

Beware of Communication Organizations That Condone Bad Practices

A well-known organization (which I won't name) distributes a daily news digest about communication management issues.

An article appeared in this digest that praised a company for deliberately withholding information it knew to be true from its employees, sometimes for an hour or so, and sometimes for a full day. The rationale is that by holding back the information, the managers can prepare themselves to deliver the message rather than have it delivered directly from the original source to the people who need it.

Other than the fact that patriarchy is being replaced by partnership in the high performing organizations, there are numerous business reasons for not following this company's practice.

First, adding an additional layer increases the opportunity that the information will be communicated inconsistently. We're all reminded of the pass-the-word game. "Quack" comes out "lawn chair" or something on that order.

Second, it slows the organization down. Slow information sharing contributes to slow decision-making, which contributes to slower response time, which contributes to waste. The customer doesn't want to pay for any of this.

The old information cascade is slow and unreliable. Simply put, it's an antiquated practice that honors the hierarchy rather than the customer. Other than that..

Are You Kidding?

In today's super competitive, high performance, twitch speed environment, the focus needs to be on getting information of value to people as quickly and accurately as possible.

Of course there are times when information requires some context and understanding of its implications. But in increasingly wide-open communication environments, people have access to context and implications from a vast array of sources.

To deliberately withhold information until managers can "deliver it" is absurd.

If I were a competitor to the company featured in the news digest, I'd be ecstatic to know that my competitor has given me at least a one and sometimes 24 hour handicap. In the down-in-the-trenches battles we might have, I have a chance to nail him like I've never had before.

Case In Point

Recently we worked with a Fortune 100 company to improve on-time-delivery and quality. In one instance, an hour after a team had assembled a customer's order, the assembly team manager communicated to the assembly team a change order that a customer had submitted the day before. The communication delay required that eight parts in the order needed to be reworked to accommodate the changes the customer wanted. The cost of the re-work and failure to deliver on time was huge.

We took the managerial communication step out of the process. Now the change order information goes directly to the assembly team.

Back and Forth Fast

As we build high performance environments that are associated with lean and six sigma, we're taking unnecessary communication steps out of the process, especially when they can cause misinformation and slow down the process.

The organization publishing the above information should know better than to pass on bad advice to its electronic news digest readers. What troubles me is that this outfit seems to target younger, more inexperienced professional communication people who may take the digest's contents at face value. Any business leader who follows that advice could set herself up for major hits in quality, service, cost and speed.

The traditional cascade is all but dead and gone, but there is a significant need to move information throughout the organization.

It should be...

Back and forth fast, versus downward with a delay.