ORGANIZATIONAL COMMUNICATION-A MOST IMPORTANT PROBLEM-PART 3

Parts 1 and 2 covered two areas contributing to the organizational communication gap in major ways. The nature of the first area is one of data and information satisficing that makes one's thinking burden easier. The easier it gets, the further away one moves from objective reality and clear water so to speak (or to paraphrase Harry Belafonte, it's clear as mud but it covers the ground and the confusion makes the brain go 'round). The second area is more subtle due to the complexities of psychological preference and the lack of understanding of same by individuals.

So What?

Well, here are a few suggestions that should add to one's ability as a communicator to augment the changing of their milieu into a model of understanding or one's Tower of Babel into a Ronald Reagan or Winston Churchill speech.

Notice that I said "…changing of their milieu…" not changing of their entire organization. The reason is that it is unlikely one can easily affect peers and superiors. One's milieu presents more doable challenges.

First Suggestion-Effort Reducing Biases

Focus on yourself. Do you practice information satisficing by using the effort reducing biases? Note when and why you do and apply the following remedies:

1. **Unstated Assumptions**-Not all aspects of an issue clearly stated and some aspects assumed because they are someone else's responsibility.

Remedy-State all assumptions that will be used to bound an event. This should be part of the event description as a specific entry.

2. **Anchoring and Adjustment**-Statement of an event includes an initial, unsubstantiated conclusion that is in fact a bias. Adjustments are then made using the initial bias as a reference.

   Remedy-Consider multiple scenarios to counteract the initial bias.

3. **Availability**-Information regarding an event is easily recalled or visualized, is recent (fresh in memory), or makes a startling or strong impression.

   Remedy-Ensure that all information is equally available and considered objectively on its own merit.

4. **Coherence**-Event is evaluated as likely because it resembles a highly plausible scenario, is like many plausible scenarios, and/or is supported by circumstantial evidence that is given too high a likelihood of reality (i.e., some probabilities are assumed to be 1 for convenience.)

   Remedy-Conduct well balanced discussions on all possible outcomes in proposed scenarios and challenge all assumptions, especially probabilistic assumptions.

5. **Representativeness**-The event has similarities to major features of the population it comes under. This unique event is thus considered to be represented by a statistic that describes the population, not the unique event.

   Remedy-Provide more detail regarding the event structure and characteristics to emphasize the uniqueness of this particular event. Remind all participants that statistics apply to the population as a whole and not to individual elements of the population from which they are drawn.

Second Suggestion-Psychological Preference

Again, focus on yourself. If you don't already know your psychological type, there are free tests available on line that will help you better understand your communication gaps beyond the biases discussed above. Don't forget, you are not stuck with your personal psychological type per the test since you can acquire and adapt learned behaviors to use instead. One's psychological type is about preferred behaviors that can be overridden by applying learned behaviors.

The study of psychological types is a complex field of study with volumes of possible interactions covering all types of personalities. For the purposes of this blog, there are two major areas to suggest for one's consideration in better managing the organizational communication function by drawing on the following remedies:

1. **Extraverted Rational (sensing-intuition) and Irrational (thinking-feeling) Types-**The events that one observes are either events caused by reason or events caused by accident. Another way of saying this is that if there are laws governing the parameters of a situation, then the event is one of reason. If the event just happens and appears to be lawless, then the event is accidental. The thinking, feeling or rational type operates in a universe that has such law. Consequently, events are either in accordance with law and reasonable or accidental. The irrational types, sensation and intuition, don't operate that way at all. They accept and simply respond to the event. The rational types assess, judge and try to control the event. Conversely, the judgement of the irrational types is not evident and it is, in fact, unconscious. What drives these individuals are their experiences, and this is what they use in place of conscious judgement. They are entirely oriented in their conscious mind by perception and consequently, respond to the event that they are perceiving without very significant use of judgement. This is another way of reacting to events in the environment.

   The irrational type operates through perception and his actions are geared to that. His judgement comes in through the unconscious. The rational type, on the other hand, would act using very rational, observable judgement, however, his perception would come in through the unconscious and it's this perception difference that creates the problem of

misunderstanding in the rational judgement individual. Later on, recalled events or discussion about the events are fit into structured frameworks if he's a thinking type or has restructured them to suit himself if he is the feeling type. So, during the course of the event, we can observe this individual and characterize him as having rational judgement but subsequently, one has to wonder what he really perceived.

Communication problems between the rational and irrational types regarding the same event arise once the questioning and interplay start regarding the event. The root cause of the problem stems from reference point differences. These arise because the irrational type thinks the rational type is perceiving and the rational type thinks the irrational type is judging, and they both think they have a common basis for their points of view. The infirm grounding for this basis of what one thought the other party knows or what one thought the other party thinks or what they're going to do just unravels the entire situation. Poor communication is the symptom of this fundamental problem.

Remedy-The first part of the remedy to manage this cause of poor communication is to be self-aware. One must know their own psychological type and know that they can manage that through learned behaviors. As such, one is in a good position to better control communication within any organization.

Next, take good notes. Make sure you get it in writing and make that memorialization available to everyone involved as possible. To the extent possible, one should learn the psychological types' behaviors so that they can spot them in the conversations to know where the communication pitfalls may lie. Help the group see the distinction between tangible and intangible attributes and how each group of attributes contributes to the value of the object or event under consideration. Especially useful in this endeavor would be a brainstorming approach to identify tangible and intangible attributes and documenting the results for future reference.

2. **The Extravert/Introvert Communication Gap-**The average person, under normal conditions, cannot achieve the ideal rationality because they can't handle subjective factors and objective factors in the same pot. As a result,

an object or event will have an indeterminant "value" consisting of some deterministic and probabilistic attributes as well as the rational and irrational components discussed above. One must synthesize all of this to come up with a perspective. This process is the essential analysis required to clear the muddy waters.

When conclusions are finally stated among the various psychological types involved in the communications and processes, there will be a difference of opinion. We have different perspectives but the reason we have them is because of the nature of these psychological types. Now this is not a significant problem for the extraverted type because western culture and western thinking happens to be based on the extraverted psychological type, hence, it is biased in his favor. The introvert is the one who pays the price, of course. The bias is against him and the communication gap is extremely difficult to overcome. He finds himself having to acknowledge only the visible and tangible values in order to attempt some form of communication. In doing so, he depreciates the subjective attributes and winds up in the extraverted overvaluation of the object or event. In this circumstance important aspects of the event can be lost in the process to determine value of the event (or object).

Remedy-While some of the previously discussed remedies apply to some extent in this case, SYNTHESIS is the name of this game, i.e., analysis to address this communication gap. So, one can achieve a better communication playing field through an analysis process. The analysis process consists of a statement of objectives for the process, collection and processing of the data/information that characterize the event or object and the synthesizing of the data/information into a new perspective that everyone can understand. Sometimes individuals **understand** the analytical process and accept the result. Sometimes individuals simply **believe** in the analytical process and accept the result. The effect on the organization is that everyone can now communicate from the same perspective.

Third Suggestion-Useful Practices

To avoid communication breakdowns in the day-to-day operating environment, certain useful practices can go a long way to clarifying roles, relationships, and

expectations. At times, poor communications are in fact a lack of communication! This is easily remedied by the following useful practices.

Remedy 1-_Interview_ the entire staff that reports to you (allow about an hour for each interview for planning purposes). This will help separate fact from fiction. Problem identification will emerge from your noisy milieu so you can focus on solutions. Construct the interview around the following steps:

- Explain that the purpose of the interview is to obtain the staff input on making improvements in the organization. State that the interview is totally private and the individual's responses are to be candid.
- Prepare to take detailed notes and let the individual do most of the talking.
- Ask the first question. "What resources do you need to do your job better?" Listen intently, do not interrupt and do not respond beyond what is necessary to get the answer.
- Ask the second question. "What roadblocks do I need to remove so you can do your job better?" Listen intently, do not interrupt and do not respond beyond what is necessary to get the answer.
- Ask the third question. "Do you understand your job responsibilities and the expectations regarding your performance?" Listen intently, do not interrupt and do not respond beyond what is necessary to get the answer. Ensure you provide the individual with the unambiguous answer to this question in the areas they don't understand.

Remember that the individual will most likely appreciate your talking to them one-on-one and sharing your most important asset, your time, with them. Make sure you interview everyone in your organization as they are all important to your organizational success. Share your findings with your staff.

Remedy 2-Prepare _standing orders_ for your subordinates that define specific communication and communication related actions that take the guesswork out of what they should do, how to do it, and when it should be done. Do not leave your subordinates in a position of relying on their psychological preferences for critical organizational communications.

Remedy 3-Use a _work package concept_ to control meetings by adding accountability along with accurate, up-to-date information. Replacing routine

status reporting with "work package" type information adds the necessary detail for understanding, controlling, and identifying necessary actions to keep things on track.

Consider the purpose of a "work package" and imagine how it contributes to effective communication among all who attend organizational related meetings. The "work package" is maintained by the person assigned responsibility for the major undertaking such as: a project (routine or special), specific problem definition and resolution, new internal operations, new external operations and interfaces, to name a few. Once set up as a "work package," information needs will become clear and the progress in fulfilling major project events will be conveyed via the project information in a most tangible way by communicating a more detailed and accurate picture than the typical status meeting presents. This will be assured by the responsible owners of the "work packages" because it is their job to do so. If they don't, they can be held accountable.

For your particular milieu, develop a "work package" checklist to be used for a variety of work assignments. The following planning checklist is an example of a generic checklist. The generic checklist can be adapted to fit specific assignments. Use of the checklist would show the task complexity, and apply to all assignments where communications are vital for success and avoiding confusion and failure due to unexpected pitfalls that could have been avoided through good communication practices.

WORK PACKAGE PLANNING TOPICAL CHECKLIST

A. Properly identify and classify equipment down to model and serial number
B. Define the type and extent of work to be performed
C. Identify all pre-work conditions and document for comparison later
D. Walk through all of the work requirements noting problem areas
E. Identify all permits, certifications, requests, inspections and approvals
F. Identify/catalogue all instructions, procedures, specifications and manuals
G. List all spare parts and consumables for the task
H. Specify human resource requirements by type and hours needed
I. Specify budget requirements including external support resources
J. Specify equipment requirements including specialty items

K. Specify pre-task conditions and post-task conditions
L. Interface with quality assurance and quality control for requirements
M. Specify the Installation Qualification (IQ) acceptance requirements
N. Specify the Operational Qualification (OQ) acceptance requirements
O. Specify the Performance Qualification (PQ) acceptance requirements
P. Develop the implementation strategy for the task results (see previous blog entry on a strategy guide topic)

Some Pretty Good Observations to Enhance Communication Skills and Style

1. Never argue with an idiot, people watching may not be able to tell the difference.

2. Observe everything, admire nothing, be patient and understanding.

3. Never resist the opportunity to keep your mouth shut. Be patient and understanding.

4. You don't know what you don't know.

5. The three laws of information: The information you have is not what you want; the information you want is not what you need; the information you need is not available!

6. The one-eyed man in the valley of the blind is king (information is power).

7. The key to executing your strategy depends on information flow in your operating infrastructure. Ignorance should not be an option for anyone in your organization.

8. Raise CONCERNS to ensure completeness, debate ISSUES to reach decisions, solve PROBLEMS to avoid stupid mistakes, and learn how to recognize each of these.

9. Keep your eye on the prize. You can't see solutions if you focus on the problem vice the objective.

10. There is no last word in diplomacy, tactfulness, or teamwork; only in insecure people.

11. The major causes of accidents and mistakes are physical, emotional, and intellectual distraction, so, pay attention to what you're doing and keep you "head" pointed in the direction you are moving.

Final Thought

Learn the differences in handling communications with your subordinates compared to communications with peers and superiors. The psychological aspects are more dominant with the latter, and you will have less control over improving communications with them if they can be improved at all. You may only have your insightful knowledge and self-awareness to work with, but that will be pretty good.