

Integrated Strategic Communication: More than the Sum of Its Parts

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Adopting a hybrid organizational structure over 30 years ago has permitted the Communications Department of Lockheed Martin Missiles and Fire Control-Orlando to evolve new capabilities and undertake new missions. The result has been an independent organization that proactively responds to business opportunities, strategically applies numerous resources, and adds new skill sets that help Missiles and Fire Control capture and retain military contracts.

Many of today's technology-rich companies have grown quickly, and one of their growing pains relates to how their information development departments should be structured. Many companies oscillate between independently distributed and functionally centralized models. Initially, technical project leads hire fellow engineers to document their products, but documentation costs aren't traceable and the quality and look of user materials vary from project to project. There is no centralized media retention. Then, a centralized department evolves to add the cost benefits of specialization and standardization, but as it matures it also grows apart from the technical organization with which it needs to successfully co-exist. Its costs become visible, and they are often misunderstood. Former STC President Dr. JoAnn Hackos asserts that a hybrid organization may be the optimum solution (1), since it benefits from the strengths of both types of organization.

So what would happen if such an organization became highly evolved? What initiatives would it be able to take? What departmental products and practices would result? How would the organization evolve over time and adapt to new missions? How would its products measure up against those of competitors? How would its employees benefit?

The Communications Department of Lockheed Martin Missiles and Fire Control-Orlando had already grown into a hybrid organization in the 1960s. A small functional organization hired staff, provided training, maintained policies, acquired budgets, and distributed required skills among decentralized project groups in place to support different military project areas. Communications leadership on the projects worked directly for program management and functioned with direct access to the technical staff.

Over the past 30 years, including the rapid changes of the past decade, the department has had just four directors. It has been organized as part of Technical

Operations (Engineering), Product Support (Logistics), and Public Affairs (Communications) during this time, and with each transformation, it has grown to accept new missions and offer new products. At a functional level, six managers are responsible for our media infrastructure, our public affairs and employee communication mission, and products and services in support of five product area vice-presidents as shown in Figure 1.



Figure 1. The Communications organization manages and distributes personnel and resources in support of a billion-dollar defense leader.

On project, ten Communications centers operate as small businesses within the larger enterprise. Each is customer-focused, offering a variety of media approaches, with

access to the department's extensive array of media resources. These include a video editing center, proposal specialists, a trade show development organization, a networked electronic reproduction center, a CD-ROM programming lab, a photographer and studio, a micrographics center, video technical documentation specialists, a meeting support specialist, writers and editors, technical and design illustrators, and a dedicated programmer/analyst.

Annually, Communications produces thousands of media products, ranging from press releases to Congressional briefings, from new business proposals to flight test video documentation, from trade show CD-ROMs to Web sites and product rollouts. Our range of services provides the department with the flexible mix of funding sources shown in Figure 2, and corresponding flexibility to move staff from assignment to assignment. In many cases, Communications staff benefits from variety in their assignments by rotating from time-constrained proposal work to advance planning of information releases for upcoming trade shows or highly visual briefings to key customers.

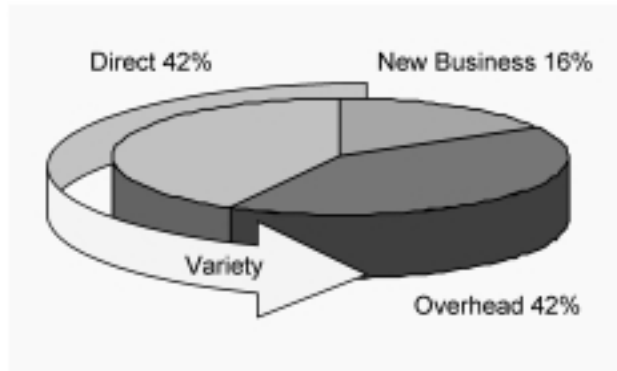


Figure 2. Funding sources include overhead, direct contract, and new business funding, permitting variety and rotation in staff assignments.

Given relative stability and a visible career path, our employees have stayed, and have grown. Over half have been in the department for 15 years. We continuously compare our work to others and challenge ourselves to be the best, with these results:

- We are visible members of the corporation's association of proposal professionals, and the proposal management software we developed is a corporate Best Practice, in use at 10 other Lockheed Martin companies.
- We directly contributed to the company's 83 percent proposal win rate in 1998.
- Four members of the department have served as president of the company's management club.

- Four members have been nominated or served as President of the Orlando Chapter of STC. One member (an STC Associate Fellow) leads the chapter's Education Committee.
- One member won the company's Author of the Year award in 1999 and remains the only non-engineer to do so.
- One member has had paintings go on to the international competition for the past 7 years, including Best of Show in the 1994 International Technical Art Competition (Figure 3).



Figure 3. We compete to improve our skills and capabilities to win new business.

- Our company newsmagazine *VISION* took Best-in-Show in the Publications category in the 1997 Florida Technical Publications competition, while the LANTIRN 2000 CD took Best-in-Show in the Online category. Our Army Experiment 5 campaign rated Distinguished in the promotional materials category and received an Excellence rating for the CD in the 1999 Florida competition (Figure 4).



Figure 4. Our multimedia campaign to demonstrate advanced soldier training methods was ranked "Distinguished" in the 1999 Florida Publications Competition.

- Over the past 3 years, 34 of 35 entries have received awards in the Florida competition.
- Nearly half of the department received special compensation awards last year.
- At the STC annual conference for the past 12 consecutive years, we have contributed presentations on proposal techniques, ethics, document development, and career planning in technical communication.

As a result, each week brings us new ways to combine our capabilities and knowledge to help Missiles and Fire Control meet its business objectives. Because we are armed with a broad array of media development resources and have the business experience and independence to plan their use, the scenario that follows, while fictitious, is not uncommon:

SCENE I: COMMUNICATIONS SENIOR STAFF MEETING

"So what are we going to do about this?" Mary Jo exclaimed, once again challenging her staff.

The Communications senior staff knew the expectation.

"We *can* do something," she went on. "We're not going to sit here and let this happen!"

At stake was a lucrative production contract on a precision-strike submarine-launched cruise missile, the Marauder III. Yesterday, Marauder III was a sole-source contract to Lockheed Martin Missiles and Control-Orlando (LMMFC-O)—the result of years of engineering development and test, rigorous cost-saving initiatives, and prototype production efforts, not to mention many long hours by Mary Jo's Communications team producing competitive proposals, high-level marketing briefings, and other communication products.

Today, according to the *Defense News*, the Navy would announce it was considering recompeting the production contract for Marauder III on a build-to-print, winner-take-all basis—thereby opening the door to Lockheed Martin's rivals in the fiercely competitive international aerospace business marketplace.

"Obviously, the competition has been working the media and the customer," Mary Jo declared. "We need to do everything we can to get this thing spiked to support the program and to protect our sole-source contract. At the same time, we also need to be ready to win—and win *decisively*—if there *is* another competitive proposal."

During a break in the staff meeting, Fred dashed to a nearby phone and called home—his first opportunity since the *Defense News* story broke—to apologize that he'd be later than he expected this evening, and probably for the rest of the month. The Marauder III fell within

his area of Communications responsibility. The long-term value of the production contract was in excess of \$2 billion. Face it—July and August were toast.

SCENE II: "SAVE MARAUDER III" COMMUNICATIONS TREATMENT CONFERENCE

Fred called the "Save Marauder III" Communications treatment conference to order. Around the conference table were several senior communications specialists, the Marauder III program director, and the Marauder III Business Development manager. On the table in front of each of them, in addition to the usual cup of coffee, was a 30-page spiral-bound document entitled "Marauder III Integrated Communications Plan."

Ron, the Business Development manager, gave a strategic overview. Consistent with the value of the contract, the Communications game plan assigned the project top priority.

"We're going to have to come at this from every angle," Fred declared. "Not only must we help the program defend its sole-source contract, we also must lay the groundwork for a successful proposal, should that become necessary."

"Do you really think they're going to compete this thing?" Mary Jo asked.

"We're not sure," replied Dave, the program director. "It might just be an attempt to ratchet us down on price, but we have to assume it's real."

"I have set up a briefing at the Government Project Office next Tuesday," Ron added. "We have a good relationship with the customer. Hopefully, we'll come back with some better insight on why they'd even consider competition at this point."

"That's good," Mary Jo replied. "It will give us sharper focus on how we should spin this in our media responses and promotion."

To keep the meeting on a path from strategic planning to tactical implementation, Fred pulled up the agenda on the electronic projection system.

The agenda reflected the breadth and depth of the integrated communications plan, spanning the full spectrum of communication products. Fred assumed responsibility to work with Ron and develop a core briefing that would serve a dual purpose: (1) spearhead the near-term marketing offensive to convince key Navy and congressional decision-makers to stay with the existing sole-source contract, and (2) create the nucleus of an executive summary for a potential competitive

proposal, should the effort to protect the company's sole-source contractual status prove unsuccessful.

Historically, the Communications Department assumed a leadership role in developing an early draft of an executive summary to serve as the core of a competitive proposal by defining win themes and discriminators. Leaders of the proposal volumes (technical, management, past performance, cost, etc.) then used the executive summary as a guide to ensure thematic consistency throughout the proposal.

"In the case of Marauder III, our discriminators are risk control and technical performance," Ron declared. "The competition is promising a rock-bottom price—probably lower than we can offer even after a thorough scrub."

"You can take that to the bank!" Dave laughed. "If I went up to the senior executives trying to underbid the number our competition is likely to throw at us, I might as well put in for early retirement!"

"Now, Dave, you can't be leaving us in a lurch," Fred chided. "Besides, they may be cheap, but they're also vulnerable."

"That's right," Ron chimed in, "so don't head out for the golf course just yet. Remember, the competition's product is still in the design phase, and we have already flight-tested a prototype that meets all of the customer's specifications."

"So we ghost them as high-risk on both schedule and performance," Mary Jo observed.

"Exactly," Fred replied. "We'll show how their low-cost story breaks down in the face of reality."

Having established a top-level strategy, Mary Jo's staff proceeded to propose specific communication products to deliver the key messages to the target audience. First was the core briefing. Fred envisioned an online interactive PowerPoint presentation suitable for conventional briefings, as well as desktop flipbooks for one-on-one sessions with key decision-makers.

As the meeting progressed, each participant set forth ideas on how the communications strategies, technologies, and capabilities in his/her area of responsibility could be brought to bear on the "Save Marauder III" campaign to maximize the company's chances of successfully defending its business.

Bill pointed out the critical role the Imaging Center would play in supporting the theme of product maturity and lower risk.

"We need to hit hard on the hardware maturity theme," he observed. "We have some good video footage of the first powered test flight and high-speed film stills of the

recent warhead tests. Fred, how do we stand on documentary photos of the hardware?"

"We have an extensive library that covers most of the subsystems," Fred replied. "There *is* one gap in coverage—we do not yet have decent imagery of the control system in fabrication."

"Can we set up a photo shoot to get that?" Bill asked.

"The problem is that the control system is a subcontract item, and the supplier has not been responsive to our requests for photo documentation."

"Do you want me to make a call?" Dave asked.

"Perhaps," Fred replied. "Let me take one more crack at it."

"OK, but please keep me posted. If I have to, I'll have Contracts send them a formal request."

"Thanks," Fred replied. "I'll let you know."

"How does the Web play in to this?" Bill asked.

"We intend to expand our external site with an emphasis on test results and hardware maturity," Fred replied. "Once we complete the interactive briefing, we will post it to the Web in the form of a downloadable slide show."

"How are you going to incorporate the test results?" Mary Jo asked.

"We plan to add QuickTime video clips of each flight test as soon as the Navy-cleared footage becomes available," Fred explained. "We're also going to expand the online digital photo file and add a submenu in the form of the inboard profile of the missile with hot spots leading to hardware photos of each subsystem, along with a brief list of its performance benefits."

"That's great," Bob said. "We have a similar element on the Javelin home page. If you like, we'll send you the source file to use as a template."

"Super."

Momentum was building.

Next was Andrea, on upcoming trade show opportunities.

"Navy League is the big hitter," she declared. "The timing is almost perfect."

"I assume we're going to show the flight test video and display the half-scale model?" Bill asked.

"Right on the first half, wrong on the second."

Bill arched an eyebrow, à la Spock. No model? Interesting...

"Real hardware."

Two eyebrows.

"You're going to haul an actual *missile* up to Navy League?" Doug found that prospect rather intriguing.

"That's right," Dave announced, thumping his coffee mug on the table for emphasis. "A *real* missile."

"Well, it's certainly thinking out of the box," Doug said.

"Without the warhead, of course." Dave winked at Doug.

"That would be most advisable," Mary Jo said. "I would sure hate to handle the damage control on *that* one with the press."

"Speaking of the *press*—" Andrea began.

"I can see it now," Don speculated, waving his hands in the air to frame an imaginary headline. "Lockheed Martin takes out three admirals in trade show explosion."

"Now, Don, honestly..." But Mary Jo's smile belied her mock scolding.

"I will say this—" she declared, "—the competition certainly can't bring real hardware."

"Perhaps they can mount an enormous transparency on a pedestal," Fred said dryly, referring to the immaturity of the rival's "vugraph engineered" design.

"Speaking of the press—" Andrea began again.

"Oh, were you wanting to speak about the press?" Fred injected.

"Yes, if we can stop blowing up admirals long enough for me to address it."

"We'll call a cease-fire," Fred laughed. "What's your plan of attack with the media?"

"I believe we need to blitz them with anything and everything showing hardware maturity," Andrea replied.

"Absolutely," Fred agreed. "I'll be sure to keep your team in the loop on all the flight test results."

"That's great," Andrea said. "Not only will that let us publicize our successes in *external* media releases, we will also be able to keep the employees posted on our *internal* media such as the TV system and the Intranet."

"That's important for sustaining morale in the trenches, because this is going to be a tough couple of months," Dave added. "Our folks on the program are already tired, and they still have a long way to go."

"I agree," Fred said. "Andrea, we'll keep you busy."

And so it went.

"I think your team has a great approach on hardware maturity," Ron summed up. "What about technical performance and schedule?"

"The biggest problem on pressing our technical performance advantage in public forum is that many of the key parameters are classified," Fred observed. "We are going to generate some unclassified charts for the briefing using normalized units of measure to show how we meet or exceed the specification in all key performance areas."

"Let's also make up a trade show panel with the same key graphics on performance," Andrea suggested.

"That's good," Fred agreed.

Bob offered a suggestion on the classified performance data.

"I believe we should work with Engineering to generate a classified white paper containing all the key performance data," he said. "We can circulate it within the approved Navy channels under our existing contract, which is something the competition cannot do. That way we can plant an inside message with the customer on our superior performance history and ghost the competition on its inability to meet the specs."

"That's a great idea," Ron agreed. "It would also give us a leg up on the technical volume if we *do* wind up in a competitive proposal."

"That's true," Fred agreed, "but hopefully if we put the right data in front of the right people at the right time, we will avoid the competition altogether."

"Sounds like a good game plan for performance," Mary Jo said. "And schedule?"

Andrea rubbed her hands together over an imaginary crystal ball.

"I see a large—no *huge!*—calendar with a countdown to low-rate initial production," she intoned, making a sweeping gesture to depict the envisioned trade show supergraphic.

"And I see a large clock ticking away ominously," Don added.

"Kind of like a Marauder III fuze ticking?" Doug offered, winking at Mary Jo.

Don glared at Doug. He had hoped Mary Jo had already gotten past his "trade show explosion" scenario.

Doug chuckled. "No, really...the clock keeps ticking, and then an alarm goes off. Botta bing, botta boom—we're ready for production, the competition isn't. We win, they lose."

"You make that sound so simple," Fred said with mock admiration.

"No, I like it," Mary Jo said, nodding in Don's direction. "I *like* the clock."

"I like the 'we win, they lose' part," Dave grinned.

"So do I," Mary Jo declared. "We *all* like that part."

The Communications director was pleased with the shower of specific, tactical ideas gushing forth from a strategic brainstorming session. This was proactive technical and business communication at its best, with senior communications specialists and program management working hand-in-glove to the same goal.

"Let's talk advertising," she said.

"Hardware, hardware, hardware," Ron chanted.

There was general assent.

"We need to hammer away at the fact that our product is *real* and that it will be *ready* for production," Fred said.

"Real and ready—that has a nice ring to it," Andrea said. "Lockheed Martin Marauder III—*real and ready!*"

Mary Jo nodded enthusiastically.

"That's the right message," she declared. "Now all we have to do is drive it home."

At that, the meeting broke up. The talking was over.

It was time to start driving.

REFERENCES

- (1) Hackos, JoAnne T., "Centralized versus Distributed Organizational Structures," *Proceedings of the 46th Annual Conference of the Society for Technical Communication*, May 16-19, 1999, Cincinnati, Ohio.

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