CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

Communication

INTRODUCTION

When was the last time you went without communicating with anyone for an entire day? What about the last time you went without receiving any communication from impersonal means such as television, newspapers, and the Internet?

Life without communication is difficult to imagine. We depend on it every day to do our jobs and live up to our responsibilities, and of course it also provides us with security and companionship. But despite the frequency with which we deliver and receive communications, we are not always good at communication. Arguably, our ability to communicate with anyone at any time anywhere in the world (thanks to cell phones and the Internet) does not necessarily mean that we are any closer to truly understanding each other or forming stronger relationships and community.

The current chapter addresses our reasons for communicating in organizations and how Mainstream and Multistream managers view and enact the communication process.

DETAILED LECTURE OUTLINE

I. Introduction to communication
   A. Communication is the process of transferring information by using meaningful symbols so that a message is understood by others.
   B. Managers spend the majority of their time communicating with others
   C. Communication can be downward, upward, or horizontal with regard to organizational level
   D. Four basic steps of the communication process
      1. Sender identifies a message that is to be communicated
      2. Sender selects the medium, encodes the message, and transmits the message
      3. Receiver hears or sees the message and decodes it
      4. Information flows back from the receiver to the sender
   E. Two basic problems that interfere with effective communication
      1. Problems with the overall context in which the communication takes place
         a) Example: a noisy room
      2. Problems with the medium used to transmit the message
         a) Example: e-mail message lacking important nonverbal communication for an emotionally laden topic

II. Mainstream communication
   A. The goal of Mainstream communication is to ensure that ideas and information travel efficiently from the sender to the receiver
   B. Step 1: Identify the message to be transmitted
      1. Mainstream communication typically begins when a manager has a message to communicate to others
         a) Message = a specific idea or general information
      2. Filtering
a) Occurs when information is withheld or not communicated to others
   (1) Filtering is beneficial when people withhold information that is not
       relevant to the other party
   (2) Filtering is detrimental when people withhold information that could be
       helpful to other parties
b) Five different ways to filter communication (from least filtering to most
   filtering)
   (1) Spray and pray: Managers offer lots of information and hope that
       members will be able to sort out the critical pieces
   (2) Tell and sell: Managers tell others what the main issues are and sell
       them on the solution they have already determined
   (3) Underscore and explore: Like tell and sell, except managers listen to
       feedback from members
   (4) Identify and reply: Managers withhold information except when
       employees identify concerns and management responds to rumors,
       innuendos, and leaks
   (5) Withhold and uphold: Managers shield members from information, and
       when confronted with rumors, they uphold the party lines

C. Step 2: Encode and transmit the message
   1. Encoding is putting a message in understandable terms by using symbols and media
   2. Two critical components of encoding
      a) Identify any communication barriers that must be overcome
         (1) Noise = any barrier that may impede communication during the entire
             four-step communication process
             (a) Time limitations can create a barrier to communication
             (b) Ambiguous words or body language may hinder communication
         (2) Semantic problems = arise when words have different meanings to
             different people
      b) Choose the medium and channel that will be used to transmit the message
         (1) Medium = the method used to carry a message from the sender to the
             receiver
         (2) Media richness = a communication medium’s ability to resolve
             ambiguity
         (3) Media richness is influence by speed of feedback, the number of cues
             and channels employed, the “personal” nature of the source, and the
             richness of the language used)
         (4) Richness of various communication media (from rich to lean)
             (a) Face-to-face communication is the richest medium
             (b) Group meetings
             (c) Telephone
             (d) Voice mail
             (e) E-mail
             (f) Reports
             (g) Web-posting
         (5) Individual differences in preferences for certain media over others
         (6) Organizational processes, culture, structures and systems influence
             communication
             (a) Proxemics = the study of how physical space conveys messages
             (b) Ergonomics = the science of designing work spaces and tools to
                 improve working conditions without compromising productivity
         (7) Channel = the path that a message travels through a medium
(a) The Wheel = an arrangement in which all information flows through one person who acts as the “hub” of the wheel
(b) The Y = an arrangement that is similar to the wheel but has extended “spokes” through which communication flows
(c) The Chain = an arrangement in which the message of the sender goes to a receiver, who in turn sends it to another receiver, and the process continues down the chain
(d) The Circle = an arrangement like the chain except that the last person reports to the original sender to confirm
(e) All-Channel = an arrangement in which everyone communicates with everyone else
(8) Formal communication channels follow the lines of authority that are shown in an organization chart
(9) Informal communication channels may skip hierarchical levels and cut across vertical chains of command
(10) Grapevine = the information network along which unofficial information flows
   (a) Can carry both organizational and personal information
   (b) Research shows that it is 75-95 percent accurate

D. Step 3: Receive and decode the message
1. Decoding = the process through which the receiver attaches meaning to the message
2. Perception = the meaning given to a message by either the sender or the recipient
   a) Two kinds of perception biases that can interfere with communication
      (1) Stereotyping = making assumptions about other people based on their group membership (e.g., gender, race, age, occupation)
      (2) Selective perception = screening out information that one wants to avoid
3. Good decoding depends on good listening skills such as:
   a) Concentrating on verbal and nonverbal messages
   b) Good eye contact, nodding, mirroring body language
   c) Open mind, assimilating information
   d) Providing feedback, paraphrasing, clarifying

E. Step 4: Feedback (information flows back from receiver to original sender)
1. Communication that lets the sender know that the message has been received as intended
2. Constructive criticism = providing a serious examination of something in a way that is intended to help the listener improve
3. Hallmarks of helpful feedback
   a) Seeks to help the person who is receiving the feedback
   b) Presented in a way that the recipient can understand
   c) Is seen as valid and plausible by recipient
   d) Is descriptive and specific
   e) Deals with issues the recipient can change
4. A common problem in organizations is for managers not to be receptive to upward feedback from subordinates
5. Management-by-wandering-around (MBWA) = a practice that allows managers to get indirect feedback and keep in touch with the everyday work environment

III. Multistream communication
   A. In contrast to the Mainstream view of communication as principally a way to increase productivity, the Multistream approach views communication as a way to celebrate diversity, nurture relationships, and build community
B. Step 1: Identify the main idea or message to be transmitted
   1. Multistream managers differ from Mainstream managers in several ways:
      a) Trying to reflect the perspective of multiple stakeholders
      b) Focusing less on “selling” and more on “seeking” and welcoming divergent ideas
      c) Pursuing divergent ideas at the same time
      d) “Trust and Adjust” = trusting people to act in the best interests of the community rather than in self-interest
      e) Placing importance on communications that are not necessarily task-related

C. Step 2: Encode and transmit the message
   1. What Mainstream managers view as “noise” Multistream managers view as opportunities for improvement
   2. Media preferences:
      a) Multistream managers are more likely to prefer face-to-face media, whereas Mainstream managers are more likely to prefer e-mail
      b) Multistream managers prefer small groups and media that enhance participation of multiple stakeholders

D. Step 3: Receive and decode the message
   1. Mainstream decoding focuses on task-related issues, whereas Multistream decoding also incorporates other issues, such as relationships, aesthetics, and community
   2. Multistream decoding is more likely than Mainstream to be at the group level, incorporating diverse voices and viewpoints
      a) Collective decoding = a message is interpreted by two or more people with the result that the group learns more than any individual could have alone

E. Step 4: Feedforward (information flows from receiver to sender)
   1. Whereas Mainstream managers are often reluctant to accept critical upward feedback, Multistream managers welcome it
   2. Feedforward communication = the relationships and prior communication that influence subsequent messages