MODELS OF ORGANIZATIONAL COMMUNICATION

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SPEAKER-CENTERED – This model is based on the belief that the manager has all the power and/or expertise and that the role of the listener is therefore simply to do as she/he is told. It originated with the ancient Greeks and prevailed as the predominant model of organizational communication for thousands of years, particularly in large, hierarchical organizations such as the military and the Catholic Church. Although this model enabled managers to clearly dictate their wants, it didn’t enable supervisees to develop their problem-solving skills or ability to think independently. It also often created resentment and/or resistance among employees.

INTERACTIONAL – As the workforce became more empowered and educated during the 1940’s, employees began to tire of being told how “high to jump” and demand that their ideas, needs, etc. be listened to. Consequently, the “interactional” model of organizational communication emerged which enabled employees to participate in problem-solving and decision-making. Rather than simply be viewed as vassals in the realization of supervisory prerogatives, supervisees began to be viewed as important organizational resources whose productivity was enhanced when they felt their opinions were valued. Consequently, even though they maintained the ultimate power, managers began to listen to rather than simply talk at employees and value teamwork as a viable alternative to strict hierarchy.

TRANSACTIONAL – In the 1960’s, the decrease in the power and expertise differential between managers and their employees significantly changed how they interacted and created the “transactional model” of organizational communication. Particularly in high tech industries such as computers, managers could not possibly possess the experience or expertise to dominate the ways in which organizational problems were solved or decisions were made. As a result, they began hire and rely on employees who could make independent decisions and work effectively without much supervision. Employees, regardless of rank, were rewarded (sometimes richly) for coming up with ideas which improved organizational functioning and/or saved money.

SHARED MEANING – In the past twenty years, the “shared meaning” model has greatly increased the success of many mission-based organizations. A major premise of the “shared meaning” model is that organizational culture and effectiveness is driven by the collective sense of values, purpose, etc. among employees as well as their abilities. A second is that employees within a culture of “shared meaning” do not need detailed expectations and rules to insure that they act properly. They choose to do so because they are inspired by the organizational mission to create an excellent service or product. A primary managerial function in the “shared meaning” model is to collaboratively develop and promote the norms, vision, etc. which guide organizational functioning.