

The Three Styles of Communication

Leadership-Style Communication

Leadership-style communication concentrates on building trust and gaining commitment to the organization's vision. Leaders are big-picture people (Daft, 2005) who understand that their role is to communicate through a visionary lens, keeping people focused on the organization's future. Communication leaders "understand that unless they communicate and share information with their constituents, few will take much interest in what is going on" (Kouzes & Posner, 2003, p. 172). As an example, a superintendent may communicate to his or her school board regarding a particular facet of a building or renovation project by stating, "The project is proceeding on schedule, and the much-needed improvements it promises are expected to play a major role in the school board's goal of improving student achievement to exceed state standards over three years."

Managerial-Style Communication

Managers, on the other hand, are information processors, predominantly relying on data and ideas and communicating these to others (Daft, 2005). These are the individuals who direct daily activities throughout the school district, the classrooms, and the district's support areas (transportation, food services, maintenance, and so on). Using the same example of a building or renovation project, a manager might communicate to his or her subordinates in this manner: "The building project is on schedule. Within two months, we need to have a developed plan showing how we will orchestrate facility use for maximum results. Please have your plan suggestions prepared for our next team meeting."

Charismatic-Style Communication

As Jay Conger and Rabindra Kanungo note (1998), charismatic leaders possess a high need to change the status quo, have a vision that is highly different from the status quo, are counter-normative, and have the power to influence. Teams should use charismatic communication with caution. This style has the potential to bring too much attention on an individual team member or even the team itself. With charisma, the communication may be inspiring or motivating, but success may be associated with those communicating charismatically and not with the broader group of stakeholders in the district who are also contributing to success. Over time, an overreliance on those communicating charismatically may occur, devaluing others' contributions. A self-serving communication from a charismatic leader might be expressed like this: "I am happy to say that the project I have fought so hard to make available to you is on schedule. I am so thankful for the privilege of bringing you this great opportunity and grateful that the school board also grasped the wisdom of my recommendation." An example where the communication would serve to engage the group might be, "The project we have all been waiting for is well underway and on schedule. The opportunities this project will afford is a result of the board's support for our school and for your recommendations."