

A Market-Based Approach to Understanding Communication and Teamworking: A Multi-Disciplinary Literature Review

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Abstract (Document Summary)

In this paper, we take an interdisciplinary approach to examining communication and teamworking. We have done this by comparing three discipline-based approaches to understanding the effectiveness of organisational groups, and then show how their interrelationship may provide a single approach to understanding communication and teamworking in organisational groups. Our work may benefit researchers in the field of organisational teamworking in that utilising this single approach takes account of important conceptual interrelationships, and may identify new and valuable areas of further research. It may also benefit practitioners in that they may understand better the importance and impact of communication within business networks, and its influence upon marketplace success. This single approach, which we term a market-based approach, highlights the importance of considering networked environments and social systems in conducting marketing research.

Our market-based approach rests upon three main principles: (1) to understand communication and teamworking one must adopt a networked perspective; (2) that internal communications (those between employees) are closely linked and have an important influence upon external communications (with business partners, suppliers, and customers); and (3) that reaching convergence and a mutual understanding between network communicators is the primary function of marketing communications within and between organisational teams. We apply this approach to the complex nature of communication within organisational teams, and its impact upon team relationships and performance. We do this because communication within and between organisations impacts directly on marketing effectiveness. Marketing managers must relate consumer needs and project development operations effectively if they are to succeed in developing new and profitable offerings in the marketplace. This places the communication activities of organisational teams and their impact on team effectiveness at the heart of a firm's market-driven behaviour.

Specifically, we examine a number of developments within three related areas of research; relationship marketing, communication theory, and organisational learning. We present these as three pathways to our recommendation of a market-based approach in further research. These pathways allow us to put forward nine suggested research topics

that underpin our market-based approach. Through these topics we recommend streams of new research that might fill gaps in our current understanding. We encourage researchers to modify existing theoretical perspectives in order to take account of the increasing interconnectedness of business networks and social systems.

In order to clarify the implications for researchers in adopting the approach we have outlined, we then summarise the key issues our topics raise. In addition, we use an example to explore how future research might take account of the observations we have made. Our example is taken from our observations and conversations with managers at one of Europe's largest telecoms organisations, British Telecom (BT).

We conclude that the market-based approach suggested in this paper should provide marketing researchers with a number of topics that we suggest could lead to research in communication and teamworking that is both more systematic and more holistic. Utilising a network perspective, it provides us with the opportunity to examine how micro level communications (at the level of the individual) between organisational team members might influence macro level marketing outcomes such as team performance. Our proposed approach focuses upon the interconnectedness that communication activities, and the use of computer-mediated communication media in particular, makes possible both within and between organisations and with other stakeholders (such as customers). In general, research and theory have often failed to elaborate the reciprocal effects of communication behaviour on its social context. This limits our knowledge and over-simplifies the interaction of social context and communication behaviour. By contrast, the concept of communication networks has had a positive and important effect on the way we understand organisations. We conclude that there is a need to modify existing perspectives to account for this interconnectedness, and to undertake research streams and develop conceptual models, which may help to develop new theory and contribute to better managerial practice in this area.

Full Text (14189 words)

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In this paper, we take an interdisciplinary approach to examining communication and teamworking. We have done this by comparing three discipline-based approaches to understanding the effectiveness of organisational groups, and then show how their interrelationship may provide a single approach to understanding communication and

teamworking in organisational groups. Our work may benefit researchers in the field of organisational teamworking in that utilising this single approach takes account of important conceptual interrelationships, and may identify new and valuable areas of further research. It may also benefit practitioners in that they may understand better the importance and impact of communication within business networks, and its influence upon marketplace success. This single approach, which we term a market-based approach, highlights the importance of considering networked environments and social systems in conducting marketing research. It highlights gaps in the current literature, and allows us to recommend streams of new research that might fill these gaps in our current understanding. It also causes us to modify existing theoretical perspectives in order to take account of the increasing interconnectedness of business networks and social systems.

Our approach is market-based because it conforms to Samli and Bahn's (1992: 147) definition of a market as a communication network, with communication defined as all means of facilitating the exchange of knowledge, the expression of desires, and the dissemination of information. This definition of a market was a significant departure from prior categorisations that tended to partition markets according to geography, economic processes and exchange, demand, or consumer characteristics (Samli and Bahn 1992: 144). We adopt this definition because it is dynamic, focuses on the flow of information and behavioural patterns, and considers both consumers and businesses as critical nodes in a communication network. Our market-based approach to understanding organisational communication and teamworking rests upon three main principles: (1) to understand communication and teamworking one must adopt a networked perspective; (2) that internal communications (those between employees) are closely linked and have an important influence upon external communications (with business partners, suppliers, and customers); and (3) that reaching convergence and a mutual understanding between network communicators is the primary function of marketing communications within and between organisational teams.

Communication within and between organisations is said to influence directly the marketing effectiveness of those organisations (Day 1994). We have seen that within the marketing domain itself, there has been a distinct shift of emphasis regarding the role of communication. Once treated as a functional aspect of marketing communications (with one notable exception, the work of Stidsen and Schutte 1972), more recent researchers have begun to place communication at the heart of the marketing concept as a business philosophy (Duncan and Moriarty 1998; Mohr and Nevin 1990; Mohr, Fisher, and Nevin 1996; Samli and Bahn 1992). This is because marketing managers must relate consumer needs and project development operations effectively if they are to succeed in developing new and profitable offerings in the marketplace. This places the communication activities of organisational teams and their impact on team effectiveness at the heart of a firm's market-driven behaviour.

There are a number of problems that may arise when organisational communication activities break down. This is because communications increasingly are bi-directional with information flowing from (as well as to) other stakeholders, such as suppliers and

end-users, directly. How these information flows are managed thus influences important actors in the firm's business environment, actors that may well be outside the boundaries of the organisation itself. Marketers increasingly recognise the importance of customer contact, and that these contacts may involve members of the organisation who are not formally linked to the marketing function (such as design and production people). Because our market-based approach recognises the impact that internal communication activities and organisational learning may have on external partners and customers, this understanding will help firms translate better both partner and customer requirements into operational activities to meet those requirements.

Communication activities increasingly take place within networks rather than simply between individuals. Thus, communicators are in fact embedded within larger and more complex contexts and so these contexts must be understood when examining organisational communication. Marketing activities rely upon organisational knowledge and competencies (Day 1994). The development of these competencies increasingly relies upon an ongoing social accomplishment that helps people in the organisation know how to get things done (Orlikowski 2002). Our market-based approach emphasises people, organisations, and social processes and suggests that the primary role of marketing communications increasingly focuses upon reaching convergence and a mutual understanding between network communicators. By understanding these social processes, firms will be better able to align organisational communication styles and structures to the needs of the communication network in which communicators are embedded.

Functional distinctions and hierarchical structures within organisations are also altered by communication patterns and flows. These changes are a result of both: (1) the requirement for functions to converge in their understanding of marketplace requirements in order to achieve their aim of satisfying customer needs and wants and; (2) the desire for organisational structures to flatten in order to encourage knowledge sharing. Regular, timely and relevant communication is seen to have a positive impact upon teamworking (Kayworth and Leidner 2002) and customer value creation (Hoegl and Gemuenden 2001), and is thus important to marketers. Our market-based approach views these functional distinctions and hierarchical structures within organisations as complex networked relationships. By understanding these relationships, firms will be better able to improve the coordination mechanisms between network partners and thus positively influence knowledge sharing.

### How Does Organisational Communication Affect Marketing Activities?

Organisational communication needs to be studied, as the consequences of connecting everyone to everyone within organisations will be far-reaching and fundamental to future business performance. New hybrid organisational forms (based neither on functional silos nor on a classic matrix) will evolve which rely on horizontal processes backed up with vertical functional strengths (Day 1999). Day asserts "...advances in data networks will permit firms to link internal teams for better faster decision-making, and to devise more interactive strategies that use information from the customer rather than about the customer (Day 1999: 33). Indeed, it is the hope of improvement in knowledge

assimilation, organisational learning, and market focus that drives many modern organisations to establish corporate/client communication channels such as Intranets and Extranets. These communication channels foster complex and interrelated connections between individuals and their activities. It is these very ties and dense lateral connections across functions that define network membership roles and responsibilities (Achrol and Kotler 1999).

Organisations can begin to operate in new ways and will tend to drift away from the old hierarchical structures (Webster 1997). Supporting these new organisational forms, such as the "network organisation" (Achrol and Kotler 1999) and the "virtual" organisation (DeSanctis and Monge 1998), will require new understandings and competencies in managing organisational teams. These teams may include new product and service development teams, inter-organisational networks, distribution channel partners, customer/company customisation and key account management activities, and internal marketing activities between organisational members. Managing and fostering communication between organisational team members will become a vital necessity in these new types of organisation, one on which competitive advantage will depend.

The changing nature of the way in which such teams work in modern organisations demonstrates several trends that will shape organisational relationships. These trends include task complexity and inter-relatedness, increased emphasis on team coordination, and diversity of team membership. As a result, communication channel structures, the style and form of communication content, and the context in which communication takes place are subject to change. Firstly, the complexity and inter-connectedness of the tasks facing teams in particular is increasing. As task complexity increases, organisational teams are becoming larger and incorporating more members who are often geographically dispersed, thus altering communication channel structures. Having previously relied upon face-to-face interpersonal communication channels to deliver their most important messages, managers may now find that they have no option but to use less direct communication channels (such as computer-mediated communication media) which may seem less persuasive (Fulk, Schmitz, and Steinfield 1990). If marketers are to understand how influence strategies operate in this changing business environment, then their focus on the psychological effects of communication upon the individual must broaden to include the study of the social effects of communication among individuals within networks as well (Achrol and Kotler 1999; Holland and Lockett 1997; Rogers 1986).

Secondly, teams are increasingly tackling tasks that are difficult to segment into discrete pieces of work to be undertaken by isolated individuals. Thus, issues involving teamworking and the style and form of communication content have increased in importance. This requires a shift away from the traditional linear model of the communication process (from source- through message- to receiver) which focuses upon a one-way mechanistic causation to a model that is mutually causal, or cybernetic (Rogers 1986).

Thirdly, teams must increasingly involve a number of specialists (including the customer) at an earlier phase in their work and design processes. Thus, the context of communication alters the traditional role of marketing communications. This may no longer aim to inform, remind or persuade, but may instead focus upon reaching convergence and a mutual understanding with customers, end-users, and other stakeholders.

These trends illustrate the increasingly complex nature of relationship development within and between organisational team members and associated parties. They may also have important implications for the conditions in which such teams operate; their structure, climate, and balance of power (Mohr and Nevin 1990). Such organisational communications involve diverse functions and operations within the firm, often including employees (such as finance, logistics, purchasing, and engineering) whose primary function is not seen as marketing per se. Nevertheless, the efficiency, effectiveness, and coordination of such communication channels within the firm is recognised by managers as being vital to the level of customer satisfaction ultimately achieved.

Yet, for all the effort and money spent on improving organisational communications (in particular through the use of computer-mediated communication media such as email, groupware and the Internet), managers experience real difficulties in realising the expected benefits of such efforts. Employees fail to use the technology in the intended fashion, or indeed fail to use it at all! The frustration at both the lack of communication (the so-called information graveyards found on so many corporate Intranets) and overuse of such media (every manager's nightmare - information overload) leads many practising managers to question just how such technologies should be used. What constitutes good practice? What value might be gained from such computer-mediated communication investments? Are an individual's computer-mediated communication media use and enhanced organisational performance related, and if so, how?

The market-based approach suggested in this paper should provide marketing researchers with a number of topics that we suggest could lead to research in communication and teamworking that is both more systematic and more holistic. It should also provide marketers with an appreciation of how micro level communications (at the level of the individual) between organisational team members might influence macro level marketing outcomes such as team performance and customer value creation. In particular, this approach focuses upon the interconnectedness that communication channels (often facilitated by computer-mediated communication media) makes possible both within and between organisations and with other stakeholders (such as customers). There is a need to modify existing perspectives to account for this interconnectedness, and to undertake research streams and develop conceptual models, which may help to develop new theory and contribute to better managerial practice in this area.

### Theoretical Foundations of a Market-Based Approach

In this section we examine a number of developments within three related areas of research; relationship marketing, communication theory, and organisational learning. We

present these as three pathways, each of which contributes recommended research topics that may guide further research. This interdisciplinary approach to academic study is one that has received considerable support in recent academic literature. For example, Moorman and Rust (1999: 194) propose that: "Functional identity is important to establish depth of knowledge; interdisciplinary study is important to explore the deep relationships between the internal and external focus in the customer connections [with the firm]." The intersections of these three pathways raise a number of interesting similarities and differences. In particular, one critical and dominant trend is identified as underpinning these theoretical developments. In an attempt to describe and understand organisational activities there has been a move away from functional and mechanistic models towards more humanistic and relationship-based models. This has led to an emphasis on people, organisations, and social process rather than on products and firms (Duncan and Moriarty 1998). This emphasis upon people, organisations, and social process and the ways in which they are interconnected and embedded within wider contexts is fundamental to our market-based approach and the recommendations for future research that flow from it.

**The Relationship Marketing Pathway to a Market-Based Approach** In an early paper, Macneil (1967) focused upon the notion of social co-operation in buyer-seller interactions. Co-operation, he maintained, was fundamental to the efficient governance of contracts (Campbell 2001) and he challenged existing exchange theory, focusing upon the concept of the "relation" in contract law (Macneil 1980). Arndt (1979) also maintained that transactions were planned and administered rather than ad hoc affairs. These observations led to a paradigm shift in marketing research (Arndt 1985) which sought to expand the focus of marketing theory development beyond the traditional logical empiricist paradigm. This paradigm shift - which included the shift from focusing upon transactions to relationships - questioned many assumptions in marketing research and practice. As relationship marketing theory developed, communication has increasingly played a central role in understanding how relationships are enhanced and developed (Duncan and Moriarty 1998; El-Ansary 1997). Traditional marketing mix approaches have frequently taken a more passive stance towards understanding the customer, often treating them as someone to whom the firm communicates, rather than someone with whom the firm communicates (Gronroos 1994). The central focus on communication and interaction between exchange partners thus differentiates relationship marketing from the more traditional marketing mix - or functional - approach.

Arndt (1985) suggested that exchange structures and processes might provide a useful focus, and the notion of key differences between discrete and relational norms was developed by Dwyer, Schurr, and Oh (1987). Their work utilised Levitt's (1983) marriage analogy to explore relational attributes and the relationship development process. However, a common complaint levied at much of the interorganisational literature is that it is based on personal psychological dimensions. While the concepts of trust, commitment and reciprocity remain important to the understanding of such interactions, their interpretation in the context of relationships with limited personal interaction should be considered (O'Malley and Tynan 1999). Firm-to-firm interorganisational theory may be appropriate to study group-level interaction, and personal psychological dimensions

may be appropriate to study interpersonal communication. However, researchers have had to grapple with the reality that individuals are embedded within groups and that groups are jointly constructed by individuals (Giddens 1984). Investigation of these issues should concern the understanding of a firm's place within the changing network context. It should also consider how individual firms, organisational teams, and exchange dyads are embedded within networks (Mattsson 1997). These interactions are micro (individual), meso (intra-organisational), and macro (inter-organisational) interactions (Granovetter 1982; Mattsson 1997).

There are several reasons why we feel it is important to explore relationship marketing theory in order to improve our understanding of communication in organisational teams. Firstly, the desired outcomes of different communication styles and structures within organisations may change if one takes a relationship marketing viewpoint. This is because the relationship marketing approach to business activities reflects three major shifts in strategic focus: that of customer utility as a result of total product and service experience; a shift to long-term social exchange relationships; and a shift from an internal process focus to one of value co-creation with partners and customers (Beckett-Camarata, Camarata, and Barker 1998; Wikstrom 1995). Secondly, relating internal processes and activities to business performance and strategic advantage is a cornerstone of relationship marketing. Not only may closer communication and interaction between producer and consumer facilitate more rapid and higher-value-rated offerings to consumers, but it also facilitates generative (i.e. new or unique) knowledge for the firm which can help in the development of new products and services (Wikstrom 1996). Thus, relationship marketing theory may offer us valuable insights into how communication in organisational teams may be linked to value creation.

It should however be noted that limitations exist to the relationship marketing approach. In particular, Hunt and Lambe (2000) observe two such limitations. Firstly, relationship marketing theory requires a theory of competition that is very different in the policy conclusions and implications it draws from traditional neoclassical theory (which views co-operation as anticompetitive in many contexts). Secondly, they observe that efficiency and effectiveness is not always enhanced by establishing relationships with all potential stakeholders and that there is a legitimate place for transaction marketing. They ask "...under what circumstances will firms developing relationships with such entities as suppliers, competitors, employees and customers be likely to lead to enhanced financial performance?" (Hunt and Lambe 2000: 14).

We propose three research topics that stem from our review of Relationship Marketing theory and which highlight gaps in the current literature and encourage researchers to consider new streams of research to fill these gaps. Firstly, we propose that:

Topic 1: New research on relationship formation and management might be improved by a focus on communication as a central and integrative activity in relationship formation and management.

For some years now, theory in the areas of both communications and marketing has been shifting from a functionalist, mechanistic, production-oriented approach to one that is more humanistic, and relationship-based. However, communication in relationship building has played, so far, a secondary role in relationship marketing research to the products of communication such as commitment and trust (Duncan and Moriarty 1998). The nature of relationship marketing gives us a clue as to the role of communication in relation to successful relationship building. As Duncan and Moriarty (1998: 3) state: "The notion that communication is a central integrative process in marketing is demonstrated in the evolving theories of integrated and relationship marketing." The impact of regular, detailed, and prompt communication by team leaders was seen to have a positive effect upon the working of non co-located (or virtual) teams (Kayworth and Leidner 2002). El-Ansary (1997: 43) suggests that "...new research on relationship marketing should focus on an examination of the various relationship marketing variables [such as communication] as determinants of channel member performance and the delivery of service quality to the end-user / customer." By focusing on communication as a central integrative activity in relationship formation and management, firms will be better able to understand and facilitate Macneil's (1967) notion of social co-operation as a basis for relational exchange and competitive advantage.

The role of communication in relationship marketing is also recognised as key to the creation of business networks, seen as fundamental to competitive success (Morgan and Hunt 1994). This leads us to our second research topic, that marketing research considers:

Topic 2: Viewing relationships in the context of networks.

The nature of communication between exchange partners, and the ways in which value is created as a result, forms the basis for important and necessary research in marketing theory and practice. Hierarchical structures as coordination mechanisms within networks negatively influence knowledge sharing, while informal lateral relations have a significant positive influence (Wenpin 2002).

Thus, the structure of communication channels also calls into question the boundary definition in marketing relationships. Strategic partnerships and channel partnerships can blur traditional organisational boundaries, and create networks of relationships. Relationship marketing therefore must also address the developing network paradigm that recognises that global competition occurs increasingly between networks of firms (Mattsson 1997; Morgan and Hunt 1994). By viewing relationships in the context of networks, firms will be better able to improve coordination mechanisms between network partners and thus positively influence knowledge sharing.

A network-based perspective requires a balancing of the needs of multiple stakeholders (not simply customers) and a focus on their different value creation requirements and roles in the value creation process. Such partners may include internal markets such as employees and business units, external suppliers, lateral organisations, end users and customers, and external influencers such as government regulators (Juttner and Wehrli

1995; Morgan and Hunt 1994). Thus, building relationships and creating value interactively with business partners and customers forms the first step in conceptualising a network-based perspective of marketing (Juttner and Wehrli 1995). This leads us to our third suggested research topic, that marketing research considers:

Topic 3: Linking communication activities and performance outcomes with customer value creation.

The involvement of outside specialists and stakeholders and the inclusion of customer input into organisational research and development team activities has led to major changes in the context of communication in organisational teams. In particular, the role of the customer in the value creation process has changed significantly with the introduction of computer-mediated communications (Thirkell 1997; Wikstrom 1996). With the customer able to make significant inputs and alterations earlier in the design and development process of many of the products and services they enjoy, value creation becomes less linear in its approach and takes on a much more dynamic quality. This dynamism stems from the simultaneous inputs of buyers and suppliers as well as employees (Peters 1998; Wikstrom 1996).

Managing relationship equity between the firm and its customers and partners is seen as going beyond the confines of marketing activities alone to include strategy, processes, technology, organisation design, and performance measurement (Sawhney and Zabin 2002). In fact, Slater (1997) proposes a customer value-based theory of the firm that states that superior performance accrues to firms that have a customer value-based organisational culture. This needs to be complemented by activities that facilitate learning about customers and their changing needs, such as organisational communications. By the nature of its activities, a customer value-based theory of the firm rests upon processes that cut across multiple functions in the organisation. In fact, it has been argued (Thirkell 1997) that companies create value not only through making their offerings more intelligent, but by making their customers and suppliers more intelligent as well. They assert that in the new economic logic of value creation only two assets really matter: knowledge and relationships.

Thus, communication activities influence directly the core activity of a market-oriented firm - that of creating customer value. Understanding how communication, coordination, and cohesion affect teamworking quality in new product development teams has been seen to be a key part of the success of innovative project outcomes (Hoegl and Gemuenden 2001). In addition, it has been suggested that a non-evolutionary model of relational exchange is needed which addresses temporal differences in relationship formation (Lambe, Spekman and Hunt 2000). They specifically define and characterise close, collaborative, fast-developing, and short-lived relationships (termed "interimistic relational exchange") which form when companies need to pool their resources to address a transient yet important business opportunity and/or threat. As a feature of such interimistic exchanges, communication (both the quality and the quantity of interactions) is seen as key when time pressures require fast non-evolutionary relationship

development. Linking communication activities and performance outcomes with customer value creation would be particularly important in interimistic exchanges because of their proposed reliance upon substitutes for trust (such as reputation, relationship-specific investments, and environmental incentives: Lambe, Spekman and Hunt 2000). By linking communication activities and performance outcomes with customer value creation, firms will be better able to create customer value. They may do this by increasing the intelligence of both their customers and suppliers, as well as by developing customer-focussed processes that cut across multiple functions in the organisation, thus making their offerings more customer-focused. A summary of the key themes relating to this pathway is presented in Table 1, which is followed by our consideration of the contribution made by the organisational learning literature.

Table 1 The Relationship Marketing Pathway

[Table]

Topics

Key Themes

New research on relationship formation and management might be improved by focusing on communication as a central and integrative activity in relationship formation and management.

Relational exchange and relationship development.

Arndt 1985;

Macneil 1980;

Dwyer, Schurr, and Oh 1987

Communication and interaction in relationship building.

Gronroos 1994

Communication and channel management.

El-Ansary 1997

Communication as central to relationships.

Duncan and Moriarty 1998

The impact of communication in team management.

Kayworth and Leidner 2002

Viewing relationships in the context of networks.

Blurring of boundaries between firms.

Morgan and Hunt 1994

Building relationships and creating value interactively with partners.

Juttner and Wehrli 1995

Embeddedness within networks.

Granovetter 1982;

Mattsson 1997

Hierarchical structures negatively influence knowledge sharing.

Wenpin 2002

Linking communication activities and outcomes with customer value creation.

Customers as Co-Creators of value. Bi-lateral value creation between firms and customers.

Wikstom 1996;

Beckett-Camarata, Camarata, and Barker 1998;

Peters 1998

Customer value-based theory of the firm.

Relational Equity with customers and partners.

Slater 1997;

Sawhney and Zabin 2002

Computer-mediated communication influence and its impact on consumer role and power.

Thirkell 1997

The importance of communication in intermistic relational exchange.

Lambe Spekman and Hunt 2000

The importance of teamwork quality upon new product development success.

Hoegl and Gemuenden 2001

The Organisational Learning Pathway to a Market-Based Approach In the modern workplace functional distinctions are rapidly converging, as the goal of many organisations becomes one of satisfying customer needs (Day 1999). The development of a systematic approach to the study of organisational communication activities and their relationship to performance enhancement can be seen as desirable to both marketing researchers and practitioners. In particular, Webster (1992: 13) notes that: "The field of organisational behaviour also offers many opportunities for productive partnerships for

marketing scholars who want to address such areas as negotiation, coalitions, team-building, conflict resolution, and group processes related to such activities as new product development that are part of managing marketing partnerships."

In particular, two areas of marketing theory have been substantially influenced by organisational learning research. These are Internal Marketing (focusing on relationships within the firm) and Marketing Channel Management (focusing on relationships between firms). We present three further proposals that stem from the Organisational Learning literature. These topics highlight gaps and encourage researchers to consider new streams of research to fill these gaps. Firstly, we propose that marketing research considers:

Topic 4: Recognising the impact that internal communication activities and organisational learning may have on external partner and customer performance outcomes.

Internal marketing activities may require the willing commitment of staff to work towards a given goal within or outside the boundaries of their job description. This will involve translating customer requirements into operational activities to meet those requirements, and establishing processes that facilitate the circulation of knowledge across departmental borders (Ballantyne 1997; Hauser, Simester, and Wernerfelt 1996; Tjosvold, Meredith, and Wellwood 1993). The marketing concept is a philosophy that places the knowing and satisfying of customer needs, wants, and desires as a key element of successful firms' cultures (Hunt and Lambe 2000 citing numerous previous researchers). Hunt and Lambe relate this philosophy to the concept of market orientation, which they assert may be seen as a measure of the behaviours and activities that reflect the marketing concept. They state that market orientation, which goes beyond the marketing concept's single focus on customers to include competitors, may be seen as a bridge between an organisation's business strategy and its organisational culture and business philosophy. Ineffective or nonexistent communication channels that hinder a shared understanding of competitive strategies within the organisation are seen as a serious barrier to market-driven behaviour (Day 1990).

Organisational learning is directly related to the concept of marketing orientation (Harris 1997; Hurley and Hult 1998; Kohli and Jaworski 1990; Morgan, Katsikeas, and Appaiah-Adu 1998; Slater and Narver 1995, 1996). It is also related by Day (1990) to what he terms "market-driven capabilities" (the conditions that enable people within organisations to produce good results). These capabilities include: shared beliefs and values which put the customer first; team-based organisation structures and systems which mirrors the market; strategy development processes which include an external orientation and competitive advantage as their theme; and supporting programs and actions which focus upon people management, incentives, and communications (Day 1990). Organisational learning is a fundamental aspect of developing these market-driven capabilities, and in a later work Day (2000) specifically relates the processes of market sensing and sense making in organisations to the learning process. Even where a superior ability to sense existing market information makes the organisation more aware of opportunities to create

customer value, there must also be the ability to process this information into knowledge that can be accessed when needed (Day 2000).

Slater and Narver (1995) suggest that market orientation provides the cultural foundation for organisation learning. However, limitations to the notion of market orientation include the lack of a theory relating market orientation and organisational performance, and a lack of understanding of how collaboration and co-operation between firms may create customer value. In other words, a firm embedded within a network perspective is lacking. Indeed, some have argued that organisational learning is more critical than market orientation per se to performance outcomes and can lead to positions of advantage for firms (Day 1994; Lievens, de Ruyter, and Lemmink 1999; Slater and Narver 1996). By recognising the impact that internal communication activities and organisational learning may have on external partner and customer performance outcomes, firms may better translate partner and customer requirements into operational activities to meet those requirements.

Our view is that the study of organisational learning promises to provide relevant insights and understanding into the role and development of communication behaviours in organisational relationships. Different communication behaviours may be understood as part of an overall communication strategy (Mohr and Nevin 1990), which might support more collaborative or more autonomous communication aims. Such communication strategies reflect not only the communication behaviour of the individual (e.g., their frequency of communication) but also reflect the communication behaviours of the team as a whole (e.g. the reciprocal nature of team communications). The acquisition, distribution, and interpretation of knowledge may be viewed as an iterative process that occurs at both the level of the individual and at the level of their embeddedness within the organisation (Lievens, de Ruyter, and Lemmink 1999). In particular, the impact of computer-mediated communication technology use within organisations highlights the need to understand communication structures and styles from a multi-level perspective. These communication technologies directly affect the ways in which organisations are structured, working patterns are formed, and participants interact with each other in satisfying their customers (Fletcher and Wright 1996). As for their impact upon organisational performance, increasingly distribution channel activities rely as much upon innovation in information management as they do upon the physical movement of goods (Duncan and Moriarty 1998). Thus research into the use of such communication technologies to enhance knowledge development and sharing in organisations has seen a change of emphasis. Research focus is shifting away from a "data-centred" view of information technology use, reliant upon database systems and formal codification and documentation of information, to one that is communication centred (Quintas, Lefrere, and Jones 1997). This leads us to our second organisational learning research topic, that marketing research considers:

Topic 5: Relating the match between communication strategy and channel conditions with enhanced performance outcomes.

Marketing contributes to, and is reliant upon, organisational knowledge. In operationalising the marketing concept, Stidsen and Schutte (1972) placed particular emphasis upon marketing as an activity which: (a) identified and evaluated the interests of both internal and external customers; (b) made decisions regarding product and technology development and utilisation (e.g., make or buy decisions); (c) was responsible for establishing methods of communication between producers and consumers; and (d) divided marketing tasks and roles appropriately with internal and external marketing agents and partners. Thus, the ability to deliver added value as a result of organisational knowledge highlights the need to understand how channel conditions (such as the level of trust, co-operation, and commitment present between partners) relate to communication strategies. This relationship is what Mohr and Nevin (1990) termed a consonance approach, and their research sought specifically to relate channel conditions and communication with channel outcomes. Their assumption is that communication strategy interacts with a given channel condition to determine levels of channel outcomes. In other words, enhanced outcome levels are contingent on the match of communication strategy to channel conditions.

In relation to communication strategy and the use of new computer-mediated communication technologies, Vandenbosch and Ginzberg (1996) report that success in the use of groupware to effect collaboration among organisational team members was significantly affected by the organisation's culture and the user's understanding of the technology. In fact, communication can serve to transmit persuasive information, encourage participative decision-making, exercise power, and encourage commitment and loyalty (Mohr and Nevin 1990). Guangping and Netemeyer (2002) relate the learning of organisational salespersons to self-efficacy (including both task and personal aspects of the salesperson and their role) which in turn is related to performance outcomes. By relating the match between communication strategy and channel conditions with enhanced performance outcomes, firms will be better able to identify those aspects of communication behaviour that best support the delivery of added value as a result of organisational knowledge.

Interest in organisational communications is also fuelled by the increasing importance that cross-functional teamworking now plays in organisations. These activities rely heavily upon sound internal communications, and upon a communication culture that seeks consensus and goal alignment rather than coercive control (Vandenbosch and Ginzberg 1996; Wikstrom 1996). This leads us to our third organisational learning research topic, that marketing research considers:

Topic 6: Including cross-functional teamworking and coordination as an important prerequisite to enhanced organisational learning.

Together with a customer and a competitor orientation, Narver and Slater (1990) include inter-functional coordination as a component of overall market orientation. Collaborative interdepartmental relationships are believed to increase the speed of learning, and the resulting adaptations enhance coordination and implementation (Dougherty and Heller

1994; Morgan and Piercy 1998). Linking innovation and new product development to the strategic context of the firm is also an important aspect of organisation learning, and is said to increase the likelihood of success in new product development activities (Dougherty and Heller 1994).

Whilst a primary concern of the marketing channel management literature is the exercise of opportunism and control over an exchange partner, this fails to account for the increasing importance of co-operation goal interdependencies in both intra- and inter-organisational relationships. The research work of Tjosvold, Meredith, and Wellwood (1993) proposed a theory of co-operative, independent, and competitive goal interdependence in business network analysis when they highlighted the need to encourage a shared appreciation of the importance of goal interdependencies when addressing customer needs. Goal interdependence focuses on the conclusions people make about how they depend on each other. In co-operation, people believe their goals are positively linked so that as one moves toward goal attainment, others also move towards their goal. In competition, people believe their goals are negatively related so that one individual's success interferes with that of the others. With independent goals, employees consider their interests unrelated so that the goal attainment of one neither helps nor hinders the other's goals. The communication style of organisational teams, and its contribution to problem solving, is seen as an important feature of co-operative goal interdependence. With increased personal involvement on the part of team members, a greater willingness to enter into what Tjosvold, Meredith, and Wellwood (1993) describes as constructive controversy may result. Constructive controversy is seen as a productive dynamic in establishing and maintaining co-operative goals, in promoting innovation, and in helping organisational teams respond to buyer's problems. Gaining a consensus of goals means recognising the agenda of each of the parties and finding a way to accommodate them. As Piercy and Lane (2003) point out, there are situations where firms may choose to be authoritative instead of relational; in particular where a business partner is seen to provide low market risk (i.e. is easily replaced by other suppliers) and/or where they have a low value-enhancing or financial impact upon the buyer's business. In such cases, network membership behaviours may be of minimal importance. However, where a business partner provides high market risk and/or increases a firm's efficiency, value-added and financial performance, then network contexts and communication behaviours and strategies are a significant factor. In such relationships, our approach would prove useful in understanding such network contexts and communication behaviours.

As relationship marketing strategies require a long-term focus from firms, information technology will play a vital role in the coordination of these cross-functional teams both within and between firms. This role will also include the establishment of a corporate memory in relation to customers that may be accessed by management to facilitate relationship development and maintenance, and improve requirements specifications and product development. DeSanctis and Monge (1998: 12) propose that: "... electronic communication products, such as conversations and documents stored in knowledge repositories, can provide stability to otherwise tenuous relationships. Perhaps communication histories from one setting can be carried into the communication future of

other settings via evolving databases." By including cross-functional teamworking and coordination as an important pre-requisite to enhanced organisational learning, firms will be better able to increase the speed of organisational learning. Given that organisational learning involves linking innovation and new product development to the strategic context of the firm, and is said to increase the likelihood of success in new product development activities, the speed of organisational learning will be of significant importance to a firm's success.

Organisational learning has been equated with innovation (Hurley and Hult 1998; Quintas, Lefrere, and Jones 1997) and thus becomes a key to corporate success (Evans and Wurster 1997). Increasingly it is suggested that organisational learning and organisational innovation are needed to supplement market orientation in business planning (Han, Namwoon, and Rajendra 1998). However, in order to realise this success, the firm must align its strategies with its capabilities and systems. This relies upon well-developed organisational learning capabilities and internal structures and systems that can implement such strategies (Day 1990; Piercy 1998). Communication, collaboration and co-operation, rather than control, thus becomes the focus for organisational norms and values. All of these activities are reliant upon not just information sharing, but on a community in discourse which shares ideas and experiences, a community participating in knowledge creation and sharing (McDermott 1999).

The focus for this learning is not in the creation of an organisational electronic library, but in the connection of people so that they can think together (McDermott 1999). In other words, information must be distributed, interpreted, and made accessible for future use. This can present difficulties for firms in developing ways in which knowledge can be accessed and shared (known as knowledge management systems). As McDermott's paper points out, knowledge always involves a person who knows. The present paper supports the view that rather than focusing upon the tools and concepts of information management to design knowledge management systems, it is to the community that owns such knowledge and the people who use it to which we must turn our attention. In the design of knowledge management systems, it is of greater importance to identify the community that cares about a topic, and to enhance their ability to think and work together, than to identify the information needs and tools (McDermott 1999). Indeed, the importance of group (as opposed to individual) learning has been recognised as a vital element in fostering an organisation's ability to respond to market change and enable group process flexibility (Edmondson 2002, Okhuysen and Eisenhardt 2002). A summary of the key themes relating to this pathway is presented in Table 2.

Table 2 The Organisational Learning Pathway

[Table]  
Topics  
Key Themes

Recognising the impact that internal communication activities and organisational learning may have on external partner and customer performance outcomes.

Internal Marketing as a process to create and circulate new organisational knowledge across functional boundaries and enhance marketplace relationships.

Tjosvold, Meredith, and Wellwood 1993;

Hauser, Simester, and Wernerfelt 1996;

Ballantyne 1997

Communications as a key component of market-driven capabilities and market-driven behaviour.

Day 1990

Organisational learning is directly related to the concept of marketing orientation and can lead to positions of advantage for firms.

Kohli and Jaworski 1990;

Day 1994, 2000;

Slater and Narver 1996;

Harris 1997;

Hurley and Hult 1998;

Morgan, Katsikeas, and Appaiah-Adu 1998;

Lievens, de Ruyter, and Lemmink 1999

Communication technologies directly affect the ways in which organisations are structured, working patterns are formed, and participants interact with each other in satisfying customers.

Fletcher and Wright 1996

Emphasis is shifting away from a "data-centred" view of information technology use to one which is communication centred.

Quintas, Lefrere, and Jones 1997

Relating the match between communication strategy and channel conditions with enhanced performance outcomes.

Marketing contributes to, and is reliant upon, organisational knowledge and communication.

Stidsen and Schutte 1972

Communication in marketing channels can serve to transmit persuasive information, encourage participative decision-making, exercise power, and encourage commitment and loyalty.

Mohr and Nevin 1990

Activities rely upon a communication culture that seeks consensus and goal alignment rather than coercive control.

Vandenbosch and Ginzberg 1996;

Wikstrom 1996

Learning is related to self-efficacy, which in turn is related to performance.

Guangping and Netemeyer 2002

Including cross-functional teamworking and coordination as an important pre-requisite to enhanced organisational learning.

Collaborative interdepartmental relationships are believed to increase the speed of learning, and the resulting adaptations enhance coordination and implementation.

Dougherty and Heller 1994;

Morgan and Piercy 1998

Defining and exploring co-operative, independent, and competitive goal interdependence in business network analysis.

Tjosvold, Meredith, and Wellwood 1993

Organisational learning has been equated with innovation and thus becomes a key to corporate success particularly in the work of new product and service development teams.

Hurley and Hult 1998;

Quintas, Lefrere, and Jones 1997;

Evans and Wurster 1997;

Han, Namwoon, and Rajendra 1998

Marketing activities are reliant upon not just information sharing, but also on a community in discourse which shares ideas and experiences, a community participating in knowledge creation and sharing.

McDermott 1999

The importance and dynamics of group (as opposed to individual) learning.

Edmondson 2002;

The Communication Theory Pathway to a Market-Based Approach In the past, communication theory research distinguished between two types of communication channel: interpersonal channels (which involve a face-to-face exchange between two or more individuals) and mass media channels (all those means of transmitting messages - such as radio, television, newspapers - which enable a source of one or a few individuals to reach an audience of many). Communications researchers now recognise a third category, machine-assisted interpersonal communication, that has certain qualities of both mass media and interpersonal channels yet is different in several important ways from either one (Rogers 1986). Because these media provide significant opportunities for organisational teams to work collectively, both in co-located and virtual settings, we focus much of our attention here upon communication theory literature which explores the new computer-mediated communications media (such as email, web and internet technologies, and groupware technologies). In exploring the differences these media embody when compared to the two traditional communication channels, we present three research topics that stem from our review of the literature in the area of communication theory. These topics highlight gaps in the current literature and encourage researchers to consider new streams of research to fill these gaps. Firstly, we propose that marketing research considers:

Topic 7: Broadening its attention to include not only the psychological effects of communication upon the individual but also the study of the social effects and the relationships among individuals within networks.

Current information search techniques in the new media, such as search engines on the Internet, allow users to select independent facts and then create new patterns of organisation of these facts (Chesbro and Bonsall 1989). This promotes the use of isolated facts without a consideration of the political-cultural context (or what Ford 1997 would term the atmosphere of a relationship) in which these facts occur. Thus, information and the context in which this information should be understood may become separated. How knowledge is utilised is clearly important with skill and effectiveness in the use of information seen as critical to becoming market-oriented. Divorcing information from its context may have serious negative consequences for marketing decision-making. Speed and flexibility of decision-making is of increasing importance in these new marketing environments (Day 2000), requiring both rational and intuitive abilities in formulating insight on the part of decision makers (Eisenhardt 1992). Such decision-making has been greatly influenced by the availability of new computer-mediated communication technologies. By turning their attention from the psychological effects of communication upon the individual to the study of the social effects and the relationships among individuals within networks, firms will be better able to understand not only the information content of the communication message, but the context in which it should be understood.

In the establishment and working of marketing networks, a research framework is needed which not only considers the definition and structure of such networks (Samli and Bahn 1992), but also recognises that this context is constructed into the social process of technology use and which avoids attempts to separate the user from the technology. This last consideration is addressed by the theory of Adaptive Structuration that explores how human beings actively structure the social world and how physical and social contexts enter into action (Poole and DeSanctis 1990). Adaptive structuration is based upon structuration theory (Giddens 1984) which examines the interplay of structure and action in creating and maintaining social systems. It examines the change process by focusing not only on the structures that computer-mediated communication technologies provide, but also on the structures that actually emerge as people interact with the technology. "Structurationists see social interaction as a kind of prism through which individual and communal ends are refracted to create social reality. Organising consists of an unresolved dialectic between autonomy and interdependence, agency and constraint.....and so it is with the relationships between communication structure and uses of organisational media - each shapes the other in an emergent pattern of mediated and non-mediated social interaction." (Contractor and Eisenberg 1990: 147)

Adaptive structuration theory has been described as one of the most fully developed theoretical process models of computer-mediated communication, focusing upon the ongoing group processes involved in appropriating communications technologies (Rice 1991). Rice points out that in adaptive structuration theory there is no direct effect of the technology itself, rather the form and application of such technologies is influenced by the choices that group members make in their use. It provides a framework for studying changes in organisations that occur as advanced technologies are used. Adaptive structuration theory has been influenced by two competing views of advanced information technology effects: the decision-making school and the institutional school. The decision-making school focuses on technology engineering, and examines issues in decision theory and task-technology fit (often utilising positivist research methodologies). Decision theorists support the view that technology should provide structures which help to overcome human weaknesses such as bounded rationality. Expected consequences of such technology use include greater productivity, efficiency, and satisfaction to both individuals and organisations. However, it has been criticized as a technocentric view that assumes that technology has the inherent power to shape human cognition and behaviour (DeSanctis and Poole 1994).

The institutional school focuses on social structure, and examines issues in social information processing and symbolic interactionism (often with interpretive, ethnographic methodologies). It advocates that technology provides an opportunity for change, rather than acting as a causal agent of change. However, this view has also been criticized as underplaying the role of technology in organisational change (DeSanctis and Poole 1994). They argue that in developing a framework for the study of computer-mediated communication technology use in organisations, an integrative perspective is needed.

This integrative perspective is termed the social-technology school, and focuses on both technology and social structure. Adaptive structuration theory extends this approach by examining the "dynamic way in which technology and social structure mutually shape one another over time" (DeSanctis and Poole 1994: 125). Adaptive structuration proposes that the social technology shapes the user, but the user likewise shapes the technology through their use and the meaning in social action that they give it. The relationship of the organisational team as a whole to its technological and social context is a key concern in structuration theory (Fulk 1993).

Our argument is that organisational teams and their technologies need to be examined as embedded, integrated, dynamic, socio-technical systems. If the primary function of communication becomes the establishment of mutual understanding and consensus, then this key role has implications for the use of computer-mediated communication technologies versus face-to-face communication (in particular where conflict resolution may be inhibited in text-based computer-mediated communication media such as email: Johnson 2002). This leads us to our second communication theory research topic, that marketing research considers:

Topic 8: Relating the need for teamworking and coordination with a shift from the traditional linear model of communication to a model that is mutually causal, or cybernetic.

To understand the limitations of past communication research, one needs to understand the prevailing models that fuelled it. In particular, the Shannon linear model of communication predominated, focusing on one-way communication and the study of communication effects (the changes in an individual's behaviour as a result of a communication message: Rogers 1986). This model, although simple to understand, has been criticised for its concentration upon communication as a simple act rather than a complex process. In particular, two fundamental problems arise in its use (Rogers 1986). Firstly, it focuses communication researchers into a narrow intellectual cul-de-sac of considering the effects of communication, in particular mass communication. Secondly, it relies upon a basic assumption regarding the nature of information - that information may be carried from source to receiver in the way in which physical objects travel from one place to another (e.g., "...the way a bucket carries water, or a hypodermic needle injects a vaccine, or a bullet heads for a target." Rogers 1986: 197).

These assumptions inflate the role of the message source, and focus research attention upon source bias rather than the interrelationship of the communicators and the style or form of the communications. New models move away from a focus upon communication as uni-directional persuasion to view communication as exchanges. This allows for a view of communication as a two-way cybernetic (or mutually causal) process that may focus attention on the interrelationship of those who communicate. It also highlights the importance of the context in which the communication takes place. It views the social effects, and the relationships among individuals within networks, as a key driver of communications research. The primary function of communication then becomes the

establishment of mutual understanding and consensus, which can then lead to collective action (Hakkio and Laaksonen 1998; Rogers 1986). By relating the need for teamworking and coordination with a shift from the traditional linear model of communication to a model which is mutually causal, firms will be better able to understand how communication style and form both reflect and influence organisational team interactions.

Two key principles underlie the departure of Internet marketing from traditional marketing practices. Firstly, the ability for computer networks to enable communication from anywhere in the globe at any time removes the constraints of space and time associated with physical marketplaces. Secondly, traditional mass marketing media have consisted primarily of monologues, from the firm to the consumer (Spalter 1995). Commercial online services and the introduction of the Web have created the potential for a mass interactive dialogue between exchange parties. The shift is then from a one (firm)-to-many (consumers) model of communication to the many-to-many model where contribution to the medium and the message may come from both directions (Hoffman and Novak 1996). "The newer computer-mediated communication media are marked by increased user control, more specialised content, speed of transmission, and non-linear access. In other words, they are interactive. This interactive nature of computer-mediated communications calls into question the classic model of an originator and receiver of information, since both parties are now playing a role in generating the final information output, even if this flows from the former to the latter." (Miles 1991: 147)

The adaptive structuration approach to the study of human-computer interaction, outlined earlier, is conceptually similar to the philosophical system termed "organicism" (Whiteside and Wixon 1988). In contrast to other philosophical systems (mechanism, focusing on the machine; formism, focusing on the similarity of objects with different appearances; and contextualism, focusing on the unique situational aspects of an event), organicism takes the metaphor of the living organism as its focus, especially the ways in which it grows and changes over time. This approach tends to be more holistic and systems-oriented (Whiteside and Wixon 1988). It also relates well to the relationship marketing approach advocated by the research work of the IMP group, which views marketing relationships within a dynamic model of buyer-seller interaction (Ford 1997). As DeSanctis and Poole (1994) point out, traditional computer systems tended to support work tasks and business transactions. The new technologies, on the other hand, not only support these activities but also facilitate coordination while providing procedures for interpersonal exchange. This leads us to our third communication theory research topic, that marketing research considers:

Topic 9: Recognising that as the communication network expands to include members such as customers, suppliers, or other organisational functions, the primary role of marketing communications in this context is no longer to inform, remind or persuade but to reach convergence and mutual understanding.

Chesbro and Bonsall (1989) state that knowledge is becoming a corporate asset rather than an aspect of personal comprehension, utility, and growth. These corporate assets have greater relevance in computer-mediated communication, as the interaction between buyer and seller often starts with the solving of problems. This then provides an opportunity for much deeper interaction and more advanced learning for those concerned. Sharing this advanced learning is important, especially as the number and type of individuals participating in these exchanges and value creation activities grows. In these activities, it is not only sales and service staff but also design and production people who interact with the customers. This means that all these people learn directly from their often close and dynamic co-operation with many of their clients. Where this information is recorded electronically, it may provide an historical picture of the development of the relationship that may be accessed by a variety of different actors within the firm. The opportunity for a wider range of organisational members to be involved in the collection, interpretation and dissemination of information through the new media also implies an increase in process-based knowledge (that is, knowledge gained through the process of conducting the research itself: Menon and Varadarajan 1992). This type of knowledge enhancement is characterised by a high level of involvement on the part of the participant, and should therefore positively affect information utilisation and decision outcomes within the firm.

The development of computer supported co-operative work within organisations is the focus of a great deal of attention in the current business environment. These systems allow multiple users to work together on the same document or database simultaneously, thus creating opportunities for social networking and communication that may mirror both the formal and informal communication opportunities found in traditional continuous working environments (Miles 1991: 151). Researchers must therefore recognise the need to understand the role and importance of human action in organisational knowledge and competence generation, where knowing how to get things done in complex organisational work is dependent upon ongoing social accomplishment (Orlikowski 2002). By recognising that the primary role of marketing communications is no longer to inform, remind, or persuade, but to reach convergence and mutual understanding, firms will be better able to align organisational communication styles and structures to the needs of the communication network. This network might include multiple organisational users, customers, and/or suppliers. A summary of the key themes relating to this pathway is presented in Table 3.

Table 3 The Communication Theory Pathway

[Table]  
Topics  
Key Themes

Broadening attention to include not only the psychological effects of communication upon the individual but also the study of the social effects and the relationships among individuals within networks.

Current information search techniques in the new electronic communication media allow users to select independent facts and then create new patterns of organisation of these facts.

Chesbro and Bonsall 1989

Speed and flexibility of decision-making is of increasing importance in these new marketing environments.

Eisenhardt 1992

The need to consider the definition and structure of communication networks.

Samli and Bahn 1992

The need to explore how human beings actively structure the social world and how physical and social contexts enter into action.

Poole and DeSanctis 1990;

Fulk 1993;

DeSanctis and Poole 1994

The impact of computer-mediated communication media use in resolving conflict.

Johnson 2002

Relating the need for teamworking and coordination with a shift from the traditional linear model of communication (source-message-receiver) which focuses upon a one-way mechanistic causation to a model that is mutually causal, or cybernetic.

A view of communication as a two-way cybernetic (or mutually causal) process that may focus attention on the interrelationship of those who communicate.

Rogers 1986;

Hakkio and Laaksonen 1998

The shift is then from a one (firm)-to-many (consumers) model of communication to the many-to-many model where contribution to the medium and the message may come from both directions.

Hoffman and Novak 1996

Interactivity makes the classic model of an originator and receiver of information rather suspect, since both parties are now playing a role in generating the final information output.

Miles 1991

The adaptive structuration approach to the study of human-computer interaction is conceptually similar to the philosophical system termed "organicism" which takes the

metaphor of the living organism as its focus, especially the ways in which it grows and changes over time.

Whiteside and Wixon 1988

Recognising that as the communication network expands to include members such as customers, suppliers, or other organisational functions, the primary role of marketing communications in this context is no longer to inform, remind, or persuade but to reach convergence and mutual understanding.

The impact of systems that allow multiple users to work together on the same document or database simultaneously.

Chesbro and Bonsall 1989;

Menon and Varadarajan 1992

The opportunities for social networking and meta-communication are not lost in the new media.

Miles 1991

The role and importance of human action in organisational knowledge and competence.

Orlikowski 2002

These three research streams - relationship marketing, organisational learning, and communication theory - have been seen to exhibit similar and complementary themes and trends in current research work. Their examination has provided a number of key features that could be addressed in the research of communications activities, organisational relationships, and performance outcomes. They also provide the bases for applying a more holistic approach to such research, which we will define in the following section as a market-based approach.

### Implications of a Market-Based Approach to Understanding Communication and Teamworking

In order to clarify the implications for researchers in adopting the approach we have outlined, we will next summarise the key issues our suggested research topics raise. In addition we will explore, using an example, how future research might take account of the observations we have made. Our example is taken from our observations and conversations with managers at one of Europe's largest telecoms organisations, British Telecom (BT). This company, which supplies telecoms products and services throughout the UK and Europe, commands a unique capability in information and communications technology. They combine carrier-grade telecommunications engineering and leading-edge network design, information technology system and application development skills with extensive expertise in business consulting and human factors in information technology use. Research and development project team membership combines both

technically skilled product developers and non-technical experts (such as education or human-computer interaction experts). The team members in the teams we observed were typically non co-located, and the use of computer-mediated communication technologies in establishing working relationships and facilitating work tasks was key to their working practices. In particular, we focus upon the experiences of one project team, Project Lingo (to preserve confidentiality we have not used its real name). This project team aimed to develop in the first instance specific applications for their BT client's needs that could later be developed into more generic market offerings. The aim of our research at BT was to develop a better understanding of how project requirement specifications could be communicated and understood by team members to improve new product development results. The communication and teamworking experiences of the Project Lingo team proved a rich source of data and significantly informed the views we have expressed as our research topics in this paper.

Communication, Relationships, and Team Performance Looking firstly at the role of communication in relationship formation and relationship and team outcomes, we can identify a number of issues that relate to our earlier research topics. An increase in multi-site location of working teams was reported by a number of managers at BT. Both the size and geographical location of their communication networks (those individuals with whom they are likely to maintain regular communications) has tended to grow. Often the growth in size was attributed to role changes, with employees having stepped into more managerial roles. They were therefore experiencing an increase in the number of people with whom they needed to communicate. The increase in dispersed geographical location of working teams' members was attributed to the increased need for specialist expertise, the continual ebb and flow of members into and out of project teams, and the ability of the new communications media to allow multi-site working. Not only does this impose a geographical (and time) distance on organisational team members, but as one manager stated: "This concept of distance is not geographic distance, it is one of separation. Ideally everyone would be located together but it can not happen." Not only did we note this psychological notion of separation in non co-located teams, but we also observed interesting trends in the dynamics of those who were in fact co-located. Many of those who were physically located in the same office were in fact working on different project teams, and so there might be little or no sense of commonality between those physically located together as opposed to those working on a project with remote colleagues via electronic communication. Thus, team members may be more fully embedded in their "virtual" project team than in their "physical" office setting.

When considering the centrality of communication to relationship formation and management (Topic 1), and its link to team performance (Topic 4), there was a need for us to examine the role of computer-mediated versus face-to-face communications for facilitating teamworking. Findings in empirical research have shown that teams are more effective in divergent thinking tasks (such as information sharing) when communicating is done anonymously, and convergent thinking tasks (resolving conflict or reaching consensus) when communicating face-to-face (DeSanctis and Monge 1998). Supporting this, we found that BT managers felt that meetings were seen as necessary for establishing team identity. As one manager in Project Lingo commented "...most of us

use the new media very fluently, but there is still a cultural attachment to getting together physically in a room like this in the company." Other BT teams did express their frustration at the difficulty in establishing communication structures and patterns in new teams. Their experience was that it often took a very long time to get everyone on the team communicating with each other. On Project Lingo, they found establishing communication to be vital: "What we found was that we had to use all of these media, we used absolutely everything and in lots of different ways until we finally got into a groove where things were working. We had quite an extensive design period, just getting into each others heads was quite tricky, what with team members coming from different cultures; the customer's organisation versus BT. But eventually we got to a point where things started to happen, and that was the result of a lot of hard work and laying foundations in terms of building relationships and trust. That transformed itself into straightforward natural use of email conferencing and so on."

It was the importance placed upon communication as a central integrative activity in relationship formation and management that distinguished the activities observed in the Project Lingo team. By focusing on how internal communication within the team could be facilitated, and how different cultures could be integrated to enhance organisational learning from each other, the Project Lingo team was able to translate customer requirements into operational activities more quickly and effectively than the comparable project teams at BT which we observed. Researchers examining communication and teamworking should consider the centrality of communication to relationship formation and management (Topic 1), and its link to team performance (Topic 4), to be important features of their research design. This is because they may help explain the coordination mechanisms developed between network partners and the resulting impact upon team performance.

In linking communication activities and customer value creation (Topic 3), and linking communication strategy and context to team performance (Topic 5), the ability to include customer thinking and feedback in team activities was recognised as vital. In particular, managers at BT valued the ability to use informal and interactive computer-mediated communication media (such as groupware) to "cycle around" issues and reach an understanding of customer needs more quickly than might have been possible with more traditional communication channels. One Project Lingo team member found the use of communication technologies particularly powerful: "It was quite productive. It has become clear to us, at the review of the project, that some of the mechanisms that we were keen on at BT (i.e. storyboards) were an unnecessary step in a certain sense. The web by its nature is quite a reasonable platform for ideas to be implemented in a quick and rough fashion. People can see what it is like and modify it accordingly. It is quite a nice prototyping platform in itself. In the end it became the single most important capability we had for communicating. What we tended to do is to build something quick and rough, show the customer, they would make suggestions, and we were able to turn things around fairly quickly. I think it is in the spirit of rapid application development that the web is so pervasive now. It is fairly simple; you can imagine doing this for a whole variety of circumstances. To be able to put ideas on a page, link pages together, and have a communication infrastructure round that allows you to talk things through."

By understanding how to match communication strategy (e.g., the use of frequent and informal modes of communication) with channel conditions (e.g., the level of trust developed within the team) the Project Lingo team members at BT were able to focus upon developing a better understanding of the goals of the customer. By concentrating less upon formal and more upon informal communication processes at key developmental stages in the project they were able to - as one Project Lingo team member put it - "capture the thinking of the customer." In fact, for Project Lingo team members the impression such communication media could give was that: "...on a good day they [the customer] will feel like part of the same team." The implication for researchers examining communication and teamworking would be that linking communication activities and customer value creation (Topic 3), and linking communication strategy and context to team performance (Topic 5), could be important features of their research design, as they may help to explain how to align organisational communication styles and structures better to the needs of the communication network in which communicators are embedded.

In summary, the implications for researchers of these four suggested research topics include a need to focus upon communication activities as a core element of relationship research, and to note how communication may be linked to performance outcomes such as customer value creation. In order to explore issues in computer-mediated communication media use in particular, researchers may need to develop a typology of computer-mediated communication media which focuses not only on the media characteristics themselves, but upon broader aspects of computer-mediated communication media use. Such aspects might include: organisational or usage contexts; group goals, processes and outcomes; and decision-making. Finally, most individuals will be part of several different (but often overlapping) networks. Identifying and establishing the boundaries that define the embeddedness of an individual within a network is likely to be critical in future research.

**Taking a Network Perspective** A number of our research topics refer to the role and importance of a network perspective in understanding communication and teamworking. Topic 2 suggested that relationships be viewed in the context of networks. In Topic 7 we state the need to focus upon the social effects and relationships among individuals within networks, and Topic 9 stressed the importance of convergence and mutual understanding as the key role of communication in networks.

As we stated earlier in this paper, the notion of closeness and distance between team members has tended to move away from a physically based perception to one that is psychologically based. Team members may be more fully embedded in their "virtual" project team - those with whom they interact on project tasks - rather than in their "physical" office setting. Thus, network contexts and the coordination mechanisms that help network partners to interact become important considerations in teamworking. They also have significant impacts upon organisational operations and boundaries. The impact of network opportunities and threats upon organisations was observed by one BT manager, who stated that: "I think what is really exciting, but also a huge threat to larger

organisations such as BT, is that it is possible for small organisations to come together now. You get the skills that you need wherever they are. You can build up things which are very powerful, and that is destabilising for a lot of organisations and institutions." Thus, viewing relationships in the context of networks allows us to focus not only on the opportunities which enhanced coordination between network partners offers, but also to consider the threats presented by new and competing network structures.

The need to focus upon the social effects and relationships among network members is another of our key topics. There has been a plea by communication theory researchers to recognise the reciprocal effects of computer-mediated communication behaviour on its social context, and to consider definitions of social context that include multiple levels of analysis (Fulk, Schmitz, and Schwarz 1991: 8; Hiltz and Turoff 1993: 489). DeSanctis (1993) highlighted a number of missing elements in existing theory related to information technology based group support systems which include: the recognition of the importance of socio-emotive communication in group functioning; the influence of group norms and values in information processing by groups; the diverse nature of group membership; and the issue of individual freedom versus managerial control and power. Thus, theory development that focuses upon the need to include the mutually dependent forces of personal freedom and collective action and the role of computer technology in this dependency would be welcome. In relation to the individual, one Project Lingo team member commented that; "The media is a great leveller. You can be communicating with people and everyone comes over as being equal in status." However, this same team member expressed cynicism about the tendency to involve the customer extensively in all team communications. Communication content and context needs to drive organisational team communication activities. For example, one manager referred to early experiments with structured messaging systems as "fascist software." This was the result of the tendency in the software to implement automated messaging to team members requiring the next action in a pre-determined work process. The resistance to such communication style and structure was mighty.

Much of the research in relationship marketing has focused upon relationship dyads (the buyer and the seller) rather than social networks. Where social networks have been examined (as in much of the IMP group's research), communication has rarely appeared as a key construct. Where communication has been examined, it has not been related to communication activities such as computer-mediation. We see a need for an approach that takes into account the variables that influence interactions between parties and relates them to the process of communication in exchange. There has also been a call for the coherent integration of effects at the group and individual level in the study of the social construction of communication technology use (Fulk 1993: 945). This paper utilises extensive prior work in theory generation in distribution channel management and business-to-business relationship building, but extends its reach beyond simple relationship dyads to the social networks that exist in organisational teams, and relates this to the communication patterns and communication styles of individuals in these social networks. The interplay of individual and group dynamics was recognised by one Project Lingo team member who commented that: "Sometimes people have political positions to defend, command has to be distant, so the use of groupware will only work

where you can have openness. When the work is going well it is nice to have that open and free flow of information. When things start getting nasty and you can not deliver then you end up having to adopt a more formal approach to the customer and to manage their expectations."

At BT the impact of network membership, at both a group and an individual level, was clearly having a profound effect upon how teams worked and how the organisation functioned. One Project Lingo team member commented that: "People will be more and more project related; they will come into a project, work on it, and move off. People will be more and more project-based rather than organisationally based. When I first came to BT most of the communication was organisationally based. Now we are working on matrix projects and projects now are more and more complex. They require a different range of skills, so you have to deal with more and more parts of the organisation to get a project done. Hierarchy does not mean a great amount except that at the end of the year you sit down and have your appraisal with your boss." These changes have led to a shift in emphasis in communication from the desire to inform, remind, or persuade to one that focuses upon building a mutual understanding between team members. The importance of clear and relevant team goals, and the willingness to place such goal setting at the heart of team working, was expressed by one Project Lingo team member: "They [team goals] were not explicit at the beginning, but it did not take long before they were fairly clear. The goal has to be a compelling one, it can not be just any one, and it has to be exciting to the participants. If it was a goal that was pedestrian then a lot of the people around here would find it hard to be motivated. The key attributes are simplicity and specificity in setting goals. The important thing about customer involvement [in setting team goals] was that it was ongoing."

The implication for researchers examining communication and teamworking would be that viewing relationships in the context of networks (Topic 2), focusing upon the social effects and relationships among individuals within networks (Topic 7), and stressing the importance of convergence and mutual understanding as the key role of communication in networks (Topic 9), could be important features of their research design. These topics may also help explain how better to align organisational communication styles and structures to the needs of the communication network in which communicators are embedded. They imply a need for researchers to incorporate a network perspective into research design. This may include the need to explore and relate data from different levels of analysis (e.g., embedding individuals within teams and/or teams within organisations). Incorporating a network perspective may also influence the choice of methodologies utilised in such research, such as the inclusion of network analysis (Knoke and Kuklinski 1982). For researchers these topics also imply that convergence and mutual understanding may need to be viewed within a networked perspective.

**Organisational Learning and Communication** We previously highlighted the link between organisational learning and communication activities. In Topic 6 we draw attention to the importance of cross-functional teamworking and coordination to organisational learning. In relation to teamworking and coordination, in Topic 8 we stress the need to move to a

mutually causal (or cybernetic) model of communication activities that recognises that communication is not a result of one-way mechanistic causation.

As relationship marketing strategies require a long-term focus from firms, information technology will play a vital role in the coordination of these cross-functional teams both within and between firms. This role will also include the establishment of a corporate memory in relation to customers that may be accessed by management to facilitate relationship development and maintenance, and improve requirements specifications and product development. When asked about what made the Project Lingo team different than other project teams he had experienced at BT, the team leader replied: "What we had on this team was a very clearly defined core team, very powerful informal communication mechanisms, very clear objectives and we stayed with the project; from one week to another we could see it growing and improving. We had a record of that in the groupware." In other words, the groupware provided both a platform for, and a record of, the cross-functional teamworking and coordination activities of the group. This ability to follow the project as it grew and evolved facilitated their organisational learning. It also illustrated to team members how their communication styles both reflected and influenced their organisational team interactions.

The role and importance of all forms of communication as a way of establishing common understanding between team members was expressed by one Project Lingo manager: "If I was going to do something like this in the future I would make sure that all the communications and stuff we use now were implemented right from day one, on a must-have basis. The other element is that you must have meetings with people regularly, electronic communication in itself is not the be all and end all." However, a darker side to this easily and widely available information flow was noted by other BT managers. Many of them struggle with the "inclusive" communication culture in which they may be included in ever increasing volumes of email information, and as a result feel that they cannot assimilate it all. As one manager put it, when asked about his strategy for dealing with information overload: "...Morphine and alcohol! I have gone from a person who found it hard to throw things away to someone who will junk things quite easily." Gaining control over information dissemination in dispersed teams was recognised as a real issue, or as one manager put it - "the challenge of the next decade."

Another important aspect of organisational learning and communication activities could be the way in which organisations utilise technology in managing organisational knowledge and learning. Organisational learning and knowledge management relies upon two distinct activities: creating new knowledge and knowledge re-use (Ballantyne 2000). In activities that focus upon knowledge generation and knowledge circulation between team members, creating new knowledge and facilitating cross-functional teamworking becomes a primary activity. This was very much the case with information technology use to support teams in BT, where web-based discussion groups devoted to technical issues or problems were common in the organisation. Their primary knowledge management activity was often to capture the expertise within product development processes, but they admitted they were less expert at retaining this knowledge in an accessible format for future use by a wider audience. Knowledge gained from these

discussion lists often stopped with the individual participant. While the desirability for co-location of Project Lingo team members was clearly expressed by many of them, in practice it could not take place. To circumvent this the Project Lingo team leader instigated regular face-to-face workshops supported by the use of common groupware to allow communications to be shared between team members and the customer and to establish a history of the conversations that took place. This provided what one team member called a complete rationale of the project, something he felt was in fact very useful to its success. As the team leader commented, "The opening up of communications has been one of the best things about the way we worked. It sometimes got a little unfocused; some messages would have a lot of replies. We kept it focused in our bi-weekly meetings." This opening up of communication between team members shifted communication structures away from the traditional models of predominantly linear and hierarchical communication channels to a cybernetic, or mutually causal, model of communication. Whilst this had the benefit of openness, the need to retain focus and the importance of interpersonal communication via face-to-face meetings presented challenges to the team leader.

The implication for researchers examining communication and teamworking would be that recognising the importance of cross-functional teamworking and coordination to organisational learning (Topic 6), and that communication is not a result of one-way mechanistic causation (Topic 8), could be important features of their research design. These topics may help explain how better to translate partner and customer requirements into operational activities to meet those requirements. In summary, the implications for researchers of these topics include the need to understand both the positive and negative impacts of cross-functional communication in examining organisational learning.

## Conclusions

Not only does the approach we have outlined allow managers to develop a better understanding of the role and impact of organisational team communications, it highlights the importance of linking the organisation's internal communications (between employees) to its external communications (with partners, suppliers, and customers). By adopting a network perspective that places communication behaviour within a larger context, we can broaden our understanding of communication influences beyond the confines of the individual team member. We can focus attention on the social effects and the relationships among individuals within communication networks. We feel that there is a need to modify existing perspectives to account for this interconnectedness, and to undertake research streams and develop conceptual models that may help to develop new theory in this area. By identifying and examining the marketing impact of communication network activities, organisations can begin to understand how communication behaviour affects business performance. For example, does the frequency of communication between project team members influence the perceived quality of their products or services in the marketplace? If so, how might an organisation encourage greater frequency of communication within project teams? Should communication in project teams include outside parties or partners such as suppliers, customers, and clients? If so,

would expanding the communication network in this way affect the behaviour of the participants and its operation?

Organisation theory has always been concerned with the processes of communication, coordination, and control. The nature and effectiveness of these processes are changed when advanced information technologies are employed (Huber 1990). In examining team productivity and effectiveness in organisations, we can see that both technology and context affect team outcomes through their influence on the structuring processes by which these outcomes are produced (Poole and DeSanctis 1990). The structuring process is of direct relevance in the building of a market-driven organisational culture. If communication technologies are misused or ill-used, either because of technical inadequacies or social group norms, marketing managers face serious problems. These include concerns over privacy in communications with consumers and end users, and concerns over trust, reciprocity, and equity in communications with employees, partners and suppliers.

We have seen how research and theory often fails to elaborate the reciprocal effects of communication behaviour on its social context. This limits our knowledge and oversimplifies the interaction of social context and communication behaviour (Fulk, Schmitz, and Steinfield 1990). By contrast, the concept of communication networks has had a positive and important effect on the way we understand organisations. The network perspective provides an opportunity to examine how micro level appropriation processes (those of individual users) influences the macro level adoption of computer-mediated communication technology by the team. Communication within and between organisations therefore influences directly activities related to marketing effectiveness. For example, marketing managers must relate consumer needs and project development operations effectively if they are to succeed in developing new and profitable offerings in the marketplace. This places the communication activities of organisational teams and their impact on team effectiveness, at the heart of a firm's market-driven behaviour. Understanding how to develop market-driven behaviour in organisational teams (including geographically dispersed project development teams whose communication is often dependent upon computer-mediated communication technologies) would improve managerial and corporate effectiveness greatly. Utilising a market-based approach in the research of such issues should facilitate this understanding.