Additional Notes for Chapter 2: Organizations

Design Strategies and Models

The essence of any structural organizational plan is the relationship between people within a group and between groups themselves. From this premise, structural strategies and models fall into two broad groups: bureaucractic models and situational models.

Bureaucratic Models. Focus entirely on the relationship between people and rely on the hierarchy’s formal chain of command. The advantage of this approach is that there is a clear understanding of who is in charge and who is responsible for specific areas of work.

Bureaucratic models can be divided into two types, depending on the level of control exercised by the top echelon of managers. Models that maintain reporting ties with each subunit and require that all decisions be checked with “headquarters” before action can be taken are part of a centralized system. A decentralized management structure attempts to bring the decision-making process as close to the work site as possible.

Max Weber, a social scientist who worked in the early part of the 20th century, identified the following five basic features of a bureaucratic model:

1. Each job has a formally established set of official duties (the modern job description).
2. There is a hierarchy-based chain of command
3. Rules and regulations are consistently applied.
4. The system works as its own “formalistic personality” without the attachment of human emotions.
5. Hiring and firing are based on qualifications and performance, and the worker is protected from the arbitrary and unpredictable whims of any one particular manager.

Situational Models attempt to tailor the organizational structure to the specific job needs dictated by the work situation. This is accomplished by looking at both the type of work to be performed and the ability of the staff to work independently.

Joan Woodward and associates have developed a technological model based on the company’s type of production process: (1) small-batch production; (2) large-batch and assembly-line production; and (3) production process that have a long-run and continuous output, for example, chemical and petroleum companies. Woodward found that successful organizations with small-batch and long-run production process tended toward similar structures – more loosely defined job descriptions and more delegation of authority to those actually performing the work. Those successful enterprises involved in mass-production techniques, such as automotive and assembly-line plants, seemed to exert tighter supervision of the workers and maintain a dominating administration that required strict reporting and control of the manufacturing system.

Another situational approach uses a matrix scheme to identify the need for different structural arrangements in an organization. This plan grades crucial variables in each unit by grouping them according to the task to be performed, the types of personnel needed, and the history of each section. These variables are tallied, and each work group is placed in a cell of the matrix, which then matches the group to one of the following structural strategies:

1. Work that consists of repetitive tasks and needs a minimally trained work force that falls into a routine strategy.
2. Nonrepetitive work that requires independent judgment and is performed by a professionally prepared staff requires an engineering strategy.
3. A craft strategy is best when the products are unique and workers are extremely skilled but the basic production process for each item is similar.
4. For work that allows a wide latitude in investigation and for more abstract products, as in research and development, a heuristic (discovery) strategy is recommended.

Companies and institutions that use situational models are more likely to have organizational charts and structures that reflect a team concept, rather than the traditional hierarchical format.

Communication Notes

The Communication Process

Communication: The act or process of receiving and transmitting messages.

Sender: Person wishing to transmit a message.

Message: The actual format of the communication effort, including verbal and nonverbal signals, symbols and language transmitted.

Mode of Transmission: The vehicle by which a message is sent: oral, written, nonverbal, recorded, or third party.

Receiver: The target of the message, either an individual or group.

Decoding: How a receiver translates the message.

Communication Directions:

Formal Communication: The official communication messages (e.g., memos, directives, work orders) generated by the business activites of organizations.

Vertical Communication: Formal messages that are channeled through the hierarchical network of the organization (top-bottom).

Horizontal Communication: Communication activity that occurs during the normal conduct of business, including the exchange of services, information, and work orders between departments, managers and staff.

Means and Methods of Communication:

Dynamic Communication: Live discourse in which all parties can simultaneously exchange ideas and information and receive spontaneous feedback.

Canned or Packaged Messages: Messages that are delivered in formats that prevent the recipient and sender from responding to each other instantaneously.

Written Messages: Messages such as memos and video programs that are prepared and transmitted by mechanisms other than a face-to-face encounter.

Verbal Messages: The actual delivery of the message.

Nonverbal Messages: The associated signals, body language, facial expressions, voice tone, context, and connotation of the words that are transmitted with the verbal components of the message.

Barriers to Communication:

Spatial Constraints: Barriers, such as geography and job duties, that isolate people from the normal communication channels of an organization.

Problems of Semantics

Semantics: The branch of communication science that studies the denotation and connotation of words and messages.

Denotation: The exact dictionary meaning of a word or phrase.

Connotation: The context and nonverbal messages associated with a word or phrase.

Perception: How a message is viewed from the standpoint of the receiver.

Credibility: Worthiness of a person as perceived by another individual within the context of trust, honesty and competence.

Barriers to Communication

1. Structural Barriers
2. Problems of Semantics
3. Denotation – the exact dictionary meaning of a word or phrase
4. Connotation – the context and nonverbal messages associated with a word or phrase
5. Technical Problems
6. People Barriers
7. Perception Problems – How a message is viewed from the standpoint of the receiver
8. Interpersonal factors

Credibility – Worthiness of a person as perceived by another individual within the context of trust, honesty and competence

1. Outcome problems – no matter how skilled the sender is at communicating the message, if the receiver cannot perform the requested task, the communication has not been entirely successful. Outcome is also closely tied to the acceptance of the message by the receiver. The receiver may perceive that the task or project requested has a low priority. Obtaining results is the purpose of management, and communication skills are an integral part of that purpose.