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AN URBAN COMMUNICATION AUDIT

Measuring Aspects of a 'Communicative City'

Leo W. Jeffres

Abstract / Treating communities as communication systems, this article applies the concept behind the International Communication Association (ICA) Communication Audit for describing communication within organizations, mapping out the turf and providing a sample of measures. Network and systems theory are merged as it is asked to what extent the communication network links people into a community social system, one of several potential goals that may be modified to fit a community analysis or attend to particular problems. Ten methods are offered as tools, from quantitative surveys, content analyses and inventories to qualitative methods employing in-depth interviews with informants and influentials, observations and examinations of critical events.

Keywords / communication audit / communication patterns / communicative city / community / media use / networks / urban communication

Treating metropolitan areas as communication systems is not novel, but our approach has generally focused on aspects of communication rather than the 'whole'. Recently, the Urban Communication Foundation has focused on cities and the extent to which their planning, programs and use of technology encourage the type of social interaction that strengthens ties and is functional for urban areas. This article is an attempt to apply the concept behind the International Communication Association (ICA) Communication Audit to urban communication systems, mapping out the turf and providing a sample of measures.

When we talk about the 'communicative city', we are referring to a community whose environment facilitates development of a communication system that integrates its residents into a dynamic whole, that enables its citizens to get involved in civic activities and participate in a variety of roles, and makes possible a balance between mobility and stability. To identify how well a community matches this picture, we need an inventory of the city's communication activities and its relationship to the urban environment.

An Urban Communication Audit constructed to inventory communication patterns in a geographically identified community would share many of the same objectives and tools with the ICA Communication Audit but also deviate in significant ways. First we describe the ICA audit, then contemplate how a similar communication audit might serve a community. In Goldhaber and Rogers' (1979) description of the

ICA audit, expenses totaled some US\$35,000 and a time requirement of more than three months; inflated to current prices, audits are no small task, and elevating the project to an entire community would require multiple methodologies, both qualitative and quantitative, that obtain useful data at higher levels of analysis.

The ICA Communication Audit

The Communication Audit advanced as an analytical tool by Goldhaber to assess organizational communication processes and outcomes was developed and tested by members of the organizational division of the International Communication Association beginning in the early 1970s (Brooks et al., 1979). The audit employs five separate but related data-gathering tools, including a questionnaire survey, confidential interviews, a network analysis, critical incident analysis and diaries. The overall objective of the audit is to evaluate an organization's communication system, providing information and recommendations that should help an organization to improve its communication practices and organizational effectiveness. Specific objectives include determining the amount of information under- or overload, evaluating information sources and the quality of relationships, identifying operational and planned networks, determining bottlenecks and gatekeepers, identifying communication incidents and experiences, describing patterns of actual communication and providing recommendations. When these objectives have been met, an organization obtains results such as the following: a profile of perceptions of communication events and practices, a map of the operational network for rumors and instrumental messages, summaries of communication experiences explaining problems and strengths, an organizational profile of actual communication behaviors, a set of recommendations for attitudes, behaviors, practices and skills to be continued, added, changed or eliminated, and benchmarks on communication behaviors and perceptions for possible efforts to make changes.

An Urban Communication Audit

Our starting point has to be goals and objectives. While organizational problems may be ascertained through discussions with leadership in the client organization and examining its purpose and goals (profit or not profit-making, for example), communities are not goal-seeking organizations but sites wherein residents in a variety of roles act out their lives through work and leisure. Furthermore, while the boundaries of organizations are identifiable, if somewhat problematic, those of communities are even more amorphous. And, one of the questions might be communication among residents vs communication of residents with others outside the community, in other systems. Furthermore, while the ICA audit focused primarily on interpersonal communication patterns (or, point-to-point through email channels today), a community communication audit would involve a broader set of channels, including mass and specialized media, interpersonal face-to-face interaction across various roles and contexts, and technologically mediated point-to-point channels.

The ICA Audit survey uses a set of 128 items plus up to 18 questions of any type determined by the organization, allowing the client to identify specific problems

or issues for examination that may be unique or currently more important to the organization. If our 'client' is the community itself, perhaps through its elected representatives, then we could ask what 'unique' problems or issues involving communication deserve attention, but we also know from the literature that a communication system is the 'glue' that ties people together in a community. Thus, a 'community audit' would identify the communication patterns that tie people together, lead to an integrated system that links people from different neighborhoods and different backgrounds. In addition to the channels, the network patterns that constitute the system, we want to identify the content of messages flowing through the system – do they confront the issues and problems, for example. A 'complete audit' of a community's communication patterns, particularly an urban area, is probably impossible without limitless resources, but a useful audit is conceivable if we ask the right questions and use a variety of methodologies to identify the shape of this elephant.

While communities are both networks and systems, it is the network that is probably most useful as a template for a communication audit. Relationships are the building blocks of network analysis and a network is often defined by a specific type of relationship; thus, we could look at a community's advice-giving communication network, a crime-fighting communication network or a social communication network (Jeffres, 2002; Mitchell, 1969). Network properties, or characteristics, that might be of interest include density, cohesion and, in a situation where we are overlaying network on a geographic area, coverage – the extent to which the community territory is covered by the network (do some neighborhoods get left out of an internet system, of media coverage, of physical institutions facilitating weak ties and interpersonal communication?). People's participation in networks includes both encoding and decoding roles, so that we might look at the extent to which citizens in a community are active encoders – sending messages throughout the community, to leaders, to organizations and institutions – as well as decoders – receiving messages from a wealth of institutions rather than being in the audiences of only a handful of institutions. We also can use network concepts to examine the 'strength of weak ties' (Granovetter, 1973), a concept particularly apt in analyzing communities. Weak ties refer to acquaintances, perhaps neighbors and associates rather than close friends, relatives or many co-workers. A community with a dense communication network of weak ties is likely to be more integrated than one composed of weak links among strong, integrated subgroups such as ethnics (e.g. Bulmer, 1985); strong ties tend to cluster into interlocking networks (see Feld, 1981), which usually form subgroups, or cliques. We might also examine how a community's communication system/network fulfills citizen information needs – about the urban environment, about community problems or how to solve them, about institutions, about how to reach particular goals, e.g. access public services (see Dervin, 1977). We also might borrow a page from Galaskiewicz and Krohn (1984), who look at community structure as a network of interorganizational links, asking how the urban communication system links different groups, organizations or institutions. And, to merge network and systems theory, we might ask to what extent the communication network links people into a community social system (Jeffres, 2002: 150–4). Clearly, communities serve a variety of goals for their constituents, so the following questions are a sample of what we might ask:

- Do the patterns of communication indicate levels of interpersonal trust, cohesiveness, supportiveness, sociability and overall satisfaction with the neighborhood and community?
- Do the patterns indicate a level of mobility or stability of relationships?
- What is the density of the pattern of communication relationships?
- Do the patterns of communication facilitate diffusion of innovations and efficient diffusion of information about the community itself?
- Do the patterns of communication facilitate civic involvement?
- Do the patterns of communication connect citizens and leaders to each other?
- Do the patterns of communication facilitate community mobilization?
- Do the patterns of communication support a strong community identity?
- Do the patterns of communication support the economic system, linking employers and employees, entrepreneurs and opportunities; the disadvantages with support systems?
- Do the patterns of communication link new or potential residents with potential neighborhoods and welcoming institutions?
- Do the patterns of communication link citizens to leisure opportunities in non-work roles?
- How does the community physical structure facilitate or inhibit social communication?
- What are the bottlenecks to communication among citizens in the community, between leaders and citizens, among different groups?
- Who are the gatekeepers of information in the different communication systems of the community (e.g. a system providing access to public resources, a crime-fighting system)?
- How open, diverse, 'complete' are the mediated (mass and point-to-point) channels of communication linking citizens to each other?
- How frequent/extensive are the interpersonal, group and organizational patterns of communication linking people in the community?
- What is volume and quality of mediated communication behaviors in the community?

Methods, Procedures and Results of an Urban Communication Audit

An individual community audit could answer a subset of the questions raised in the previous section, as well as others unique to the community. Data-gathering tools that could be employed include:

- A survey measuring individual-level data to describe citizens' involvement in the community communication system;
- Confidential interviews with influentials and others in key observer roles for ascertaining communication among groups, organizations and institutions;
- A critical incident analysis completed in group sessions to capture interaction within different neighborhoods and to reflect on the community-wide survey;

- Communication diaries filled out by a sample of residents from different neighborhoods, and of key representatives from different institutions measuring their communication with other groups/organizations;
- An inventory of mass media and mediated technology/systems linking residents to each other and outside the system;
- Inventories of physical locations (the constructed environment), forums, institutions and opportunities, internal and external public settings and public activities that facilitate formal and informal communication behaviors;
- Systematic content analyses of media messages;
- Use of communication informants from a sample of neighborhoods;
- Systematic observation of communication behaviors in different geographic locations to ascertain patterns of interaction as related to the built and natural environment;
- Use of unobtrusive measures and naturally occurring data, or information collected by other public and private institutions in the community.

Identifying Audit Goals and Objectives

A barebones audit should cover the key characteristics of a 'communicative city', stated earlier as: integrating residents into a dynamic whole, enabling its citizens to get involved in civic activities and participate in a variety of roles, and making possible a balance between mobility and stability. Each of these can be broken down further into subcomponents that can be matched with assessment instruments, but first we need to inventory the descriptive features of the communication system.

A. Inventorying Features of the Communication System

1. What are the mass media serving the community, how well do their audiences match the citizenry? (e.g. Are some areas of the community media rich – metro media, 'alternative' newspapers, neighborhood media, cable access channels, neighborhood websites – and others media poor?)
2. What are the opportunities for point-to-point technologically mediated communication, and how well do they 'match' the citizenry? (e.g. Are there community bulletin boards, blogs, email letters/lists serving neighborhoods and groups in the community, and how extensive is the geographic area/population served?)
3. What are the key public forums, institutions and opportunities for interpersonal communication about public issues or concerns, and how extensive is their collective coverage of the geographic area/population served (e.g. city club sessions, public hearings, block clubs that meet regularly, open-mike sessions at city council meetings, school board meetings with public input, community organization meetings focusing on public concerns)?
4. What are the available public settings, 'third places', for informal communication and how extensive is their collective coverage of the geographic area/population served (e.g. outside venues – parks, plazas, communication-friendly settings in lifestyle shopping centers – and inside venues – coffee shops, recreation centers, social clubs)?

5. What are the traditional public events/activities that facilitate informal communication and how extensive is their collective coverage of the geographic area/population served (e.g. rib fests, ethnic festivals, concerts in the park)?

B. Integrating Residents into a Dynamic Whole

1. To what extent do the features of the system (described above) integrate (bring together) people from different ethnic-racial, social or economic backgrounds for social purposes?
2. To what extent do the features of the system (described above) integrate (bring together) people from different ethnic-racial, social or economic backgrounds for instrumental public purposes (to discuss, act on public issues)?
3. To what extent are civic leaders and public officials connected with citizens/constituents by system features (and how extensive is the connection, i.e. what groups or areas of the community are left out, and which leaders are disconnected)?
4. To what extent do features of the system (described above) encourage collective problem-solving and civil dialogue?

C. Enabling Citizens to Get Involved in Civic Activities and Participate in a Variety of Roles

1. How rich is the variety of civic activities open to and accessible to citizens? (e.g. Are there active neighborhood, political, self-help, ethnic, fraternal groups throughout the community or are they limited to particular areas and groups? How active are these in communicating with residents, encouraging involvement?)
2. What are the barriers to citizen participation and involvement through public forums, institutions and opportunities for interpersonal communication about public issues or concerns?
3. To what extent does media coverage of civic institutions facilitate involvement by residents? (e.g. What institutions are covered, which are not? Is mobilizing information widely available?)
4. To what extent do features of the system facilitate citizens' involvement in the 'economic system' as entrepreneurs, buyers-consumers, employees-employers, clients-resource providers? (e.g. Do the media/public websites alert residents to available resources, economic opportunities?)

D. Making Possible a Balance between Mobility and Stability

1. To what extent is the communication system open to new ideas, to external input, to criticism? (i.e. How open is the system? Are new immigrants welcomed or feared? Are outside speakers invited to present their ideas? Do letters to the editor and the blogs demonstrate a diversity of ideas? Are non-mainstream groups covered in the media?)
2. To what extent do the media and other features of the communication system

pass along the traditions and history of the community and its cultures? (i.e. socialization of new generations and new residents so they understand the community's past; Do the media offer historical features? Are traditions of ethnic groups covered in the media?)

3. To what extent do features of the communication system reach out to potential residents? (e.g. Does the community website have the ingredients of a 'welcome wagon' for new residents, descriptions of neighborhoods?)

Developing the Audit Instruments

Ten different methods were identified earlier for their ability to ascertain data on urban communication systems. Perhaps the most expensive item is a public survey of residents, which would obtain a host of self-report data on citizen communication patterns as well as their perceptions of the environment and how it facilitates their involvement in the system. In constructing a time-line, the first methods should be the inventories, first of mass media and mediated technology/systems linking residents to each other and outside the system, and inventories of other key features facilitating communication behaviors.

- I. An inventory of mass media and mediated technology/systems linking residents to each other and outside the system (providing data to address objectives A1 and A2).
- II. An inventory of key public forums, institutions and opportunities for interpersonal communication about public issues or concerns, and their collective coverage (providing data to address objectives A3 and C2).
- III. An inventory of available public settings, 'third places', for informal communication and their collective coverage (providing data to address objective A4).
- IV. An inventory of traditional public events/activities that facilitate informal communication and their collective coverage (providing data to address objectives A5 and C1).
- V. Use of unobtrusive measures and naturally occurring data, or information collected by other public and private institutions in the community. This might include compilations of website visits, groups tracking civic involvement in organizations, public data on attendance at various events/celebrations, and so forth (such data might address some A and B objectives, as well as C1).
- VI. A survey measuring individual-level data to describe citizens' involvement in the community communication system (obtaining data on people's communication behaviors, their perceptions of the communication behaviors of others/influentials, their perceptions of the communication system itself and their perceptions of the urban environment and how it affects their communication behaviors, including data to address objectives A1–4, B1–4, C1 and D1).
- VII. Confidential interviews with influentials and others in key observer roles for ascertaining communication among groups, organizations and institutions (providing data to address objectives B1, B2, B3, C1, C2, C4 and D1).
- VIII. A critical incident analysis completed in group sessions to capture interaction

- within different neighborhoods and to reflect on the community-wide survey (providing data to address objectives A3-5 and B1-4, especially B4, C2 and D1).
- IX. Communication diaries filled out by a sample of residents from different neighborhoods, and of key representatives from different institutions measuring their communication with other groups/organizations (providing data to address objectives also measured as part of the survey).
 - X. Use of communication informants from a sample of neighborhoods (providing data to address objectives in B and C).
 - XI. Systematic content analyses of media messages (providing data to address objectives A2, C3, C4 and D1-3).
 - XII. Systematic observation of communication behaviors in different geographic locations to ascertain patterns of interaction as related to the built and natural environment (providing data to address objectives B1, B2 and D1).

Following are descriptions of the methods available for conducting an Urban Communication Audit.

Method A: Inventories

The conduct of inventories (audit instruments I-IV) is largely inductive affairs that operate much like grounded theory methods. Thus, the team conducting each inventory starts with a suggested template developed in conjunction with local experts familiar with the urban communication system and environment being examined. Then local employees/volunteers specializing in the particular areas are gathered, trained and provided with resource materials that would include online searches and directories, published materials and directories, maps of the area, public records and archive data. Once the inventories have been completed, they should go through reviews by other local experts and officials for assessment of their completeness. The actual materials for an inventory are largely checklists; some ideas can be found from Miller (1991).

Method B: Unobtrusive Measures and Naturally Occurring Data Collected or Available

Although unobtrusive data methods are difficult to set up with high reliability, they still represent opportunities for pursuing objectives of the audit. Furthermore, organizations, private companies and institutions routinely collect data on people and events that may address some of the objectives; certainly this has to be pursued on a case-by-case basis, but we can provide some suggestions.

Thus, commercial sources have data on media audiences (e.g. Audit Bureau of Circulation, Arbitron, Nielsen) and many websites routinely collect information on who is logging onto their sites, as well as where they come from. Local organizations may keep track of attendance at events, and, if the area has a public tax on tickets to some events, the tax data can be used to track public participation.

Method C: Confidential Interviews with Influentials

In-person meetings with influentials in the community generally follow an interview schedule comprised of a questionnaire that can collect some of the same data as the public survey, and open-ended items that solicit their views about the community's communication system and the urban environment. Some of the items employed with neighborhood communication informants would be included, including those soliciting critical incidents and information explaining influentials' position and relationship with the community. Influentials can be identified using the procedures employed in 'power studies' (Dahl, 1961). Influentials can be identified by position, e.g. mayors, heads of city council, corporate executives, heads of foundations and so forth. Influentials also can be identified by people in a position to observe the exercise of power; thus, local journalists covering the domains identified as power centers (e.g. government, partisan politics, manufacturing, commerce, religion-ethnicity, health, media, entertainment-leisure, social services, foundations, transportation) nominate influentials. A combination of approaches also can be used, e.g. asking expert observers to nominate influentials by role and then asking those individuals to nominate candidates from within their area, who then can be interviewed in turn.

Method D: Critical Incident Analysis

This may accompany the interviews with influentials and or community/neighborhood communication informants. Depending on the importance of this method for the particular community (e.g. a major conflict is unresolved and the client community wishes to improve communication between the parties involved), critical incident analysis asks principals in a particular case to present their views of the situation. In addition to the qualitative assessments and the comparative data collected from the parties involved, interviews may pose 'hypothetical situations' and how they would handle them, what they would expect, what roadblocks would be anticipated, what parties would be involved.

Method E: Communication Diary

A communication diary is designed to obtain data where the reports are closer to the events/behaviors being recorded. This enhances the reliability of our measures. Diaries are particularly useful for communication scholars who want to ascertain patterns of interaction and media use. Thus, an audit might employ diaries distributed to selected members of representative groups or neighborhoods (perhaps the communication informants interviewed before or after the diary is administered) or influentials. Diaries can collect general communication data, e.g. when media are used, when the participant communicates with someone in their neighborhood, and the content of the messages, or more specific data on communication behaviors targeting concepts such as the following: when the participant felt a need for civic information not available; when one observed conflicts in communication among neighbors; when one observed environmentally facilitated interaction among strangers.

Diaries are set up as small folders/booklets that are clearly labeled and easy to fill out. A more expensive but modern approach would employ PDAs or electronic instruments for recording. And an even more expensive but systematic approach would use the electronic collection of specific information stimulated by randomly picked time-frames throughout the day, e.g. participants are contacted by a 'beep' on the device employed, at which point they report on the designated communication behavior.

For an example of the diary method, see Robinson (1977) and Szalai et al. (1973).

Method F: Use of Communication Informants

Communication informants are selected because of their knowledge of the community. The concept of 'informants' is a technique popularized by linguists and anthropologists trying to get insights into a language or culture. The informant 'role' also relies on the interview technique but the individual is selected because he or she is believed to have insight into the culture and, by being one step removed, provides a selective screen for the investigator (Webb et al., 1981). Jeffres et al. (1991) extended the concept to examine neighborhood communication patterns. They selected 'communication informants' to ascertain perceptions of neighborhoods and interactions within them from individuals who shared a history with the area and were knowledgeable about it.

Informants may be selected to represent neighborhoods, groups or cultures. This method is similar to interviews with influentials, who also are expected to be in positions that allow them to observe behaviors not available to others. 'Neighborhood communication informants' are long-term residents integrated into the neighborhoods and acting as informants about the patterns of communication in the area. Names of communication informants may be solicited from editors of community newspapers or other influentials familiar with individuals who have lived in the neighborhood, interacted with others in the community and are knowledgeable about the area.

Communication informants may be asked about their own communication patterns as well as those of the community itself. The interview may employ a questionnaire providing data much like the general public survey, as well as items that explain their relationships within the community and their more expert perceptions of the communication patterns in the neighborhood, e.g. the extent to which residents from different background communicate with each other, the extent to which civic leaders such as city council or school board representatives interact with and are open to views of residents. Open-ended items should solicit roadblocks to communication with the community and examples of critical incidents that demonstrate the climate for communication within the community. For example, an informant may be asked to think of a recent situation where everyone seemed to know about something going on in the neighborhood before they did, or of a conflict situation that resulted from poor communication.

Informants may be asked for their perceptions of communication in the neighborhood and how people get along, types of conflicts, which groups interact most

often and which do not, their perceptions of the quality of life in their neighborhood, the major problems and efforts to solve them. They may be asked, 'How much do people talk and communicate with each other in the neighborhood/community?' Scales may be developed to test the extent to which statements such as the following characterize the community or different sections of the neighborhood: 'you often see people talking on street corners and you see a lot of street activity throughout the neighborhood'; 'you see a lot of people talking in a few places in the neighborhood but most areas have little street life'; 'most activity is private, with almost no street life and few people chatting on the street'; 'people in the neighborhood limit their interactions to other people in the neighborhood/community'; 'people keep mainly to themselves and interact very little'; 'people interact only with people in the immediate neighborhood'; 'people interact only with people outside the neighborhood'; 'people interact infrequently with people both inside the neighborhood and elsewhere in the city'; 'people interact frequently with people both inside the neighborhood and elsewhere in the community'.

To ascertain perceptions of community activity, informants are asked: 'How much activity goes on in formal organized groups like block watch, clubs, charities, scouts, etc.?' and asked to pick one of the following responses: 'there are a lot formal groups and many activities'; 'there are a few very active formal groups but not many'; 'there are few formal groups and few people active'; 'there are almost no formal groups in the neighborhood'. A second item might solicit: 'How much activity in the neighborhood/community served occurs in informal situations, e.g. people visiting each other's homes, socializing while playing card games, parties?' They are asked to pick one of the following responses: 'there is a lot of this activity in the neighborhood'; 'there is a moderate amount of this activity in the neighborhood'; 'there is only a little amount of this activity in the neighborhood'; 'there is almost none of this activity in the neighborhood'.

Respondents may be asked for how well informed residents seem to be, e.g. 'Based on your discussions with people in the neighborhood/community and what you've learned, how informed would you say people are about current events?' – 'almost all adults are well informed about current events'; 'most people are well informed but a few aren't'; 'a few people are well informed but most are poorly informed'; 'almost all adults are poorly informed'.

Method G: Content Analysis

Content analysis to obtain data on objectives A2, C3, C4 and D1–3 would be tailored to the media system of the community. Thus, for A2, determining how well the internet websites, community bulletin boards, blogs, etc. match the community is largely a content analysis following an inventory that begins with the key community web addresses and leads through various searches. Once the 'list' has been obtained, the sites, blogs, etc. are content analyzed to see how they match/cover the community turf being audited.

To address C3, determining the extent to which media coverage of civic institutions facilitates involvement of residents, the major print (newspapers, city magazines)

and broadcast news media (news broadcasts and magazine or other 'non-fiction' local programs) would be systematically sampled and content analyzed for coverage of city councils, school boards and other public institutions, including the frequency and amount of time/space devoted to these activities, and whether/how much 'mobilizing information' (dates, times, locations, phone numbers and other information that allows residents to be mobilized) is included.

Content analyses that provide data for objective C4 (the extent to which features of the system facilitate citizens' involvement in the 'economic system' as entrepreneurs, buyers-consumers, employees-employers, clients-resource providers) require a more precise determination of the actual goals for the audit. Thus, for example, in a community plagued by unemployment and major social problems, the audit might focus on the extent to which the public media provide news and information about resources for entrepreneurs, people seeking jobs and employers seeking scarce skilled workers, assistance available from public agencies and private institutions. Such a content analysis would likely focus on print media (newspapers) and the internet.

Content analyses addressing objective D1 (the extent to which the communication system is open to new ideas, criticism, external input) could include an examination of letters to the editor in newspapers, and local blogs, as well as news coverage of groups (newcomers, immigrants, non-mainstream groups). Media news and features that focus on history, local traditions and cultures would be examined in content analyses of newspapers, city magazines and television news broadcasts to address objective D2. And an analysis of local websites for information targeting new residents and visitors (e.g. welcome wagon areas, descriptions of neighborhoods, 'things to do' and list of organizations to join) would help address objective D3.

Method H: Systematic Observation of Communication Behaviors

Participant observation is the often-employed method used by anthropologists and organizational communication scholars, and systematic observation is an appropriate tool to obtain data on (1) interaction in public settings throughout communities; and (2) how the built and natural environment facilitates or inhibits communication. Again, the purpose is our guide. For an Urban Communication Audit, systematic observation can be used to gather data for examining objectives B1 (the extent to which features of the system integrate – bring together – people from different ethnic-racial, social or economic grounds for social purposes), B2 (the extent to which features of the system integrate – bring together – people from different ethnic-racial, social or economic grounds for instrumental public purposes, to discuss, act on public issues), and perhaps others (e.g. D1).

In addressing objective B1, we would sample geographic areas for systematic observation of interaction at different times among people from diverse backgrounds. Coding sheets would be constructed with clear instructions for reporting interactions, and training sessions would be set up to test the instruments and gauge reliability. Teams of observers would be assigned to geographically identified areas at specific

times to make observations. Depending on the availability of resources, samples of public spaces (parks, plazas), streets, public retail areas and other 'third places' (e.g. coffee shops, recreation centers) would be selected. Furthermore, those managing the audit should familiarize themselves with the built environment and natural features in the community so that they can identify those features that the literature (and common sense) says should facilitate or inhibit public communication; this knowledge would then be used to add additional systematic observations to test the hypotheses raised.

Objective B2 requires that similar observational instruments be employed to examine the nature of the interaction at public events, meetings and other settings. Thus, observers armed with similar instruments would attend public meetings, hearings, gatherings and events to identify patterns of interaction.

Method I: Survey of Residents

A survey would be tailored to the community but a battery of urban communication items have already been tested by scholars. Depending on available resources, the client might be asked to pay for a metropolitan survey of adult residents, or the sample could be taken of neighborhoods/communities to be certain all areas are included. Furthermore, depending on the needs of the client, ascertaining zip codes of respondents allows for matching responses with census or other community data pertinent to the objectives of the audit.

Following are the concepts measured in a survey, with a sample of measures. For a complete set, see Jeffres (2008).

Interpersonal and Point-to-Point Communication Links

This measures the volume of one's interpersonal communication via an assessment of dyadic links, e.g. number of people talked to across various contexts (neighbors, at work, in public places).

Communication Need

This concept measures the need to communicate in various roles as encoder (sending messages) and decoder (receiving messages), within and across contexts, mediated and interpersonal.

Reports of Interpersonal Communication Routines

The concept being measured here refers to the routines or patterns of communication that capture people's encoding and decoding behaviors, including interpersonal communication patterns at work, family communication behaviors, communication homopoly patterns – or the diversity of one's communication partners within and across contexts, interpersonal communication with friends and communication within clubs/organizations.

Involvement in Neighborhood Communication Networks

Involvement in a neighborhood communication network is a concept that measures the extent to which a person is able to share information and/or ideas with other persons in his or her neighborhood while also having the opportunity to receive information and/or ideas from others in the same neighborhood. The network may be very formal and structured or it may be informal and casual. It is the process whereby various forms of verbal and non-verbal communication are used to share and distribute ideas and information among and between residents of a given neighborhood. It includes both mediated and interpersonal communication links, e.g. talking with neighbors and reading the neighborhood newspaper.

Neighboring Activity

Some measures of neighboring activity include communication items such as providing advice and personal support, while others focus on helping out with the mail, caring for pets, etc.

Strength of Neighborhood Ties

Neighborhood ties refer to the interpersonal connections (relatives, friends, neighbors) and the nature of those links (e.g. interpersonal communication).

Neighborhood Activity

To measure 'neighborhood activity' that provides opportunities for people to engage in interpersonal communication, respondents' use of facilities and the environment is ascertained – from coffee shops to fraternal halls, libraries, parks and churches.

Organizational Membership/Involvement

Involvement in organizations is a key concept in social capital. It is also an opportunity for people to communicate. Residents are asked about membership in formal groups.

Diversity of the Interpersonal Communication Network

This concept is tailored to represent the diversity of the community being audited, including the religious, ethnic, philosophical diversity of one's communication partners.

Third Places at the Neighborhood/Community Level

The notion of a 'third place' refers to opportunities residents have to engage in communication outside work and home. This concept measures the availability of such places for communication in a community and the compatibility of those available with the population, e.g. excellent facilities for seniors but not youth.

Comfort in the Public Sphere

This captures the extent to which people feel comfortable talking with other people in general, as well as talking about significant things with associates, neighbors, strangers.

Perceived Climate for Communication in the Community

This represents respondents' perceptions of the climate for communication about civic issues in their community.

Strength of Neighborhood Attachment

This concept refers to the affective tie between residents and their neighborhood/community, which is positively related to communication patterns.

Political-Civic Discussion Network

This concept refers to the frequency, diversity and size of the political-civic discussion network.

Political-Civic Involvement/Activity

There are a variety of scales available in the literature, many including overt political behaviors (attending meetings of the city council) as well as communication behaviors (writing letters), e.g. Milbrath's (1965) scale.

Perceived Political Efficacy

Political efficacy refers to one's perception/belief that one can make a difference, have an impact in the political arena. Some of these items often included involve communication, others are affective assessments (see Olsen's [1969] political incapability scale for the community level).

Media Use, Internet Use, Access to Communication Technologies

Standard items readily available in the literature tap internet use, frequency of exposure to the media, access to technologies, interest in community topics in the news and uses and gratifications driving these patterns.

Social Capital

Although not entirely communication, the concept of social capital as usually operationalized includes organizational membership and interpersonal trust.

Operationalizing Communication Capital

The concept of 'communication capital' refers to those communication patterns that facilitate social problem-solving (see Jeffres et al., 2007). Patterns cross interpersonal, organizational and mass communication contexts, each representing a subscale of the concept.

Involvement in Community Leisure Opportunities

Leisure activities represent opportunities to meet people, discuss problems and learn about the community. This set of opportunities would need to be tailored to the area being audited and include events, venues and context.

Making Recommendations

The goal of an Urban Communication Audit is to make recommendations addressing the goals of the client community. These would include identifying gaps in features of the communication system inventoried, as well as suggesting options to improve the community's communication system and urban environment to achieve the basic goals (to better integrate residents into a dynamic whole, enable citizens to get involved in civic activities and participate in a variety of roles, and striking a balance between mobility and stability) as well as those identified by the community as particularly relevant or unique at the time of the audit.

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Leo W. Jeffres is professor of communication at Cleveland State University. He is the author of four books, including *Urban Communication Systems: Neighborhoods and the Search for Community* (Hampton Press, 2002), as well as numerous articles and papers focusing on the urban context over the past three decades. His research has contributed to our understanding of ethnic media use and identity, roles of neighborhood newspapers, audience uses of communication technologies and media effects. He has been director of the Communication Research Center at Cleveland State and is a member of the executive board of the Urban Communication Foundation.

Address Cleveland State University, Cleveland, OH 44115, USA. [email: l.jeffres@csuohio.edu]