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Communicator style as a predictor of rhetorical sensitivity

Karen L. McCormick
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Communicator style as a predictor of rhetorical sensitivity

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COMMUNICATOR STYLE AS A PREDICTOR
OF RHETORICAL SENSITIVITY

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of Communication Studies
San Jose State University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

By

Karen L. McCormick

December, 1990

APPROVED FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNICATION STUDIES

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ABSTRACT

COMMUNICATOR STYLE AS A PREDICATOR OF RHETORICAL SENSITIVITY

by Karen L. McCormick

This thesis addresses the topic of communicator style as a predictor of rhetorical sensitivity. It was the purpose of this study to determine if a relationship exists between supervisors' self-reported rhetorical sensitivity scores and their communicator styles as perceived by their subordinates. In addition, the gender of the supervisor was analyzed to determine if it had any effect on the supervisors' self-reported rhetorical sensitivity scores and their communicator styles as perceived by their subordinates.

Results indicated that three variables emerged as the best predictors of rhetorical sensitivity. Those variables were dramatic, animated, and impression leaving. The results also revealed that the gender of the supervisor had no significant effect on the relationship between their RHETSEN scores and their perceived communicator styles.

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CHAPTER I

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Introduction

Effective communication between management and their subordinates is a critical factor in the success of an organization. Researchers have stated that management and communication are intertwined. This stresses the importance of communication skills in management positions. Workers rely on supervisors or management personnel for direction and guidance in work-related activities. Those same supervisors or management personnel must also exchange information with other members of management. Likewise, bosses need to be kept informed of the progress of work units, and customers need to be contacted. To meet these expectations, supervisors must communicate effectively.

Recent research in the area of organizational communication suggests that communication is what managers do. It is the essence of managerial work. Timm (1986) states that "all levels of management must be involved in optimizing organizational communication" (p. 34). He further indicates that consultants should be used when necessary but ultimately success will lie with increased

understanding, commitment, and effort on the part of the working members of the organization.

One approach that supervisors may consider in trying to improve their communication skills is adopting the attitude of rhetorical sensitivity. Rhetorical sensitivity can be defined as an attitude which involves thinking about what is to be said and deciding how to say it (Hart, Carlson, & Eadie, 1980). Hart and Burks (1972) describe the rhetorically sensitive person as an "undulating, fluctuating entity, always unsure, always guessing, continually weighing" (p. 91). The rhetorically sensitive person is an individual who takes into consideration the person with whom he or she is communicating, the topic being addressed, and the communication situation before responding.

In addition to rhetorical sensitivity, the communicator style of a supervisor may have an effect on his or her communication skills. Communicator style is defined as the way in which one verbally and paraverbally interacts to signal how literal meaning should be taken, interpreted, filtered, or understood (Norton, 1977). While rhetorical sensitivity is an attitudinal measure, communicator style represents a behavioral measure. This research was designed to investigate whether a relationship exists between rhetorical sensitivity and perceived communicator styles in terms of first-line supervisors.

A review of the literature indicates that substantial research has been done regarding rhetorical sensitivity and communicator style. The remainder of this chapter will review how each of the variables involved in this study has been defined and operationalized.

Review of the Literature on Rhetorical Sensitivity

Communication scholars are continually seeking ways in which individuals can improve upon their communication skills. One possible approach to this improvement, that has been under study, is that of adopting the attitude of rhetorical sensitivity. Rhetorical sensitivity is defined as an attitude which involves thinking about what is to be said and deciding how to say it (Hart, Carlson, & Eadie, 1980, p. 2).

Hart and Burks (1972) refer to rhetorical sensitivity as an instrumental approach to communication in contrast to an expressive approach. They define an expressive style as a way in which to vent or express one's own feelings, and an instrumental style as a way in which one can achieve or move toward a goal. The concept of rhetorical sensitivity, according to researchers, is directly associated with the instrumental approach, as the ultimate goal of the rhetorically sensitive person is to communicate in a manner

which will facilitate human understanding and effect social cohesion.

According to Hart, Carlson, and Eadie (1980), there are five parts of the rhetorically sensitive attitude:

1. **Acceptance of Personal Complexity:** The rhetorical perspective supports the idea that a person is a complex network of selves. According to this view, there is no single real self.

2. **Avoidance of Communicative Rigidity:** The rhetorically sensitive person views arbitrary social conventions and rigid adherence to rhetorical norms as distasteful.

3. **Interaction Consciousness:** The rhetorically sensitive person is constantly concerned with interpersonal aspects of communication.

4. **Appreciation of the Communicability of Ideas:** The rhetorically sensitive person realizes that not all feelings should be communicated.

5. **Tolerance for Inventional Searching:** The rhetorically sensitive person realizes that there are many different ways of making an idea clear. There is a great deal of intellectual work involved in examining how feelings should be made known.

Hart and Burks (1972) state "the rhetorically sensitive person deals with the most slippery of intellectual stuff,

the values, the attitudes, the philosophical predispositions of others" (p. 91). They go on to state that once the communicator understands and appreciates the complexities of people, in an interpersonal situation, social cohesion is possible.

In addition to the five parts of the rhetorically sensitive attitude previously mentioned, Hart and Burks (1972) offer five characteristics of rhetorical sensitivity:

1. Tries to accept role-taking as part of the human condition.
2. Attempts to avoid stylized verbal behavior.
3. Is characteristically willing to undergo the strain of adaptation.
4. Seeks to distinguish between all information and information acceptable for communication.
5. Tries to understand that an idea can be rendered in multi-form ways.

According to Hart and Burks (1972), the rhetorically sensitive person is someone who characterizes himself or herself as an "undulating, fluctuating entity, always unsure, always guessing, continually weighing" (p. 91).

Adaptability, on the part of the communicator, is an important factor in terms of rhetorical sensitivity. Darnell and Brockriede (1976) help to place or categorize rhetorical sensitivity theoretically and to distinguish it

from its potential rivals. They suggest the rhetorically sensitive person is better understood when contrasted to "noble selves" as well as "rhetorical reflectors". Noble selves are described as individuals who view any variation from their personal norms as hypocritical, as a denial of integrity, as a cardinal sin. Rhetorical reflectors are described as individuals who have no self of their own; they value the other over the self in interaction. These individuals present a new self for each different person and situation. Rhetorical sensitivity, according to the authors, seeks to moderate these two extremes.

Ward, Bluman, and Dauria (1982) attempt to identify the assumptions underlying the concept of rhetorical sensitivity and examine how these assumptions extend the traditional rhetorical thought of earlier researchers. They offer the following rhetorical assumptions they feel are a major aspect in the understanding of the concept of rhetorical sensitivity:

1. Rhetorical communication is goal-directed. Speakers create messages that will influence audiences to respond in particular ways.
2. Members of audiences are active participants. They make decisions about the messages they receive.
3. Situations impose constraints on communication to which speakers must adapt.

4. The rhetorical situation is based on probability. Speakers and audiences are concerned with the contingent rather than the certain.

5. Speakers engage in rhetorical invention. Speakers consider their goals, the audience, and their speaking situation when making decisions about what to say and how to say it.

6. Speakers adapt their verbal behavior to the audience as well as the situation. This process takes place when they are engaged in rhetorical invention as well as when they are in the actual speaking situation.

Ward, Bluman, and Dauria (1982) proposed these six underlying assumptions in an attempt to more distinctly clarify Hart and Burks' (1972) concept of rhetorical sensitivity. The authors also felt that their essay would provide scholars with fresh insights into interpersonal communication.

While Hart and Burks (1972) focus on achieving effective relational communication with an individual other, they are limiting their scope to the transferring of these assumptions into everyday interpersonal communication situations. Ward, Bluman, and Dauria (1982) extend their ideas beyond the traditional thought of rhetorical sensitivity by presenting the concept of the audience as a unique group of decision-making individuals who are aware of

self as well as the speaker, the situation, and the circumstances. The authors' six assumptions are projected to serve as a useful tool by allowing individuals to assess the rhetorical effectiveness of interpersonal communication by first determining whether communicators deal with each other as unique individuals actively engaged in decision-making (p. 194). In addition, "we are enabled to judge the rhetorical choices communicators make not in terms of simple logical probabilities, but in terms of the adaptive fit of the rhetorical selves and the roles that are invented as communicators build relationships" (Ward, Bluman, & Dauria, 1982, p. 194).

In addition to interpersonal communication, small group communication researchers have indicated an interest in rhetorical sensitivity. Phillips, Pederson, and Wood (1979) suggest that rhetorical sensitivity is an important factor in the effectiveness of group discussion. These authors provide five basic attitudes that reflect a "sensitive" person:

1. I am aware of your existence and declare your importance.
2. I believe in what I am saying.
3. We are all going to get something out of this.

4. I am going to take care with what I say so you will understand it, and my reasons for saying it, in your own terms.

5. There is more to come. There may be more benefit in the future.

Ward (1981) examined the relationship between the rhetorical sensitivity of supervisors and satisfaction of supervisors and subordinates with those supervisors. He found that supervisors' attitudes toward rhetorical sensitivity were dependent on types of organizations and situations. Ward concluded that "it is the situational nature of each organization that determines whether rhetorical sensitivity can be beneficial, negative, or irrelevant to subordinates' satisfaction with their supervisor" (Ward, cited in Rudd, 1985, p. 10).

Kelly (1981) examined account giving, which is defined as an intentional statement that explains the motivation for a particular behavior, from a rhetorical perspective. Although no significant relationship was found between scores on the Rhetorical Sensitivity Measure (RHETSEN) and account giving, Kelly makes the observation that rhetorically sensitive individuals "may be more creative and able to choose less common accounts from a larger repertoire of responses" (p. 30).

In an attempt to develop a measurement for rhetorical sensitivity, Hart, Carlson, and Eadie (1980) utilized Rhetorical Sensitivity (RS), Noble Self (NS), and Rhetorical Reflector (RR) in the development of the RHETSEN scale. Rhetorical sensitivity represented the "middle ground" while noble self and rhetorical reflector represented the two extremes. A study conducted by the researchers in 1978 surveyed 3,023 college students indicated the RHETSEN scale is both a valid and reliable measure of rhetorical sensitivity. This study allowed the authors to compile a demographic profile based on the results of the surveys completed by the students across the nation. This demographic data also allowed the authors to present the following general description of the rhetorically sensitive person. The rhetorically sensitive person is more likely (a) to be male than female, (b) to be academically competitive than noncompetitive, (c) to be richer than poorer, (d) to be from the professional rather than the laboring class, and (e) to be low rather than high in ethnic identification. In addition, the authors concluded that rhetorically sensitive persons are less likely to be Democrats than Republicans or Independents, are not particularly faithful in church attendance, and are unlikely to be conservative Protestants or persons of Afro-Hispanic descent. The overall pattern seems to indicate that the

rhetorical sensitive person is white, middle-class, and in most cases a third generation individual. While the results pointed toward these generalizations, it was also concluded that rhetorical sensitivity was not exclusive to one particular age group, marital status, or geographical section of the country.

Eadie and Paulson (1984) investigated whether communicator style variables could distinguish among three attitudes toward communication: rhetorical sensitivity, noble self, or rhetorical reflector. They also analyzed whether these attitude types would be perceived as being more or less competent depending on situational variables and if competent communication was constituted differently for each of the three attitude types.

Results indicated that noble selves were rated as being more impression leaving, dominant, and less friendly than rhetorical sensitives and rhetorical reflectors. In addition, rhetorical sensitives and rhetorical reflectors were distinguished from each other in terms of degrees of perceived competence among situations and in terms of the style variables that were seen as contributing to perceptions of communicative competence. The results of this study show great support for the idea that adaptability is an important characteristic of rhetorical sensitivity.

Eadie and Powell (1988) analyzed the role of rhetorical sensitivity in persuasive communication situations. This study examined the way in which persuasive strategies were used by persons who had been identified as holding rhetorical sensitive, noble self, and rhetorical reflector orientations toward interpersonal rhetoric. Results indicated that a style of persuasion is likely to be associated with each orientation, partially in the way strategies were selected, but also in the ways in which they were used differently in the actual situations. The results indicated that orientations toward communication influence the way in which persuasive situations are perceived and enacted.

The understanding of rhetorical sensitivity may be an important factor in the organizational communication realm that may enhance understanding and cohesion. Studies indicate that individuals who perceive themselves as rhetorically sensitive are, quite often, perceived by others as being more effective in their communication. Research has been done linking or relating the concept of rhetorical sensitivity to interpersonal, organizational, and small group communication. Much of this research has been done by explaining and setting parameters for the concept leaving a great need and desire for studies that will examine the relationship of rhetorical sensitivity to other variables.

An attempt to determine the relationships to other variables may give further attention to specific behaviors and attitudes in a variety of situations and settings.

Review of the Literature on Communicator Style

"Communicator style is broadly conceived to mean the way one verbally and paraverbally interacts to signal how literal meaning should be taken, interpreted, filtered, or understood" (Norton, 1978, p. 99). Norton goes on to state that communicator style can be operationally defined in terms of ten variables. The variables are dominant, dramatic, contentious, animated, impression leaving, relaxed, attentive, open, friendly, and communicator image.

The dominant communicator is one who tends to take charge of social interactions. Research dictates that the dominant communicator tends to be physically stronger than the persons with whom they are interacting. These individuals also tend to utilize eye contact, congruent body movements, voice loudness, voice modulation, and rate of information in manipulating dominance. Individuals who communicate in a dominant way are viewed as being more confident, forceful, active, competitive, and conceited (Schereer, London, & Wolf, 1973).

Dramatic communicators utilize stories, fantasies, metaphors, rhythm, and voice to highlight the content of

their messages. When communicating in a dramatic way, the speaker often changes or transforms the literal meaning of the message, sometimes without even realizing that this has occurred. Dramatization in communication is used to cope with anxiety, relieve tension, and frequently it is used to increase popularity and self-esteem.

Contentiousness in communication is directly related to the argumentativeness of the communicator. Oftentimes contentiousness is closely associated with the dominant style of communication.

The animated communicator employs physical as well as nonverbal cues in communication. The most common animations being eye contact, facial expressions, and gestures. As with the dramatic communicator, the animated communicator utilizes these behaviors to exaggerate or understate the content of his or her messages.

Impression leaving involves impressions that a communicator makes upon the person with whom they are interacting. It is thought that a communicator who leaves an impression has a memorable style of communicating.

Relaxed, as a style variable, can suggest calmness, peace, confidence, and how comfortable a communicator is in a particular situation.

The attentive communicator is concerned with empathy and assuring the other person involved in the interaction that he or she is being listened to.

The open communicator is an extroverted person—one who is conversational, expansive, outspoken, and approachable. He or she is readily willing to disclose personal information about himself or herself during interaction. This type of communicator is frequently viewed as a trustworthy person.

The friendly communicator can range from an individual who is basically unhostile to one who is very intimate.

Communicator image is related to how an individual views his or her communicative ability. Norton (1978) suggests that a person who has a "good" communicator image finds it easy to interact with others whether they are intimates, friends, acquaintances, or strangers.

Norton (1978) made some predictions about the relationship of the variables. He claimed that three types of analyses could be made based on his measure of communicator style: (a) clustering of variables within a smallest space configuration, (b) determining dimensionality within the structural solution, and (c) locating the "best" predictors of communicator image.

According to his expected relationships, two large clusters should occur in the smallest space configuration.

Dominant, dramatic, animated, contentious, openness, and impression leaving were expected to group together. This group of variables consisted of the "active" communicative behaviors which indicate a strong communicative style. The second cluster would consist of attentive, friendly, and relaxed. These variables fall into the category of being more passive, less talkative, and more receiver oriented.

Norton (1978) states that if the clustering expectations hold true as suggested, the following hypothesis would be supported: "If a person communicates in a style that is dramatic, dominant, animated, open, contentious, and impression leaving, then that person tends not to communicate in a style that is attentive, friendly, and relaxed" (p. 101).

In terms of locating the "best" predictors of communicator style, Norton suggests that dominant and impression leaving are expected to be strongly associated with communicator image. If an individual perceives himself or herself as creating a memorable or visible image, he or she, in most cases, will perceive himself or herself to be a good communicator because he or she was able to affect the person with whom he or she is interacting. As with impression leaving, if an individual is able to interactively control conversations by using dominance in his or her interaction, he or she will often perceive

himself or herself as being a good communicator. This perception of himself or herself is based on the fact that he or she was in control of the situation.

Norton (1978) conducted a study in an attempt to support the structural analysis of the communicator style data in regards to clusters, dimensionality, and predictors. A total of 1,086 student surveys was obtained from introductory communication classes at two universities. Each of these subjects was asked to complete the Communicator Style Measure.

The results of this study showed the independent variables falling into six clusters: Cluster I - impression leaving and communicator image; Cluster II - dramatic and animated; Cluster III - attentive and friendly; Cluster IV - dominant and contentious; Cluster V - relaxed; and Cluster VI - open.

Two dimensions are suggested by this research; the first, anchored by attentive and friendly style components at one end and dominant and contentious style components at the other end, indicates a continuum ranging from nondirective communication behavior to more directive communication behavior. The second dimension appears to be anchored by dramatic and animated at one end and relaxed at the other end.

The results of this study suggested three predictors of communicator image: impression leaving, open, and dominant.

Research in the area of communicator styles prompted Infante and Gorden (1987) to conduct a piece of research analyzing superior and subordinate communication in relation to argumentativeness and communicator styles. Earlier research by these authors emphasized the importance of argumentativeness in superior-subordinate communication because of its ability to satisfy values which are very important to American workers (Infante & Gorden, 1987). The basic premise of their research was that organizations should encourage and nurture employee "independent-mindedness." By utilizing the concept of independent-mindedness, organizations would be allowing freedom of speech by encouraging arguing and discouraging verbal aggression. Arguing involves the ability to present and defend positions on particular issues while trying to refute others' positions. Verbal aggression, on the other hand, involves attacking individuals' self-concepts in order to deliver psychological pain (Infante & Rancer, 1982).

In the past, research has supported assumptions about the positive and constructive nature of an organization which is argumentative rather than verbally aggressive. In one study conducted by Infante and Gorden (1985), subordinates were more satisfied with superiors and the

organization as a whole when superiors were higher in argumentativeness and lower in verbal aggression. Another study documented that subordinates' satisfaction was greater when their superiors encouraged subordinates to argue corporate issues even when the subordinates did not like to argue (Infante, 1981).

Infante and Gorden (1987) conducted a study examining superior and subordinate communication profiles in an attempt to fulfill two purposes. The first purpose was to determine the communicator styles of the superiors and subordinates who were higher in argumentativeness and lower in verbal aggression. The second purpose was to test the idea that argumentativeness produces a positive climate in the realm of organizational communication.

The results of this study indicated that when superiors were perceived as high in verbal aggressiveness and lower in argumentativeness, they were perceived as being unattentive, unfriendly, less favorable in terms of impression leaving, and relaxed. When subordinates were perceived to be verbally aggressive, they were viewed as dramatic, dominant, and to some extent open. When subordinates as well as superiors were perceived to be more argumentative, they tended to be viewed as attentive, animated, relaxed, impression leaving, dominant, and friendly.

Overall, the results of this study indicate that being argumentative is a positive factor in the organizational setting. Subordinates related the argumentativeness of their superior with such communicator styles as friendliness and attentiveness. In addition, the argumentativeness of subordinates was also valued. Superiors related this characteristic with such communicator styles as attentive, animated, relaxed, impression leaving, dominant, and friendly. Argumentativeness appears to be a major force in encouraging independent-mindedness in the organizational atmosphere.

Norton (1978), in the presentation of the Communicator Style Measure, claims that the instrument is a reliable tool in the measurement of communicator style. The basis for the reliability of this measurement is that it remained stable across various samples, situations, and contexts. In addition, the instrument's internal reliability has been established.

The validity of this measurement, according to Norton (1978), has not yet been proven. A major area of concern is that the Communicator Style Measure is a self-report instrument.

Communicator style is dependent upon context, situation, and time. Context refers to the setting, rituals, and expectations. Situation refers to the people

and the purpose of those people within the context. Finally, time can refer to the time of day, the time of year, or the age of the participants. Each of these factors, in some way, influences the styles of communication that individuals utilize.

Research Questions

Research has been conducted linking or relating the concept of rhetorical sensitivity to interpersonal, organizational, and small group communication. A great deal of this research indicates that rhetorical sensitivity may be one possible approach to communication in the organizational realm that may enhance understanding and cohesion.

It was the purpose of this study to determine if the communicator style of a supervisor would predict how rhetorically sensitive he or she is as perceived by his or her subordinates. The following research questions are proposed:

1. Is there a relationship between supervisors' self-reported rhetorical sensitivity scores and their communicator styles as perceived by their subordinates?
2. Will the gender of the supervisor affect the supervisors' self-reported rhetorical sensitivity scores and their communicator styles as perceived by their subordinates?

CHAPTER II

METHODOLOGY

Design

This study investigated the relationship between rhetorical sensitivity and communicator style. The purpose was to determine if the perceived communicator style of a supervisor would predict his or her rhetorical sensitivity.

Elements of communicator style served as the predictors and were measured by the Communicator Style Measure (CSM). Rhetorical sensitivity was measured by the RHETSEN scale.

Measuring Instruments

The RHETSEN scale, developed by Hart, Carlson, and Eadie (1980), was utilized to measure rhetorical sensitivity. This is a forty-item Likert-type scale designed to measure the attitude of rhetorical sensitivity (see Appendix A).

The CSM, developed by Norton (1977), was the instrument utilized to measure communicator style. This measurement is a fifty-one-item Likert-type scale. The scale consists of ten variables. The variables are dominant, dramatic, contentious, animated, impression leaving, relaxed,

attentive, open, friendly, and communicator image (see Appendix B).

Participants

Participants in this study consisted of immediate supervisors and their subordinates selected from four organizations. These four organizations included a county department, an insurance company, a real estate company, and a communication sales company. From each of the organizations, ten immediate supervisors were selected to participate. All supervisors were required to meet the following criteria: (a) they must have been in their present position in terms of title and location of employment for at least one year and (b) the individuals they supervise must be employed in entry-level positions.

Ten subordinates per supervisor were chosen at random by the supervisors' supervisor to complete the CSM scales.

Procedures

The data were collected during the spring of 1989. Each supervisor was given the RHETSEN scale to be completed and returned to the researcher to be scored. Following the collection of the RHETSEN scales, packets containing the Communicator Style Measure were distributed to the supervisors. The supervisors were instructed to distribute the packets to the ten subordinates who were randomly

chosen. Each packet contained instructions on how to complete the scale and where to return the scales when completed (see Appendix C). After all possible packets were collected, 30 supervisors met the criteria noted earlier. CSM scales were completed by 229 subordinates.

Analysis of Data

The RHETSEN and the Communicator Style Measure were scored following the instructions and procedures outlined by their originators (see Appendix D). The RHETSEN, a self-report instrument, was given to ten supervisors in each of the four organizations. The Communicator Style Measure was given to the supervisors' subordinates to obtain their perceptions of the supervisors' communicator style.

The first research question was examined by obtaining bivariate correlations between all possible pairs of the thirteen variables and a Multiple Regression Model to determine the best predictors of rhetorical sensitivity. The second research question was examined by running separate ANOVA's on each of the ten dimensions of the Communicator Style variable and the RHETSEN variable to determine the significance of the supervisors' gender on each. A .05 level of significance was utilized for both research questions.

Limitations

Several limitations need to be addressed when interpreting the results of this study, the first being the small number of subjects included in the study. Although forty supervisors (ten from each organization) were asked to participate, only thirty met the requirements and completed the study.

Another concern of this study involves the validity of the RHETSEN scale. Many researchers have indicated that self-report instruments are not a good measure of a variable. Respondents to these types of instruments have the possibility of displaying inaccurate perceptions of themselves.

Hart, Carlson, and Eadie (1980) have made several attempts to establish the validity of the RHETSEN and are satisfied with their findings. Other researchers such as Carlson (1978), Ward (1981), and Bell and Lui (1982) have utilized the RHETSEN and found it to be a valid measure. Pearson (1981) has expressed her doubts about the validity of the scale. She contends that the RHETSEN is more a measure of assertiveness in communication rather than competence in interpersonal communication. Pearson (1981) also stated that the measure tends to emphasize moderation rather than flexibility.

The construction of the scale may also have an effect on the results. The RHETSEN, which is a 5-point scale, utilizes the midpoint as the optimum choice for each of the 28 items that measure rhetorical sensitivity. Previous researchers have concluded that some individuals have a tendency to select the midpoint regardless of the remaining choices.

Although many researchers have found the RHETSEN to be a valid measure, Pearson's concerns must be addressed.

CHAPTER III

RESULTS

The first research question was: Is there a relationship between supervisors' self-reported rhetorical sensitivity scores and their communicator styles as perceived by their subordinates? Scores for each of the thirteen style variables were entered as predictors while rhetorical sensitivity was treated as a criterion variable in a multiple regression analysis. A final stepwise procedure was performed in which the variables that could explain the most variance were entered. These variables are seen as the most powerful predictors of the dependent variable. Tolerance was set at .05, meaning that if a variable increased explanation by 5% or more, it would be allowed to enter the equation. Of the twelve predictor variables entered, three of them met this criterion. The best predictor was "dramatic" with a partial correlation coefficient of .70. The "animated" style variable produced a coefficient of -.62 and "impression leaving" a coefficient of .46 (see Table 1).

Table 2 summarizes the results of the regression of the three style variables on rhetorical sensitivity. The

variable "dramatic" was entered into the regression on the first step. The overall regression is significant ($R=.50$, $R^2=.25$; $F(2,228)=9.34, p=.005$). The variable "animated" was entered into the regression equation on the second step. The overall regression was significant ($R=.69$, $R^2=.47$; $F(2,228)=12.08, p=.000$). "Impression Leaving" was the variable entered at the third step. The overall regression was significant ($R=.82$, $R^2=.68$; $F(2,228)=18.38, p=.000$).

The three-variable regression model accounted for 68% of the variance in rhetorical sensitivity. Since the predictor variables making up the style instrument have been previously validated for their independence, there is every reason to believe that the R^2 obtained was not inflated due to multicollinearity.

The second research question was: Will the gender of the superior affect the supervisors' self-reported rhetorical sensitivity scores and their communicator styles as perceived by their subordinates? Separate ANOVA's were run for each variable in relation to the gender of the supervisor. The results indicated that significant differences were obtained with impression leaving ($F=3.89$; $df=1$), contentious ($F=4.87$; $df=1$), and animated ($F=6.11$; $df=1$). Tables 3 through 7 display mean scores for each variable. Although these variables indicated a significant difference between the supervisors in terms of gender, an

overall MANOVA analysis produced non-significant results (see Table 8).

The MANOVA analysis was performed in order to examine the possibility of having obtained spurious significant differences with the ANOVA analyses. Such spurious differences could be the result of the number of analyses performed. The non-significant results of the MANOVA analysis suggest that a conservative interpretation requires considering the significant ANOVA results as problematic.

CHAPTER IV

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Summary

A large body of research in the field of communication has focused on the importance of effective communication in the organizational setting. One possible approach that may lead to better communication is adopting the attitude of rhetorical sensitivity. Previous research in this area has provided a rationale for this study. This study looked at the attitude of rhetorical sensitivity and an attempt was made to establish its relationship with the perceived communicator styles of first-line supervisors. An attempt was also made to determine if the gender of the first-line supervisor would affect the relationship between rhetorical sensitivity and the perceived communicator styles.

Rhetorical sensitivity represents an approach to communication in which an individual first thinks about what is to be said and decides how to say it taking into consideration the individual that is being spoken to, the topic of discussion and the communication situation. The manner or style of communication necessary to effectively complete this process appears to be closely associated with

the concepts of communicator style described by Norton (1977).

Four bay area organizations were selected to participate in this study. Ten first-line supervisors from each of the organizations were asked to complete the RHETSEN scale to determine their rhetorical sensitivity scores. Each subordinate, under direct supervision of the participating supervisor, was asked to complete the Communicator Style Measure. This measure represented the subordinates' perceptions of their supervisors' style of communicating.

Results for the first research question, using multiple regression analysis with a stepwise procedure, indicated that the variables dramatic, animated, and impression leaving were the best predictors of rhetorical sensitivity. Results for the second research question, employing both multivariate and univariate analysis of variance, indicates that the gender of the supervisor has no significant effect on the relationship between their RHETSEN scores and the perceived communicator styles.

Discussion

This study was conducted to determine if the perceived communicator style of a supervisor would be a good predictor of how rhetorically sensitive they are based on their self-reported RHETSEN scale. This study also looked at the

relationship the gender of the supervisor had on the self-reported RHETSEN scale and the perceived communicator styles.

Results indicated the variables dramatic, animated, and impression leaving were significant predictors of rhetorical sensitivity. Norton (1977) concluded that these three variables were among those directly associated with "strong communicative style." Norton's research determined that the variables were closely related to the category of "strong communicative style" because individuals who possess these characteristics are viewed as communicators who create a memorable or more visible image, thus resulting in being an effective communicator. This provides support for the concept that individuals who are high in rhetorical sensitivity are viewed as being better or more effective communicators. The final MANOVA indicated that the gender of the supervisor had no effect on the relationship between the supervisors' self-reported RHETSEN scale and their perceived communicator style. However, the individual ANOVA's indicated that the variables impression leaving, contentious, and animated produced a significant difference between the supervisors in terms of gender. The lack of significance obtained from the MANOVA suggests that these significant differences in terms of gender were simply due to chance.

Unlike the study conducted by Eadie and Paulson (1984), this study utilized the superior-subordinate relationship rather than written dialogues submitted by individuals rated as rhetorically sensitive, noble self, and rhetorical reflectors. While this study indicated dramatic, animated, and impression leaving were significant predictors of rhetorical sensitivity, Eadie and Paulson (1984) found that rhetorically sensitives were perceived as dominant, open, and friendly. The results obtained by Eadie and Paulson (1984) were from a sample of college students who completed the Communicator Style Measure based on how they perceived the individual who had written the dialogues. These procedural differences may have accounted for the differences in results obtained or the different populations sampled may account for such disparity. As always, further studies including replications should be conducted.

Although the first research question was supported, there is always the possibility that the problems inherent in the RHETSEN scale may account for less than reliable results. If, as Pearson (1981) claims, the RHETSEN does not measure what it claims to measure, then the results of this study become problematic. It is also true, as stated by previous researchers, that an individual's self-perception of the rhetorically sensitive attitude may not result in similar behavior. In other words, just because an

individual perceives himself or herself as being rhetorically sensitive, does not mean that he or she is going to exhibit rhetorically sensitive behavior. In this case, a supervisor's communicator style as perceived by his or her subordinates may have little to do with the attitude of rhetorical sensitivity. Individuals may possess this attitude but may not always be able to display the behavior that would be an expected result of the attitude.

Many organizations are very structured and/or rigid in terms of the behavior of their supervisors so, in essence, an individual's behavior may be very different from the attitude he or she has in terms of communication.

The results of this study were satisfying in that a significant three-variable model was obtained. However, the study failed to indicate that gender would be a contributing factor in the relationship between rhetorical sensitivity and communicator style.

Further research in this area of study is essential to lay a stronger foundation for the concepts of rhetorical sensitivity and communicator image.

Recommendations for Future Research

Only a few empirical studies have been done using rhetorical sensitivity in the field of organizational communication. The concept of rhetorical sensitivity has been given mixed reviews by researchers which, as discussed

earlier, may be due to the validity aspect of the RHETSEN scale. The re-design or improvement of the scale may be the initial step in future research.

Another area of research that needs to be examined is being able to measure or take into account individuals who not only possess a rhetorically sensitive attitude but actually display the behavior related to the attitude. Possibly a more behavioral type of approach to determining the RHETSEN score may be the answer. Situational type questions or actual observations made of the individual may help in determining the actual level of rhetorical sensitivity an individual possesses and/or utilizes.

Future research might also examine what effect the gender of the subordinate has on his or her perceptions of supervisors. Although this data was sought in the present study, over half of the participants failed to comply with that request.

It is apparent from previous research that the attitude of rhetorical sensitivity is one that should be examined in the organizational setting. Further research is necessary to substantiate just how much of an effect this concept has on the communication act and other surrounding variables.

TABLE 1
PARTIAL CORRELATIONS OF THREE
SIGNIFICANT STYLE VARIABLES

Variable	Part Correlation	T	SigT
Dramatic	.69594	6.269	.0000
Animated	-.61849	-5.571	.0000
Impression Leaving	.45520	4.100	.0004

TABLE 2
SUMMARY OF MULTIPLE REGRESSION ANALYSIS:
THREE-VARIABLE MODEL

Variable	Beta In	Step	Mult R	R ²	F	SigF
Dramatic	.5001	1	.5001	.2501	9.341	.005
Animated	-.6198	2	.6873	.4723	12.084	.000
Impression Leaving	.5279	3	.8243	.6795	18.378	.000

TABLE 3
VARIABLE MEAN SCORES FOR ENTIRE POPULATION

Variable	Mean Score
Rhetorical Sensitivity	36.9
Friendly	14.7
Impression Leaving	14.7
Relaxed	13.4
Contentious	11.5
Attentive	14.5
Precise	14.2
Animated	13.6
Dramatic	12.6
Open	12.5
Dominant	12.3
Communicator Image	16.5

TABLE 4

RHETORICAL SENSITIVITY AND PERCEIVED COMMUNICATOR
STYLE SCORES OF SUPERVISORS BY ORGANIZATION

Organization #1: County Department
10 Supervisors/86
Subordinates

Variable	Mean Score
Rhetorical Sensitivity	35.7
Friendly	14.5
Impression Leaving	14.7
Relaxed	13.7
Contentious	10.9
Attentive	14.7
Precise	14.0
Animated	13.1
Dramatic	11.8
Open	12.6
Dominant	11.4
Communicator Image	17.3

TABLE 5

RHETORICAL SENSITIVITY AND PERCEIVED COMMUNICATOR
STYLE SCORES OF SUPERVISORS BY ORGANIZATION

Organization #2: Insurance Company
6 Supervisors/49
Subordinates

Variable	Mean Score
Rhetorical Sensitivity	38.1
Friendly	14.8
Impression Leaving	14.5
Relaxed	13.7
Contentious	11.1
Attentive	13.6
Precise	14.2
Animated	13.2
Dramatic	12.3
Open	12.3
Dominant	12.1
Communicator Image	17.1

TABLE 6

RHETORICAL SENSITIVITY AND PERCEIVED COMMUNICATOR
STYLE SCORES OF SUPERVISORS BY ORGANIZATION

Organization #3: Real Estate Company
8 Supervisors/53
Subordinates

Variable	Mean Score
Rhetorical Sensitivity	38.3
Friendly	14.7
Impression Leaving	14.6
Relaxed	13.0
Contentious	11.6
Attentive	14.5
Precise	14.1
Animated	13.8
Dramatic	12.9
Open	12.3
Dominant	12.8
Communicator Image	17.1

TABLE 7

RHETORICAL SENSITIVITY AND PERCEIVED COMMUNICATOR
STYLE SCORES OF SUPERVISORS BY ORGANIZATION

Organization #4: Utility Company
6 Supervisors/41
Subordinates

Variable	Mean Score
Rhetorical Sensitivity	35.6
Friendly	14.8
Impression Leaving	15.0
Relaxed	13.4
Contentious	12.7
Attentive	14.7
Precise	14.5
Animated	14.1
Dramatic	13.2
Open	12.9
Dominant	13.5
Communicator Image	14.4

TABLE 8
 RHETORICAL SENSITIVITY AND PERCEIVED COMMUNICATOR
 STYLE SCORES OF SUPERVISORS BY GENDER

Variable	Male	Female
Rhetorical Sensitivity	37.1	36.5
Friendly	14.9	14.4
Impression Leaving	15.0	14.2
Relaxed	13.5	13.1
Contentious	12.0	10.9
Attentive	14.6	14.4
Precise	14.5	13.7
Animated	14.1	12.9
Dramatic	13.2	11.6
Open	13.0	11.9
Dominant	12.7	11.7
Communicator Image	16.4	16.5

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

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APPENDIX B

APPENDIX C

March 8, 1989

I am currently a graduate student at San Jose State University working on a Master of Arts Degree in Communication. As part of the requirements for this degree I am conducting research in this area.

As an employee of this organization, I am requesting that you complete the enclosed questionnaire based on how you perceive your immediate supervisor. For example, each of the items on the form use the pronoun "I", instead of answering the questions about yourself you will answer them about your supervisor. In other words, think of the "I" as "My Supervisor". This information will give me the necessary data to determine what type of communicator your supervisor is.

There are no right or wrong answers and the results will be kept confidential. Your supervisor will not see your completed form or find out how you rated them. Please indicate on the questionnaire the title of the position you hold in this organization and your gender.

When the questionnaire is completed please put it back in the sealed envelope and return it to your supervisor.

Thank you very much for your cooperation and participation.

Sincerely,

Karen McCormick

APPENDIX D