Fundamentals of Organizational Communication

Participating in Organizations: Developing Critical Organizational Communication Competencies

Chapter Eight

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Objectives

- Distinguish between decision making and problem solving
- Describe problem-solving processes
Objectives

- Describe types of organizational communications technologies
- Understand individual and organizational influences and barriers for decision making and problem solving
Objectives

- Apply analysis capabilities to group interactions and case studies
- Assess individual communication competency needs
Objectives

- Relate decision making and problem solving to organizational excellence
- Understand effective communication as essential to decision making and problem solving
Objectives

- Understand the importance of individual communication competencies for organizational participation.
- Relate effective interviews, presentations, and the use of technologies to overall organizational effectiveness.
Key Terms

- **Decision making** - process of choosing from among several alternatives.
- **Problem solving** - multistage process of moving an issue, situation, or state from an undesirable to a more desirable condition.
- **Leader-made decisions** - leader of a group makes a decision and announces the decision to the group.
Participation Challenges for Problem Solving and Decision Making

- Changing demographics in the workplace
- Problem solving and decision making increasingly are virtual
- Ethical dimensions
Influences for Problem Solving and Decision Making

- **Culture**
  - Organizational vs. Individual

- **The Problem/Decision Issue**
  - The nature of the problem and it’s complexities

- **Communication Competency**
  - Our perception of our personal competencies and our predispositions for communication help determine how and when we engage in individual and group decision making

- **Technical Competency**
Methods for Problem Solving and Decision Making

- **Majority-rule decision** - when more than 50 percent of a group agree, a decision has been reached.
Powerful-minority decision - process for decision making occurring when group membership is characterized by unequal distribution of power among members. Those members who have the most power (although in the numerical minority) are in a position to assume decision-making responsibility.
Methods for Problem Solving and Decision Making

- **Consensus** - a method for decision making that results in all members agreeing on what is best and supporting the group decision.
Barriers to Effective Problem Solving and Decision Making

- **Organizational Barriers** –
  - Groups who work together over time can become so cohesive they suspend critical thinking during decision making.
  - The term *groupthink* is commonly used to describe the surface harmony which groups adopt rather than probe the complexity of an issue.
  - This suspension of critical thinking and limiting of information considered in order to maintain harmony is a powerful barrier to excellent decisions.
Barriers to Effective Problem Solving and Decision Making

Organizational Barriers –

- Organizational culture
  - Strong cultures that retard innovation
  - Discount or marginalize individuals or groups
- Technology
Barriers to Effective Problem Solving and Decision Making

Organizational Barriers –

- Group Task and Procedural Barriers
  - Group members frequently jump to solutions that appeal to them rather than work toward solutions better suited to the complexity of the issues.
  - Overestimate the positive benefits of a chosen alternative while rejecting accurate or valid information in favor of more popular but flawed data.
  - Develop a sense of superiority which views others as either inferior of incapable of making solid contributions.
  - Suppress dissent and discard information both within and from without the group which does not support the group’s (or at least the majority of the powerful in the group) way of thinking.
Barriers to Effective Problem Solving and Decision Making

- Organizational Barriers –
  - Interpersonal Barriers
    - Poor leadership or a variety of self-centered or ego-centered behaviors can negatively influence any group. What we may not see is group cohesion—too much to too little—can influence the quality of decisions.
Key Terms

- **Standard agenda** - process for decision making based on reflective thinking beginning with understanding the charge, followed by understanding and phrasing the question, fact-finding, setting criteria and limitations, discovering and selecting solutions, and preparing and presenting the final report.
The Standard Agenda

The Diagnostic Phase

1. **Understanding the charge.** What output is desired? Do you choose your own problem? What are your instructions? How will your work be evaluated?

2. **Understanding and phrasing the question.** Who decided it was a problem? Is the problem routine or an emergency? Has the issue been addressed before? Is everyone clear about the goal? What do the words in the question mean? Are the words specific and realistic?

3. **Fact-finding.** What are the evidences and symptoms of the problem? What is the effect of these symptoms? Has this happened before? What caused the condition? What have other interested and expert parties had to say about this issue? What might happen if the problem is not addressed? Using the answers to the previous questions, what is the problem now?

4. **Setting criteria and limitations.** What are the standards or goals by which we can judge possible solutions? What could be achieved by an effective solution? What are the legal, institutional (policy and tradition), financial, persuasive, moral, and logistical limits on decision making?
The Solution Phase

1. *Discovering and selecting solutions.* What are the alternatives? How does each meet the goals? How do they measure up against the limitations? Which provides more of what is wanted with the least new harm? Which one should be selected? Who is to do what about what, when, where, and with what projected effect, and how will it be paid for? What evaluation plan can be used to measure the effectiveness of the solution?

2. *Preparing and presenting the final report.* What must be written down and said? When, where, and to whom? How can the final report be most persuasively presented?
**Brainstorming** - technique for generating ideas for problem solving based on methods that break away from linear and controlled processes. The process encourages maximum idea generation in a short period of time.
Key Terms

- **Experientially-based processes** - processes reflecting bounded rationality contributing to satisficing or the generation of decisions that are good enough if not the best. Decision processes utilize a variety of past experiences, emotional reactions, and knowledge and beliefs often not possible with more strictly rational approaches.
Key Terms

- **Decision Tree Process** – proposes leaders of decision making groups ask a series of questions to determine the nature of the problem, the consequences of the decision, and the types of involvement needed to make a solid choice.
Key Terms

- Decision Tree Process
  1. Quality requirements for the decision
  2. The level of commitment required for successful decision implementation
  3. The quality of the information the leader already possesses
  4. The structure of the problem in terms of clarity, organization, and time constraints;
Key Terms

- Decision Tree Process

5. How committed people will be to the decision if they are not involved in making the decision.

6. Goal congruence between the organization and those implementing the decision.

7. The degree of likely conflict over preferred solutions; and

8. The amount of information people other than the leader have to make a quality decision.
Key Terms

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Key Terms

- **Interaction process skills** - skills based on an understanding of the communication process; an awareness of individual predispositions, strategies, and tactics in a variety of circumstances; and knowledge and sensitivity for decision making and problem solving.
Lumsden and Lumsden gave examples of Roger von Oech’s Mind Locks (1993):

1. The right answer
2. That’s not logical
3. Follow the rules
4. Be practical
5. Avoid ambiguity
6. To err is wrong
7. Play is frivolous
8. That’s not my area
9. Don’t be foolish
10. I’m not creative
Key Terms

- **Fact-finding and evaluation skills** - skills that assist in the discovery and criticism of information utilized in problem solving and decision making.

- **Informational interview** – interview to gather data for problem solving and decision making.
Key Terms

- **ICTs**—information and communications technologies which are used for all organizational activities.

- Ronald Rice and Urs Gattiker (2001) suggested ICTs have the potential to resolve problems of traditional bureaucracies by reducing organizational complexity and hierarchical structures and facilitating a better sense of member opinions through increasing participation and democratic interaction.
Key Terms

- **Synchronous settings**—use of technology to promote immediate exchanges between interacting parties.
Key Terms

- **Asynchronous settings**—use of technology to send messages without expecting immediate interaction with receivers.
Key Terms

- **Media richness**—capabilities of various mediums to promote immediate feedback, provide a variety of channels and cues, incorporate language diversity, and focus on receivers.
Discussion Question #1

- Describe the differences between problem solving and decision making.
Discussion Question # 2

Describe a problem-solving situation that you have observed and apply one of the problem-solving processes to that situation.
Discussion Question #3

Describe an organization with which you are familiar. Discuss the influence of culture and technical and communication competencies on how that organization makes decisions and solves problems.
Discussion Question #4

- How can improved fact-finding, and interaction process skills affect organizational excellence?
Discussion Question #5

- What are the ethical/values ramifications for decision making and problem solving in our more complex information society?
Discussion Question # 6

Discuss the implications of ICT choice for communication and work effectiveness. Describe effective and ineffective choices.