

Communication indicators of organizational integrity (CIOI) model: The rationale, theoretical construction, and practical applications

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Abstract

Lapses in integrity including breaches of ethics, scandals, and corresponding changes in legal requirements create an opportunity for organisational communication scholars to utilise their skills and tools to investigate the relationship between communication and organisational integrity. The idea of examining organisational communication as an indicator of underlying organisation integrity and ethical practices can lead to an interdisciplinary blending of organisational communication and business ethics fields. Little prior research has explored the interplay of these two research areas.

The Communication Indicators of Organizational Integrity® (CIOI) Model is proposed as a new conceptual framework for the investigation of ethical organisational communication and communication as a manifest indicator of the ethics of organisations. This new interdisciplinary model for the assessment of manifest communication indicators of organisational integrity is introduced and described in this paper. The goal of this model (and related measurement focus) is to offer a useful tool for assessing and evaluating the dimensions of ethical integrity including measuring the underlying culture, ethical climate (including attitudes) ethical behavioural conduct captured in communication, and patterns of communication which appear to be correlated with ethical and unethical actions.

The CIOI model is an approach that provides description, analysis, illumination, and critique of communication to reveal the state of integrity and ethics in the organisation. This is a communication centric approach to the interdisciplinary goals of understanding the state of business ethics and integrity. Likewise, the traditional business ethics audits and traditional organisational communication audits can be integrated and extended from this framework. This paper provides the conceptual rationale for the emerging CIOI model as well as a roadmap for further development of the construct. This paper concludes with calls for testing and validation of the model, further research into refining the constructs, deliberate instrumentation development, and practical field testing of this model and its associated measurement modes.

This paper argues for the conceptual rationale for the proposed CIOI model as well as a roadmap for further development of the construct.

This paper argues that manifest communication which occurs in both formal and informal setting and revealed in multiple contexts may be a unique and useful manifestation of underlying ethical norms, culture, decision-making, and integrity within the organisation. The analysis of organisational communication may be able to make a significant and important contribution to the growing need for practical tools to gain an insight into the inherent ethicality of an organisation.

Introduction

News headlines increasingly call attention to the issue of ethics scandals in organisations. The major scandals of the past few years have made “household” names of the list of infamous companies including Enron, WorldCom, Tyco, Sunbeam, Arthur Anderson, and Global Crossing just to name a few. These scandals are a form of unexpected organisational crisis that can emerge from a range of individual employee misconduct to allegations of widespread sexual harassment, racial discrimination, bribery, fraud, and deceptive practices, violations of regulatory rules and laws, and outright corrupt policies and practices. Such a scandal can disrupt routine operations, paralyse employees and reduce productivity, destroy organisational reputations and erode stakeholder confidence, as well as result in incalculable legal and financial costs. Unmitigated ethical misconduct disasters include costly disruptions to business operations, loss of brand or reputation value, and in some instance the demise of many well-known companies. Ethical misconduct, whether illegal or simply unethical, is a serious issue that calls for attention from many different disciplines and fields.

Organisational communication scholars (theorists and researchers) may be in a unique position to provide illumination of organisational integrity. Communication may be a unique and useful manifestation of underlying ethical norms, culture, decision-making, and integrity. The analysis of organisational communication may be able to make a significant and important contribution to the growing need for practical tools to gain an insight into the inherent ethicality of an organisation. Such insights are increasingly demanded by stakeholders, constituents, and regulatory authorities.

Strategic integrity continuity

Most organisations have long acknowledged that business continuity planning is an essential priority in order to effectively anticipate, prevent, mitigate, and survive natural disasters, data loss, accidents, and deliberate malevolent acts. What many are only now discovering is that *integrity continuity* planning is also a duly diligent policy and business priority. Ethical issues must be on the strategic agenda. Such planning must go beyond compliance issues and reactive disciplinary policies to actually manage integrity. Integrity management should be a priority because it is legally required and because it is the right thing to do (LeClair, Ferrell, & Fraedrich, 1998). Employees who know that certain workplace decisions, behaviours,

and processes exist in an ethically judged context are more aware and motivated to act ethically. Employees who perceive such activities as existing detached from an ethical context or who utilise an alternative (unethical) value paradigm (i.e., financial or perceived performance) are less aware of ethical implications and more motivated to act unethically.

The more employees recognise when a decision or behaviour involves questions of ethics, the more their consciences are raised about the importance of acting ethically and the more likely they are to behave in appropriate ways. Senior management must set the example and communicate the importance of professional integrity in the workplace in order to create a climate of integrity.

Integrity management includes creating formal and informal systems which ensure that employees will act in ways that ensure legal compliance as well as enact the corporate code of conduct goals in ways that are consistently professional, ethical, and desirable. Integrity management is intertwined with managing the larger corporate culture and informal reward/motivation processes that impact employee decisions and behaviours in ways that transcend policies printed in a written code of conduct. In many instances, major ethical scandals have occurred even in companies that have clear and explicit policies and codes of conduct. There is more than merely having policies in place to avoid, mitigate, and survive these risks. Obviously, every business needs to strategically create structures and processes that fundamentally require all employees and managers to obey all legal requirements and regulations. Furthermore, common ethical and professional standards would obviously include assumptions that decisions and behaviours are conducted honestly, and that employees and managers would never knowingly harm or do damage to fellow employees, stakeholders, customers, clients, or vendors by deception, misrepresentation, fraudulent report, coercion, conflict of interest, or other mordacious acts. Organisational integrity must be strategically managed as are other mission critical strategic factors connected with business success and effectiveness.

Organisational integrity is the first line and fundamental strategic planning area to minimise the risks of major unethical scandals. Ethical misconduct disasters and scandals are serious costly risks to the continuity and survival of your business. Evidence can be found almost daily in the news headlines that breakdowns of integrity collectively cost businesses billions of dollars in litigation, fraudulent financial acts, increased costs, fines, reputation and image damage, customer/client trust, lost sales, and recovery costs.

Ethical breakdowns can disrupt business operations just as significantly as can natural disasters, data loss, accidents, and deliberate malevolent acts. Such scandals can have enormous costs, impact your business, wound your reputation and brand, anger your stakeholders, and potentially land senior management in prison. No company is immune from these threats. Prudent businesses must plan to manage integrity continuity by assessing their vulnerability to ethical disasters, taking pro-active measures, and preparing their organisations to mitigate and survive when such scandals break. Achieving consistent integrity is much more than simply ensuring legal and regulatory compliance. Proactive integrity continuity requires that a company have a fundamental strategic commitment to integrity, be aware of intrinsic risks, and build a culture of integrity that ensures that company employees are likely to make ethical decisions and

behaviours. Managing integrity is depending on creating an ethical context in which employee decisions and behaviours are consistent with the mission critical goals of professional, ethical, and strategic processes. Managing integrity (as in managing people) involves managing employee's perceptions of situations and understanding of how they should act, behave, and decide in the various situations in which they must perform their work.

Recognising the risk for integrity lapses

It amazes me when I hear a manager make a statement that ethical scandals "couldn't happen here". Those sentiments are intrinsically related to the aftermath statement, "I never thought this would happen here." The reality is that all of the common justifications for ignoring integrity continuity planning are based on unsubstantiated (no systematic psychometric assessment that would provide a substantiated level of confidence) trust in unmanaged human nature and in ignoring the systemic factors that give rise to ethical disasters. Managing integrity requires more strategic planning and enactment beyond hiring "good, basically moral people". Even systematically hiring only employees with the highest levels of morals and ethics is no sure-fire method for preventing a major scandal (e.g., consider the significant scandals questioning conduct of some priests within the Roman Catholic Church). Neither does having a detailed written statement of ethics or specific documented policies provide a sure-fire method to prevent such disasters. (For example, the final 65-page Enron Corporation's *Code of Ethics* was written in 2000 and was intended to help guide employees for "conducting the business affairs . . . in accordance with all applicable laws and in a moral and honest manner" (Enron Corporation, 2000).) In addition, one cannot adequately avoid these scandals by delegating planning to subordinates. Managing integrity continuity requires that organisational standards and expectations must be clarified; such standards must be used in the formation of formal and informal processes, be part of an active and on-going training programme to ensure employee alignment, be meshed with the decision-making processes that occur at various levels and functions in the organisation, and identify "at risk" behaviour included in regular and periodic assessment of employee behaviour.

All of these efforts should be considerations at the highest levels of management. Integrity continuity planning must occur as part of the strategic planning process. It must be integrated with decisions on development, transformation, goal setting, prioritisation, and regulatory compliance issues. The fact is that every organisation is vulnerable to integrity disasters, and such risks must be continually and proactively managed. A false sense of security is a main factor that prevents companies from creating a plan of action to follow if a disaster occurs. Obviously no company is totally immune from scandals regardless of their efforts to manage integrity. Not all scandals are of the company's making and there are certainly those disgruntled antagonists who will spread false rumours, slander, and distort the truth for their own self-interests; nonetheless the threat of such scandals and public disasters of all types, including ethical, necessitate strategic integrity continuity planning.

Ethical misconduct disasters (EMD)

Ethical misconduct disasters are a specific, unexpected, and non-routine unethical event or a series of unethical events that create significant operational disruptions and threaten or are perceived to threaten an organisation's continuity of operations.

While acknowledging that there is no universally accepted definition of an ethical misconduct disaster, I nevertheless argue that such scandals can negatively affect an organisation, a major business unit, the reputation and image of a brand, and all stakeholders of the organisation. An ethical misconduct disaster can also damage, perhaps severely, an organisation's financial performance, impact employees, result in litigation and regulatory responses, and create a media circus that can destroy the public's basic trust or belief in an organisation, its reputation, and its image. These scandals can threaten the continuity and very existence of the corporation itself (e.g., Enron).

Not every unethical decision that occurs is a crisis for the organisation. In fact, businesses that effectively manage integrity can systemically absorb, react, and appropriately adjust to most breakdowns in conduct or decisions. Poor choices happen all the time. The key is whether the organisation has adequately planned to mitigate through prompt response, disciplinary actions, appropriate disclosure, communication to the workforce, and public crisis management communication in order to manage these events so that they do not escalate into catastrophes. Misconduct, because of its severity, persistence, lack of quick and appropriate response, public scrutiny of the organisation's mishandling of the event, or necessary involvement of legal or regulatory structures, may escalate to a level where it is classified as a disaster for a business. Such an ethical misconduct disaster goes beyond the mere disruption of routine operations. It poses disastrous results that have potentially significant economic consequences, or in some cases presents a threat to the survival of the organisation.

Recent revelations about ethical misconduct scandals make the prospects of the "unthinkable ethical disaster" a realistic concern. Prudent strategic continuity planning must take into account the risks of ethical misconduct disasters along with other serious threats to business continuity. Recent headlines document the need for strategic integrity continuity planning. Ask yourself what you think of when you hear the following corporate names: Martha Stewart, Quest, Merrill Lynch, Tyco, Enron, WorldCom, Andersen, Sears, Mitsubishi Motors, and United Way of America, Global Crossing, Adelphia, Smith Barney Citigroup, or the Roman Catholic Church. Senior executives are facing prison sentences as a result of some of these scandals. In a Sarbanes-Oxley world, what prudent executive would ignore the risks of ethical scandals? One study found that 62 percent of all companies experienced a "significant or major" integrity continuity disruption between 1986 and 1996 (Gottlich & Sanzgiri, 1996). Although predicting ethical scandals in American business is not an exact science, one *CFO.com* projection forecasts up to 20 "major" business ethical misconduct disasters every year (Taub, 2002).

Categories of Ethical Misconduct Disasters (EMD)

Harassment & Discrimination (e.g. Ethnic, Sexual)
Criminal & Illegal Activities
Financial Improprieties (Fraud & Falsifying Records)
Customer/Client Deception
Bribery & Improper Influence
Failure to Adhere to Policy/Regulations
Corruption & Unethical Decisions
Undisclosed Conflicts of Interest

Ethical misconduct scandals can spring from any segment or level of a company's operations. The major categories of such disasters typically include instances of harassment or discrimination, criminal or illegal activities, financial improprieties, customer deception, bribery or improper influence, regulatory violations, corruption, or undisclosed conflict of interest.

These scandals can disrupt business operations, negatively affect performance, produce entangling regulatory scrutiny or litigation, create labor problems, damage reputation, image, and brand, and produce criminal charges against senior management or top executives. Sentencing guidelines, such as those of the *Uniform Federal Sentencing Guidelines for Organizations*, hold executives and senior management accountable by instructing judges to consider organisational efforts to plan, train, and implement policies to mitigate, enact full-disclosure efforts, and cooperate with authorities. One important conclusion emerges from these expectations: Corporations are increasingly held accountable for their efforts to educate, train, and enable employees to act ethically, legally, and with integrity in the performance of their duties.

According to a 2002 national study of 12,000 USA high school students:

74 percent admitted cheating on an exam at least once in the past year;

38 percent admitted shoplifting at least once in the past year;

37 percent admitted that they would lie "in order to get a good job."

Josephson, M. "Report Card 2002: The Ethics of American Youth," (Josephson Institute of Ethics: Los Angeles, 2002).
http://www.josephsoninstitute.org/Survey2002/Report-Card_data-tables.pdf.

Expectations for intrinsic ethical orientations

Ethical behaviour is a growing concern across society in general. It is no surprise that these issues are encroaching into the workplace on many different fronts. The time have changed since the days when one could uncritically assume that all employees are hired with a fundamental and rigid commitment to recognising, understanding, and acting ethically in every possible situation. Furthermore, even good moral individuals may be influenced by reward systems, unique temptations, or unseen pressures that will affect their ethical decision-making in some situations.

In addition, the “inherent ethics” of the “good moral people” that a company hires include the 76 percent of MBA graduates who reported that they were willing to commit fraud to enhance profit reports to management, investors, and the public (Lazere, 1997). Fewer than 50 percent of employees believe their employers have high ethical integrity ((Judy & D’Amico, 1997). Thirty percent of all employees currently report that they “know or suspect ethical violations such as falsifying records, unfair treatment of employees, and lying to top management”. Specifically, 41 percent of employees in the private sector and 57 percent of employees in the public/government sector are aware of ethical misconduct of illegal activities (Public Management, 1998).). Furthermore, 60 percent of employees state that they know, but have not reported, instances of misconduct in their organisations (Public Management, 1998). Most employees cite as reasons for not coming forward about ethical misconduct in companies the lack of confidentiality policies, fear that existing policies won’t protect them, and the fear of “whistle-blower” retaliation.

Integrity continuity analysis: Analysing communication for ethical conclusions

Integrity continuity considerations are commonly ignored by senior management, particularly at the chief executive level. Research has found that 60 percent of chief executives and boards of directors failed to engage in integrity continuity planning discussions or to include such considerations in strategic planning (Taub, 2002). Furthermore, 57 percent of companies “have never” incorporated integrity continuity planning at the strategic executive or board level (Taub, 2002). More than half of all businesses fail to assess ethical misconduct risks and plan to ensure integrity continuity (Chandler & Wallace, 2001). For example, 54 percent of companies do not have employee ethics compliance measurement in their performance appraisal criteria (Taub, 2002). Another 56 percent of companies have never conducted an ethical behaviour compliance audit and 23 percent have never engaged senior management in ethics/compliance training efforts (Chandler & Wallace, 2001).

The challenge of determining organisational integrity

In today’s legal climate it is imperative that companies carefully assess the integrity risks that are unique in their business, organisational culture, and performance reward systems, codes of ethics, compliance training, and employee development programmes. Organisational communication analysis could become a major tool for evaluating organisational integrity. The following basic questions confront organisations seeking to comply with regulations and to minimise the risk of ethical misconduct disasters.

- On what criteria do you base confidence in your company’s integrity continuity?
- Do all company personnel know how to act or behave ethically and appropriately in all situations and contexts?
- Do employees know the rules for each situation that may arise?
- How does the company know the employees have this information?
- What insight from examining your organisation’s communication can you gain to help in analysing a company’s integrity, strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats?

CIOI® should:

- Assess information, messages, meta-messages, and communication processes
- Identify relevant channels, media, critical aspects
- Assess ethics training, compliance efforts, and monitoring
- Examine perceptions of “insiders” about communication and ethics
- Alert to “warning signs” present in observable communication
- Identify patterns of potential misconduct in communication (deception, etc.)

Formal codes of ethical conduct alone are insufficient to prevent scandals or ensure integrity continuity. Active ethics efforts are the key for integrity continuity. Ethical concerns must be regarded similarly to other business disruption/resumption concerns. In most cases, ethical disasters involve employees who failed to follow their own internal corporate policies and guidelines. Rarely, if ever, does a scandal arise from a single individual who was acting independently from the larger system, culture, process, and reinforcement of expectation norms, all of which tend to facilitate, encourage, or reward the unethical behaviour.

These risks can be minimised by assessing employee conduct, integrity of the organisational culture (including measuring employees’ knowledge and familiarity with policies, rules, and protocol), conducting effective, active ethical conduct training, and evaluating the effectiveness of ethical codes of conduct and training efforts. One approach that has been used effectively to assess a company’s strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats is the *Ethical Conduct Audit*© (Chandler & Wallace, 2001). Such an assessment can provide insight into both legal compliance behaviours and the ethical reasoning and decision-making that is often difficult to see with unfocused or casual observation.

Approaches for assessment of organisational processes

Examinations of accounting practices, leadership, corporate culture, individualistic assessments of character, regulatory and compliance adherence, CSR, and philosophical discussions of business ethics have all been deployed with mixed success.

Ethical Conduct Audits © have had some success in discovery of existing problems (hopefully before a full blown scandal develops.)

Organisational communication audits and analysis

The current state of organisational communication analysis can be traced back to the ICA Organizational Communication Audit project in early 1970s (Dewine, 1994; Goldhaber & Rogers, 1979). The organisational communication audit developed by the International Communication Association (ICA) included five measurement tools: (a) questionnaire survey, (b) interviews, (c) network analysis, (d) communication experience analysis, and (e) communication diary.

Some approaches to organisational communication have sought to identify and understand the role of communication networks in organisations (Downs, 1988; Downs & Adrian 2004).

The ICA Audit instrument/method and related communication audits have focused on information distribution (load, directionality, channel factors, etc.); the flow of formal and informal messages; diffusion of information; the communication role an individual plays in an organisational communication system (network and ECCO analysis); selection and utilisation of communication media and channels; diffusion of innovation; perceptions of information adequacy; perceptions of communication satisfaction.

Organisation-wide communication analysis has traditionally focused on capturing perceptions of communication and/or measuring information transmission across formal and informal organisational networks. Most of this research was consistent with structural-functional assumptions about the ontological characteristics of organisational communication.

Recent research has explored new manifestations of organisational communication but largely seeking answers about routine structural functional questions (Goldhaber, 2002). Organisational communication scholars from both NCA and ICA have been talking about developing an infrastructure for assessing organisational communication. In a working session at NCA in 2004 several organisational communication scholars met to explore the feasibility, practicality, opportunities, and challenges of creating the *Organizational Communication Assessment and Research Infrastructure*. This laudable project, however, merely extends (in a desirable systematic fashion) the research trajectory of organisational communication analysis and audits. There has not as of yet been a systematic, valid, reliable, and

empirical quantitative measurement of communication with the goal of analysing the ethical nature of either the communication or the organisation.

Other approaches include the application of communication diary (self-reports), ECCO analysis, discourse analysis, textual analysis, focus groups, 360 feedback analysis, research questions and outcomes including gender bias/sexism, racism, power (critical theory) and hegemony, satisfaction, and information needs (load adequacy).

There have been some research efforts which are qualitative and/or critical that have addresses issues of power, ideological struggle, and repressive control of people within organisations. However little attention has been paid to how communication is related to aspects of integrity and ethical standards within organisations. There is a pressing exigency to turn the organisational communication analysis focus towards the questions of organisational communication indicators of organisational ethics, ethical cultures, ethical communication processes, and the underlying nature of organisational integrity.

Measuring deception in computer-mediated communication

This section considers advances in detecting and measuring deception in computer-mediated communication (CMC). DePaulo et al. (2003) have identified “cues to deception”, indicators that individuals are being deceptive in their communication. The researchers defined deception as a “deliberate attempt to mislead others” (p. 74), and state that “liars’ attempts to control their behaviours so as to maintain their deception can paradoxically result in cues that instead betray it” (p. 75). In their study the researchers coded behaviours believed to be indicators of deception and analysed exchanges among a sample population of mostly students. In one study students were introduced into a gallery with paintings and instructed to select their most and least favorite paintings. Afterwards they interacted with an artist who claimed that the least liked painting was his or her own. The students thus tried to communicate in manner that was truthful while also concealing their true opinions from the artist (p. 106).

Other researchers have extended studies of deceptive communication practices to analysing computer-mediated communication (CMC). Researchers have compared classification methods for predicting deception in CMC (Zhou, Burgoon, Twitchell, Qin, & Nunamaker, 2004). The authors suggest that CMC poses at least two problems to deception research: humans’ capacity to transmit information has exceeded our capability to process it, and humans have poor deception detection capability (pp.140-141). Their solution to these problems is to “automate the deception detection process” (p. 141). The researchers enlisted participants from a management information systems course at a large university and grouped them in pairs. Each two-person group exchanged emails with each other regarding a decision-making task. The groups were randomly assigned to either the deception or the truth condition, meaning that the first partner to log in to computer either received instructions to deceive their partner, or received no special instruction at all (p. 151). The data set comprised the emails exchanged by the

partners. In analysing the results, no single method of the four considered by the researchers emerged as superior for predicting deception (p. 158). The findings supported prior research in that “deceivers used more modal verbs and fewer individual references, making their utterances more tentative and nonspecific” (p. 162), and “deceivers tended to include more sensory, spatial, and temporal details than truth tellers, which is opposite to the propositions in reality monitoring” (p. 162).

Carlson, George, Burgoon, Adkins, & White (2004) synthesised and summarised past literature and research on deception in CMC. The researchers extended a model of deceptive communication focused on the impact of media choice and participant experiences and merge that framework with theories of interpersonal deception to “derive propositions relevant to the CMC realm” (p. 6). Past literature suggests that it is easier for deceivers to create believable messages when communicating through a medium of low-bandwidth or richness (p. 19). The authors address automating deception detection and provide a model of deceptive communication.

CMC poses two problems for assessment of inherent integrity. First, humans’ capacity to transmit information has exceeded our capability to process it. Second, humans have poor deception detection capability. It may be possible to address these challenges by automating the deception detection process and applying other exploratory research on computer mediated communication (e.g., large scale systematic email screening for key indicators) to help efficiently assess large collections of samples of communication within an organisation.

Communication indicators of Organizational Integrity (CIOI) Model©

The proposed CIOI model is a systematic research method and theoretically based process for correlating organisational communication analysis with indicators of underlying corporate ethical integrity. The model assumes that ethical characteristics of the organisations and constituent actors (employees, managers, executives, etc.) can be assessed through analysis of manifest communication content, processes, and systems. This model points us toward early warning indicators manifest in communication that could potentially alert auditors to unethical characteristics or failed integrity, or predict the potential for ethical misconduct disasters and scandals. This approach is consistent with the traditional communication audits but with a goal of measuring both ethical communication and organisational integrity manifest in organisational communication. In fact, the intention of this newly emerging model is consistent with the original goals of the ICA audit instrumentation development.

This model is intended to help articulate a conceptual framework for the investigation of ethical organisational communication and communication as a manifest indicator of the ethics of organisations. Specifically the goal is to offer a useful conceptual approach as well as suggest the tools for assessing and evaluating the dimensions of ethical integrity: measure of underlying culture, ethical climate (including attitude), ethical behavioural conduct and patterns of communication which appear to be correlated with ethical and unethical actions

The CIOI model is intended to provide organisations with reliable, factual data about ethics, ethicality, and organisational integrity by means of systematic measurement of both internal and public communication of the organisation. Furthermore, the goal is to do so in a way that permits comparability with similar organisations and make a standardised (predictive) assessment and evaluation of organisational integrity based on measurements of organisational communication. The benefits of this approach allow the combination of expertise, effort, time, and care that will go into the creation and validation the CIOI instruments and procedures to produce a consistent and valid assessment of organisational integrity. A small set of standardised instruments and procedures will be developed to allow for widespread and quick application. A longer and more complex set of secondary and elaborative instruments and procedures will be developed to allow for case study and idiosyncratic investigation of specific organisations in depth. The CIOI shall use automatic data collection and analysis as well as a variety of assessment methods, instruments, and procedures.

The CIOI model draws upon a number of organisational communication theories and empirical research findings, as well as business ethics models in the assessment of manifest **communication** that can be predictive indicators of ethics and integrity. The model and related research method (instruments, procedures, and data analysis process) examines samples of both public (external) and private (internal) communication. There are four communication dimensions measured; these are (1) communicated **Information**, (2) Communicated **Messages**, (3) Communicated **Meta-Messages**, and (4) communication **Processes**. In addition, the issue of measuring “ethical communication” itself is an additional anticipated evaluation assessment of this model and method.

Communicated information includes the presence/absence of specific words, phrases, data, content, or facts/figures in the various communication artifacts sampled. In addition to the presence or absence of specific information are the questions of how frequently such words appear, the timing of when, where, and how such information appears in the communication content. Obviously information about compliance, ethical actions, boundaries, etc., can be a cornerstone of this analysis.

Communicated messages are a broader and more thematic communication content to be studied. These would include explicit messages about norms, rules, expectations, climate, and modelling of how to act ethically with integrity and implicit messages (reading between the lines) about these same issues. It is significant to determine the consistency (inconsistency) between the explicit and implicit messages. The overt communication to foster ethics and integrity among employees would be measured and evaluated.

Meta-messages are messages that are not explicitly (high context) articulated yet are clear and discernable by audiences. These implicit messages may be about norms, rules, expectations, climate, and modelling of how to act ethically with integrity. The method seeks to recognise what is being communicated “between or underneath” the lines of the explicit messages.

Communication processes would include both formal and informal procedures, mechanisms, reporting rules, policies, feedback channels, participation norms, and communication networks that operate within the organisation. Various conclusions about underlying ethical characteristics can be drawn from a

snapshot of the communication processes that typify (or are absent) in an organisation. The types of communication variables will include specific communication variables related to ethicality, communication ethics, communication veracity (withholding/disclosing relevant information, misrepresentation and deliberate distortion, deception and deceit and systematically distorted communication), groupthink, the ethical aspects of communication norms and rules, and candor and confidentiality practices. Issues such as prejudice, discrimination, harassment, loaded language, stereotypes, and ethical decision making should also be included.

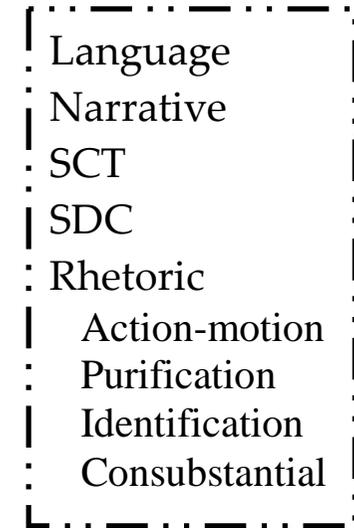
Figure 1 depicts a conceptual model for the relationship of manifest communication content and underlying organisational integrity. It also provides suggestions of the various theoretical and conceptual frames in which the ethicality of organisational communication might be evaluated in the CIOI model.

Explanatory Theories



Information
Diffusion

Explanatory Theories



Messages

Information

Nature of Integrity

Messages

Meta-

Employees

meaning

Processes

Employees

Explanatory Theories



Explanatory Theories



Integrity continuity

To survive crises of integrity, an organisation must maintain a fundamental commitment to the strategic goals of pro-actively managing integrity. Corporations should expect, reward, and encourage ethical behaviour of their employees. Post-crisis analysis of many of the major ethical scandals has revealed that employees were frequently motivated by formal and informal reward systems and explicit and implicit expectations of management, or that they believed themselves to be acting consistently with the behaviour of other employees in the organisation. Far too many corporate scandals have occurred because the organisation (culture, policies, or reward system) was an “enabler” of the employee’s unethical behaviour.

Specifically, employees should not be required to “bend the rules” to successfully perform their job tasks. The consistent message (not mere words, but also reflected in reward structures) is that employees can and should act in ethical ways to complete their work. Managers should never, even inadvertently, reward an employee whose performance was achieved at the expense of integrity or ethical behaviours. Ethical decisions and behaviour should be facilitated by culture, attitudes, and actions of the other employees and managers. Integrity is a process and way of working. Employees can be trained to make integrity a work habit. Ethical conduct is a dividend-paying long term investment, not an expense. Ethical misconduct is a fundamental breach of obligation to stakeholders.

The next phase of development for the CIOU model is the identification of specific theoretical grounding of the approach, articulation of assessment method and related procedures, creation of instrumentation, and preliminary pilot testing of both the instruments and methods to ascertain the validity and reliability of the CIOI method.

Anticipated data collection methods

The instruments and data analysis procedures for the CIOI model are still evolving. The instruments will be used to assess both public (external) and private (internal) samples of organisational communication. The goal is to develop a precise and concise instrument package that would allow for manageable data collection and analysis sufficient for evaluative and predictive assessments of the ethicality. Development and pilot testing of instruments is underway. The major categories of data collection methods includes (1) content Analysis (public and private communication), (2) quantitative psycho-metric multiple measure perception instrument, (3) stratified random sample research interviews, (4) focus groups, (5) communication diaries, and (6) network analysis. The goal is to find the most effective instruments to combine in order to triangulate data collection/analysis conclusions and provide a single classification outcome for comparative and developmental purposes.

Validity and reliability of the CIOI model and method

Current social scientific testing of the model and method seeks to determine the reliability and validity of the CIOI conceptual model, research method, and instrumentation. In addition, empirical research should ascertain the predictive variables underlying ethical characteristics relationship (correlation) with the observable manifest organisational communication content.

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