

Kommunikasiewetenskap en kommunikasie van die wetenskap

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Die sentrale tema van hierdie kongres is kommunikasie binne die organisasie. Dit is uiteraard nie toevallig dat hierdie tema gekies is nie. Per slot van rekening beleef ons tans in Suid-Afrika — maar dit geld in 'n sekere mate ook vir die res van die wêreld — 'n fase waarin daar krities en indringend gekyk word na organisasiestrukture waarbinne die mens die grootste deel van sy of haar tyd deurbring.

Teen die agtergrond van prosesse soos analises van die organisasie en arbeid deur verskillende kommissies, die toenemende mate van aktivering van die werksmag en dergelike verskynsels, is dit noodsaaklik dat ook die wetenskaplike gemeenskap op 'n wetenskaplik-verantwoorde wyse na hierdie terrein kyk. Ek wil daarom vandag enkele aspekte rakende organisasiekommunikasie aan die orde stel. Toegegee, my oriëntasie mag aanvanklik ietwat a-tipies voorkom, maar ek is nogtans daarvan oortuig dat my tema aktueel op hierdie terrein is.

In die lig van die feit dat die terrein van organisasiekommunikasie nog relatief jonk is, is dit nodig om ter oriëntasie my tema enigszins breër aan te pak. As agtergrond wil ek daarom eers kortliks aandag gee aan die stand van kommunikasiewetenskap in die algemeen in Suid-Afrika. Vervolgens wil ek 'n kort oorsig van die aard van organisasiekommunikasie gee waarna die aandag dan toegespits word op die moontlike bydrae wat die Kommunikasiewetenskap kan lewer tot die problematiek rondom die wetenskap.

Die stand van die Kommunikasiewetenskap

Die Kommunikasiewetenskap het die afgelope tien jaar met rasse skrede vooruit gegaan. Sekerlik die duidelikste bewys van hierdie vooruitgang is geleë in die redelik algemene aanvaarding en erkenning van die Kommunikasiewetenskap as selfstandige dissipline aan Suid-Afrikaanse universiteite en teknikons. Dit is trouens seker geen geheim nie dat minstens nog twee ander residensiële universiteite ook die dissipline van Kommunikasiewetenskap sou ingestel het, as dit nie vir die ekonomiese insinking was nie. Soos bekend, word die Kommunikasiewetenskap tans in die een of ander vorm formeel aan agt universiteite gedoseer. Dat daar nogal variasie in die inhoud en vorm

van hierdie kursusse bestaan, is 'n bekende feit. Dit behoort egter nie afbreuk te doen aan die empiriese belang van die Kommunikasiewetenskap as dissipline nie. Intendeel, die gediversifiseerdheid van kursusinhoudes dui veel eerder op die omvang van die dissipline.

Die vooruitgang van die Kommunikasiewetenskap blyk verder ook uit die omvang van navorsing wat op hierdie gebied onderneem word. Die inhoud en omvang van 'n dissipline blyk die allerbeste uit 'n ontleding van dit waarmee die deskundiges op hierdie gebied hulle besig hou. Ek het gevolglik 'n kort opname-ondersoek oor die stand van kommunikasiewetenskap aan die hand van sodanige navorsing uitgevoer. Sonder om in al te veel besonderhede in te gaan, wil ek vir u kortliks die belangrikste resultate meedeel. Hoewel baie navorsers moontlik self nie kommunikasiewetenskaplike opleiding geniet het nie, toon selfs 'n oppervlakkige analise van hul werk spoedig dat hul teoretiese kader spesifiek kommunikasiewetenskaplik is.

'n Oorsig van navorsing

Die databasis oor navorsingsinligting wat deur die Instituut vir Navorsingsontwikkeling (RGN) in stand gehou word, bestaan uit die bibliografiese besonderhede van ondersoeke wat sedert 1969 vir graaddoeleindes sowel as nie-graad-doeleindes in Suid-Afrika onderneem is. Hierdie databasis is wat graadnavorsing aanbetref, prakties volledig; in die geval van self-geïnisieerde navorsing is dit ongelukkig nie so volledig nie. Al die items in die databasis word vooraf ten opsigte van veld van navorsing, d.w.s. dissipline, gekategoriseer — as sodanig die eerste fase van 'n inhoudsanalise. 'n Soektog deur die databasis vir items in 'n sekere dissipline, gee dus 'n oorsig van die navorsing wat op daardie gebied onderneem is. Alhoewel die databasis baie meer buigsaam is as wat miskien uit hierdie opsomming blyk, is vir die doeleindes van hierdie opname van hierdie bepaalde toegangspoor gebruik gemaak.

Alle navorsing vir die periode 1977-1982 wat as kommunikasiekundig geklassifiseer is, is opgeroep en as data vir die res van hierdie ontleding gebruik. Die ICA se indeling van die terrein is as kategoriesisteen vir die inhoudsontleding gebruik. Weliswaar was dit nodig om enkele aanpassings te maak om die sisteem meer sinryk te maak — soos goed bekend, is die ICA se indeling nie baie logies of sistematies nie. Die volgende terreine is aldus geïdentifiseer: fundamenteel, massamedia, effekte van kommunikasie, interpersoonlike kommunikasie, voorligting en interkulturele kommunikasie, reklame en skakelwerk, onderrigkommunikasie, organisasiekommunikasie en politieke kommunikasie.

Enkele resultate

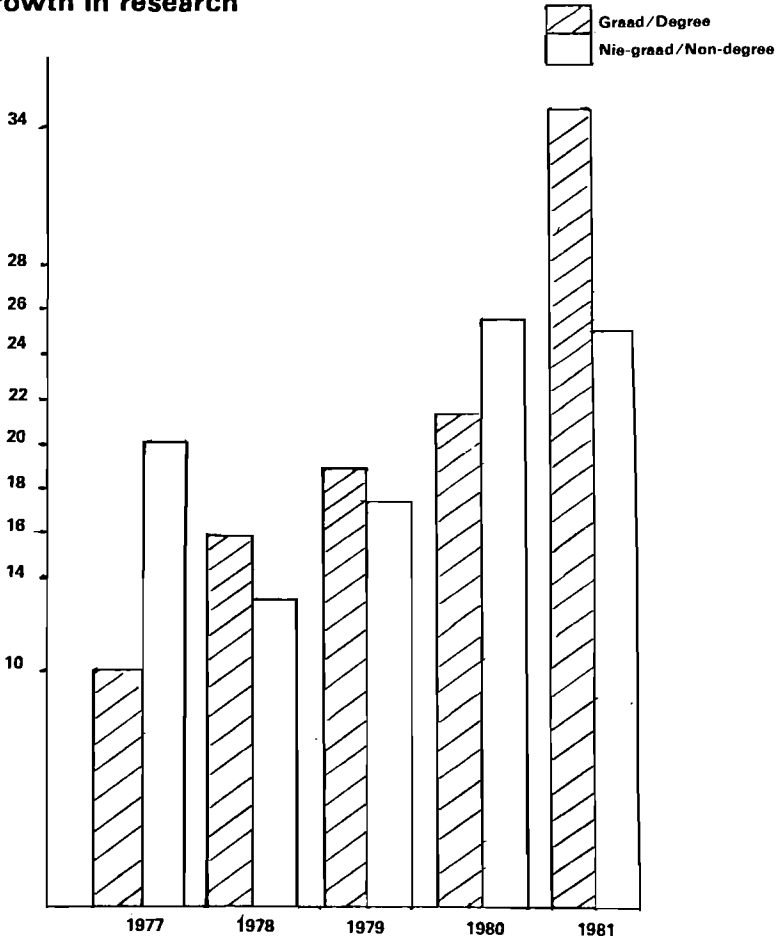
Vir die periode 1977-1982 is 'n totaal van 278 projekte gevind. Hierdie totaal verteenwoordig ongeveer 1,2 persent van die totale aantal items op die databasis. As in aanmerking geneem word dat kommunikasiewetenskap sekerlik 'n laatlammetjie in die akademiese kraal is, en dat die

database 33 departemente of dissiplines behels (waaronder al die tale as een departement gereken is), moet die omvang van kommunikasie-wetenskaplike navorsing as noemenswaardig beskou word.

'n Onderskeid is tussen afgehandelde en lopende navorsing getref. Die aantal navorsingsprojekte wat reeds afgehandel is beloop 109, terwyl 169 projekte as onafgehandel geregistreer is. Hierdie verdeling skep dus die indruk dat die afhandelingsukses van navorsing op hierdie gebied redelik positief is. In dié verband ontstaan die vraag na die moontlike groei oor tyd van navorsing. In figuur 1 is 'n grafiese voorstelling van die navorsingsprojekte oor tyd diagrammadies voorgestel.

Figuur/Figure 1

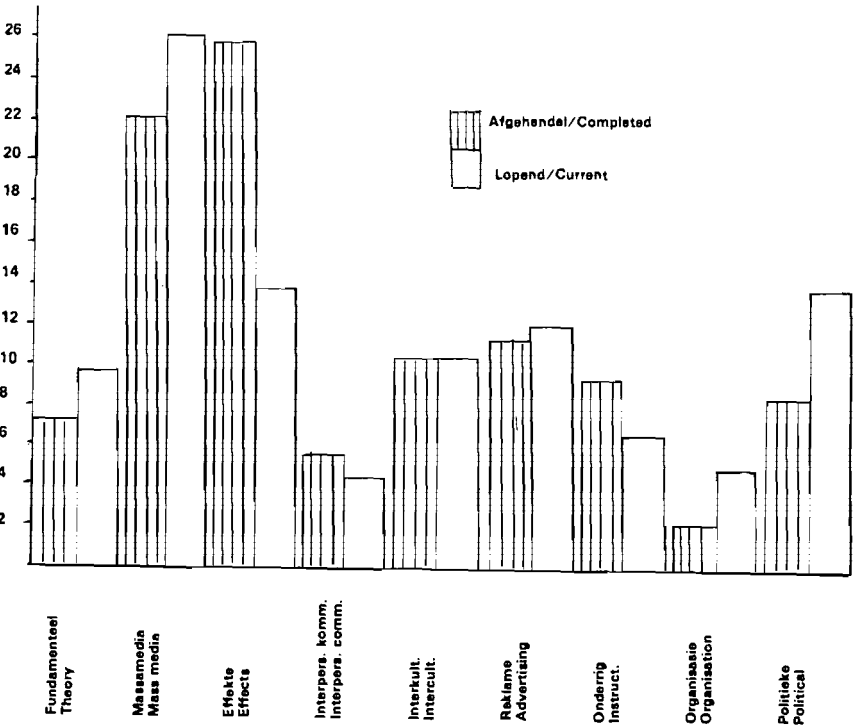
Toename in navorsing Growth in research



Uit die besonderhede in figuur 1 blyk dit dat daar 'n redelik positiewe groei sedert 1977 plaasgevind het. Meer as die helfte van die ondersoek is in 1981 geregistreer of afgehandel. Dit is baie duidelik dat daar 'n sistematiese groei in die volume navorsing plaasvind. Besonderhede oor die afdelings van die kommunikasiewetenskap waarin hierdie navorsing plaasvind, kan in figuur 2 aangetref word.

Figuur/Figure 2

Ontleding van kommunikasienavorsing Analysis of communication research



Uit figuur 2 blyk onder meer die volgende:

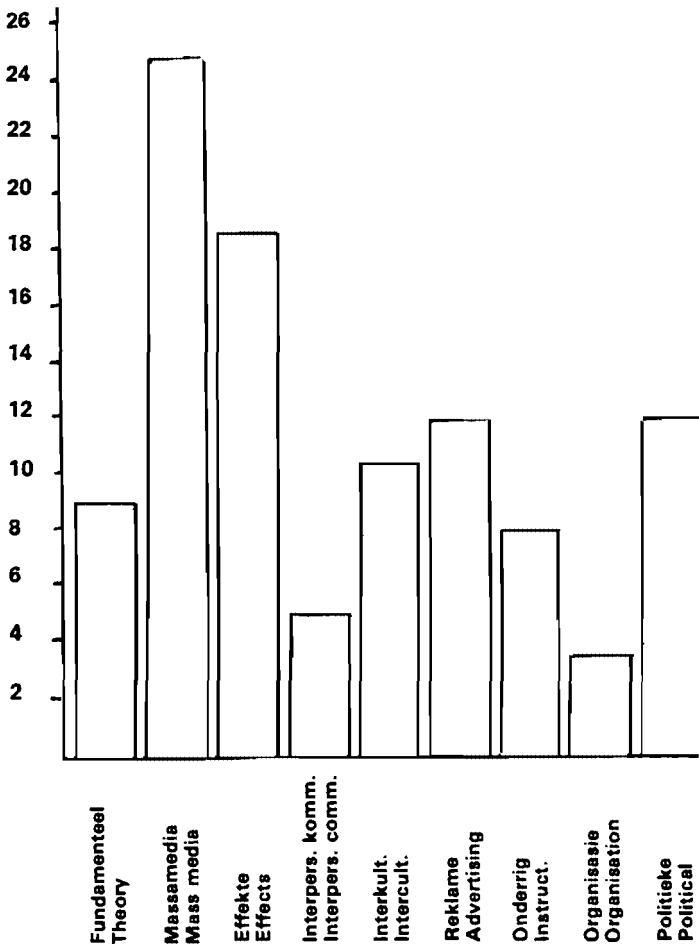
- Daar is 'n opvallende hoë korrelasie in rangorde tussen die verskillende tipes (d.w.s. afgehandel/lopend) navorsing. So is die gebiede massamedia en effekte die twee populêrste navorsingsterreine terwyl organisasiekommunikasie dié terrein is waarop die minste navorsing onderneem is. Dit blyk ook dat reklame en skakelwerk een van die populêrste navorsingsgebiede is, terwyl voorligting en interkulturele kommunikasie hierby nie ver agter staan nie.

- Bemoedigend vir so 'n jong dissipline soos kommunikasiewetenskap, is die waarneming dat fundamentele werk, d.w.s. teoretiese navorsing betreklik gunstig vergelyk met die ander toegepaste gebiede.
- Ondanks die populariteit van die bestudering van kommunikasie-effekte, sou 'n mens nog steeds 'n vraagteken oor die kommunikasiewetenskaplikheid van hierdie onderwerp kon plaas.

Figuur/Figure 3

Ontleding van kommunikasienavorsing Analysis of communication research

Alle navorsing/All research



Figuur 3 verteenwoordig 'n opsomming van die resultate van afgehandelde en lopende navorsing. Vir al die navorsing wat in die kommunikasiewetenskap onderneem is, blyk dit dat massamedia die eerste posisie inneem, gevolg deur die effekte van massakommunikasie met reklamekunde en politieke kommunikasie in 'n derde posisie. Hierdie diagram toon duidelik dat organisasiekommunikasie die enkele gebied is waarop die minste navorsing tot dusver onderneem is.

Uit hierdie bondige samevatting van die belangrikste resultate van die opname van navorsing in die kommunikasiewetenskap blyk dit dus dat heelwat navorsing onderneem is en onderneem word. Soos miskien voorspel sou kon word, word die meeste navorsing op die gebied van massakommunikasie onderneem. Verblydend is die feit dat daar na verhouding tog ook redelik aandag aan fundamentele navorsing geskenk word. In die kader van hierdie kongres is dit egter uiters verontrustend dat so min navorsing deur ons aan organisasiekommunikasie geskenk word. Hieraan wil ek vervolgens aandag skenk.

Organisational communication

Because the central theme of this conference is organisational communication, I thought it useful to pay greater attention to this category of research. What were the typical research projects classified in this category? The major themes were the following:

- Communication skills in industry
- A communication model for companies
- Managerial communication
- The role of credibility in vertical communication
- Internal communication and black workers
- Communication of task-related information
- The relationship between non-verbal communication and job success
- Career information on television
- Communication competence and its relation to the employment of women.

The preceding list clearly represents a rather broad spectrum of research themes given the limited number of studies undertaken. To some extent there is a minor total point in the area of vertical communication i.e. superior-subordinate relations. However, even within this area the topics are still rather divercificio. For the rest, one gets the impression that the research in the field of organisational communication has not yet been undertaken in a concerted and systematic way.

If the spectrum of themes usually found in organisational communication is considered, the present state of affairs under consideration

conferring this important area leaves much to be desired. A dynamic overview of the extent of the field of organisational communication can, for instance, be found in the work of Farace, Monge and Russell (1977). According to Farace et al. (1977) the field of organisational communication can be studied at the molecular level, the meso level and the molar level. Examples of themes on the molecular level include message formulation, and information load. Aspects dealt with on the meso level would include group decision making and problem solving. On the molar level, themes like the following would receive research attention: Group structure, network analysis, etc.

It should be clear from the preceding that there is more than enough work for the communication scholar who wants to concentrate on the South African scene, the research challenges are practically infinite, especially in a developing and highly dynamic situation like ours. Since the communications scholar focuses primarily on the dynamics of the communication processor, his or her contribution in a multi disciplinary effort is needed. The conference programme tells us that a wide variety of topics will be discussed during the next two days. I trust that this conference will contribute towards increasing the importance of this research field and stimulate more active interest on the part of our research community.

A close inspection of the major reviews on organisational communication shows that one of the major common denominators in organisational communication is *the transfer of information*. Phrases like "the exchange of symbols", and "sharing of meaning" reflect this idea. I submit that this particular perspective on organisational communication is unique to the communications scholar. In the third part of this paper I would like to call your attention for considerations concerning communication of research information.

Communication of research information

Many organisational models that are based on the systems approach use *information* as a key concept. The work by Katz and Kahn is but one example. An organisation dynamically seen can even be defined as the interactive and therefore the interdependent system of decision-making. Obviously, the primary input to decision-making and also output from this process is information. Here I have in mind all types and kinds of organisations whether it be civil service types or private enterprises. Given this approach a major research field becomes obvious, viz., "what are the necessary and sufficient conditions for available information to be used as input in the decision-making process?"

The preceding question is one that not only concerns the policy maker and organisation as such, but one which is at least just as relevant and salient to the scholar. This is even more so in the case of the social

scientist where data tend to be softer, decisions potentially more ambiguous but the consequences of invalid information just as harsh as in the case of the natural sciences. For the social sciences it is a question of “proving” that his information can eventually be used by the decision maker. For various reasons — most importantly obviously the decreasing amount of money available for the support of research — the social scientist is equally aware of the need for the utilisation of the information than is his colleague in the natural sciences. As a matter of fact, this situation has become so acute in recent years that the social scientific community in the USA has formed its own lobby to persuade and influence government and, by the same token, industry, of the value and applicability of their information for the policy making process. In other words, this lobby is aimed at showing the policy and decision-maker that social scientific information can be utilised in various practical spheres.

The preceding background makes it imperative for us as scholars of communication to direct some of our research energy in this direction. Firstly, the utilisation of information, also research information, could — to my mind, should — be analysed within the context of organisational communication. Secondly, it is clearly a very important issue for all organisations. Thirdly, it could be to the benefit of the research community if ways and means could be found to facilitate the utilisation and implementation of our research findings. In this context I would like to draw your attention to a few of the many aspects related to this complicated matter.

A prominent figure in the area of the utilisation of social sciences information is Professor Rich, formally of Princeton University and more recently professor at the Carnegie-Mellon University in the USA. In a recent book, entitled “Social sciences information and public policy making”, Rich tried to ascertain under what conditions research information becomes assimilated in the decision and policy making process. His study yielded a wide array of findings, e.g.

- Social science information in the form of survey research can be useful for policy making.
- Information utilisation takes place in two separate ways, viz. a first wave of information utilisation that goes upward and a second wave which is in a lateral and/or downward direction.
- The absolute amount of information as such becomes progressively reduced in the upward flow of information.

For communication scholars, one of the most important findings confirms the role played by communication variables in information utilisation. Rich came to the conclusion that communication variables were necessary, but not sufficient ones for the utilisation of social science information. Variables like timeliness, relevance and compre-

hensibility of form were preconditions for utilisation to follow at all. However, these conditions were not found to be sufficient ones for activating knowledge utilisation. To put it another way, if the message is formulated optimally, no guarantee can yet be made as to the probability that the information will be utilised. This study clearly showed that the sufficient conditions for knowledge utilisation consisted of what could be called the politics of information. This term refers to aspects like the bureaucratic norms and values pertaining to decision and policy making in that particular structure. Considerations like maximisation of personal and organisational interests as perceived by the persons concerned were construed as major explanatory variables.

Attention can be fixed on two traditionally different but conceptually, yet nevertheless parenthetically related theoretical orientations. I refer specifically to the diffusion of innovation (e.g. Rogers and Shoemaker) and the phenomenon known as groupthink (Janis). Although very interesting and important theoretical relations can be shown, these won't be dealt with in this paper.

The study of Rich on the utilisation of social sciences information unambiguously showed the range of variables to be considered when one wants to facilitate and enhance the utilisation of such information in the larger organisation. Indeed, Rich made use of two models, viz., a communication and a bureaucratic one, to explain the process of utilising social sciences information. A close analysis of Rich's definition and model of communication clearly shows that *communication* is reserved for aspects like message formulation, whereas the context as such is not thought to be part of that process. This is clearly an unacceptable and a too restricted model of communication. Most, if not all, models of organisational communication, very clearly include contextual and structural aspects in this process. To paraphrase, the meaning is in the situation. Given this point of departure, one could be lead to conclude that many of the so-called sufficient conditions specified by Rich, could also be analysed and eventually manipulated by the scholar of communications. In this respect the models by scholars like Farace, Katz and Kahn, Grunic, etc. can be quoted in support of this statement.

In view of time consideration, I would prefer not to elaborate any further on the preceding notions. It is sufficient that the scholar of communication specialising in organisational communication is pre-eminantly suited for contributing towards the more optimal utilisation of research information in organisation. And there can be little doubt whatsoever that organisations are in real need for utilisable research information. I don't think it is pretending too much to profess that the social sciences, in particular communication do possess information that can be of great value to organisations in this country. I therefore submit that this area needs closer analysis and more attention on our part in contributing towards a happier and more prosperous South Africa.

Besluit

Ek het probeer om die posisie van organisasiekommunikasie binne die groter geheel van kommunikasiewetenskap te bepaal. Ek glo dat dit geblyk het dat organisasiekommunikasie baie belangrik, maar teweens baie verwaarloos is. Voorts het ek probeer aantoon dat daar binne die kader van organisasiekommunikasie ook gekyk moet word na die kommunikasie van wetenskaplike inligting. Vir elke organisasie is dit van groot belang dat beskikbare inligting benut moet word. Eweneens is dit vir ons as geesteswetenskaplikes van belang — slegs van wesenlike belang — dat inligting wat ons mag besit of genereer optimaal benut word — of selfs net vir benutting oorweeg word. Ek is oortuig daarvan dat die kommunikasiewetenskaplike die nodige kundigheid het om op hierdie gebied 'n belangrike rol te speel. Ek vertrou dat hierdie sesde kongres van die Suid-Afrikaanse Kommunikasievereniging daarvan bewys sal lewer.

Verwysings

- Farace, R.V., Monge, P.R. & Russel, H.M. (1977). *Communicating and organizing*. Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley.
- Rich, R.F. (1981). *Social science information and public policy making*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.