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Efficient Communication: Better Results with Less Time and Effort

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The cost of poor communication to a company's operations can be staggering. Think of the negative financial impact of

- Ambiguous product specifications
- Misunderstood customer expectations
- Differing views about what strategies or plans were decided upon
- Decisions based on confusing information
- Time wasted in meetings that do not accomplish their objectives

And it doesn't stop there. Ripple effects compound the problem, costing more money, wasting more time, and straining internal and external working relationships.

So much is written and taught about the importance – and the difficulty – of effective communication in business, as in life. However, let's focus for the moment on *efficiency in communication*. How much more productive would your company's operations be if messages – whether written, spoken, or unspoken – were transmitted and acted upon correctly the first time? Furthermore, why isn't this happening right now?

The principal culprit in inefficient communications is that people concentrate on what they want to say. In fact, they should focus on the person they want to receive the message. The true purpose of business communication is to change or expand what the receiver understands and/or to cause the receiver to take some action. When you work from the premise that communication is an interchange – as much about the receiver as it is about the sender – additional factors must be considered in framing your message, including

Focus on the person you want to receive the message.

- Is the receiver equipped to understand the message that I send? Do we have a shared vocabulary, and do the words and symbols mean the same to both of us?
- Do I have the receiver's attention? What external or internal "noise" might be interfering with this communication?
- Do my words, implications, and gestures capitalize on the recipient's usual way (or style) of receiving and being influenced by information?

Overview

Do you know a small, growing company – perhaps yours? – that has to fill the same key position over and over again?

One after another, a potential new hire's skills and experience look so good on paper, but his/her first few weeks on the job are very disappointing, and the company's whole operation seems to stumble and slow down.

The underlying cause could be "the culture issue."

- Does my message address and resolve any conflicts that it may raise with other messages that the receiver has received?
- Does the receiver have the authority, motivation, and skills to take the desired action?

Only when the answer to these questions is "Yes" can you be assured that the receiver will get your message, and it will indeed be what you wanted to say.

Here are several guidelines for improving the efficiency of communication in your company:

1. Recognize that instead of trying to "fix" every point-to-point communication channel, you'll be more successful by addressing the overall environment in which business communication takes place.
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2. Communication slow-downs and errors are reduced when the corporate vision, mission, strategy, objectives, and values are widely known, well understood, and mutually consistent. In addition, the behavior of the leadership team must be consistent with the company's vision and values.
3. When the knowledge and skill to take action are matched with the authority to decide and act, both the clarity and efficiency of communication increase.
4. An active working knowledge of different communication styles and preferences will boost communication efficiency.

Right now, you may be thinking that improving communication in your organization will be a lengthy and difficult job – but recognize that it is almost impossible to overstate the value of good communications.

Attention to a few key points can make big improvements in both communication efficiency and communication effectiveness, as well as in company performance. In some areas, quick corrective action, like training in communication styles, is available. Other areas may require a more sustained effort, but the objective, the path, and the payoff will be clear.