had an effect on the bottom line. "With all our assumptions about the relationship between communication competence and success shown to be uncertain at best, we were forced to go back to the drawing board in search of a new perspective on the data we had collected so far."

If clear communication strategies and effective tools don't make the difference, what aspects of communication are common to successful organizations? Researchers were able to isolate these **characteristics shared by successful companies**:

1. **Clarity of purpose**. They tend to **focus on a few key messages and constantly reinforce them**. Leaders are consistent in their messages and ensure that everyone understands reasons for initiatives, changes. "One change program was successful with managers and workers who would be directly affected, but failed to reach the secondary audience of support workers. The confused picture they had formed of the company's intentions affected their ability to support the reorganized teams."

2. **Effective interfaces** between leaders and employees, managers and direct reports, within teams, and even between the business and its customers. In a business with effective interfaces, **employees can ask for information and receive honest, useful answers**. "A retailer we studied was highly successful in its culture change program, partly because it arranged for both formal and informal interactions to achieve its goals. It planned events such as brainstorming groups, training workshops and feedback sessions as well as setting up informal support networks."

3. **Information sharing**. Systems and networks must enable managers and employees to **have the right info at the right time** to do their jobs, to share opinions and discuss ideas, to circulate best practices and learn from each other. "Several companies successfully addressed this issue through a mixture of formal structures such as knowledge sharing databases and print campaigns and informal initiatives, such as networking events and job-swap schemes."

4. **Consistent communication behavior of leaders**. Their actions must support the "business story." And **leaders must be good communicators themselves, so they can tell the story convincingly**. "One re-engineering project failed to engage employees, despite the efforts made to create debate and dialogue and share information. Employees identified the chief executive's inconsistent communication as one of the main reasons it was difficult to maintain focus and interest in the project."

(More from IABC, 415-544-4700 or visit www.iabc.com.)

WHO'S WHO IN PUBLIC RELATIONS

ELECTED. IABC Research Foundation, 2001-02 chair, Tamara Gillis, Ed.D., ABC. First educator to fill the role of chairwoman of the Foundation. Gillis has served IABC as a local chapter leader, district leader, student chapter advisor, international leader on the executive board and executive committee, trustee of the Research Foundation, and volunteer on many committees. Gillis is associate professor of communication at Elizabethtown College (Pa) where she teaches, courses in public relations, journalism, visual communication, civic journalism and international communication.

John Clemons, ABC, APR, from vice chrm 2000-01 to chairman 2001-02. Clemons is vp, internal communication at Nextel Communications (Reston, Va). He was director of internal communication for Ameritech in Chicago, and before that, vp of internal communication for Marriott International.

pr reporter

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AS CONSUMER PRIVACY BECOMES THE NEW HOT ISSUE – ARE YOU DOING ENOUGH *NOW* TO PREVENT FUTURE BACKLASH?

The consumer privacy issue is heating up. **It is a major issue that is expected to result in legislative action unless business takes responsible and *meaningful* action.**

The marketplace can be trusted to develop voluntary privacy policies, believe the Bush administration and Richard Purcell, Microsoft's chief privacy officer. 66% of companies have privacy policies, shows a May 1999 survey by the Federal Trade Commission but *Business Week* (March 20, 2000) calls them a sham. Several opinion surveys demonstrate high public concern, but also some inconsistencies that suggest the public is more flexible on the subject than surveys seem to indicate.

POLLS INDICATE SUPPORT FOR NEW PRIVACY LAWS

71% of Web users favor new laws to protect privacy on the Internet, according to the tenth annual survey of Georgia Tech's highly respected GVU (Graphic, Visualization & Usability Center) "WWW User Survey." 73% are concerned about personal privacy on the Internet, finds a recent poll by *The Wall Street Journal*/Harris Interactive.

An April study commissioned by *American Demographics* indicates that consumers fear:

- businesses or individuals targeting their children – 66% are extremely or very concerned
- bombardment by solicitations – 64% are extremely or very concerned
- private information somehow being used against them (58%), and over half fear that if they disclose private information, they'll be robbed or cheated, or their identity will be stolen.

Arthur Page's 1920's warning still rings true: *Organizations must conduct themselves today as if they are to be held accountable under the standards of decades hence.*

The question today is: Are organizations doing enough now to protect consumer privacy so that in the future they won't be accused of having done too little? Issue anticipation teams are good venues for identifying problem areas, seeking solutions. **"Constraint removal" is the goal** – how do we make it easy for customers to protect their privacy with us?

Alan Westin, a legal scholar and privacy consultant who has written extensively about privacy, calls the latter "anti-victimization" fears, because they hinge on physical or financial harm. He has also identified two other fears:

1. "anti-manipulation" fears – "Companies will manipulate my behavior with the information they collect."
2. "anti-intrusion" fears – "Don't call me in the middle of dinnertime."

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WHAT'S CONSIDERED PRIVATE? The top five items of personal information people are most sensitive about are credit card number, social security number, home phone number, home address and health information. "Consumers are far less concerned about protecting their shopping habits than they are about keeping safe basic socioeconomic information," observes *American Demographic*. Only 9% consider brand preferences private. An interesting item: Women care less than men do about their food preferences, but are much more protective of body weight information.

INCONSISTENCY OF CONSUMER ATTITUDES SUGGESTS POSSIBILITIES OF TRADE-OFFS Consumers are contradictory in their attitudes. Despite their protestations about invasion of privacy, only 30% of respondents to a Yankelovich survey say they have asked to have their names removed from junk mailings, and only 24% have requested their phone numbers be removed. Another inconsistency: people say they hate telemarketing, yet they pony up their credit card number for the chance to win millions.

Privacy appears not to be an absolute demand; it is negotiable, as the *American Demographic* survey indicates. "More than 1 consumer in 5 is tempted to exchange private information for cash incentives, discounts on purchases, or a free offer, such as Internet access or wireless service." Companies point to other benefits of data collection as well: faster service, easier-to-obtain credit, cost savings, and promotions targeted to the needs of specific customers. Conditions for a trade-off exist – by exchanging personal information for benefits.

RECIPE FOR ACTION Marketers can weigh in most effectively by **communicating to consumers the benefits of providing private information** with business. The GVU survey shows the troubling result that nearly half (44.6%) of respondents do not agree with the statement that "information about users improves the marketing of a site." "It is an article of faith in the business world that the more an organization knows about its customers, the easier it is to service those customers' needs," comments Curtis Frye in his new book, *Privacy-Enhanced Business* (Quorum Books, Westport, Ct.). Public relations professionals acknowledge that knowing the needs and concerns of one's stakeholders is one of the building blocks in establishing healthy relationships. Two other steps also must be taken:

1. **Establish voluntary privacy policies and statements**. Frye concludes his book with the warning: "Rather than fight to the bitter end to resist privacy restrictions, companies should take their customers' expectations, plus their power to enforce those expectations, into account and build personally identifiable information protection practices into their everyday operations." In so doing, companies should **consider some form of consumer participation** – what advocates of the relationship model in public relations call "mutuality of control." It is doubtful that trust can otherwise be established.

2. **Install privacy officers**. Many companies have responded to the privacy issue by creating the position of chief privacy officer. AmExpress, AT&T, Citigroup and Prudential Insurance are among the 200-300 US companies that have done so. The **number will likely grow to several thousand within a couple of years**, says Alan Westin, founder of the Association of Corporate Privacy Officers. (Germany already has 2,000 data-protection officers).

DOES YOUR NPO REALLY NEED AN ADVISORY COMMITTEE?

Don't just organize an advisory committee for your nonprofit organization because others have one or because it looks good. Susan Ellis, president of Energize, a Philadelphia-based training, publishing and consulting firm specializing in volunteerism, lists **ten questions you should ask**. The most important fall into two areas:

1. **Its purpose**: "Do you want advice, decision-making, hands-on help or enhanced public image?" Ask whether anyone in your organization really wants advice. The committee's name might be indicative; e.g., don't use the word "board" if governance is not intended. And if you can't list the specific short-term goals or tasks you need to accomplish, you don't need an advisory body.

2. **Its membership and tasks**: Which constituencies do you want represented and why? How will they be selected? What is their "job description"?

Ellis also asks other questions: How will the committee operate? How often will it meet? What form will communications with members take? Will all discussions be held in group meetings? Will minutes/reports be expected, and by whom?

TO BE EFFECTIVE, COMMUNICATION MUST BE WEDDED TO KNOWLEDGE OF THE BUSINESS, FINDS IABC STUDY

To be worth their salt, communicators must have knowledge of an organization's business, finds a study from the International Association of Business Communicator's Research Foundation. The Foundation commissioned management consultants Deloitte and Touche to conduct the research, which was released at IABC's national convention in June. "The study found that the level of competence in communication does not affect business success unless those efforts are directed at the critical business function," says D&T's David Clutterbuck.

CHALLENGE FOR COMMUNICATORS No matter how good the design, planning and implementation of a communication initiative, or how competent the communicators, **all is for naught if it's not tied to the business strategy**. "This poses a challenge for communicators – many are viewed as deliverers of tactical results, and therefore not always provided with the opportunity to prove their worth by supporting the business' goals at a strategic level," says Clutterbuck. An earlier IABC/Watson Wyatt study found that just over half of high-performing companies have "well-defined communication strategies that allow employees to understand better their organization's business goals. Which means, puzzlingly, almost half of high-performing companies do not have such a strategy."

CORE COMPETENCIES NOT LINKED TO BUSINESS SUCCESS A review of existing literature and queries of groups of communicators revealed four core competencies: 1) strategic communication planning; 2) effective management of communication activity; 3) experience/ability/skills of communicators; 4) high quality communication and media tools. Researchers compared these with an in-depth study of ten global companies. "When it came to finding correlation between these core competencies and business success, we drew a blank," said Clutterbuck. And it didn't seem to matter whether that company exhibited best practice in communication or relied on the rumor-mill. Neither