The five concepts and theories that seem to have the most relevance to my current professional position as an English Language instructor and the head of an English Language and Education Department are: (1) diversity in the workplace and its effect on communication, (2) leadership, (3) management and administration, (4) decision making and (5) problem solving with a special focus on organizational influences and barriers that relate to them. Although these five terms signify different functions in organizational communication, there is actually a close relationship among them with respect to the human aspect of communication and their contribution, when used effectively, to the creation of a healthy working environment.

Truly, these concepts, and the theories associated with them refer to different organizational functions and individual ways of behavior, in the ultimate analysis; however, they are complementary to each other as they constitute one entity, especially when we remember that their interaction is governed by the same approach, namely the competency framework approach. This approach emphasizes an integration of four human components: personal knowledge, interpersonal sensitivities, communication skills, and ethical value though a blend of theory, practice, and analysis.

The competency framework approach helps contemporary organizations achieve their objectives not only by relying on technical communication and the processing of large amounts of information but also, and more importantly, through human communications or individuals who obtain responsibilities for developing relationships that are ultimate conductive to effective communication, trust, creativity, innovation, and change. In fact, it is this human aspect or
perspective and the extent to which it is effective in organizational communication that constitute the common denominator among the five concepts and the theories related to them.

As far as working in a diverse work environment and its effect or interpersonal communication is concerned, I would like to focus in this regard on the supervisor/subordinate relationship, motivation, active listening, and conflict management. Working in such an environment does not ensure the ability to relate effectiveness to it. In order to ensure a healthy working environment, supervisors must value individual differences in order to keep their subordinates well motivated. This is because when people feel that they are appreciated, they work the hardest; and they feel that they are most appreciated when they believe attention is given to their individual differences. Moreover, people feel strong when they recognize that they are able to learn from others who are deemed to be different from them. In addition, they become capable or constructing positive interpersonal skills when they feel empowered. This process of valuing differences enables individuals to benefit from watching and assessing differences in people’s propositions and builds realistic and significant relationships with individuals and groups they consider different.

In order to increase the effectiveness of our communication competency, we have to understand the barriers and obstacles that prevent recognizing the value of diversity since these barriers help shed light on problems that occur to people within the framework of ethnicity, race, and values. For instance, we can improve the implications that can contribute to the improvement of effective communication by personalizing knowledge and preconception. Moreover, we can improve the barrier of prejudices that lead to negative emotional reactions towards others by being non-judgmental or the positive opposite of prejudice; and, finally we can overcome the barrier of stylistic differences in personal communication that prevent interpersonal relationships by the show of respect for those differences. By overcoming these barriers, we can keep all people highly motivated regardless of individual differences (Shockley-Zalabak, 2002).

Another specific communication skill that is necessary for valuing diversity and establishing positive interpersonal relationships within organizations is active listening. We should foster interpersonal experiences of individuals in organizations regardless of individual differences. An effective utilization of the three theories of Maslow, Herzberg, and Skinner could lead to positive
interpersonal relationships among all individuals. Active listening means the way of hearing, assigning meaning, and validating our interpretations. It also means increasing the soundness of message reception, thus allowing responses founded on what was reported, not on what might have been reported. We should overcome barriers to active listening in order to ensure effective interpersonal communication. Examples of such barriers are: considering communicators and subjects as insignificant, emotionally not accepting messages, pinpointing personal styles instead of messages, not succeeding in identifying listening distractions, pretending attention; and, finally, “misusing thought speed and speech speed differential” (Shockley-Zalabak, 2002, pp.170-171).

We form interpersonal communication in organizations for task and social reasons. To reach a stage of effectiveness in a variety of relationships, we have to comprehend how other people attract us and how the impressions we form affect our communication behaviors. For example, others may attract us by physical and personality characteristics. In other words, we identify with people whom we consider more positively attractive than others, and who are similar to us in attitudes and beliefs. However, the effect of physical attractiveness and similarity in personal characteristics becomes more problematic when establishing interpersonal relationships in organizations. In addition to these effects, we tend to like most individuals who reward us. Again the pattern of influence formation can affect the development feedback we receive from diverse organizational members. People generally form certain positive impressions of individuals who are of the same race, religion, age, and general social class. To sum up, there is more likeliness to build acceptable interpersonal relationships founded on similarity rather than marked by diversity, and knowing this about ourselves is the first step in rectifying the problem.

Highly competent organizational individuals, especially supervisors, should not confine themselves solely to the normal; they should also be ready to establish constructive interpersonal relationships with people who are both similar and dissimilar. Supervisors can use the aforementioned specific skills of active listening and motivation to improve communication effectiveness in a diverse work environment. Both supervisors and subordinates introduce a wide range of personal characteristics to their relationships. The interaction of these qualities not only affects the contentment each individual has towards the other, but also determines the general effect of the relationship. A supervisor, for example, who shares followers the same value is
more likely to see followers as competent. In addition, a follower could be more content with his/her relationship with the manager, if he/she perceives a high level of competence in the relationship. In this context, conviction between managers and followers is the main element of improving sound communication and changing any potential negative effects to positive ones. Trust is founded on the four competencies of communication (knowledge, skills, sensitivity, and values) that supervisors and subordinates bring to relationships. The relationship is affected not only by the amount of openness and support between the two but also by the amount of influence the supervisor has in satisfying the subordinate’s needs.

Supervisors, as well as all other members of the organization, should know how to deal with conflicts if they want to be competent communicators, regardless of any individual differences. To develop communication competency, it is important to grasp the meaning of conflict, its mechanism, and role in organizations. Conflict as a process occurs as a result of the frustration that individuals, small groups, or organizations feel or undergo while trying to reach their goals. Organizations bring individuals who approach conflicts differently.

Sensitivity to our preferences enables us to develop sensitivity to differences among people. Shockley-Zalabak (2002) believed that “participants interact in conflict with their preferences or styles, strategic orientations, and tactical communication behaviors” (p.346). Individuals differ in how they approach conflict situations and in their perception of what effective leadership is. The theorization of leadership and conflict preferences affects the choice of communication strategies and tactics in leadership and conflict situations. For instance, an individual with a strong competitive predisposition may not collaborate with the ideas of others in the same way as an individual with a cooperative and accommodative predisposition. Individual characteristics, group conflict styles, interpersonal issues, and groupthink all contribute to productive and counterproductive group conflict.

Organizations can manage conflicts with negotiation, bargaining, mediation or forcing, and third-party arbitration. The outcomes could be productive if the parties in conflict possess problem orientation, empathy, equality, and credibility.

As far as diversity in education, especially higher education, is concerned, Arthur Levine, in his article “the Meaning of Diversity” traces the concept of diversity through four consecutive
phases, all of which are reported present on college and university campuses. The concepts of
diversity that respectively correspond to the phases of the 1960S, 1970S, 1980S, and 1990 S, are
those of representation, support, integration, and multiculturalism. Levine states that all of these
concepts are present on college and university campuses (Martin, 2012, p.16). Researchers
believe that diversity in U.S. society brings its special strengths and vitality. E. D. Hirsch, for
instance, declares that, “Paralleling our cultural diversity, and in fact preceding it, has been our
tradition of our political diversity” (2007, p. 95).

Grant (2012) stated that multicultural education is not only preparation for the social, political,
and economic realities that individuals experience in culturally diverse and complex human
situations; it is a recognition of “the importance of culture, race, sex and gender, ethnicity,
religion, class, and exceptionalities in education process” (pp. 227-228).

As regards the development of an awareness of language discrimination, which Tove Skutnabb-
Kangas defined as “ideologies and structures that are used to legitimate, effectuate, and
reproduce an unequal division of power and resources between groups that are defined on the
basis of language” (qtd. in Diaz, 2001, p.154), we need to develop an understanding that would
view language diversity in terms of equity. This definition implies that the “entire communities,
including American Indian nations and enslaved African Americans, have been deprived of the
use of their native languages for either communication or education”. Thus, we need to redefine
and re-conceptualize our view of language diversity. We can do this easily if we view language
diversity as an integral part of the multicultural education framework. In addition, the issue of
language diversity and what to do about language minority students is an issue of educational
equity. Whatever the approach is, individuals and groups should develop this issue on the
rationale that they should promote educational opportunities for all students. Taking into
consideration the increasing number of students who join schools speaking a native language
other than English, it is the responsibility of teachers and educators to take care of the condition
of language minority students. Teachers and educators should respect and attend to all students,
those with limited English language proficiency, as well as those who are monolingual and who
are learning to communicate in more than one language.
The next two items that seem to have the most relevance to my current position, as well as to my future career aspirations are leadership and management. Leadership is a system of interactive relationships which consists of the theories, processes, and activities of creating, development, introducing, organizing, directing, influencing, inspiring, guiding, and controlling the attitudes, behaviors, patterns, and activities of individuals and groups toward the attainment of some particular interest, goal or objective. In simpler terms, Certo defines leadership as “the process of directing the behavior of others toward the achievement of some objectives” (1994, p. 348).

The main idea of leadership is achieving goals through people. Theories of leadership describe leaders in terms of personal traits, style approach, responsiveness to leadership requirements in certain situations, and transformational approaches. Although these four approaches to the study of leadership are complementary, since they build on each other, they are different ways of attempting to describe how leadership occurs. As far as the effectiveness of these approaches is concerned, I believe that the transformational approach is the most reliable, for, in addition to its focus on the transaction between leaders and subordinators, it changes situations and circumstances through personal example and the rhetorical ability to establish vision.

The earliest approach to the study of leadership was the trait approach which attempts to uncover the characteristics an individual needs to be an effective leader. Examples of these traits are intelligence, self-confidence, task-relevant knowledge, social maturity, initiative, and communication ability. Despite the importance of these traits, the trait approach has generally failed to predict accurately or explain comprehensively the meaning of effective leadership. In other words, it does not show, for instance, the way leaders interact and respond to the requirements of specific situations.

With respect to the style approach, it attempts to define a variety of general approaches which leaders employ to affect goal fulfillment. These approaches are essentially founded on leaders’ visualization of what motivates people to achieve goals. Prominent among the pertaining theories to the style approach which Shockley-Zalabak (2002) mentioned, the oppressive, the democratic, and the laissez-faire. The autocratic leader makes decisions with little influence from others; the democratic leader involves followers in decision making; and the laissez-faire leader behaves as a non-leader, for he expects individuals and groups to make their own decisions. Although
groups can succeed with laissez-faire leaders, their success depends fundamentally on their abilities and readiness to work with little or no leadership. Despite its expansion, the style approach, like the trait approach, fails to describe comprehensively why certain approaches would work while others would fail.

In response to these failures, situational or contingency approaches emerged. These approaches attempted to understand more effectively the way leaders interact with their subordinates and the demands of a specific environment. The situational approach states that effective group performance depends upon the proper match between the leaders’ style and the extent to which the situation provides control and influence to them. This approach states that the task-oriented style of leadership is effective in either very favorable or very unfavorable situations. In other words, the situational approach describes leadership effectiveness as a style choice suitable to the needs of subordinates in a specific situation.

A quick review of the trait, style, and situational approaches shows that all of them focus on the transaction between leaders and followers. The three approaches imply that the leader is able to boost the morale of followers through an understanding of the situation and control of rewards and, sometimes, punishments.

Compared with these three approaches, the transformational approach transcends the followers and leaders, and changes situations and circumstances through personal examples and the rhetorical ability to establish vision. According to Certo, “transformational leadership inspires organizational success through greatly influencing followers’ beliefs in what an organization should be, as well as followers’ values like justice and integrity” (1994, p. 366). In terms of explaining the way leaders motivate followers by personal leadership examples, and in view of Certo (1994), the transformational approach seems to be more reliable and effective than the other three approaches. In other words, transformational leadership is a source of authorization and stimulation; and it increases leaders and followers to higher levels of motivation and morality. Hackman and Johnson believed that “Transformational leaders are creative, interactive, visionary, empowering, and passionate” (qtd. In Shockley-Zalabak, 2002, p. 236). J. Kevin Barge (2002) suggested that, “Transformational leadership is more capable than transactional leadership at empowering employees and generating higher levels of employee
commitment, satisfaction, and motivation” (p.236). Thus, transformational leaders are
distinguished by their ability not only to provide a sense of vision but also to inspire through
communication of high expectations. Furthermore, they are known for their ability to urge the
use of intelligence for problem solving and to give personal attention and training to followers.

In conclusion, the transformational approach seems to be the most reliable and effective
approach to explaining leadership, for, according to this approach, leaders attempt to develop
leadership in others, which is sometimes referred to as dispersed leadership or ‘Super
Leadership’. Leaders do this, in the main, through providing a vision, defining goals for
themselves, as well as for their followers, reinforcing individuals for good performance.

Concerning management, although leadership and management affect nearly all aspects of
organizational life, the role that leaders play remains the more influential and the more effective.
Basically, “to manage”, means to bring about, to undertake, to have responsibility for, and to
conduct. According to Shockley (2002) “Leadership is influential, is guiding in direction, course,
acting, and opinion” (2002, p.239). Leaders guide individuals, groups, and entire organizations in
establishing goals and nourishing action to support goals. Managers, by contrast, play specific
assigned roles in their organizations, roles that are intended to guide, facilitate, assess, and
evaluate the work of others and to support organizational goals. Besides, managers are appointed
and have the ability to influence based upon the authority in their organizational positions.
Leaders, on the other hand, can either be appointed or emerge from within a group. In the case of
emergent leadership, leaders do not have any formal authority, but they possess the necessary
power bases to influence others’ behaviors. Although managers are thought to be able to become
leaders, not all managers exhibit leadership qualities.

Unlike management, leadership occurs through communication behaviors and interactions with
others. Leadership communication represents the organization’s vision that directs and redirects
all organizational activities. The role of management represents the formal organizational
hierarchies; it is, therefore, deeply embedded in effectively planning and carrying what the
organization has decided to do. Although managers are entrusted with the task of managing the
physical sources of the organization, its people, machine, and products, and they can get work
done efficiently, excellence originates only form leaders who inspire followers to excellent
performance, as well as to emotional involvement with work and their organization. In this context, Bennis and Nanus (2002) stated that, “great leaders often inspire their followers to high levels of achievement by showing them how their work contributes to the worthwhile ends” (qtd. In Shokley-Zalabak, 2002, p.240).

In contrast with leadership and management, administration can be defined as the application of present rules to organizational situations. Leon A. Wortman defines administration as “the branch of management concerned with the supervision and operation of an organization” (2008, p.12). As far as administrative supervision is concerned, Ivan Banki defines it “as the process of influencing organizational forces, resources, activities or processes by administration in order to ensure that the goals and objectives which have been set and tasks which have been assigned are carried out according to the requirements and structure of appropriate plans, policies, standards or programs” (2012, p.29). As such, administrative position is a continuous job of planning, evaluating, analyzing, organizing, regulating, and coordinating. An administrator is a high-level official authorized and accountable for carrying out the purpose and the provisions of the law, rules, and policies of an organization, institution, or system.

Compared with the administration, management is generally “the art, science, system, function, process or office of planning and working toward the accomplishment or completion of stated goals, objectives and missions of a group, organization, institution or system” (2012, p.537). Thus, although both managers and administrators are concerned with the accomplishment of organizational goals, objectives, and tasks, the application and implementation of these goals, objectives, and tasks is the concern and specialty of administration.

Despite the superiority of leadership in the numerous ways I have described, I still consider that a good understanding of the implications or the functions of leadership, management, and administration would enable me, in the future, to defy my role more clearly and play it more effectively if I assume solely a managerial or administrative position or a combination of both.

The last two items that I also consider very important and relevant to my career, as well as to my future career aspirations are decision making and problem solving. Decision making and problem solving are not the same thing although the latter is included in the former. Decision making is the process of selecting a course of action from a variety of alternatives while problem
solving is a manifold process for changing an issue, situation or state from an unlikeable condition to a more likable one. Decision making depends on individuals or groups selecting from among known alternatives whereas problem solving is the process whereby individuals and groups find alternatives and assess them in the light of the identical problems. Both decision making and problem solving, however, involve an element of risk that rises from unknown outcomes. The efforts put in the process of decision making and problem solving, along with individual and group decision-making and problem-solving abilities, affect personal and organizational effectiveness.

The approach to decision making that I would like to follow in my career job should be based on the following four steps: establishing and weighing standards, creating alternatives, assessing alternatives, and finally choosing the best alternative. As far as the problem-solving process issue is concerned, it is important, first of all, to mention that the problem-solving process includes a variety of approaches. In my working environment, I will always try to select the approach that would best suit the situation, including the geographical location and the kind of people involved in it. In this regard, I should also take into consideration the individual and organizational influences and barriers for decision making and problem solving.

Groups and individuals make decisions and solve problems via a number of methods, including leader guidance the rule of the majority, powerful minority influence, and consensus. Sometimes they encounter barriers that we can identify in four areas: organizational, task, procedural, and interpersonal. Shockley-Zalabak stated that the primary factors that influence the methods used for individual and group decision making are: organizational culture, the problem itself, technical competencies, and communication competences. (2002)

Organizational cultures affect the methods of decision making differently. The military and the college/school/college/ university, for instance, influence decision making in two different ways: the former by not depending on majority rule or consensus decision making and the latter by depending on a long tradition of consensus at all organizational levels. In other words, the ways and degrees of participation wanted for decision making and problem solving reflect organizational values and culture. At the same college, where I work at present, decision making and problem solving are fundamentally the concern of groups, not individuals. This is in
agreement with the twenty-first century trend that decision making and problem solving should be a group or team responsibility, not an individual one.

Sometimes the nature of the problem itself affects decision making and problem solving. Significance of the decision or problem may affect the party that is responsible and the amount of time needed for decision making.

Communication competency is a third factor that influences decision making and problem solving. As decision making and problem solving happen through human communication, the ability and desire for quality participation affect the highest stage of decision. An incompetent leader or school supervisor, for instance, affects the process, the method, and results of decision making and problem solving.

A fourth factor that affects decision making and problem solving is technical competency. Individuals or groups involved in decision making and problem solving should have the technical background or competency needed to deal with the problem thoughtfully. Individuals who are unaware of the most favorable information on which to build their assessment cannot take the right decision or solve the problem easily.

As far as the barriers to effective decision making and problem solving are connected, we may identify them in four areas: “organizational, task, procedural, and interpersonal”. Organizational barriers produce organizational silence, because strong influential forces in the organization lead to widespread withholding of information about potential problems contributing to the poor discussion making. These forces or top managers believe that employees are self-interested, that management knows best, and that unity is positive while dissent is negative.

Task barriers occur when groups make decisions as they avoid problem analysis by resorting to solutions that they appreciate rather than working toward solutions that are more relevant to the complexity of the problem. Also, groups and individuals overestimate the good points of a selected alternative while declining accurate information to the advantage of a more popular but inadequate data. Procedural barriers occur when groups make poor decisions as a result of the contribution of role ambiguity to disorder concerning responsibilities, process, or leadership.
An example of procedural barriers is the inability to define who is in charge of what, the way decisions are to be made, and the kind of authority the group has. A further example is the lack of agendas and the allocation of too little or too much time for management. Interpersonal barriers are interpersonal conflicts that block effective decision making. Poor leadership, influential group members, groupthink, and conformity behaviors that suspend critical thinking, for instance, can reflect negatively on the quality of decision making.

In conclusion, the five items that seem to have the most relevance to my professional position as an English Language instructor and as head of the English Language Department are related, in one way or another, to working in a diverse environment, leadership, management and administration, decision making, and problem solving.

Although the interaction among these five terms, concepts, or the theories associated with them seems to be flimsy in respect of their denotations, the human aspect that governs this interaction makes it much stronger than it seems to be. This interaction becomes even more enhanced when we remember that all organizational communication functions and activities are solidly bound together within the competency-based framework or approach that integrates knowledge, sensitivity, skills, and value through a blend of theories, practices, and analysis.

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