors cannot adequately anticipate or respond to internal and external issues impacting organizational effectiveness.⁵⁷

Analyzing innovation introduces another misfit. As discussed, exploration within the defender strategy focuses on process innovation. However, as Lai, Ching, and Wang emphasize, organizations in turbulent environments cannot rely on their competitive advantage but must incorporate advanced technology and innovation into strategy.⁵⁸ Besides an organizational focus on efficiency, the climate is typically known for high tension with low trust and leadership credibility, producing productivity and efficiency as long as innovations are not regularly required.⁵⁹ That said, the innovations required to compete in a turbulent environment would further strain the organizational climate and cause problems for productivity and efficiency. Furthermore, the skill-based incentive framework does not lend well to innovation. The organization rewards individuals for education, rank, and seniority but lacks incentivization for collaboration which is critical for increased innovation.⁶⁰

Also, with an emphasis on predictability, executives within functional configurations can quickly become overwhelmed and lose control as the environment becomes less predictable and more turbulent. Managers within the functional configuration often attempt to respond to unexpected turbulence by driving change but quickly become overloaded. This can be seen by a backlog of decisions, changes, and actions not in coordination across the organization.⁶¹

⁵⁵ Burton, Obel, and Håkonsson, *Organizational Design*, 145-146.

⁵⁶ National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States, *The 9/11 Commission Report* (2004), 13.3, <https://9-11commission.gov/report/>.

⁵⁷ Michael L. Tushman and David A. Nadler, “Information Processing as an Integrating Concept in Organizational Design,” *The Academy of Management Review* 3, no. 3 (July 1978): 613-624, 615, <https://doi.org/10.2307/257550>.

⁵⁸ Wen-Hsiang Lai, Chio-Ching Lin, and Ting-Chu Wang, “Exploring the Interoperability of Innovation Capability and Corporate Sustainability,” *Journal of Business Research* 68, no. 4 (April 2015): 867-871, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2014.11.043>.

⁵⁹ Burton, Obel, and Håkonsson, *Organizational Design*, 141-142.

⁶⁰ René Belderbos et al., “Heterogeneity in R&D Cooperation Strategies,” *International Journal of Industrial Organization* 22, no. 8-9 (November 2004): 1237-1263, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijindorg.2004.08.001>.

⁶¹ Burton, Obel, and Håkonsson, *Organizational Design*, 137-138.

Proposed Design for Government Organizations Employing Strategic Communications

Turbulent environments are highly complex and unpredictable. A turbulent environment is the most challenging for managers as there is high uncertainty and the requirement to act and coordinate quickly. Agile organizations can make the right changes at the right time with the right speed, successfully reacting to rapid advancements in technology, the emergence of new competitors, and sudden changes in the environment.⁶² To achieve agility, there must be intentional and balanced decentralized decision-making and formal processes and goals, offering organizational ambidexterity, the optimal balance between efficiency and effectiveness.⁶³

Highly successful strategic communications in a turbulent environment will best operate within an analyzer with an innovation strategy that defends and innovates. Organizations with this strategy prioritize exploration and exploitation, looking beyond what others are doing in search of technologies and markets that can provide sustained competitive advantage while also defending their position. Governmental organizations can realize this through an ambidextrous strategy where incremental and radical innovation co-occurs with product and process innovation. Due to high and fast information processing demands, organizations can support this strategy through frequent monitoring, forecasting, and predictive analytics.⁶⁴

Hierarchical or relatively independent divisions do not perform well in highly complex and continuously changing environments. Instead, Burton, Obel, and Håkonsson point toward the matrix structure that operates according to “dual-authority relations” and has functional and divisional dimensions. With coordination and control resting on their shoulders, functional and divisional managers within a matrix configuration are positioned optimally to coordinate activities across the organization. Furthermore, managers are better able to respond to continual adjustments and changing tasks.⁶⁵

The knotty task design best complements the analyzer strategy within a turbulent environment. This approach empowers teams to develop innovative or adaptive ways and means to achieve results while ensuring integration with other organizational subunits. The knotty task design is highly effective for strategic communications as it enables customized output for the varying audiences (customers) but also creates the most significant demands for managers.⁶⁶

The leadership style of a *producer* is the best fit for this configuration as this type of leader prefers delegation and has high uncertainty avoidance. The producer focuses on “short term and long term; operations and strategy; current

⁶² Burton, Obel, and Håkonsson, *Organizational Design*, 7.

⁶³ Burton, Obel, and Håkonsson, *Organizational Design*, 21.

⁶⁴ Burton, Obel, and Håkonsson, *Organizational Design*, 37-38.

⁶⁵ Burton, Obel, and Håkonsson, *Organizational Design*, 77-80.

⁶⁶ Burton, Obel, and Håkonsson, *Organizational Design*, 125-126.

products/services and innovation; internal activities and environment reading; hands-on management and delegation so others can act independently; and efficiency and effectiveness.”⁶⁷

Using strong norms embedded within employees and formalization, the clan or mosaic coordination and control system supports the analyzer configuration. Norms are achieved by selecting employees likely to conform, then providing guidance and instruction through formal means such as training manuals. Additionally, rules are learned through modeling by workers and managers. At the same time, written rules are minimal, ensuring greater flexibility.⁶⁸

Profit-sharing/gain-sharing incentivizes the organization, with groups or teams rewarded collectively based on results. Such an incentive design encourages collaboration and innovation, leading to success on projects with limited resources. Furthermore, despite high tension, the incentives system works well in a goal-oriented climate that pursues change through cooperation. Lastly, the profit-sharing/gain-sharing design acts as an organizational glue, ensuring integration between subunits as they confront a turbulent environment.⁶⁹

Matrix Design Case Study: Psychological Operations

From 2011 to 2017, U.S. Psychological Operations (PSYOP) conducted Military Information Support Operations (MISO) in support of Special Operations Command – Forward in Central Africa against the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA). For background, the LRA “abducted over 60,000 children, massacred tens of thousands of civilians, displaced 2 million people, and destabilized a region the size of California.”⁷⁰ Assessing that most LRA combatants were child soldiers who were abducted, PSYOP initially focused on defection efforts. The operation, according to Col. Bethany Aragon, previous Commander of the U.S. Army’s 4th Military Information Support Group (Airborne), led to a 24 percent increase in LRA defections within one year, five of the six LRA leaders either killed or tried by the international criminal courts, and civilian deaths reduced by 95 percent. Ultimately, the LRA was rendered ineffective, with their forces taken down from 2,000 to less than 100.⁷¹

U.S. PSYOP plays an important role in U.S. Department of Defense communication efforts as PSYOP influences “foreign audience perceptions and subsequent behavior as part of approved programs in support of U.S. government policy and military objectives.”⁷²

⁶⁷ Burton, Obel, and Håkonsson, *Organizational Design*, 137

⁶⁸ Burton, Obel, and Håkonsson, *Organizational Design*, 161-163.

⁶⁹ Burton, Obel, and Håkonsson, *Organizational Design*, 186-187.

⁷⁰ Scott R. Gourley, “Psyop Target: Joseph Kony,” *Issuu*, accessed August 16, 2022, <https://issuu.com/faircountmedia/docs/special-operations-outlook-2018/s/72716>.

⁷¹ Gourley, “Psyop Target.”

⁷² Department of Defense, *Joint Publication 3-13.2 – Psychological Operations* (January 2010), I1, <https://irp.fas.org/doddir/dod/jp3-13-2.pdf>.

U.S. PSYOP teams often fall under the matrix configuration when deploying, falling in some capacity under the oversight of two bosses, a functional manager and a project manager. In the case above, the regional PSYOP team fell under the functional oversight of the 7th PSYOP Battalion and the Special Operations Command – Forward project oversight in Central Africa.⁷³

The established matrix structure shared resource planning and enabled collaboration between multiple stakeholders to create a community of interest which included nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) Invisible Children and Pathways for Peace, the African Union’s regional task force, the People’s Defense Forces of Uganda, the Bureau of Conflict and Stabilization operations in the U.S. State Department, and local and cultural leaders.⁷⁴

Demonstrating the knotty task design, MISO practitioners were empowered to customize MISO operations according to a specified target audience in support of their mission rather than applying generic, cookie-cutter tactics, techniques, and procedures. MISO practitioners could flexibly plan and conduct operations to support mission objectives and authorities rather than rely solely on organizational rules and directives. Furthermore, integrating PSYOPs with other special operations forces subunits formed a “symbiotic whole” toward achieving named objectives.⁷⁵

In this example, the application of an “indigenous approach,” integration, collaboration, information sharing, information environment monitoring, collective analysis, precise targeting, and modifications due to feedback loops led to operational innovation in continually accessing the target audience and exploiting vulnerabilities with tailored messaging. Considering but also looking beyond what others had done before, the community of interest determined that the most effective communication method for the operation was a hybrid communication campaign utilizing traditional radio, leaflet, and aerial loudspeaker operations. This methodology enabled adaptation to the dense jungle environment. Additionally, assessing that most of the target audience were combatants that were once abducted child soldiers, dissemination included prerecorded and printed messages of family members begging the combatants to come home. Application of feedback loops, including defector debrief sessions, enabled the community to modify their operation for continued effectiveness, supporting both near-term and long-term strategies of the operation, which spanned over multiple years. Furthermore, the community and formalized processes, according to Col. Aragon, were crucial to operations by leading to the identification of key LRA leaders.⁷⁶

⁷³ Gourley, “Psyop Target.”

⁷⁴ Gourley, “Psyop Target.”

⁷⁵ The Fayetteville Observer, “How US PsyOps Lured an African Warlord to Defect Using His Mother’s Voice,” *We Are the Mighty*, March 31, 2018, www.wearethemighty.com/mighty-trending/how-us-psyops-lured-an-african-warlord-to-defect-using-his-mothers-voice/.

⁷⁶ Gourley, “Psyop Target.”

Though this example does not highlight all of the elements outlined in the matrix design, the case study emphasizes that combining many of the matrix design elements strengthens operations.

The Role of Strategic Leadership in Organizational Design and Strategy

Astute leaders recognize the extraordinary effort required to achieve and sustain effective operations.⁷⁷ That said, being an effective astute leader does not necessarily mean an individual is an effective strategic leader.⁷⁸ Furthermore, while there is no agreed definition of leadership, “ethical commitments are central to how scholars define leadership and shape their research.”⁷⁹ This is challenging because not everyone’s ethics align, nor is everyone equally clear about their ethics.⁸⁰ Strategic leadership has a more refined description, requiring direction, alignment, and commitment to achieve the enduring performance potential of the organization.⁸¹ Strategic leadership requires leaders to create and agree on clear organizational priorities, with some leaders feeling more like winners and others feeling a bit more like losers, then working together to implement those priorities.⁸² The unit as a whole must implement agreed-upon organizational priorities. If one part of the unit does not work toward organizational priorities, that part impacts other parts and causes the organizational strategy to fail.⁸³ Leaders must work in harmony, sharing information and capabilities, creating synergy, and enabling the organization to grow and succeed.⁸⁴

While working to achieve short-term goals, strategic leaders must keep long-term goals in mind. As Hughes, Beatty, and Dinwoodie state, “strategy involves change, and achieving long-term performance potential in an ever-changing environment requires continuous change.”⁸⁵ To make changes successfully, leaders must challenge their preexisting opinions with new information and knowledge that facilitate decision-making and action-taking and avoid taking decisions that drain the organization’s energy and do not reflect developing capabilities and value. Furthermore, strategic leaders must win the hearts, minds, and

⁷⁷ Leonard R. Sayles, *The Working Leader: The Triumph of High Performance Over Conventional Management Principles* (London: Touchstone, 1999).

⁷⁸ Hughes, Beatty, and Dinwoodie, *Becoming a Strategic Leader*.

⁷⁹ Joanne B. Ciulla, *Ethics, the Heart of Leadership* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2004), 14.

⁸⁰ Ken Hultman, *Balancing Individual and Organizational Values: Walking the Tightrope to Success* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Books, 2002), 325.

⁸¹ Hughes, Beatty, and Dinwoodie, *Becoming a Strategic Leader*, 11.

⁸² Fran Ackerman and Colin Eden, *Making Strategy: Mapping Out Strategic Success* (London: Sage Publications, 2011), 6.

⁸³ Ackerman and Eden, *Making Strategy*, 8.

⁸⁴ Thompson and Cole, “Strategic Competency – the Learning Challenge.”

⁸⁵ Hughes, Beatty, and Dinwoodie, *Becoming a Strategic Leader*, 21

hands of all those engaged in carrying out the strategy to achieve the enduring performance potential of the organization. At the heart of leadership is the ability to engage others to create shared direction, alignment, and commitment. Hughes, Beatty, and Dinwoodie emphasized, “Strategic leaders motivate others through personal connection and inspire them to work together to pursue a superordinate goal that each individual can somehow identify with.”⁸⁶

Conclusion

Russia’s illegal and unjustified invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 has not only negatively impacted resources and economies globally but has also had an impact on the information environment. As Russia reaches into global audiences with malign activities, Western strategic communications that defend and compete against malign narratives are essential.

As senior leaders assess current effectiveness and possibility for future operations, many consider additional opportunities of how Strategic Communications may support the achievement of organizational objectives. That said, senior leaders must look internally to evaluate if the organizational strategy and structure fit the outcomes they seek. If misfits exist, leaders must contemplate what needs to be changed, at what level the change needs to begin, and if the organization has the current capability or resources to see change through. Furthermore, for organizational change to succeed, change should begin from the top, supported across leadership, with their focus on carrying out the change effort and strategy elements.

Disclaimer

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⁸⁶ Hughes, Beatty, and Dinwoodie, *Becoming a Strategic Leader*, 231.