The Impact of Informal Communications in Organizations

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Abstract. Communication today, has different names – interaction, relationship, exchange, influence, control, power, community etc., its being all present. Informal communication refers to that type of communication that is not made through customary official channels. It represents an important part of the communication of an organization and has an important influence on it. The informal communication does not follow the ordinary stipulations, but it is based on the personal relationships of the organization’s members and it molds, mainly, on personal or group interests. There are different informal communication models. The so-called gossip or rumor takes place when a person transmits a piece of information to as many person possible. These, at their turn, transmit it further. Usually, these information are personal. The appearance of the rumor cannot be stopped, but it’s spreading can be controlled, through the good timing of the official transmission of the information. There are also unofficial transmissions of information outside work. The employees spend a part of their free time together, always talking about work. They have no fixed objectives for their talks and the subjects vary from one meeting to another. But they contribute to the understanding of the way in which the organization runs and in the consolidation of its culture. Its existence reflect in the improper of formal channels for the communication needs of the organization’s members and the fact that any group of people between which there are structural relationships will develop its own communication way.

Keywords: interaction, relationship, gossip, power, information

INTRODUCTION

Communication is part of the organization. Each effort in the development of an organization must primarily take into consideration the human component of its development, and the efficient communication is the only way in which people can coordinate their efforts. Communication becomes a critical element necessary during the periods of radical changes in the life of the organization, as it is the instrument needed for changing, redesigning the inner processes, for the new strategy of the organization. During periods of structural change, management communication gains new valences, and becomes an art, more than anything else. Rational communication can convince human minds to change, but in order to also change the “hearts” of people, one must use emotional language. Any structural change implies a radical change of attitude and this is the most difficult to achieve. Without an open, permanent, precise and supportive communication, resulting from a strategic thinking, the attitude change in question is impossible to achieve.

If communication serves to build the self-image (personal and of the organization/firm), a good, efficient communication means to attach a positive, favorable, often rich and coherent image. A free person is a well-informed person and capable to communicate in a clear, precise and efficient way, irrespective of their hierarchical level, all people are interested in working with other people who are able to have initiatives and not
with those transformed into robots, who are simple executing others’ orders.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Management communication involves two partners: the manager and his subordinate or collaborator. Both partners can be transmitters or receivers and they both equally try to achieve the established objectives through communication. The manager’s personality often inhibits the communication between the two partners. It is important to determine which role each plays in the communication process and their obligations. For the manager, communication must take precedence, taking into consideration that none of the manager’s functions can be achieved without communication, using distinct techniques. For managers, communication is a work tool whose perfect mastery is required.

The manager, through his position, has a considerable power and influence on the other participants. For some of the employees, the manager is the first representative of authority, a wise person that guides, protects, supports, gives advice. Managerial communication is strongly influenced by the manager-subordinate relationship and often generates for the latter a positive, as well as a negative attitude. The manager, as an emitter, must know that the influence that he exerts over the receptors can be very strong and by exerting this influence, he or she takes on a considerable moral responsibility. The manager is imposed as an administrator of not only material and financial resources of the organization, but also of its human resources (Popescu, 1998).

The concept of leader is added to that of manager, these implying different work relations than the autocratic ones. The concept of group and employees team is also added.

Communication helps managers to keep the subordinates aware and interested in the organization strategy, its progress and problems, to make all the members of the organization contribute to finding new ways in reaching better results in order to achieve the organization goal and at the same time to solve the problems and conflicts. Communication is the way which enables the subordinates to be motivated and it can change their behavior and attitude. Communication can also help the manager to ensure the flow of information: the correct and useful information must get in due time to the due place, so that everybody’s efforts be coordinated. This is the context in which the communication channels and the activities of managerial communication are the glue that keeps the organization together, for everybody’s benefit and in the interest of society. Consulting the specialized literature and the specialists in the field we can try to understand the phenomenon of informal communication (gossip, rumor etc.).

Communication is an extremely complex process: it is achieved through different types of languages, it may be disturbed by different elements, it depends on the context it takes place in, it is specific to each person, and it can take place at different levels.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Communication becomes the harmonization instrument in human resources, the manager’s basic instrument in fulfilling functions and in achieving the organization’s objectives.

The basic role of the managers becomes the development and keeping alive the communication system meant to support the implementation of organizational strategy. From here, the imperious need to perfect the manager’s skills as an interpersonal as well as a group communicator, in the organization and outside has arisen. The manager represents the organization and transmits its policy, has a role of a negotiator, must organize and maintain a
network of contacts with the organization’s partners and information sources on which the organization’s orientation can be borne.

The manager has different roles and each role has different specific aspects related to the way in which communicates. The interpersonal roles are manifested in the manager’s relationship to the ones surrounding him; the informational roles consist in maintaining and developing an informational network; decisional roles are manifested in those situations in which the manager has to make a choice. By explaining these roles in order to emphasize the way in which communication comes into play in each one, there are:

Interpersonal roles – of representation, leader and contact person that realize, for example, through: representative communication in front of the subordinates, motivation and influencing of subordinates, creating and maintaining relationships inside as well as outside the organization.

Informational roles – of monitor and disseminator of information and spokes person that is achieved, for example, through: searching and receiving information from multiple sources in order to understand the internal organizational processes and its environment, transmitting the information inside and outside the organization, the action of being the spokes person of the organization’s policy, actions and results.

Decisional roles – of entrepreneur, of dysfunctions mediator, responsible with the allocation of resources and negotiator that are achieved for example through: activities, strategies and tactics initiation that would lead to change, identification of important disturbances in the organization’s activities and the elaboration of collective actions, taking or approving important organizational decisions regarding resource allocation in order to achieve the objectives and insuring the acceptance and the implementation of these decisions, the discussions and the talks that are involved in achieving the objectives that enter in the responsibility of the manager (Johns, 1998).

The actual purposes for which the manager communicates result from the roles played in the organization. In achieving these roles, the manager will have to rely on the following communication functions:

Informative functions – the organizations imply and need interactions with the external environment as well as with the internal one, between its components and people. The manager is faced with monitoring the two pieces of information: the external one – sent and received through marketing, promotion, supplying and public relations activities and internal information – that circulates through formal and informal channels of communication.

Command and instruction functions – these functions refer to the ways in which managers insure that the people and the departments are continuously working in the direction of the organization’s objectives. The decisions and instructions insure alignment to the organization’s policy, the uniformity of practices and procedures, the honesty and completeness of work. They are also important in the process of forming and developing new employees and in keeping the individual activities correlated.

Influencing and convincing, guiding and advising functions – through these functions, there are several types of control exercised on information and on the behavior of the organization’s members.

Integration and maintaining functions – these functions must be seen under the following aspects: keeping the organization operational through informational free flow; collective use of communication channels in order to avoid useless information overload, authority undermining and thus the reduction of manager efficiency; sorting and evaluating data; integrating the parts into the whole by reporting to it and to the context in which the parts should act.
In any organization, there is a great quantity of information that flows through informal channels, under the form of discussions outside the context of subordination relations.

Informal communication represents any communication that takes place outside formal channels of communication. Informal communication has two main elements: communication that takes place through informal channels created on the spot and the communication that the manager has outside the context of subordination imposed by the organizational structure (Dinu, 1993).

Instinctively, people communicate preferentially with those that could help them realize their needs, desires, purposes with those that make them feel safe, nice, with those with which they have a common base of language and preoccupations. People tend to communicate in a way that insures their growth of social standard, of influential power or extension of control area. Thus there are channels that form on the spot, informal channels that transmit the rumor (the informal message that refers to situations, events) and the gossip (the message refers to persons). Informal messages contain information regarding more delicate aspects (feelings, attitudes, perceptions).

Informal communication channels appear and exist uncontrollably, are in continuous modification and operate in all directions. They have the advantage that they are quick, selective and have great influential power. They supplement the formal channels. The informal channel structure is the most used as the formal one is most inefficient, unsatisfying or lack credibility. The informal channels are the “pulse” of the organization. For example, informal channels can be used by the manager to test the reactions to some measures and decisions. If the reactions are negative, the manager will not make them official or will reformulate them. Informal communication can create links between the manager of the most upper echelon and the employees of the lowest hierarchic level, having friendship relations and other such at those independent of the organizational structure as a base. Informal channels have the most active role when the organization passes through changes or is threatened in some way.

Managers must know the informal channels and use them, they must take into consideration the unreal and hurtful rumors, they must prevent their spreading and they must use the information thus gained, after checking it.

Some of the difficulties that can be present in managerial communication in organizations with a complex structure of formal and informal communication networks are:

Managers receive too much faulty or useless information. The information, being too much, cannot be processed and the manager cannot extract what is relevant (the quality of the decisions is correlated to the quality, not the quantity of information the manager has access to). Information is usually located in too many places in the organization.

There is a possibility that the phenomenon of distortion and blocking of messages occur due to faulty interpretations and personal interests.

Vital information usually appears after the decisions were taken.

Informal communication refers to that type of communication that does not happen through the usual official channels. It represents an important part of an organization’s communication and has special influence on it. Informal communication does not follow the directing regulations, but it is based on personal relations of members of the organization and mainly molds itself on personal or group interests.

There are different types of informal communication. The so-called gossip or rumor takes place when a person transmits a piece of information to as many persons possible. These, at their turn, send it further. Usually, this information is of personal character. The appearance
Another type is represented by the “bunch”, when a person transmits information to only a few selected people. A part of these transmit, at their turn the information to other selected individuals and some keep it for themselves.

Another type of informal communication is the one practiced by some managers that walk through the organization and talk to different persons, at different hierarchical levels. Thus, they have a better feel of the organization’s pulse and their decisions can be closer to the employees’ aspirations.

Outside work there are also unofficial information exchanges. The employees that spend together a part of their free time always talk about work. They do not have fixed objectives for their discussions and the subjects vary from one meeting to another. They contribute to the understanding of the way in which the organization functions and in strengthening its culture.

When information is based on facts, not speculations, informal communication can be quite exact. It gains importance especially when there are major changes in the organization, such as: fusion of some organizations, bankruptcy, dismissals, headquarters relocation etc. These are problems that affect the employees and they cannot be indifferent. When there is a problem for which a solution has not yet been communicated, those that feel affected will give a presumption that reflects fears or desires. Passing from person to person, it becomes affirmation.

Informal communication also appears when the received information through official channels is not enough or fulfilling. The attempts of the management to obliterate this kind of communication have always failed because it is an integrant part of the organization’s life and of interpersonal relations.

Informal communication transmits a large number of information and is very fast. According to some researchers (Cândea and Cândea, 1996), 70% of organizational communication is of this type. A good part of the employees consider it the most credible source of information, because it is not controlled by the superiors. Because it can serve personal or group interests of the members of the communication network, it can act as a brake in obtaining the organization’s objectives. Understanding this type of communication is essential to managers. Those that keep the communication channels open and know who the leaders of informational channels are can influence this type of communication. They can find out what are the reactions of the employees to some changes, what is their attitude towards the management style and can obtain important information for the decision making process or for resolving some problems.

Informal communication is mainly verbal. Although information is usually incomplete, it is quite accurate and its broadcast is made rapidly, in any direction in the organization.

There can be difficulties at the moment of the spreading of false rumors, but there are also some positive aspects when it is well managed.

A positive aspect is the reduction of stress, due to that fact that people like to talk about their work under all its aspects. Researchers have demonstrated that this can be a valuable help in communicating rules, values, traditions, company history.

Employees must be told what happens in the organization and the management must listen to their points of view. The problems regarding communication with the employees must have as first purpose the help given to them in understanding the mission and the development direction of the organization, from here coming all the other elements tied to its management.
CONCLUSIONS

Thus, through communication, the managers can keep their subordinates conscious and interested in the organization’s strategy, its progress and problems; they can insure that all the members of the organization help finding ways to reach better results regarding the achievement of the organization’s purpose; they can solve the problems and conflicts of the organization. Communication is the way through which subordinates can be motivated and their behavior and attitude can be influenced. The manager can also insure through communication the free flow of information: correct and useful information that has to reach the proper place at the proper time so as to coordinate all the efforts. This is the context in which channels and managerial communication activities are the binder that maintains the organization as a whole, to the advantage of all and in the interest of society.

REFERENCES