

Decision Downloading: An Analysis of How Leaders Communicate Their Decisions

Introduction

Decision-makers are often admonished to include people in the decision-making process because it enhances the likelihood of acceptance. Yet confidentiality issues, time constraints, or other considerations, often render this advice impractical or unfeasible. Consider these examples:

- An executive team has been engaged in merger talks with another company. By mutual agreement, they cannot talk about the possible merger, even to employees. Once the offer is formally presented to shareholders, what should the executive team share with employees about the merger negotiations?
- Union and management are locked into contentious negotiations that involve changes in compensation, work rules, and benefits packages. By agreed-upon rules, the offers and counteroffers are not openly discussed with union employees. After months of give-and-take, they agree on contract language and want to put it to a vote. What should the union leadership communicate?
- An executive-level task force has been established with the principle objective of “finding a creative way to reduce health care costs”. After months of discussions with various vendors, they decide on an approach that minimizes the company health care expenses, preserves quality levels but involves modest increases in employee contribution levels. How should the committee announce the decision?

In each situation, the decision-makers--either by choice or by prior agreement--do not involve others in the decision-making process. Discussions leading to the decision are often deep, nuanced and sometimes contentious. The decisions are frequently complex, often difficult to understand, and sometimes controversial. Simply put, the nature of the decision-making process and the features of the decision itself often make any subsequent communications about the decision extraordinarily difficult. All too often, the subsequent communications are an afterthought borne out of psychological exhaustion from the decision-making process itself. Consequently, decision-makers frequently stumble through what we call the “*decision downloading process*”. No wonder

researchers have found that only 50% of all decisions ever get implemented and sustained. (Nutt, 1999)

What is Decision Downloading?

We use the term “decision downloading” to set apart those special situations in which decision-makers communicate a decision that has already been made. The communicators cannot, for whatever reason, keep everyone informed in real-time about the decision-making process.

Consider the inherent difficulty of communicating under such conditions. The decision-makers and their uninformed audiences perceive the situation in very different ways. During the decision process decision-makers weigh contradictory evidence, debate interpretations and delineate different alternatives. Typically they integrate facts and intuitions, separate the significant from insignificant, while considering the benefits and drawbacks of various alternatives. The process flows with rapid give-and-take. Dialogue ensues about impressions, which allows time for the decision-making group to psychologically adjust. At the end of the process, the decision-makers often pat themselves on the back for persevering through all the complexities, uncertainties, and quandaries to reach a reasonable and defensible decision. Who could blame them? Decision-makers have often labored over a decision so long that it seems self-evident. In fact, they may become exasperated by the need to explain something so “understandable”, “obvious” and “reasonable”.

Those uninvolved in the decision have quite a different viewpoint. They may find the decision incomprehensible, not understandable; tenuous, not obvious; and bewildering, not reasonable. Why? Because they do not have the benefit of the decision-making process to educate them. They lack access to critical facts, key insights, and the analytical process. They have little insight into how various options were weighed and how the decision links to the company’s strategic direction. In essence, they lack perspective on the reasons for the decisions.

Often, the net result is two groups, living in almost two separate, perceptual worlds. The decision-making group enthusiastically endorses the decision, or at the very least, is reconciled to it. During the decision process, most of their anxieties have been quelled, their concerns answered and doubts cast aside. So, they often communicate from a position of confidence, rationality, and emotional certitude. Yet, those uninvolved in the decision process may still be in denial or anger about the pronouncement. They are often put off by the cheerleading of the decision-makers who have had time to psychologically adjust and are privy to decisive but confidential information. Veterans of many such communicative practices may become jaded and cynical, reasoning that “this too, shall pass”.

While decision downloading often plays out in this fashion, there may, in fact, be more viable alternatives. The purpose of this research was to investigate how leaders download decisions, how employees perceive this process, and how employees respond to different types of decision downloading. In addition, suggestions are made to leaders on how they can best download decisions in organizations.

Method and Results

Questionnaire Development

Two empirical investigations were employed to develop a questionnaire on how decision-makers download decision. In the initial investigation, items were generated from two sources: 1) consultants who facilitate organizational communication, and 2) research on how organizations disclose decisions to employees. Respondents were asked to indicate how their organization typically communicates major decisions to employees. The resulting pool of 35 items was screened by a convenience sample of employees across a variety of organizations, checking for clarity and unnecessary redundancy. The result was a 13-item scale that was then completed by 93 employees. Following a series of factor analyses, certain items were eliminated or considered for rewording

depending on their factor loading. Others were added in an effort to improve reliability and face validity.

In the second study, a refined scale consisting of 18 items was administered to employees from a broad spectrum of organizations in Wisconsin, Minnesota, Michigan, and Texas. In addition, a website was created so respondents could complete the scale online. A 7-point Likert scale (ranging from 1 “Strongly Disagree” to 7 “Strongly Agree”) was used. Organizations represented in the sample included manufacturing companies, state government agencies, universities, financial institutions, health profession organizations, and retail organizations. A total of 270 surveys were completed and analyzed. Seventy-three percent of the respondents were female and 27% were male. The age of employees ranged from 19 to 63, with a mean of 34 years. The distribution of subjects by managerial level was: 4% top management, 27% management, 27% non-managerial professional, 33% non-management and 9% other. Eleven percent had a high school degree, 11% had professional certification or a technical college degree, 46% had completed some college, 25% had an undergraduate degree, and 7% had a graduate degree.

Factor analyses (with orthogonal varimax rotation) of the 18-item scale revealed two dominant factors with eigenvalues of 1.0 or higher (see Table 1). Guidelines prescribed by McCroskey and Young (1979) were used to select factors. Items were eliminated or considered for inclusion depending on their factor loading, item-whole correlation, contribution to the reliability of the factor, and the number of items needed to create a reliable factor. The first factor explained 39.2% of the variance, was named the “How and Why Factor,” and contained 6 items. These items addressed how the decision was made, how it relates to the mission/vision of the organization, how the decision impacts the employees as well as the organization, and why the decision was made. The second factor was named the “Announcement Factor.” It contained 3 items and explained 27.0% of the variance. Items loading on this factor related to the formal announcement of the

decision and communication channels used. The alpha reliabilities of the two factors were .88 and .81, respectively.

Table 1
Decision Downloading Scale Items and Factor Loadings

| Item | Factor 1 (How and Why) | Factor 2 (Announcement) |
|---|---------------------------|----------------------------|
| 2. Information about how the decision impacts the organization is presented. | .75 | |
| 3. Information about how the decision impacts employees is presented. | .69 | |
| 4. Information about why the decision was made is provided. | .84 | |
| 7. Other alternatives to the announced decision are discussed. | .74 | |
| 8. Information about how the decision was made is provided. | .80 | |
| 12. Information about how the decision fits into the organizational mission and vision is provided. | .62 | |
| 13. Formal communication channels are used to announce the decision. | | .82 |
| 16. Decisions are formally announced. | | .87 |
| 17. Details about how the decision will be implemented are provided. | | .73 |

Types of Decision Downloaders and Their Effects

Three types of decision downloaders were created based on the rankings on the “How and Why Factor” (Factor 1). Using the sum score for items on Factor 1, responses were divided into thirds. Those in the top third were placed in the Robust downloader category, those in the middle third were coded as Restricted downloaders, and those in the bottom third were identified as Remedial downloaders. In a separate analysis, three types of decision downloaders were created based on the rankings on the “Announcement Factor” (Factor 2). As before, the responses were divided into thirds. Analyses of variance were then run to see if the three categories of downloaders on Factor 1 (i.e., an independent variable with 3 levels) and the three categories of downloaders on Factor 2 (i.e., a separate independent variable with 3 levels) produced different effects on employee perceptions.

The survey questionnaire included an additional 11 outcome items (i.e., dependent variables) addressing issues such as satisfaction with their job, commitment to the organization, identity with organizational values, satisfaction with communication from their supervisor and the organization, and how well the organization was managed. The results of the analyses of variance on Factor 1 and Factor 2 produced significant differences for all 11 items, with Robust downloaders having the highest mean scores and Remedial having the lowest (see Table 2). Overall, these findings revealed the Robust decision downloaders created the most positive effect, followed next by Restricted downloaders. Remedial downloaders were last and had the most negative impact. Analyses of variance for the demographic variables (i.e., gender, job position, education, and age) indicated they were not significantly related to whether a decision downloader was perceived as Robust, Restricted, or Remedial (see Table 2).

Employees' perceptions of the three types of decision downloaders were investigated further. Figure 1 presents the percentage of agreement employees felt toward Robust, Restricted, and Remedial decision downloaders on Factor 1. (Note, on the 7-point response scale, the categories of slightly agree, moderately agree, and strongly agree were collapsed into one category.) For the organizational outcomes presented in this figure, Remedial downloaders received the lowest percentage of agreement. Agreement ranged from 11% to 66%. The two items with the lowest agreement for Remedials were "satisfaction with organizational communication" (11%) and "organization is well managed" (28%). The average agreement for these organizational outcome items for Remedial downloaders was 42%. Those rated as Restricted fared better. Agreement percentages ranged from 55% to 85%, and the average agreement for the outcome items was 72%. The greatest percentage of agreement on outcome items was for Robust downloaders, however.

Table 2
Analysis of Variance F Ratios for Robust, Restricted and Remedial
Downloaders on Outcome Items and Demographic Items

| Item | Factor 1 | Factor 2 |
|--|----------|----------|
| 19. I am supportive of most decisions in my organization. | 40.5* | 28.5* |
| 20. I'm satisfied with my job. | 37.8* | 28.0* |
| 21. I'm committed to my organization. | 23.1* | 17.6* |
| 22. I'm satisfied with the communication in my organization. | 88.6* | 44.6* |
| 23. I identify with my organization's values. | 31.0* | 19.7* |
| 24. The longer I work in this organization, the more cynical I become. (-) | 9.5* | 3.3** |
| 25. I'm satisfied with the communication from my supervisor. | 30.1* | 26.0* |
| 26. My organization is headed in the right direction. | 58.8* | 32.4* |
| 27. My organization is well managed. | 59.9* | 28.0* |
| 28. My organization is a great place to work. | 44.2* | 27.5* |
| 29. My organization makes good use of my skills. | 30.9* | 20.7* |
| 31. Sex | 0.0 | 1.4 |
| 32. Job Position | 0.9 | 0.3 |
| 33. Age | 0.8 | 0.0 |
| 34. Education | 0.5 | 1.6 |

*F ratio significant at $p < .001$

**F ratio significant at $p < .01$

(Note: Analysis of variance mean scores revealed that for items 19 to 29, Robust downloaders scored highest, Restricted were next, and the lowest mean scores were for Remedial downloaders.)

Most items showed agreement of 90% or higher, with an overall average of 90%. Figure 2 presents the agreement findings for Robust, Restricted, and Remedial downloaders on Factor 2. The percentage of agreement for the organizational outcome items parallels those for Factor 1. These results further clarify the analysis of variance findings and help explain the impact of different decision downloading styles.

Figure 1
Decision Downloading Styles for Factor 1
and Percentage of Agreement With Organizational Outcomes

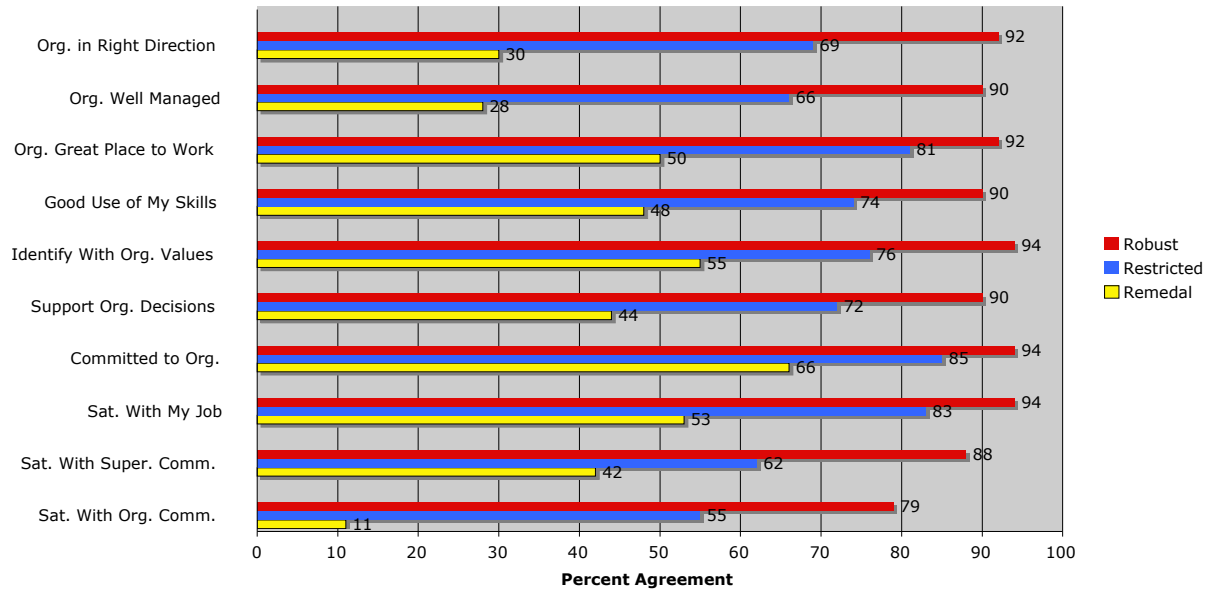
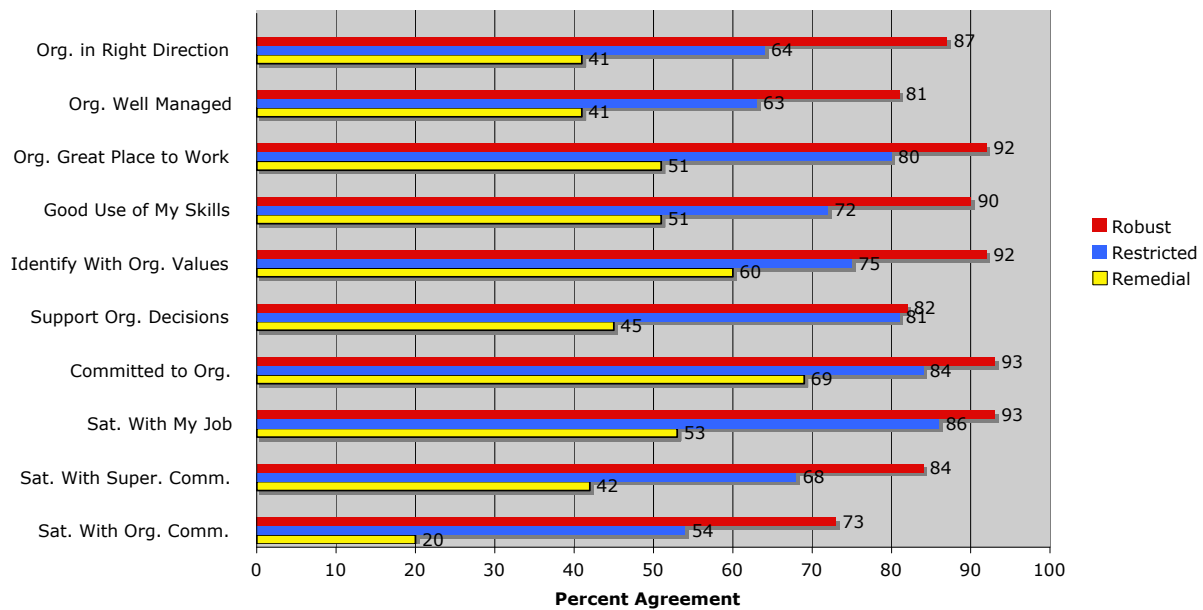


Figure 2
Decision Downloading Styles For Factor 2
and Percentage of Agreement with Organizational Outcomes



Discussion

This analysis discovered three distinct modes of decision downloading: Robust, Restricted, and Remedial. Robust decision downloaders communicate to employees by discussing:

- How the decision was made
- Why the decision was made
- What were some of the rejected alternatives to the announced decision
- How the decision fits into the organizational mission and vision
- How the decision impacts the organization
- How the decision impacts employees

In addition, they:

- Formally announce the decision
- Use formal communication channels
- Provide detail on implementation of the decision

Restricted downloaders discuss some of these issues, but not all. They often try to simply persuade employees that their decision was right. Remedial decision downloaders provide little or no information on these matters. As a result, employees are often left to discover the answers through happenstance or their own personal networks.

This research found that the downloading choices used by decision-makers had a profound impact on employees. For example, employees who experience robustly downloaded decisions are more than twice as likely to be supportive of the decision compared to those forced to cope with a remedially downloaded one (see Figures 1 and 2). In fact, robustly downloaded decisions engender greater employee job satisfaction, commitment to the organization, and identity with the organization than either of the other modes. Nor was it surprising to find a similar trend regarding employee perceptions that the organization was well managed and headed in the right direction. Simply put, the decision downloading mode greatly influences employees' perceptions and their willingness to align with the announced decision.

Reasons for Ineffective Downloading

Given these findings, why would any decision-maker opt for the remedial or restricted downloading modes? As suggested above, fatigue may be a factor but there are other reasons, often seemingly reasonable, as well.

Failure to Clarify Responsibilities. Decision-makers sometimes fail to clarify who has responsibility for communicating the decision. Remedial and restricted downloading often emerges in such situations. Indeed, some managers believe that their job only involves making decisions. They assume that others will carry them out. In fact, traditional decision-making models give scant attention to communicating the decision. If it is mentioned, it is often as an afterthought. No wonder many employees treat implementation as an afterthought as well.

Desire to Quickly Inform. Motivated by a desire to promptly inform everyone, decision-makers may restrict communication to the informational highlights. They tend to focus on the results of the decision-making process, not on the relevant facts, the options weighed, the manner by which decisions were made, and uncertainties surrounding conclusions. This was illustrated in a recent government report on how decisions are announced (Commission on the Intelligence Capabilities of the United States Regarding Weapons of Mass Destruction, 2005). They recommended changing the daily “product” of the intelligence agencies. The two primary documents, the *Senior Executive Intelligence Brief* (SEIB) and the *President’s Daily Briefing* (PDB) provided attention-grabbing headlines designed to save busy officials time and expedite the information flow. Yet, the Commission found the documents often failed to reflect the reservations implicit in their decision-making process and frequently left a “more alarmist and less nuanced” impression than analysts intended. Lacking that kind of understanding inhibits any organization from grasping a more realistic view of the environment in which decisions are made.

Interest in Protecting Employees. When we discussed robust downloading with some senior military leaders at the U.S. War College, one asked, “Aren’t leaders supposed to be uncertainty buffers?” Translation: why confuse the troops with the messy decision-making process? Charged with making the “tough calls”, this officer calculated the costs and benefits of providing deeper explanations. He reasoned that “the troops don’t want to hear all the gory details; they just want the bottom line.” No doubt, many of his troops did prefer such an approach. Yet, what are the true costs of an eager paternalism? Other officers in the group quickly pointed out that too much “buffering” inhibits the unit’s flexibility. In other words, the officers believed that if the troops had a deeper understanding of the decision-making dynamics, it may help the troops achieve goals in novel ways when the original plan falters.

Contrary to the prevailing wisdom, research indicates that employees prefer to work in organizations that acknowledge environmental uncertainties (Clampitt & Williams, 2004). This desire persists even when employees personally do not feel comfortable with uncertainty. It may be natural to think that decision-makers can alleviate employee anxieties by screening out the uncertainties. Yet, the uncertainties eventually are exposed and employees may not be swayed by new reassurances. In short, skilled downloaders acknowledge the uncertainties and focus on collectively responding to them.

Applications: Becoming a Robust Decision Downloader

Robust decision downloaders have a different frame of reference than their less effective counterparts. They view themselves more as educators than cheerleaders. They recognize that education cannot be “once and done”. They know employees learn at different rates, in different ways and from different of sources (Smeltzer, 1991; Smeltzer & Zener, 1995).

This research revealed that Robust downloaders approach communication as a multi-staged process, not a singular act. An example illustrating this approach occurred in a utility company in

the southwest that was restructuring the benefits package and retirement compensation.

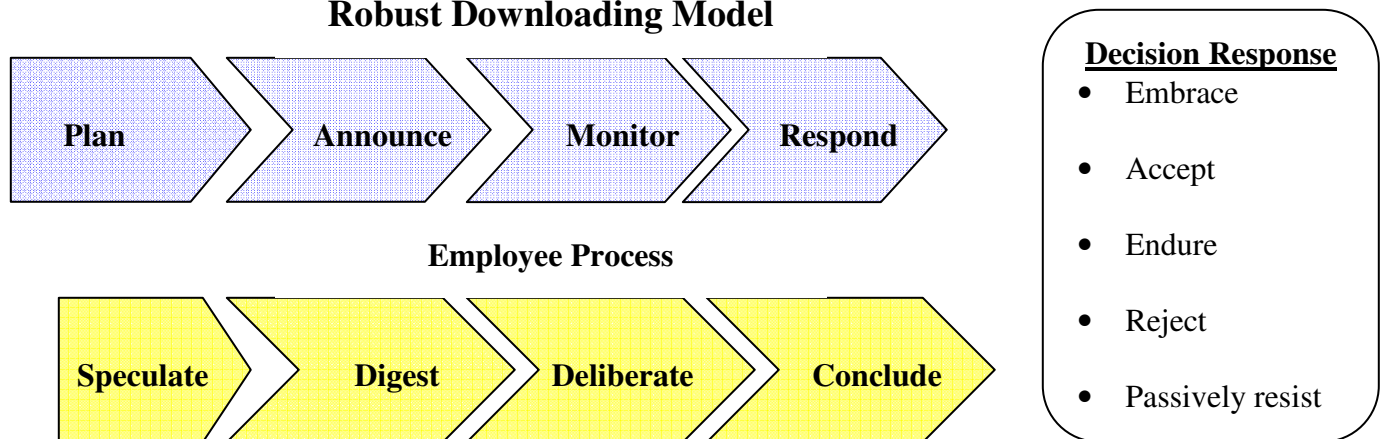
Management knew it was important that employees hear about the corporate decision internally instead of discovering it in the news media. Following a brief announcement by the general manager, a one-page summary was disseminated to everyone in the organization. Employees were then directed to the company website that provided a more detailed version of the announcement as well as a question and answer section. Within two days of the announcement, small group meetings were organized where employees could ask questions, voice concerns, and directly interact with those involved in the decision-making. Since the decision greatly impacted those approaching retirement, separate meetings were set up for this specific audience. Following these small group meetings, the company website summarized the dialogue and added to the question and answer section. These follow-up interactions greatly diffused ungrounded rumors and allowed the decision-makers to be active players in the meaning-making process. Employees appreciated the opportunity for extended dialogue and clarification. Despite the controversial nature of the decision, ultimately it was endorsed with overwhelming approval across the organization.

This case highlights the four stages involved in successful downloading: planning, announcing, monitoring, and responding (see Figure 3). In the *Planning* phase, downloaders think deeply about the implications of the decision from the viewpoint of employees. Messages are then constructed in light of this understanding. In the *Announcing* phase, downloaders reveal and publicize the decision. During the *Monitoring* phase, downloaders take the pulse of employees by discerning employee reactions to the decision. In the *Responding* phase, downloaders elaborate on certain features of the decision, provide further rationale or counter misrepresentations.

As seen in the illustration, the four downloading stages are designed to influence employees' interpretations as they struggle to make sense of the decision. During the planning stage, employees are often *Speculating* because they hear rumors or see signs of change. During the announcing

phase, they are *Digesting* or trying to understand the decision and related rationale. Then they *Deliberate*, much like a jury, by discussing the announcement with their peers and opinion leaders.

Figure 3
Robust Downloading Model



Often they are struggling to understand the implications of the decision. Finally employees draw some conclusions which serve as a basis for their reactions to the decision. In the *Concluding* phase, they may decide to embrace it, denounce it, endure it, or passively resist it.

Clearly, inept planning and announcing can undermine downloading. More often downloaders stop at the announcement stage, thereby forfeiting opportunities to influence employee interpretations during their deliberating and concluding phases. In short, effective downloaders must be effective at all four stages. We conclude with a discussion of typical strategies Robust downloaders use at each stage.

Planning

At this stage, Robust downloaders seek to understand how employees will respond to the decision. They then select the appropriate messages for subsequent phases. They use the following strategies:

- **Understand the conceptual terrain of employees.** Robust downloaders orient their communication to the psychological world of those outside the decision-making group. They are cognizant of how others might not be so accepting of the decisions. Often those in decision-making positions have a very different conception of the state of the business and what adds value than those in other positions. Some critical questions to ask are:
 - What do employees already “know” (or think they know) about the facts surrounding the decision?
 - What are the likely resistance points to the decision?
 - Who are the opinion leaders?

Answering these questions allows downloaders to create the right strategy, message and tools.

- **Structure communications around beneficial comparisons.** We make sense of events by comparing them to past events, similar situations, or personal expectations. Sometimes the comparisons are advantageous to the downloader but often they are not. Downloaders can unwittingly get caught up in defending a decision based on improper comparisons. Defending the new contract by arguing that it’s “not that big of a change” from the previous one can be a losing proposition. It offends the sensibilities, minimizes concerns and borders on the dishonest. Better to simply acknowledge the differences or deficiencies in the contract, and shift the attention to a more advantageous comparison that focuses on other contract issues. In short, decision-makers can thrust a decision into the best possible light by dimming certain comparison points and spotlighting others.

- **Select the appropriate labels, images, and catch phrases.** If decision-makers don't select a proper name for the new initiative, then others – often with less than charitable motives – will provide one. Effective labels, images and catch phrases typically share five attributes: they are actionable, linkable, accurate, resonant, and memorable. *Actionable* catch phrases allow most employees to take some affirmative step to support the decision. *Linkable* labels or catch phrases allow the decision-makers to create a rich network of associations with the decision or initiative. *Accurate* labels provide an appropriate description of a key feature or features of the program. *Resonant* labels create associations that employees can identify with and find motivating. *Memorable* images or catch phrases help cultivate buzz, engagement, and acceptance. They are simple with profound implications. A good example illustrating each of these qualities is the World War II slogan, “Loose lips sink ships.”

Announcing

In this phase, Robust downloaders seek to create an understanding of the decision and bolster their credibility by using the following strategies:

- **Choose a highly credible person for the announcement.** Robust downloaders know that creating resonance with an audience is determined not only by what is announced but also by who makes the announcement. Often a decision gains immediate value when championed by a high-level person in the organization. A decision is no longer an abstraction when the CEO promotes it. Often employees need the icon—somebody who personifies the decision and the change you are trying to make.
- **Amplify the message by linking it to behaviors, policies, core values, and the organizational mission.** The well chosen name, image, or catch phrase works because it starts to change the way employees conceptualize the decision and the links they make to it. Robust downloaders avoid using a “spray and pray” communication strategy: *spraying* employees with

an array of information while *praying* for employee understanding and motivation (Clampitt, DeKoch, & Cashman, 2000). Instead, they use the stickiness of the concept to create “up links” to fairly abstract notions such as core values and the organizational mission that appeal to more abstract thinkers. They also create “down links” to something more concrete like behaviors, incidents, and policies that more concrete action-oriented employees can relate to. Up linking and down linking helps answer a critical question: “How does this fit with what we are already doing?” When new decisions are linked to the mission, they are associated with the underlying logic of the organization. They are seen as fitting into a larger picture and consistent with an already established way of life. Decisions that are not linked to the mission or policies are often perceived as fragmented, unfounded, and devoid of meaning.

- **Highlight the thinking process and key facts that led to the decision.** Robust downloaders use communicative methods designed to promote deeper learning into the decision-making process. They openly discuss what factors were considered during the decision-making process, how evidence was weighed, and what proved to be the decisive factors. When employees know what counts as evidence and what counts as a viable argument, then they are more willing to respond to that evidence as well as enter into future debates and decisions.
- **Focus on a proper balance between implications for the organization and employees.** Employees listen to announcements with ears tuned to two channels: “WIFM” (What’s in It For Me?) and “WIFO” (What’s in It For the Organization?). Downloaders often make the mistake of broadcasting only on the WIFO channel. The temptation to do so often increases with news negatively impacting employees. Yet by avoiding the WIFM channel, downloaders undermine their credibility and employees seek out other sources of information. Robust downloaders acknowledge both the upside and downside of the decision for employees. If not, they know the result is likely to be unfounded fears and rumors.

- **Use multiple channels and tools to communicate.** A single e-mail or even a well-honed PowerPoint presentation may announce a decision but it is unlikely to successfully communicate it. The distinction is critical. An announcement provides information while communication focuses on seeking employees' understanding and acceptance of the decision. Different experiences, breadth of vocabulary, and perceptual biases all contribute to limiting effective communication. Multiple channels facilitate communication because people learn in different ways and pay attention to different features of the message. For example, during oral presentations employees often pay particular attention to the dynamism of the speaker and the emotionality behind the message. On the other hand, written documents can underscore the core arguments and critical facts leading to the decision. In addition, they provide a tangible reference point during subsequent conversations with their fellow employees.

Monitoring and Responding

During the monitoring phase, Robust downloaders seek to understand how employees are reacting to the announcement. It is the time to harvest misrepresentations, misunderstandings, distortions and rumors; and then respond appropriately. Effective downloaders use the following strategies:

- **Utilize opinion leaders.** As we know "message sent does not necessarily equal message received". While most people nod their heads in knowing agreement, they often act otherwise. Downloaders often fail to build any mechanisms into their communication plan that checks for message fidelity. Opinion leaders can contribute greatly by checking employee understanding and helping them make sense of the decision. They are respected for their insight and expertise, are typically more outgoing, and are good at expressing their opinions as well as clarifying those of others. Robust decision downloaders identify key opinion leaders, determine their understanding of the decision, seek their input, and assess their degree of support. If opinion

leaders express resistance, Robust downloaders address their concerns and determine how to gain their endorsement. In many respects, the “buy-in” of the opinion leaders is the most important determinant of whether the decision becomes fully implemented.

- **Allow employees time to digest the announcement before officially responding.** Cognitive neuroscientists have demonstrated that there are physical limitations to the amount of information that reaches our consciousness and that we can process. Responding too quickly to employee concerns can actually hinder the sensemaking process. They simply cannot pay attention to all the stimuli. Before coming to a point of acceptance, employees might need to go through periods of denial, anger, and bargaining. Robust downloaders realize that their timing of the messages greatly influence the pace of this process.
- **Prompt discussions and be prepared to attack “thought-terminating clichés”.** Interactive discussions facilitate understanding, but resistant participants often employ “thought-terminating clichés”. These phrases are designed to stop further thought, discussion and action. Once someone invokes a thought-terminating cliché, it becomes difficult to probe much further into the idea. One often-used cliché is “Here we go again”. By linking new initiatives to this phrase, employees subtly resist change, disengage from the process, and stop further discussion, regardless of the merits of the proposal. Successful downloaders identify these clichés, expose them, and trigger more thoughtful discussions about their decisions. In the case above, leaders might directly attack the cliché by proactively presenting a direct counterargument such as, “This initiative is NOT one of these ‘here-we-go-again’ ideas and here’s why...”. Then they invite employees to discuss the differences between this initiative and others. Using this approach sends two very strong signals: first, the leadership team understands employees’ preconceptions, and second, the leadership team wants to quickly move beyond the prosaic and engage in serious discussions about the initiative. Skillful downloaders learn to use the

resistance as a persuasive opportunity. Instead of minimizing employee concerns, they acknowledge, legitimize, and objectify them.

Robust downloaders define success as employee understanding and acceptance rather than disseminating a script. They perceive communication as a dialogue with negotiated meanings rather than a conveyor belt of transmitted symbols. They realize they have the power to initiate and encode messages but employees have the power to decode and translate those messages in the context of discussions with their peers and opinion leaders. They recognize that effective communication is often the exception more than the rule, and thus operate with guarded optimism when planning and announcing decisions. Robust downloaders may well be enthusiastic but they don't overreach. They realize that the learning experienced by the decision-makers can never be completely duplicated for employees. Yet they believe that cultivating understanding of the decision process – with all its tough calls, blemishes, uncertainties, and implications for the organization and employees – engenders the most important feature of sustained success: trust.

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