



Dairy Organizational Communication: Assessing the Structure
Drs. W.M. Sischo, C. Crudo, and D.A. Moore

With the increasing size and complex management structures on modern dairy farms, the veterinarian, consultant, and Extension educator may question where their messages should go. They need to first understand the structure of the farm with respects to the area they would like to impact, as well as understand how communication and decision-making occur. This form was developed as a result of a USDA:NIFA funded research and outreach project (#2010-01412) that focused on communication flow for calf health. From 54 farms visited and 224 people interviewed, the individuality of each farm, communication flow and structure were elucidated. The form presented is a result of that research.

This form is intended to help dairy veterinarians, consultants and Extension educators determine where decision-making occurs and how communication flows on a dairy operation. The form uses the example of calf-rearing and is specifically related to health, but could be adapted for any “enterprise” of the dairy farm where lines of communication might be complicated and for which teams are important.

The example calf health communication form consists of 11 questions and is divided into two themes: (1) Decision-making for goals and management changes associated with calf health, and (2) Communication of goals and daily work associated with calf health. The following is a step-by-step process in how to use and interpret the tool. The initial process is:

1. Determine the reason you need to use the tool. Is there a specific recommendation you need to make? Have you made a recommendation in the past that was not successful? Do you think that improving your communication on the farm would help with implementation of new programs or procedures?
2. Obtain buy-in from upper management to talk to all the individuals involved in a potential line of communication for a specific are of the farm; e.g. calf health.
3. Set up times to spend 15 to 20 minutes with each person within the “communication network”.
4. You will need only one copy of the form. Ask each person each and every question and place their responses on the form. Go through the whole set of questions with each person before moving on to the next person.

The following will provide you with an example of information gleaned from the “interviews”.

Theme 1: DECISION MAKING--Who determines farm level goals for calf health? Who decides what changes to implement regarding calf health?

Think back to the last time there were changes in the procedures for monitoring health, or treating sick calves.

Q1. What type of a change was made? (In the space below, write the respondents’ actual words)

Change	Owner	Herd Mgr	Calf Mgr	Calf Feeder	Calf Treater	Total
New scours treatment protocol	√	√	√	√	√	5

In this section, ask each person to recall a change in procedures; in this example, for monitoring health or treating sick calves, and then ask what that change was. For each person it is meant to anchor a memory for the following question but it may also suggest a variability or consistency in beliefs across the farm (or different memories). In this example, they all mentioned the same change.

Q2. Who decided to make this change in calf health procedures on the dairy? (Check all that apply)

Who	RESPONDENTS					TOTALS						
	O	HM	CM	CF	CT	O	HM	HD	CM	CF	CT	OT
Don't Know						O	HM	HD	CM	CF	CT	OT
Owner (O)												
Herd Mgr (HM)												
Herdsman (HD)												
Calf Mgr (CM)			√	√					2			
Calf Feeder (CF)												
Calf Treater (CT)					√						1	
Other (OT) VET	√	√										2

In the question above, ask each person who they think decided to make the change noted in Q1. Check the box for their response of "Don't know" to "Other". In this example, two people said the calf manager, one said the calf treater and two said the veterinarian decided to make the change. In this example, several people are invested in decision making on this farm. Also to note in this example, the perception of decision making varies between upper management and middle management and workers.

Think back to the last time there was a calf health problem.

Q3. What was the problem? (In the space below, write the respondents actual words)

Problem	O	HM	CM	CF	CT	Total
Salmonella	√	√	√	√		4
Pneumonia					√	1

Although this question, like the first question, is meant to anchor a problem for the next question, this section may also identify consistency in recall of calf health problems across the farm. Enter the problem and check who mentioned it.

Q4. Who decided what change to make to resolve the calf health problem?

Who	RESPONDENTS					TOTALS						
	O	HM	CM	CF	CT	O	HM	HD	CM	CF	CT	OT
Don't Know						O	HM	HD	CM	CF	CT	OT
Owner (O)		√	√	√		3						
Herd Mgr (HM)												
Herdsman (HD)												
Calf Mgr (CM)												
Calf Feeder (CF)												
Calf Treater (CT)					√						1	
Other (OT) VET	√											1

This section again look for who people think is making the decisions. In the example, 3 said the owner, one the veterinarian, and 1 (the treater) said the treater.

	O	HM	HD	CM	CF	CT	OT
TOTAL	3			2		2	3

In the bottom boxes, you enter the total number of times an individual was mentioned as a decision-maker from Questions 2 and 4. In this example, the perception of who is making decisions is quite varied and suggests that many decisions are being made by the day-to-day work crew.

Q5. What are the two most important calf health goals on this farm? (Examples are include: death loss goals, growth goals, morbidity goals, colostrum goals, etc.)

Calf Health Goals	O	HM	CM	CF	CT	Total
Less than 2% mortality	✓	✓				2
Serum TP >5.5 on 90%	✓	✓				2
No dead calves			✓	✓		2
Double birthweight by weaning			✓	✓		2
Don't know					✓	1

Having people articulate the goals of the operation helps to identify if (1) the goals are reasonable and (2) if the goals have been communicated to everyone. In this example, the goals appear to be different between upper management and the people working directly with the calves. This would point out an opportunity for training on the goals and why they are important.

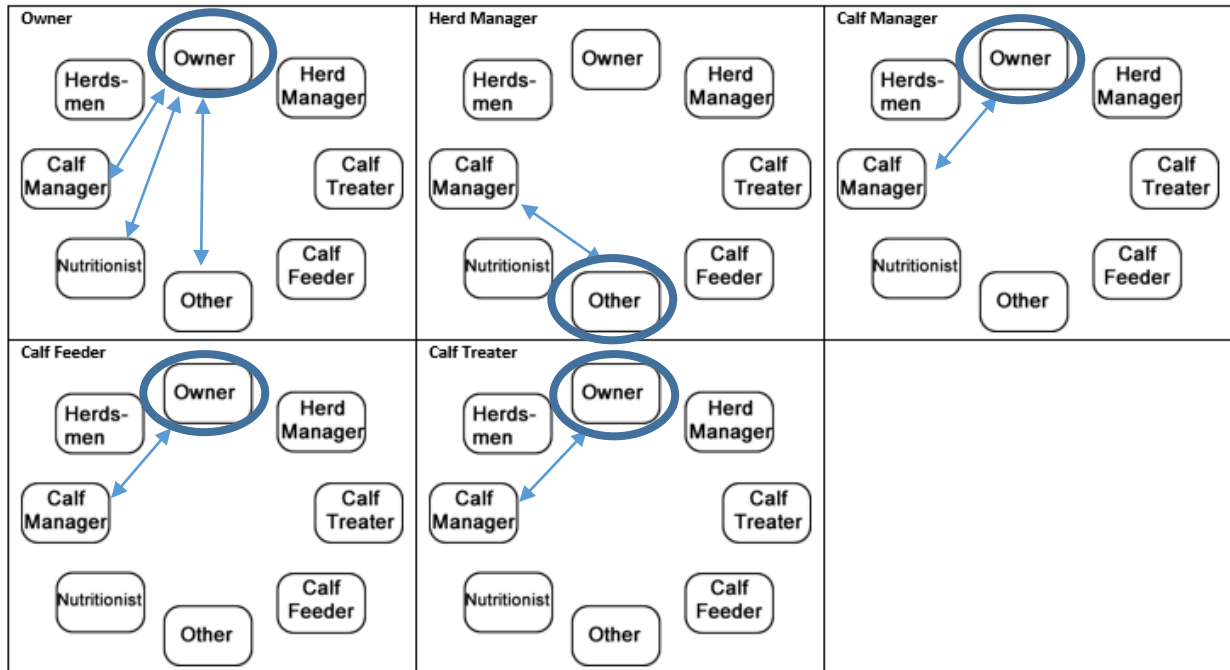
Q6. Now, describe a communication network for DEVELOPING THE GOALS FOR THE CALF HEALTH PROGRAM. To do this we will fill out another communication flow chart focused on the lines of communication for DEVELOPING THE GOALS FOR CALF HEALTH.

Please fill in the attached organizational chart by:

1. Determine the primary person or people deciding health goals (circle that person's title)
2. Draw lines between people where there is back and forth input on developing goals

This question involves a set of communication network charts, one for each person interviewed. The charts are to describe who individuals believe is the primary person or persons deciding the health goals and then who they might get input from. Circle the primary person(s) and then draw lines between those thought to communicate about developing the goals.

In the boxes below the figures, total the frequency with which each person is noted as a primary person deciding health goals and in the second line, the number of lines connecting to each person on the chart.



Count the occurrences of the primary person/people identified in the charts as deciding health goals

	O	HM	HD	CM	CF	CT	OT
TOTAL	4						1

Count the number of lines connecting to a job title and enter it in the summary box below.

	O	HM	HD	CM	CF	CT	OT
TOTAL	6			5			2

In this example, the owner is identified as the one who decides what the health goals are with input from the calf manager. Not everyone recognizes the input from the veterinarian.

Theme 2: Who decides how the work is done and whether calf health goals are met?

Q7. Who is mainly responsible for communicating the goals of the calf health program to treater(s) and feeder(s)? (Check all that apply)

Who	RESPONDENTS					O	HM	HD	CM	CF	CT	OT
	O	HM	CM	CF	CT							
Don't Know												
Owner (O)												
Herd Mgr (HM)												
Herdsman (HD)												
Calf Mgr (CM)	√	√	√	√	√				5			
Calf Feeder (CF)												
Calf Treater (CT)												
Other (OT)												

Question 7 through 10 are similar to 2 and 4 where you check the response for each person. Question 7 asks for who people think are responsible for communicating the goals of the calf health program to the treaters and feeders. In this example, the calf manager was selected by everyone. Reflecting back to the communication network chart, the calf manager did provide input on goals and is likely in a good position to be responsible for explaining goals to the workers.

Q8. Who makes sure that the goals for calf health are being met? (Check all that apply)

Who	RESPONDENTS					O	HM	HD	CM	CF	CT	OT
	O	HM	CM	CF	CT							
Don't Know						O	HM	HD	CM	CF	CT	OT
Owner (O)	√					1						
Herd Mgr (HM)	√	√					2					
Herdsmen (HD)												
Calf Mgr (CM)			√	√	√				3			
Calf Feeder (CF)												
Calf Treater (CT)												
Other (OT)												

In the above example, there appears to be some discrepancy as to who might be responsible to making sure the goals are met. It would be important to discuss the importance of clear roles.

Q9. Who is responsible for ensuring that calf health procedures are being done correctly? (Check one)

Who	RESPONDENTS					O	HM	HD	CM	CF	CT	OT
	O	HM	CM	CF	CT							
Don't Know						O	HM	HD	CM	CF	CT	OT
Owner (O)												
Herd Mgr (HM)												
Herdsmen (HD)												
Calf Mgr (CM)	√	√	√						3			
Calf Feeder (CF)												
Calf Treater (CT)				√	√						2	
Other (OT)												

With regards to who is responsible for ensuring the calf health procedures are being done correctly (identification of sick calves or following treatment protocols), the calf manager is mentioned by most. But not by the treater and feeder. They might think they are ultimately responsible.

Q10. Who is routinely tasked (on a daily basis) with monitoring calves for health and disease?

Who	RESPONDENTS					TOTALS						
	O	HM	CM	CF	CT	O	HM	HD	CM	CF	CT	OT
Don't Know						O	HM	HD	CM	CF	CT	OT
Owner (O)												
Herd Mgr (HM)												
Herdsmen (HD)												
Calf Mgr (CM)	√	√	√						3			
Calf Feeder (CF)			√	√	√					3		
Calf Treater (CT)			√	√	√						3	

In this example, it is clear that upper and middle management think the calf manager is monitoring calves daily while the calf care team says it is they who are doing the daily monitoring.

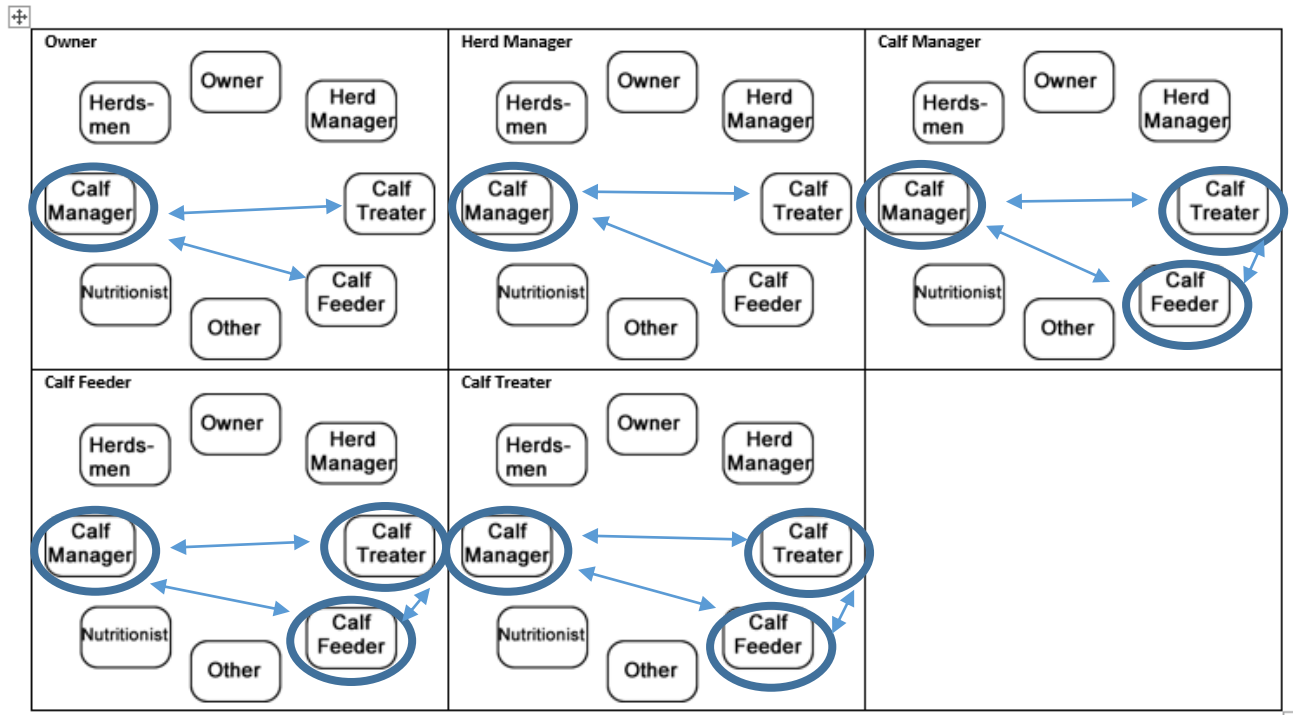
	O	HM	HD	CM	CF	CT	OT
TOTAL	1	2		9	3	5	

The bottom boxes are for the totals for individuals mentioned in Questions 7 through 10. Although there is some discrepancy on this farm on who is translating goals into work, there is agreement that someone closely associated with the work is principally responsible.

Q11. Describe a communication network for COMMUNICATING ABOUT THE DAILY WORK RELATED TO MONITORING AND TREATING DISEASE. To do this we will fill out another communication flow focused on the lines of communication for the DAILY ROUTINES RELATED TO MONITORING AND TREATING CALVES.

Please fill in the attached communication network chart by:

1. Please circle the person (or people) that are deciding how the daily work is going to be done (it is possible that people work independently on daily tasks and make their own decisions – please circle everyone involved)
2. Draw lines between people where there is back and forth input or communication on daily work tasks



Question 11 is a second set of communication network charts but this time is focused on communication of daily work. You will need to ask each person to identify the person or persons they believe decide how the daily work gets done and then draw arrows between people that communicate on daily work tasks. Then tally the frequency of people deciding on daily work and the number of arrows connected to each job title.

Count the occurrences of the primary person/people identified in the charts as deciding health goals.

	O	HM	HD	CM	CF	CT	OT
TOTAL				5	3	3	

Count the number of lines connecting to a job title and enter it in the summary box below.

	O	HM	HD	CM	CF	CT	OT
TOTAL				10	8	8	

In the example, it is clear that the owner and herd manager perceive the calf manager to be the primary person making decisions about daily work. In contrast, the calf manager, treater and feeder perceive each of them as making daily decisions on work. It is an important observation for identifying who should receive information about calf health protocols. Clearly, the calf care team is equally invested in making decisions and need to be equally informed. The network they have (the 3 of them) appears to be important to getting the daily work done.

Conclusions

In summary, use of this tool can help you understand the communication structure and networks on larger dairy operations. Once you have a better understanding, you can make sure you include the right people when both gathering input for a decision and communicating and implementing changes in animal health practices on the farm.

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