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# The Routledge Handbook of Strategic Communication

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First published 2015  
by Routledge  
711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017

and by Routledge  
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon, OX14 4RN

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*Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data*

The Routledge handbook of strategic communication/edited by Derina Holtzhausen, Ansgar Zerfass.

pages cm

Includes bibliographical references and index.

1. Communication in organizations. 2. Communication in management. 3. Business communication. I. Holtzhausen, Derina Rhoda. II. Zerfass, Ansgar, 1965–

HD30.3.R684 2015

658.4'5—dc23

2014016226

ISBN: 978-0-415-53001-9 (hbk)

ISBN: 978-0-203-09444-0 (ebk)

Typeset in Bembo Std and ITC Stone Sans  
by Swales & Willis Ltd, Exeter, Devon, UK

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## Organizational Goals and Communication Objectives in Strategic Communication

Kirk Hallahan

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Strategic communication involves an organization communicating in a purposeful way to achieve its mission. Implied in the term *strategic* and the adjective *purposeful* is the notion that one or more outcomes are envisioned, planned and pursued (Hallahan, Holtzhausen, van Ruler, Verčič & Sriramesh, 2007).

Effective strategic communication begins with *analyzing situations* (problems or opportunities) that confront the entity through *research* (see chapter 24 in this volume). *Goals and objectives* that are specific provide the foundation for planning and *evaluating* the effort as well as for *strategy* and *message development* (see for example chapters 15 and 17 in this volume).

When strategic communication is viewed from a modernist perspective, strategically pursued outcomes smack of control and manipulation. Yet, in today's increasingly postmodern communication environment, entities of all types (organizations, products, services, personalities and causes) strive for desired outcomes—although the nature of those outcomes and methods for achieving them might be quite different from traditional modernist approaches.

This chapter examines the nature of goals and objectives as they apply to strategic communications across the various subdisciplines that comprise the field—including management communication, marketing communication, public relations, technical communication, political communication and public diplomacy, and health and pro-social information campaigns.

### The Modernist Perspective: Management by Objectives

Despite any claims to the contrary, organized communication programs or campaigns by an entity are no different from other carefully planned organizational endeavors when viewed from the modern managerial perspective. Communicators must be accountable in order to earn the respect of organization leaders.

Perhaps representing the pinnacle of modern management theory, *management by objectives* (MBO) is a concept introduced by management guru Peter Drucker (1954; 1974, pp. 430–422) who argued that each manager's job must be focused on the success of the whole organization. He wrote:

The performance that is expected of the manager must be derived from the performance goals of the business, his results must be measured by the contribution they make to the success of the enterprise. The manager must know and understand what the business goals demand of him in terms of performance, and his superior must know what contribution to demand and expect

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of him—and must judge him accordingly. If these objectives are not met, managers are misdirected. Their efforts are wasted. Instead of team work, there is friction, frustration and conflict. *Drucker, 1954, p.121*

MBO was later codified and popularized as management gospel by George Odiorne of the University of Michigan, who defined MBO as

a process whereby the superior and subordinate managers of an organization jointly identify its common goals, define each individual's major areas of responsibility in terms of the results expected of him, and use these measures as guides for operating the unit and assessing the contribution of its members.

*Odiome, 1965, pp. 55–56*

He explained that MBO required no particular jargon because MBO is “essentially a system of incorporating into a more logical and effective pattern the things many people are already doing” but in a way that makes risks and responsibilities clear.

Communications professionals quickly embraced the value of objectives-based approaches. In 1961 Russell Colley called for advertising professionals to define advertising *goals* for measured advertising results (Colley, 1964). His DAGMAR model included specification of audiences and corresponding objectives (outcomes of the advertising message). Colley argued that advertising should be conceptualized fundamentally as a *communication* process, not merely in terms of sales. The latter approach had predominated advertising at the time. Colley extended the legendary AIDA model (Strong, 1925) by arguing that key steps included awareness, comprehension, conviction and action. Subsequently, others identified the importance of planning and specifying objectives in various strategic communication disciplines. This focus is most prevalent in advertising (Parente, 2006; Sheth & Sisodia, 2012), public relations (Austin & Pinkleton, 2006; Broom & Sha, 2013; Brody, 1988; J. E. Grunig & Hunt, 1984; Nager & Allen, 1984; Ross, 1977) and information campaigns (Lee & Kotler, 2011; Pfau & Parrott, 1993; Resnick & Siegel, 2013; Rice & Paisley, 1981; Rice & Atkin, 2013). Managerial communication and technical communication do not dwell as much on broad organizational goals or shorter-term objectives, although their purposes are unequivocal: enhanced productivity. In the case of managerial communication, the major focus is on leadership communication and is stated in terms of providing information and direction (Argenti, 2009; Munter, 2012). Technical communication similarly focuses on understanding and effective actions by providing information that can help organizational customers and staff perform tasks on a timely basis in a satisfying way (Carliner, 1998). Political communication similarly tends to focus on the achievement of short-term outcomes, such as winning elections or seeking adoption of a particular law or administrative rule sought by political interests. Yet, broader goals are often sought both by politicians (Baines, 2011, p. 120–122) and political activists (M. F. Smith & Ferguson, 2001, p. 294). These are grounded in the desire for long-term changes in public policy, social values and culture.

In the context of communications, Simmons (1990, pp. 115–116) argued that management by objectives

1. assures all concerned people are informed in writing
2. requires the statement of specific, observable or measurable outcomes
3. ensures campaign messages are clearly related to objectives
4. facilitates work delegation
5. provides accountability, and
6. confirms whether intended outcomes actually resulted from communications activities or from spurious forces in the environment.

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## The Postmodern Perspective: Role for Goals and Objectives

Today, many precepts of modern management and marketing are being challenged by alternative management theories and postmodern approaches (Boje & Dennehy, 1993; Firat & Venkatesh, 1995; Hatch & Cunliffe, 2006). Yet, as evidenced in a variety of fields, such as marketing (Brown, 2006, p. 223), modernist concepts continue to be deeply embedded.

Management theorists, for example, recognize that organizations are not monoliths with singular, rationale goals. They point out that organizational goal attainment can be often compromised by struggles over power and control *within* the organization's dominant coalition of leadership. Indeed, organizational interests trump personal self-interests only when organizations are threatened by external forces or become dependent on others (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978). Individual managers seek to increase their authority or the prominence of their perspectives in organizational thinking. Thus strategic communicators strive to be recognized and trusted. They strive to become members of the dominant management coalition (or at least develop strategic alliances with the CEO or with factions if no single coalition exists) and seek to influence organizational, goals and strategies through their counseling role (Berger & Reber, 2006; L. A. Grunig, J. E. Grunig & Ehling, 1992, p. 78; J. E. Grunig & Hunt, 1984, p. 120).

Postmodernism's influence is readily evident in how organizations are structured and managed. Changes observed over the past three decades include the flattening of hierarchies, the delegation of responsibility, the rise of work teams, the shift from specific- to general-rules making, and the encouragement of innovation. In particular organizations have been implored to becoming responsive learning organizations (Senge, 1990) and to share information in all directions using technology ranging from intranets to knowledge management systems (Hislop, 2013).

Postmodernists similarly recognize the limitations of traditional linear approaches to strategy and planning. Chaffee (1985), for example, outlined three broad approaches to strategy: linear, adaptive and interpretive (see Moss & Warnaby, 1997). Separately, Mintzberg and Waters (1985) differentiated between purely prescriptive *deliberate strategies*, where outcomes are clearly specified and activities are painstakingly planned, versus a purely *emergent strategy*, where action evolves as the organization engages in strategic learning and responds to changing circumstances and external factors that cannot be controlled by an organization. The authors suggested most organizational strategies array along a continuum between these two extremes and combine elements of each. An emergent strategy can develop over time in the absence of specific mission or goals, or despite specifying a mission and goals, according to Mintzberg (1994). However, as a practical matter, managers often must impose their desires or intended outcomes (and intended action) on their organizations to provide a sense of direction. Furthermore, in certain circumstances (when required information is collected and environments are known), it might be appropriate to abandon emergent strategies and to pursue intentions with as much determination as possible (Mintzberg & Waters, 1985, p. 271).

Importantly, organizations today continue to be *results-oriented*, and *work units* remain accountable. It is only the *micromanagement* of every unit's activities by senior managers that has been eliminated. Indeed such scrutiny is impractical in light of the expertise required to manage various specialized functions found in organizations and the size and scope of large complex organizations.

Not surprisingly, professional communicators today act with increasing levels of autonomy in many organizations and are not merely responsible for execution of assigned tasks. Indeed, they have an obligation to be critical thinkers and leaders, not order takers (Nager & Truitt, 1987). Because of their considerable autonomy, even employees *within* organizations have become *agents* of the clients who hire them and have considerable independence and power to control their work and shape their environment. According to Derina Holtzhausen, the consequences of this type of agency are (a) expectation of self-assertion, (b) evaluation and judgment of performance based on concrete achievement, (c) initiatives to shape and change the environment to serve the agent's preconceived

ideas, (d) independent actions, and (e) being influenced by developments from both outside and inside the organization (Holtzhausen, 2012, p. 213, see also Weick & Sutcliffe, 2007). Principal-agency Theory (PAT) suggests that experts (such as strategic communicators) have an advantage over principals (employers and clients) and often have divergent interests (Miller, 2005; Holtzhausen, 2012, pp. 216–217).

This postmodern perspective explains why goals and objectives continue to be important in contemporary strategic communication. First, goals and objectives are usually part of a communications plan that is presented to a client, and which essentially creates a *contract* that provides incentives for the agent to work in the client's interests. Second, plans containing goals and objectives are either *approved* or *determined* by clients (Cralle & Vibbert, 1986, p. 209) or *negotiated* and/or *co-created* with them collaboratively. Third, goals provide an agreed-upon basis for which the results will be recognized. Fourth, goals and objectives can guide the activities of strategic communicators so that intended outcomes are actually achieved, which reinforces the communicator's professionalism or self-identity.<sup>1</sup>

## Organizational Goals versus Communications Objectives

Confusion reigns among scholars and practitioners alike about the use of goals versus objectives, and the terms are often used interchangeably. Thus, Drucker might have written about management by goals. Importantly, *multiple outcomes* also might be sought in a strategic communication effort—outcomes that can be assessed at both the organizational and program levels. Although this distinction might appear arbitrary and contrary to how the terms have been (mis)used in everyday practice, this chapter argues that two inter-related sets of outcomes should be the focus of strategic communication (Hallahan, 2011). These are compared in Figure 16.1.

*Organizational goals* are end results pursued by an entity at the organizational, division or unit level, whether or not any communication activity is undertaken, whereas *communication objectives* are changes in behavior by people (or other entities) that are the direct outcome of strategic communication activities, and which aim (and are necessary) to achieve organization goals.

Importantly, both goals and objectives are creations of *planning processes*—goals as a result of organizational planning and communication objectives as a result of communication planning. Despite numerous advances, communications planning remains, at best, an imperfect art (and hardly can be considered an established science).

Authors have noted the dearth of empirical research about goal-setting at the organizational level (Smith, Locke & Barry, 1990; Young & K. G. Smith, 2013) and lamented the lack of proficiency among communicators in specifying outcomes. For example, Anderson, Hadley, Rockland and Weiner (2009, p. 4) noted that objectives are often “overlooked” components in public relations planning. Dozier (1985, p. 22) stated “practitioners don’t know how to set measurable objectives.” Pieczka (2000, p. 227) observed “poor skill in objectives setting and evaluation, or both” in her analysis of award-winning programs in the United Kingdom. In advertising, Sheth and Sisodia (2012, p. 12) opine that marketing departments typically operate with fuzzy goals and objectives that are not clearly articulated.

Consistent with the turn toward postmodern marketing approaches (Grant, 1999), Watkis (2010) observed that many marketers (and communicators) still consider their role to be a creative one that focuses on promotion, customer relationship management, and networking. Marketers, he says, perform their jobs with comparatively little regard to their responsibility for managing resources to achieve organizational goals.

According to Watkis, the most important activities for marketers are the establishment of objectives, a plan for their achievement, a budget to support the plan, and the management of assets and resources to achieve those objectives. Watkis contends that many marketers are found wanting in

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Table 16.1 Goals and Objectives Compared

<i>Organizational goals</i>	<i>Communication objectives</i>
Higher-order outcomes that center on <i>organizational activities</i>	Lower-order outcomes that involve <i>people's behaviors</i>
Established as benchmarks to help attain an organization's mission or to fulfill its vision	Established to achieve a specified organizational goal in the context of a communication campaign, program or project
Measured in terms of regularly monitored organization activities, such as <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• units sold or donated</li> <li>• revenue</li> <li>• attendance at events</li> <li>• traffic to a facility</li> <li>• market share (of sales or as a service provider)</li> <li>• market position or rank in an industry or field</li> <li>• some specified accomplishment (such as winning an election)</li> <li>• reduction in the incidence of disease, or risky or antisocial behaviors</li> </ul>	Measured in terms of people's response specifically to communications campaign <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• knowledge (mere awareness, recognition, recall, comprehension, understanding)</li> <li>• attitudes (affect, predispositions, beliefs)</li> <li>• intermediate actions (typically interactions or communications actions)</li> <li>• ultimate actions that benefit the organization <i>and</i> individual—buying, investing, donating or volunteering, working, voting, adopting a particular faith, etc.</li> <li>• post-action behaviors</li> </ul>
Measured using data from extant or specially created organizational systems or from public sources.	Measured using data collected as part of the campaign, program or project using quantitative or qualitative research methods
Often identified by client or management as part of the annual or other planning activities; sometimes refined or restated by communicator for inclusion in a communication plan	Usually specified by <i>campaign planners</i> and recommended to a client based on stated goals. Some objectives might be for the communicator's own use

these critical skills—a problem that extends to many professional communicators. The consultant elaborates, “Unfortunately, many marketing objectives are subjective statements and therefore difficult to measure. Alternatively, objectives may be quantifiable but not usefully comparable to other measurements, a potential difficulty for marketers, especially when asked to give proof of their contribution to the business” (Watkis, 2010).

## Goals: Outcomes Identified at Organizational Level

Goals are desired outcomes typically identified by the organization as a result of either formal or informal strategic planning processes (Abraham, 2011; Allison, 2011; Simerson 2011; see also Mintzberg, 1994). Corporate objectives (goals) are often established or ratified by a board of directors and then trickle down through the organization (Bart, 1997; Sheth & Sisodia, 2012, p. 11). Importantly, strategic communications can (and should) participate as advisers in helping organizational leaders to hone organizational goals (White & Mazur, 1995, p. 29).

According to Steyn (2007), goals more properly should be thought about as stemming from *strategic thinking*. Thus goals are only *refined* as part of any formal strategic planning exercise. Simply stated, strategic thinking and strategic planning involve identifying an organization's purpose and direction, the strategy that will be pursued based on current circumstances, and alternative courses of action. Strategic plans typically begin with a mission statement that succinctly describes the entity's purpose and what it does to achieve its reason for being (Bart, 1997; Haschak, 1998; Jones & Kahaner, 1995; McGinnis, 1981). A vision statement is an aspirational statement that outlines

what the organization wants to be and how it might be ideally differentiated from similar entities (Lipton, 1996; Truitt, 2002).

In turn, goals are statements of outcomes an entity strives to achieve to fulfill its mission and vision and provide the basis for strategy (R. D. Smith, 2013). Goals can be long-term, intermediate-term or short-term ones, and ideally they should drive the nature and level of activities in which the entity engages over a specified planning cycle (which ends whenever planned activities conclude or will be evaluated). Entities can pursue multiple compatible goals (goal congruency), can cluster or nest related goals within one another (goal hierarchies), and can address goals in order (goal sequencing).

Management theorists such as Kaplan and Norton (2006) argue that organizations should adopt a *balanced scorecard* approach that takes into account four perspectives in setting goals and assessing organizational success. These include financial, customer, operational or internal, and innovation or learning perspectives (see also Fleisher & Mahaffy, 1997; Zerfass, 2008a, 2008b). Although goals have traditionally been internally driven, corporate goals increasingly reflect external conditions (Steyn, 2007). Elkington (1998) suggested three pillars for business success and accountability: profit, people and planet—an idea that has since been popularized as the “triple bottom line.”

Psychologists since the 1960s have recognized the importance of *goals* and *plans* as constructs in communication and problem-solving (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002; Elliot & Dweck, 1998; Hawkins & Daly, 1988; Ryan, 1970). Kruglanski (1996, p. 600) writes that a goal describes “a desirable future state of affairs one intends to attain through action.” As cognitive structures, goals involve knowledge both about what is goal-worthy and the processes required to achieve them, based on experience. Similarly, Miller, Galanter and Pribaum (1960/1986, p. 161) defined a *plan* as “any hierarchical process in the organization that can control the order in which a sequence of operations is to be performed.” As cognitive structures, goals contain alternative paths or schemas (mental scripts) for goal attainment (Schrack & Abelson, 1977).

Goal-setting is clearly a component of management by objectives as well as planning more generally. Industrial psychologist Edwin M. Locke proposed *goal-setting theory* in the context of motivating employees, and led a program of research spanning four decades that stressed the importance of goals and incentives to enhance individual performance versus merely asking employees to do their best. That research was later extended to consider the impact of macro-level goal-setting on organizations. Locke and his colleague concluded that the goals provided the focus for activities, energized effort, fostered persistence, and provided specific communication strategies for success. Performance was found to be positively linked to the specificity and difficulty of the goal, and moderated by goal commitment, goal importance, self-efficacy, feedback, and task complexity. Satisfaction with performance and rewards, in turn, prompted willingness to commit to new challenges (Latham & Locke, 2002, p. 714). Goals, along with the self-efficacy (task-specific confidence) required to achieve them, are also influenced by factors such as personality, feedback, participation in decision making, job autonomy and monetary incentives (Locke & Latham, 2006).

Depending on the rigor with which planning is pursued, goals can be quite broad (such as a “Big Hairy Audacious Goal”—Collins & Porras, 1997) or quite specific. Effective goals have their most practical value when *specific* (identify clearly identifiable outcomes) and *measurable* (indicate verifiable results). Most importantly, goals are desired outcomes that can be *communicated* and shared widely in the organization as outcomes to be pursued (by strategic communication as well as by other units). Sometimes these are derived directly from written strategic, marketing, or other plans. However, goals also can be articulated by organizational leaders or by managers of the organization based on their *interpretation* of the organization’s mission, vision or purpose without being extracted directly or summarized from any kind of official source. Indeed goals are *social constructions* co-created or enacted within organizations through the process of communication (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Weick, 1995).

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Ideally, strategic communicators, in their counseling role, are involved in helping formulate or clarify organizational goals (White & Mazur, 1995). Reflecting the autonomy enjoyed by strategic communicators acting as organizational agents, strategic communicators can help clients clarify or articulate extant explicit goals that serve as the basis for strategic communication. Brody (1988, p. 75) goes so far as to state about goals that public relations practitioners “should assume responsibility for creating them—at least to the extent necessary to developing an effective public relations program.” Because communication goals do not need to be adopted verbatim, the power of communicators to focus and frame goals discursively reflects their ability to construct reality.

In addition to being shared throughout the organization, client organizations typically can measure the attainment of goals using extant monitoring, tracking or other feedback systems. Most entities routinely measure goals attainment where data are easily and directly available based on transactions or readily verifiable public information, such as the following.

- *Activity levels:* These include number of units sold, attendance at events, participation in programs, traffic to a facility, and so on. Although goals most frequently involve *increasing* activity levels, some communications programs focus on decreasing undesirable or anti-social activities (to lower incidence of disease, for example, or risky behaviors such as drinking and driving).
- *Revenue levels:* These are outcomes typically measured in financial terms, such as revenues, representing the monetary value of units sold, contributions received, or other finance-based accomplishments. Revenue is often used as a proxy measure for activity, but revenues from the same activity can vary based on accounting procedures. Thus activity levels (versus revenues) might be the purest measure.

Other common goals include the following.

- *Comparative accomplishments:* These goals involve comparing an organization’s activity or revenues against others. Examples include percentage of *market share* (the proportion of activity compared to others in the arena) or *market ranking* enjoyed in an industry or field compared to others and achieved by moving up in a measured list of leading organizations. However, such goals can be problematic because they are predicated on the activities of all the organizations involved. A dramatic increase in activity by an organization could be emasculated by a similar increase by other players, while a decrease in market share or rankings might be purely a function of extraordinary accomplishments by others.
- *Specified accomplishments:* Sometimes goals involve achieving distinctions identified as priorities by the organization, such as winning an election, winning a prize or being selected for an award. Elections are an ideal example because all ostensible benefits go to the victor. Merely winning 45% of the vote (a plurality) is not itself sufficient if a majority is required. Winning a prize might be sought because it is viewed as an avenue to financial or other tangible rewards. But the direct value is mostly in the “bragging rights” associated with the distinction, which might or might not lead to higher activity or revenue levels.

Goals can vary based on circumstances. The key is to reach an agreement between the client and strategic communicator as to the outcomes to be sought and to be considered in the evaluation of a campaign, program or project.

## Objectives: Outcomes Identified at Program Level

Whereas organizational goals are rooted in organization planning and culture and are either adopted directly or adapted by communications professionals, *communication objectives* are almost always

formulated by communication professionals to facilitate communication planning. Communication objectives can be conceptualized as lower-order *outcomes* that contribute to achieving higher-order organizational outcomes. Notably, the process is not reciprocal; organizational goals do *not* lead to attaining communication objectives.

Pursuing behaviorally-based objectives is completely consistent with modernist views about deliberate strategy as well as postmodern adoption of emergent strategies. Indeed, nothing in postmodern management nor the postmodern marketing literature attempts to delegitimize or deconstruct goals or objectives per se. Postmodern approaches primarily challenge modernist institutional practices that involve centralization and the egregious exercise of power.

Depending on the circumstances, a strategic communicator becomes involved in influencing various aspects of human behavior. These include ultimate actions that can directly translate to the achievement of organizational goals as well as intermediate behavioral actions that lead individuals toward the desired response. These involve both changes in awareness and attitudes as well as intermediate behaviors. Figure 16.2 summarizes eight broad categories of organizational goals commonly found in various subdisciplines of strategic communication, as well as corresponding behaviors or communications objectives required to attain those goals (second column) and intermediate behaviors or steps that might be specified by a strategic communicator in attaining those organizational outcomes (goals).

### **Ultimate Behaviors**

*Communication objectives* address the ultimate actions people can take that are consistent with an organizational goal. Although these are sometimes *implied* in stating organizational goals, the reality of the task that must actually be accomplished can be easily lost unless it is explicitly stated. For example, *generating sales* (whether for products, services, or tickets to cultural events) is probably the most universal behavior sought in marketing communications programs. But the underlying behavior that drives sales is *buying* (such as ordering by distributors and retailers and purchases by consumers). In a similar way, one of the most important functions of investor relations is to *attract capital* or funding, but the underlying behavior is *investing* (the term used in the case of commercial ventures, but also to seek major gifts to not-for-profit causes). Much managerial communication is directed to *enhancing performance and productivity*, but this can only be accomplished by shaping work habits of employees—getting them to apply for employment, be industrious, or work safely. Political communication seeks to *influence public policy*, but the underlying action is *voting* (balloting by the electorate as well as decision-making by lawmakers and government officials). Many information campaigns for worthy causes seek to *promote particular cultural values*, but such social or cultural change requires people to adopt *prosocial behaviors* (such as professing faith in a particular religion or sect or following sound environmental practices). In the same vein government agencies and non-government organizations (NGOs) often have the goal of *protecting public health and safety* through the eradication of disease or maladies—but such outcomes are only effected when people *avoid risky behavior* or *adopt healthy lifestyles*.

### **Intermediate Steps Toward Effecting Behavior**

Figure 16.2 (third column) includes various intermediate steps that might be involved in effecting the ultimate communication objectives suggested in the second column. As most strategic communicators know, influencing people's behaviors is a complex process, which can involve what they know (cognition), how they feel (affect) and actual actions (conation). These intermediate steps are basic concepts in psychological processing (Christen & Hallahan, 2014) and are the bases for persuasion (McGuire, 1973). These are also found in hierarchy of effects models in advertising

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Table 16.2 Eight Common Organizational Goals and Corresponding Communication Objectives

<i>Organizational goals</i>	<i>Communication objective (ultimate behavior)</i>	<i>Intermediate steps to communication objective</i>
Generate sales, revenue	Buying	<b>Knowledge</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• awareness (recognition, recall)</li> <li>• comprehension or understanding</li> <li>• beliefs</li> <li>• norms</li> </ul>
Attract capital	Investing	
Enhance organizational performance	Working productively or safely	
Influence public policy	Voting	
Help others	Donating (financial resources) Volunteering (time and talent)	
Advance peace, reduce conflict	Co-operating	<b>Attitudes</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• arousal</li> <li>• affect</li> <li>• values</li> <li>• believability</li> <li>• predispositions</li> <li>• trust</li> <li>• acceptance</li> <li>• preference</li> </ul>
Promote cultural values	Supporting or participating in supportive cultural causes and activities	
Protect public health and safety	Avoiding risky behaviors	
	Engaging in healthy activities	
		<b>Intermediate actions</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• intent</li> <li>• self-efficacy</li> <li>• message engagement</li> <li>• information seeking</li> <li>• information sharing</li> <li>• trial</li> <li>• self-observation</li> </ul>
		<b>Post-action behaviors</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• affirmation</li> <li>• reinforcement by others</li> <li>• information sharing or bolstering</li> <li>• repetition</li> </ul>

and theories about the diffusion and adoption of innovations (Barry, 1987, 1990; Lavidge & Steiner, 1961; Rogers, 2003; Strong, 1925). These same notions are widely recognized in discussions about behavioral aspects of strategic communication (see Anderson, Hadley, Rockland & Weimer, 2009; Broom & Dozier, 1990; Coombs & Holladay, 2009, p. 70; Dozier, 1985; Dozier & Ehing, 1992, pp. 163–164; J. E. Grunig & Hunt, 1984, p. 125; Smith, 2013, p.74–77; Stacks, 2012, pp. 28–32; Tucker & Derelian, 1989, p. 45; Watson & Noble, 2005, p. 166), Wilcox & Cameron, 2012). These are effects that intervene between message production and action (Parente, 2006, p. 105).

- **Knowledge objectives** include but are not limited to *awareness* (measured in recognition and recall—the ability to retrieve information from memory on either an aided or unaided basis), *comprehension* or understanding (as exhibited in the ability to explain a concept), the adoption of *beliefs* (information in memory believed to be true), and the assumption of *norms* (contextual reference points to which information is compared).
- **Attitude-related objectives** include *arousal* (emotion excitation), *affect* (negative or positive emotion), *values* (emotionally based assessments that a topic is important or unimportant),

*believability* or verisimilitude (whether the message resonates with personal experience), *predispositions* (favorable or unfavorable assessments of a topic or idea), *trust* (whether the information is reliable, consistent or from a credible source), *acceptance* of claims or arguments (exhibited by lack of resistance to or counter-arguing) and *preference* (choice of a particular option versus alternatives).

- **Intermediate actions** involve conative or observable actions that people actually take. *Behavioral intent* involves an individual's conviction to undertake a particular action (not merely the expression of an opinion indicating favorability). *Self-efficacy* involves the person's belief (confidence) that they are capable of engaging in a particular behavior. Both are included under actions because they deal with the person's contemplation of specific actions, not merely generalized attitudes. *Information seeking* includes queries to obtain more information as well as efforts to verify information (which can take the form of personal visits, telephone calls, access to websites or online discussions, and conversing with family, friends or colleagues). *Message engagement* involves extended attention and processing of persuasive messages, such as re-reading or participating in an online activity such as a game or contest. *Information sharing* includes a variety of reinforcing behaviors in which people express opinions about their experience with a newly adopted idea. Today, information sharing is especially relevant in the online world and takes the form of ratings; online recommendations (such as liking or favoriting online content), forwarding e-mail, text or microblog messages; and sending or posting comments (essentially endorsements or complaints about their experience). *Trial* involves tentative adoption of the new idea, often for purposes of making a first-hand assessment. *Self-observation* is a form of learning reinforcement in which the person observes him- or herself taking an action as well as his or her response.
- **Post-Behavior actions** can lead to a pattern of habitual behavior based on satisfaction with the behavioral action taken. *Affirmation* involves personal validation of decision. *Reinforcement by others* entails receiving and taking into account social support that reinforces the behavior. *Information sharing/bolstering* encompasses communicating with others about an experience, which serves to reinforce personal assessments. *Repetition* involves taking the targeted behavior more than once.<sup>2</sup>

Setting communication objectives involves the same process of setting organizations and does not differ substantively in terms of the benefits that can be accrued. Although the ultimate behaviors called for can be extrapolated from organizational goals set by clients, the specification of the various intermediate steps that might be appropriate require substantial expertise on the part of the communicator that might or might be held by the client. Here again, strategic communicators exercise considerable control over specification of desired outcomes. Importantly, whereas client organizations often have the systems in place to measure the attainment of organizational goals, communications objectives require communications professionals to arrange the collection and analysis of relevant measures. The communicator exercises considerable power in terms of measuring and reporting results based on intermediate-level behavior objectives.<sup>3</sup>

## Processes of Identifying Goals, Objectives, and Intermediate Behavioral Steps

Clarifying organizational goals and corresponding communications objectives is one of the most critical steps in the strategic communication planning process. It is typically based on formative research that examines the *organization* and the circumstances in which it operates, its focal *offering* (products, services or ideas that might be the basis for the program), the *opinions* of key constituents, and *opportunities* to communicate (past activities and potential media and channels). The resulting *situation analysis* attempts to synthesize the results into a coherent statement of problem or statement of opportunity

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and can incorporate a variety of popular analysis tools, such as SWOT analysis (Hill & Westbrook, 1997; Mind Tools, n.d.) and force-field analysis (Lewin, 1943; Tucker & Derelien, 1989).

Research includes interviewing client representatives as key informants (Anderson, Hadley, Rockland & Weimer, 2009). Clients are often able to articulate the outcomes they want to accomplish, especially when they have been directly involved in the development of an organizational strategic plan or an annual or quarterly operating plan. But many less-experienced clients are unable to articulate communications goals and objectives or are vague about specifying them. For example, a client might state the purpose of an effort is to “create awareness.” But what they are really saying is that they know awareness leads to sales—and *sales are their actual goal*. Or consider the example of a political campaign. Every candidate wants to “get elected.” The actual objective, however, might be stated as follows: “To obtain 50% plus one of all votes cast in the general election.”

Well developed communication objectives provide a vital linkage with organizational goals (Steyn, 2007, pp. 155, 161) and are derived from organizational objectives or goals (Anderson, Hadley, Rockland & Weimer, 2009, p. 3). Moreover, communications objectives link organizational goals to the behaviors of important constituents (which might be variously labeled as audiences, publics, markets, constituents, stakeholders or communities).

Although a communicator might research and consider possible goals and objectives simultaneously, the process is best accomplished by setting organizational goals first. There is no point in conducting a communication program that does not address an organizational need. If not adopted directly from extant organizational plans, goals at least should be congruent with what the organization seeks to accomplish.

One of the most important considerations in goal- and objective-setting is determining the *number* of outcomes that should be pursued. Where possible, organizations do better by focusing on the *fewest numbers of goals and objectives* at any one time, although multiple outcomes might be appropriate. For some plans, one goal, one objective and a few intermediate steps are sufficient. In a phased campaign, the initial period might focus merely on awareness, while a later phase emphasizes prompting actions among informed and positively predisposed audience members. This is consistent with the admonition by Intel CEO Andy Grove (cited in Sheth & Sisodia, 2012, p. 11) that organizations should pursue a small number of precisely articulated objectives (and then give managers considerable leeway in determining how to achieve them). Few authors address the specific criteria for comparing possible communication objectives that might contribute to achieving an organizational goal. One notable example in social marketing suggests objectives might be evaluated based on potential impact, audience willingness, measurability, opportunity and need (Lee & Kotler, 2011, p. 166–167).

Specifying communication objectives is especially important because audience members vary where they are situated on the pathway to ultimate actions based on their knowledge, attitudes and behavioral intent and self-efficacy. The specific challenge might be to crystallize, to intensify or reinforce, or to change responses (Pfau & Parrott, 1994). Research can be most useful to determine the *intermediate steps* required to effect behavior change. At least four situations are possible involving people's extant knowledge and attitudes.

- When an idea is new, the challenge is to create both supportive knowledge and positive attitudes so that desired behavior is possible.
- When knowledge is adequate, but attitudes are absent, the focus might be entirely on attitudinal steps.
- When the situation is reversed (knowledge is absent but attitudes are positive) the focus should be on raising knowledge and encouraging intermediate steps that facilitate education (such as information seeking).
- When both awareness and attitudes are positive, the need might be to simply overcome inertia and provide compelling incentives to prompt action.

Consider the case of a public information campaign where the general goal is to reduce HIV/AIDS. This goal could be refined and restated to focus on either a) reduction in the *incidence* of AIDS, i.e. the rate of infection or b) a reduction in *number of deaths* among victims, or preventing the unnecessary loss of life when treatment is available. These are quite different outcomes and several possible behavioral changes might be involved. For example, the objective might be to a) discourage casual sexual contacts, b) encourage the consistent use of condoms, c) promote regular screenings and the availability of treatment or d) encourage patients who test positive to actually obtain treatment.

In this example, general awareness of HIV/AIDS is already quite high in society, but specific knowledge about the dangers of casual sex with strangers, use of condoms, or the availability of treatment might not be readily accessible. Thus information is a key step. Similarly, attitudes might vary among target audience members whose fears might need to be reduced and self-efficacy increased to avoid risky situations, might need to be increased to use condoms consistently, or to seek testing or treatment.

When creating goals and objectives (and specifying the intermediate steps that can effect behavior), a useful procedure is to *brainstorm* all possible goals and objectives and then to mercilessly pare the list to the fewest possible outcomes. Resulting items should complement one another and eliminate contradictions or duplications. A long, unwieldy list of multiple outcomes can obfuscate the purpose, complicate assessment, and distract clients and staff members from priorities. (See following section about writing goals and objectives statements.)

For determining the required intermediate steps, the best strategy is to focus on the highest-order intermediate step whenever possible. Prompting actions usually is more desired than merely changing attitudes, and forming or crystallizing attitudes is usually more important than merely creating knowledge. Often these higher-level measures assume achievement of lower-level outcomes. However, depending on circumstances, merely enhancing knowledge or fostering positive attitudes might be sufficient, especially when no change in behavior is required and the desired behavior is understood or implied.

## Writing Goals and Objectives

Goals and objectives are useful to the extent that they are precisely measurable.

In his DAGMAR model, Colley (1964) was among the first to stress the importance of clearly defined, written objectives. He stressed four key elements. According to Colley, a good objective should be concrete and measureable, target a specific audience, provide a benchmark and a measure for the degree of change sought, and specify a time period. Variations on these guidelines are suggested by authors in advertising today (see Duncan, 2002; Moriarty, Mitchell & Wells, 2012; O'Guinn, Allen & Semenik, 2009).

In the intervening years, various models and mnemonics have been proposed to suggest characteristics of effective objectives. The most prominent of these is the S.M.A.R.T. formula, which suggests a good objective should be specific, measurable, attainable, relevant and time-framed/timely (Doran, 1981; Meyer, 2003). Meanwhile, experts in personal planning suggest that objectives should follow a formula representing specific, measurable, achievable, and compatible ("Goal setting" n.d.) S.M.A.C. guidelines. Duncan (2002, p. 199) applies a similar S.M.A.C. acronym to suggest that advertising objectives should be specific, measurable, achievable and challenging.<sup>4</sup>

## Using a S.M.A.R.T. Approach to Write Precise Statements

One deceptively simple—but critical—skill in strategic communication involves writing clear statements of organizational goals and communication objectives that withstand testing when included in a communication plan. The best goals and objectives statement are simple phrases that communicate

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a single concept, and begin with the infinite “To. . . .” As suggested in the S.M.A.R.T. formula, goals and activities include specific results that can be measured at a specific time in the future. The metrics used can be based on raw numbers or percentages, but those figures need to be attainable and realistic/relevant to qualify under the S.M.A.R.T. regimen.

The following are examples of well-written, notably brief outcome statements that might be appropriate in a strategic communication campaign.

### *Examples of S.M.A.R.T. Goal Statements*

- to increase sales of XYZ product by 30% before Christmas, 2015
- to achieve sales of €375 million by year-end
- to raise 600 million euros in new capital through an initial public stock offering before December 31, 2015
- to become the largest reseller of kitchen cabinetry in Germany during 2010
- to gain a 20% market share among pet food sellers nationwide by June 30, 2015
- to eradicate reported incidents of food contamination in the western United States by October 31
- to become the most popular women’s website in New York during 2015

### *Examples of S.M.A.R.T. Objectives Statements*

- to create awareness of XYZ product among 35% of South American consumers by December 31.
- to increase consumer awareness by 10 percentage points (from 15% to 25%) by year end
- to increase the candidate’s favorable (positive attitude) ratings in the polls from 45% to 55% by 10 days before the election
- to create a positive attitude about the new benefits plan among 35% of employees by the merger date (note: actual date is either unknown or implied)
- to generate 2,500 sales leads from Australian consumers by December 1.
- to increase traffic on the website by 50% prior to the movie’s release date.
- to generate 6,000 sign-ups for the organization’s new e-mail newsletter in May.

Several points are worth noting based on the above examples. First, metrics and time frames often can be *implied* in goals and objectives. For example, “eradicated” means 100% eliminated. Similarly, “by the merger date” implies an unknown, moving target but it is understood that the event will occur even though the date is uncertain. Yet the targeted outcomes are specific and measurable. Finally, goals and objectives are more valuable to clients when actual values (activity levels, revenues, market shares, etc.) are noted instead of mere percentage changes.<sup>5</sup> For additional considerations in writing objectives, see Ferguson (1999, pp. 38–39).

## **Goals and Objectives as the Basis for Evaluation**

Specific and measurable organizational goals and communications objectives are widely acknowledged to play a critical role when assessing strategic communication initiatives (Broom & Dozier, 1990; Fill, 2009; Stacks, 2011; Watson & Noble, 2005). To be strategic, communication activities must be important to the organization and planned, and desired outcomes ought to be identifiable in advance. Without clearly stated purposes, communications activities might be valuable, but are not strategic.

Although many clients possess the systems and savvy to evaluate organizational-level outcomes (goals), they are frequently dependent on communications staff members or consultants for compiling

and analyzing communication results. As suggested previously, the onus of responsibility is on the professional communicator to assure that required data and insights are available and delivered in keeping with the communicator's commitment to the client.

Evidence suggests that many communicators do not fully address organizational goals (Piecicka, 2000) and merely impute (rather than substantiate) the achievement of organizational goals in awards competitions (Bissland, 1990).

Measuring communications objectives independently of organizational goals is essential. Indeed, communication objectives ought to be conceptually linked to organizational goals, but they are not necessarily directly correlated. This notion has been recognized in the advertising field since Colley's argument that advertising (communication) results should be separate from sales activity. Thus, advertisers continue to resist efforts to link advertising results only to sales, but instead focus on a variety of measures such as awareness, attitude change, trial, repeated purchases and brand switching (McGuinn, Allen & Semenick, 2009, pp. 269–270; Parente, 2006, pp. 105–106). In a similar vein, the maintaining of a publicly traded company's stock price often drives executives to invest in investor relations activities, but IR officers overwhelmingly reject stock price as a valid measure of their efforts because so many other factors can influence financial markets (Laskin, 2011).

Indeed, various strategic communication programs can be cited that were highly effective in prompting people to take desired actions—yet organizational goals were not attained. Most frequently such failures result from external factors (such as market conditions or public controversy) or internal factors *not related to communication* (such as financial investment, lack of inventory, or staff performance). Fear of failure is one of the reasons some communicators are reluctant to be specific about goals and objectives. Yet, when multiple outcomes are sought, such as a measureable organizational goal in combination with one or more behavioral objectives, the ability to detect positive outcomes (and more meaningful insights) is enhanced.

Assessments of strategic communication can be based on impact, process or financial measures. *Impact measures* focus on the outcomes or results obtained, and thus goals and objectives are integral to outcome assessments. By comparison, *process measures* address factors such as the quality of materials produced (outputs), the number of exposure of messages, and audience response to a message (liking or engaging with the content). Yet process measures, at best, serve as proxies for measuring impact. Finally, *financial measures* can address the comparative costs of two or more strategies to determine which was more efficient (presuming the same impact or outcomes were attained) or can address *return on investment (ROI)* (the extent to which an activity contributed to an organization financially). Yet, like process measures, favorable efficiency or ROI are not reasons in themselves for organizations to undertake strategic communication activities. There must be a clear purpose (organizational goal or communication objective).

Effective evaluation of program impacts (outcomes) requires a philosophical commitment on the part of the communications professional, knowledge of evaluation methods, and allocation of resources to evaluation. Effective evaluation also requires creating an organizational culture that embraces evaluation as a strategic tool but also recognizes the importance of validity and reliability and limitations of evaluation research methods.

## Discussion and Implications

### *Goals and Objectives as Distinct Outcomes*

This chapter has presented a framework for distinguishing organizational goals and communications (behavioral) objectives that departs from other treatments of these two concepts.

The proposed approach conceptualizes goals as organization-level outcomes and is consistent with the approach of authors such as Brody (1988), who describes goals as *prerequisites* for public

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relations programs, and Ferguson (1999), who uses the objectives to refer to both types, but at least differentiates between *corporate objectives* and *functional objectives*. Others relegate goals to be a program-specific concept. For example, Broom & Sha (2013, p. 270) state goals are “broad summative statements that spell out the overall outcomes of a program.” The authors don’t specify at what level (organizational or program) these outcomes will be accomplished, only that they are “what will be accomplished if the objectives set for each of the publics are achieved.”

Other authors use the terms interchangeably (Parente, 2006), while others convolute the distinction. Crable and Vibbert (1986, p. 209) state, for example, “Objectives are public relations goals . . . and provide for intermediate progress toward shared goals.” Nager and Allen (1984, p. 56) use a metaphor to contrast goals as *general directions* whereas objectives are *specific destinations* (also cited in Watson & Noble, 2005, p. 162, and Austin & Pinkleton, 2006, pp. 36–40). Watson and Noble (2005, p. 160) dodge the issue by stating, “Here, we will be no more precise than accepting that goals and aims are frequently slightly broader and less closely defined than objectives and concentrate on understanding and applying the latter.”

Others suggest that that a goal serves as a “generalized end” (Grunig & Hunt, 1984, p. 116; Dozier & Ehling, 1992, p. 163), as a “general, usually nonmeasurable end” (Hainsworth & Wilson, 1992, p. 12), as a “broader, more general outcome” (Bobbitt & Sullivan, 2005, p. 87), as a “general direction” (Rayfield, 1991, or as “any desired change or effect attempted in each target audience” (Moffitt, 1999). Similarly, this conceptualization is different from the approach suggested by Tucker and Derelian (1989), Kendall (1996), Austin & Pinkleton (2006) and Wilson and Ogden (2008)—all of whom suggest that a program goal is merely a statement that offers a *solution* to the problem or opportunity that is the basis for a campaign, program or project.

As used here, objectives are *not* generalized statements about any outcomes but refer specifically to outcomes measured at the conclusion of campaign dealing with *changes in people’s behavior*. One noted campaigns theorist identified at least three ways that the term can be used: *global objectives* (broad outcomes to be achieved), *intermediate objectives* (tasks to be accomplished), and *terminal objectives* actually measured at the conclusion of an effort (Simmons, 1990; also cited by Austin & Pinkleton, 2006, p. 40). Others have similarly and superficially identified objectives as specific tasks to be accomplished or procedures to be followed (Hainsworth & Wilson, 1992; Kendall, 1996; Moffitt, 1996; Nager & Allen, 1984; Pavlik, 1987). The present conceptualization recognizes that intermediate steps or stages are involved, but these represent *behavioral states* of the target audience, not tasks to be undertaken by the communicator.

Regrettably, confusion between goals and objectives continues to reign in everyday practice. A handful of authors reverse the two concepts, using goals to denote specific metrics for measuring program objectives (e.g., Lee & Kotler, 2011, p. 165).

Pieczka (2000, p. 222) also lamented how winning entries in a British awards program routinely included two or three levels of organizational goals and objectives without distinguishing between them. Meanwhile, a popular book directed at public relations professionals identified four types of objectives (informational, motivational, statutory and financial) and then went on to use the term to cite *process objectives* versus *outcome objectives* (Bobbitt & Sullivan, 2005, p. 88; see also J. E. Grunig, 2008, pp. 104–106).

### ***Paying More Attention to Goals and Objectives***

Comparatively little formal research has been conducted in the various subdisciplines of strategic communication about practitioners’ opinions about goals and objectives. Although the need for clear objectives is recognized in advertising (Corkindale, 1976; Huntington, 2008; U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2003; Welsh, 1965), academic research in advertising has abandoned any focus on studying the objectives of actual programs and their achievement (Preston, 1985; Smallianov

& Aiyeku, 2009). Other fields such as management communication, political communication and technical communication (Carliner, 1998) have paid virtually no attention to the topic.

In public relations, Hon (1997) observed that comparatively little research has been conducted pertaining to what public relations actually does for an organization. She argued that more needs to be done to understand how effectiveness can be defined. In a second study also involving depth interviews with practitioners and CEOs, she defined *effective public relations* as being achieved when “communications activities achieve communications goals (in a cost-efficient manner)” (p. 104) and argued that public relations outputs “increasingly must be tied to meaningful outcomes for organizations and clients” (p. 104). Although the practitioners she interviewed generally opined that setting goals and objectives was uncomplicated, her study revealed tremendous variability in respondents’ explanations of their public relations goals and objectives. She concluded that setting goals and objectives and conducting evaluation are actually quite complicated tasks (Hon, 1998, p. 128).

One 2012 online poll of 54 public relations practitioners addressed reasons that programs failed and concluded that not enough strategic thought goes into program planning (Siegel, 2012a). To illustrate: More than half of respondents (57%) responded affirmatively when asked the question, “Was the failure tied in any way to not setting any PR goals (or setting unrealistic goals) at the start”?

### ***Questioning the Value of Goals and Objectives***

At least five problems can be identified in the processes of developing, negotiating and assessing organizational goals and especially communications objectives.

#### ***Misapplication***

One fundamental problem is the flawed assumption that particular problems can be resolved merely through communication vis-à-vis substantive changes in organizational policies or practices. Goals and objectives also can fail to meet the SMART criteria by being unclear, inconsistent or unrealistic in terms of what can be achieved, or unreasonableness in terms of time frame. Although the strategic communicator enjoys great latitude in formulating goals and objectives as implemented, adequate research must be conducted and the quality of input from the client must be sufficient to assure that client and communicator expectations are in sync. This includes good communication between all levels of management—poor communication is a shortcoming that often leads to failure (Siegel, 2012b).

#### ***Obsession with Metrics***

Although strategic communication and constructs such as planning, goals and objectives and measurements are vaunted in modern management theory, latter-day theorists do not uniformly embrace them. Mintzberg (2009, pp. 61–62) refers to management by objectives as “deeming,” where subordinates are driven to perform when managers don’t know what to do. He chides strategic planning as a formulaic process that focuses on analysis rather than synthesis, and one that fails to specify strategy (see also Mintzberg, 1994). Although an advocate of planning and the importance of outcomes, W. Edward Deming, a noted statistician and management expert who gained notoriety for his work in Japan, rejected the notion of management by objectives and called for the elimination of management by numerical goals. Instead, he called for leadership to be substituted for measurement (Walton, 1991).

#### ***Misused Metrics***

Metrics or measurement levels for goals and objectives also can be misused. Some communicators or clients might purposely establish conservative goals and objectives levels that are too low and thus

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do not serve the needs of the organization. Or goals might be set low out of fear of missing more ambitious outcomes. Take the example of a goal involving a 4.0% increase in revenue. Attaining an increase of only 3.9% could be viewed either as failure or tantamount to success, depending on the culture of the organization or propensity of a particular manager to interpret such figures favorably or unfavorably to advance a particular agenda. This is consistent with the often-cited axiom “Figures can lie, while liars can figure.” Falling short is to be expected if goals and objectives are purposefully ambitious, and allowing people to fall short is a necessity.

Postmodernists similarly challenge abuses involving goals and objectives. Although he does not address goals and objectives directly, French social theorist Jean-Francois Lyotard probably would describe them as devices that enable strategic planning to become a form of terrorism based on its slavish attention to measurement (Holtzhausen, 2012, p. 152; Lyotard, 1992, pp. 138–139) and productivity and efficiency (Holtzhausen, 2012, pp. 189–191; Lyotard, 1984, p. 51).

In critically examining how organizations exercise power, postmodern communications scholar Derina Holtzhausen provides a framework for considering how goals and objectives might be questioned from a critical perspective. Examples include their discursive nature, their reliance upon intelligence gathering and subsequent use for exploitation, their insertion of distance between organizations and others, their framing and focusing on particular ideas, and their creation of organizational metanarratives (Holtzhausen, 2012, especially pp. 108–111, 151–153, 217–219). She notes that such organizational metanarratives were rebutted by social philosopher Jürgen Habermas (1979, p. 210) as “deliberate pseudoconsensual communication” and by sociologist Zygmunt Bauman (1993, p. 205) as tools to assure prediction of and the “colonization” of the future.

### *Reification of Objectives*

The importance of clearly differentiating goals from objectives is especially evident in the growing trend toward identifying desired outcomes in symbolic terms, including enhancement of an organization’s *image* or *reputation* and *identity* or the fostering of *goodwill*. In the organizational behavior literature, Elsbach (2006) has carved out a niche for *organizational perception management*. According to the author, who never mentions the word “communication” as the underlying constitutive activity, organizational perceptions are managed through verbal accounts, categorization and labels, symbolic business behaviors, and physical markers. Similarly, Fill (2009, p. 326) notes that image, reputation and preferences of stakeholders toward the organization are commonly cited as promotional objectives.

Although these ideas can contribute to goal achievement, the concepts of image, reputation and identity are not themselves concrete outcomes that can be measured on a par with organizational activity or revenue levels. At best they might serve as intermediate constructs that can be used to measure core behavioral measures such as knowledge, attitudes and behavioral intent.

In a similar way, two other constructs popular today—*relationship* and *engagement*—are inappropriately cited as desired outcomes of communications programs. Although J. E. Grunig (1993) rejected any focus on symbols in favor of substance in public relations, his measures of relationships (trust, commitment, control mutuality and satisfaction) are based on *perceptions* of organizational public-relationships (Hon & J. E. Grunig, 1999). Indeed, marketers more properly focus on relationships as a pattern of interaction based on purchasing behavior between an organization and its customers or markets (Sheth & Parvatiyar, 2000). Engagement similarly is not a single construct, but an amalgam of behavioral components that encompass learning, attitudes, interactions, and depth of message processing involvement (Evans, 2010; Gambetti & Graffigna, 2010; Mollen & Wilson, 2010). Strategic communicators need to better clarify how some of these “fuzzy” concepts actually represent valuable and measurable outcomes that directly translate into client organization benefits.

### *Focusing Solely on Organizational Outcomes*

A final critical question is whether goals and objectives are used only to advance the organization's own purposes (such as wealth creation) or also to better the quality of life or the interests of the publics, constituents, markets and communities it serves. Organizations no longer operate in an environment in which they can assume to be more knowledgeable or in more privileged positions to make decisions for others. Nor can they assume people share a common worldview of reality and would readily adopt organizational priorities if they could only be convinced to do so. Concocting clever, persuasive messages might capture attention but are not sufficient in an era when audiences are obstinate (Bauer, 1964), vary widely in their motivation and ability to process persuasive messages (Hallahan, 2000) and are co-creators of meaning.

Today strategic communicators must demonstrate a genuine concern for others and act ethically or demonstrate what Bauman (1993, pp. 10–15) called a genuine “moral impulse.” To create organizational goals (or communications objectives) that only serve the interests of the organization are destined to failure in an era where audiences are skeptical and organizations are mandated to be socially responsible. Effective goals mutually benefit *both* the organization and its constituencies, and effective communications objectives should empower audiences to take mutually beneficial actions.

### **Notes**

- 1 Various other benefits for clearly articulated goals and objectives might be cited (Hallahan, 1992, 2007). Broom & Sha (2013) suggest, for example, that objectives give focus and direction for developing a communication program, provide guidance and motivation to those implementing the program, and spell out criteria for monitoring progress and assessing impact. Anderson, Hadley, Rockland & Weimer (2009) suggest these provide a structure for prioritization, reduce potential for later disputes, focus resources and identify areas for pre-scriptive change. Dozier (1985 pp. 21–22) cites justification of communication as a management activity and accountability. Fill (2002, pp. 310) adds determining the time period in which the activity is to be completed and communicating the values and scope of the activity to participants.
- 2 Importantly, attitudes do not automatically lead to behavior; attitudes and behaviors can be inconsistent for a variety of reasons. Similarly, evidence suggests that the traditional order assumed in hierarchy of effects models (knowledge → attitudes → behavior) does not always apply, such as in conditions of low involvement or when people are forced to radically change their behaviors (Ray, Sawyer, Rothschild, Heller, Strong & Reed, 1973). High (or low) believability and trust do not always translate into positive (or negative) attitudinal or behavioral responses (Parente, 2006).
- 3 This chapter does not attempt to tackle the complex topic of strategy, or how to influence responses. However, strategy can include the organization proactively reaching out to people directly, responding to queries, utilizing mediated communications, or involving third-party influencers as intermediaries. The latter essentially requires a two-step persuasive process where the ultimate desired action is communication by the influential. The same intermediate steps toward action are required, including knowledge and positive attitudes, and especially behavioral intent and self-efficacy.
- 4 Other proposals include SAFE (see the end result; accept the end result; feel the end result; express the end result); RUMBA (reasonable, unambiguous, measurable, bounded by time, achievable); STEP UP (specific, time-bound, engaging, practical, under your control, progress management); STAR (specific, testable, achievable, relevant); GROW (goal, reality, options, will); and SMARTT (with targeted added to time-framed) and SMARTER or SMARTERS (specific, motivating, achievable, rewarding, tactical, evaluated, revisable, satisfaction). Various advisers have substituted words in these acronyms for their own purposes, while others have created other extended lists of characteristics, using numbering without acronyms, which include four to 11 desirable characteristics (Kotler, 2002; Parente, 2006; Simmons, 1990, pp. 119–121; Wilson & Ogden, 2008, pp. 78–80).
- 5 Stating goals and objectives in terms of percentages can be problematic. For example, increasing the number of customers by 50% sounds impressive, except when the reader finds that it means going from 6 customers to 9 customers. Percentages can be fraught with other problems: A change from 38% to 41% is not a 3% percentage change; it's an increase of 3 *percentage points*, which actually represents a 7.8 % increase (41 is 107.8% of 38). Finally, a metric can be increased by a percentage if the starting point is zero. (An increase of 15% from

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zero is mathematically equal to zero.) Thus, increasing awareness of a new product by 15% is impossible if no knowledge exists.

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