Communication in organizations: A case study of communication tools application

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Abstract

In this paper, we try to apply some communication tools into anonymized organization that indicated some problems and lack of effective communication. The analysis of inner environment of the organization, based on interviews with particular stakeholders and SWOT analysis, showed some key aspects, that should be enhanced and solved at the managerial level. According to the findings, proposed communication tools have been implemented into organization. Realized evaluation interview with top manager of the organization revealed the enhancement of inner communication flows and overall better environment in the organization.

Keywords: Communication, Inner analysis, Management, Organization

1. Introduction

This paper tries to look in detail at the inner organization communication, its benefits and possible problems. It is introduced as a case study of particular, anonymized organization. The main purpose of the paper is to provide outline of evaluation, proposal and implementation of some relevant communication tools and methods that would enhance inner communication and overall environment in the organization.

The study is based primarily on realization of interviews with relevant inner stakeholders throughout the organization. These interviews should help to reveal the main characteristics of inner communication as well as point at potential problems or limitations. Consequently, the SWOT analysis is compiled to categorize the findings. Finally, the proposals of enhancement of inner communication are provided. The final part of research is dedicated to evaluation, based on interview with top manager of the organization.

The paper follows traditional research-based structure. In the following chapter, the theoretical basis of communication in organization is provided (highlighting the strategic nature of communication and its importance). Another chapter summarizes methodological approach,

based primarily on interviews and analysis of their findings. Subsequently, main findings of realized interviews and SWOT analysis are introduced, as well as the proposals formulated regarding analysis findings, and the way of their implementation. Conclusive chapter evaluates the implemented tools and provide some ideas for further enhancement of inner communication in the organization.

2. Theoretical basis

Baker (2002) or Cornelissen (2004) define communication to be a process of information exchange between two or more subjects. This process is realized through various communication canals, various forms respectively.

Communication represents of the strategic features for success and survival of every organization in economy, society respectively (Baker and Gower, 2010; Gardner et al., 2001; Hayase, 2009; Zerfass and Huck, 2007; Cornelissen, 2004). Baker and Gower, 2010 connect the strategic character of inner communication, among other, with globalization processes, changes in economy and society, technological progress, diversity of inner and outer environment etc. (also in Hallahan et al., 2007). Regarding this, effective inner communication should be formulated and operated in strategic way. This means, that communication strategy itself should involve all relevant stakeholders, provide wide scale of communication canals, enable both, top-down and bottom-up approaches and also provide convenient environment (e .g. Cornelissen, 2004; Holtzhausen, 2005; Macnamara and Zerfass, 2012; Zerfass and Huck, 2007).

Hallahan et al. (2007) categorize models of communication in organizations in the following way:
-   Transmissive models – communication is understood to be one-way transmission of information from one subject to the other
-   Interactive models – communication is perceived to be creation and exchange of information between various subjects.

Managerial praxis usually indicates shift from the first type of communication to the second one.

What are the basic functions of communication? The issue introduces e. g. Baker (2002), who conclude several functions – to reach agreement; to lead, motivate and influence; to create meanings; to solve problems and make decisions; to negotiate.

The basic overview of communication tools (or communication canals in other words) could be summarized in the following way (Hayase, 2009; Baker, 2002): face-to-face communication, Intranet of organization, Internet, e-mail communication, meetings, newsletter, messages delivered to home or other places outside organization, videos or internal TV of organization, blogs, celebrations and other semi- or informal organization, posters, brochures or leaflets, education and seminars, video-conferences and similar online tools, informal spontaneous communication. Effective and appropriate utilization of particular tools is key aspect of communication success, communality and loyalty in organization (Holtzhausen, 2005; Gardner et al. 2001, Baker, 2002 or Zerfass and Huck, 2007). Thus, broad acceptation of communication strategy and particular tools throughout organization is essential.

According to Hallahan et al. (2007), effective communication in organization should impact management (managerial competencies, application of appropriate techniques, organizational management quality); action and praxis (implementation of communication tools, feedback, evaluation); meaning (understanding to the aim and content); influence (purpose achieving, beliefs, influencing of actions in desired way).

From managerial point of view, let us point at several other issues of organizational communication, that should be taken into account:

- Informal communication (Argawal and Garg, 2012; Hayase, 2009 or Kraut et al., 2002 for a discussion) – provides wide space for information exchange and can significantly influence organizational processes. Managers should take care about the risks of negative informal communication, but also about its opportunities, finally they should be able to solve potential conflicts between formal and informal communication.
- Formation of effective, diverse and appropriate tools of communication, regarding environment, preferences of stakeholders according to gender, age, ethnicity, religion etc. (for further discussion e. g. Hayase, 2009; Baker and Gower, 2010).
- Utilization of technologies and social media that could widely substitute face-to-face communication. The basic advantages of these communication tools are speed, intensity, effectiveness, sharing possibilities in real time on long distances, enhancement of communality. On the other hand, manager have to take into account also risk, mostly connected with safety, acceptation between stakeholders, balance of various tools atc. (for further discussion e. g. Macnamara a Zerfass, 2012; Baker and Gower, 2010).
- Acceptation and implementation of feedback findings, information sharing and cooperation. This aspect furtherly enhances the communality and loyalty throughout organization (Argawal and Garg, 2012; Gardner et al., 2001).

Finally, let us look briefly at barriers of effective communication in organizations (according to Argawal and Garg, 2012):

- Physical, that are embedded into environment characteristics or physical barriers (closed doors, walls and similar)
- Systematic, that are embedded into complicated and unclear organization structure, including responsibilities and duties
- Employee´s approach, that are embedded into incompetent management, sharing problems and personal conflicts, unsatisfaction and change-resistance
- Unclear and fuzzy communication, that are embedded into sharing of ambiguous information, language skills of stakeholders (e. g. in professional or technical language)
- Physiological, that are embedded into well-being and health of stakeholders
- Representational, that are embedded into inappropriate communication canals and sharing system, low quality of information etc.

Altogether, abovementioned findings of researchers build up the background of our case-study-based paper and we try to provide proposals to be implemented in organization – thus, the managerial viewpoint of the whole question is accentuated.

3. Methodology

The main aim of case study is to provide model of evaluation, proposal formulation and implementation of communication tools and methods that would enhance inner communication and overall environment in the organization. Specific, anonymized organization is used as a case study for our research, that is empirically oriented. The studied organization can be categorized as small and medium-sized, running its operation in service sector in region of central and southern Bohemia. From inner perspective, it is characterized by a two-level managerial system (top management and line managers of particular divisions) and divisions-based organizational structure (financial, personal and law, marketing and PR, research and development, IT).

The methodology of this paper is based primarily on realization of structured interviews with key stakeholders of the organization. In this regard, the sample of respondents introduced in table 1 was interviewed. Let us mention, that the age structure of the organization is characterized by relatively young stakeholders (less than 45 years of age). The gender structure is characterized by slight majority of men (64 %). Thus, some results could be biased by these characteristics.

Table 1: Characteristics of respondents

Type of respondent	Number of respondents
Employee	7
Line management	5
Top management	1

Source: Own elaboration

Structured interviews were realized in the horizon of three weeks (the list of posed questions is introduced below in table 2). Subsequent analysis of findings and formulation of SWOT analysis was applied. Regarding the findings introduced in the following section, the proposals for management and a model of their implementation were formulated. The last step of our case-study-based research was the evaluation, that was realized by the interview with the top manager a half year after implementing the proposals. The results of this evaluation are introduced in conclusive part of this paper.

Table 2: Questions for the interviews

To what extend are you satisfied with following aspects of communication with your manager:
Providing of instructions and information about you working duties
Possibility to propose and consult your own ideas connected with your working duties
Provided feedback connected with your working duties and its relevance
Appreciation of your working performance quality
Politeness, appropriation of the communication
To what extend are you satisfied with following aspects of communication with your colleagues:
Sharing of relevant information
Willingness of colleagues to provide professional advices and feedback, and its quality
Mutual support and help during fulfilling of working duties and teamwork
Appreciation of your working performance quality
Politeness, appropriation of the communication
How often do you use following communication tools in communication with your colleagues?
E-mail
Phone communication and SMS
Face-to-face communication, including meeting
Communication platforms (e. g. videoconferences, MS Teams etc.)
Social media and other online platforms (e. g. Facebook, WahtsApp etc.)
Intranet and helpdesk of organization
Informal communication (smoking areas, leisure time activities, teambuilding etc.)
How often do you use following communication tools as a source of information for your work?
Communication with managers
Communication with colleagues
Communication with subjects outside organization
Intranet and Internet

Legislation, professional literature, external materials, conceptions etc.
To what extend are you satisfied with working environment of the organization?
Please, express other aspects of communication in the organization, that you feel to be relevant

Source: Own elaboration

4. Empirical results and proposals

In this section, we summarize the main findings from realized interviews and also present the SWOT analysis of communication in the organization.

Based on empirical results of realized interviews, we can conclude, that overall communication situation is on relatively good level of quality. Respondents are basically satisfied with the situation and environment. Respondents most frequently appreciate:

- System and organization of meetings and conferences realized on regular basis and also ad hoc, according to actual needs.
- Clear and straightforward communication of working-duties from managers to employees. It was highlighted this issue in case of both, either employee entry or during the whole time of employment.
- Relatively wide mix of communication tools and methods, that are used. Furthermore, the communication mix is consistent with the needs of employees and managers and with their characteristics and preferences.
- The level of information and knowledge sharing between stakeholders is evaluated to be suitable and majority of respondents appreciate the nature of teamwork.
- Stakeholders are usually provided with relevant and beneficiary feedback to their working performance from managers as well as from other colleagues. The feedback is provided in suitable manner (positive feedback also publicly; negative mostly in privacy).

On the other hand, there were indicated some problem points, that can be summarized as follows:

- Top-down information flows indicates problems in case of sharing relevant amount and detail of information from top management to employees; especially information from managerial meetings are not fully shared with other stakeholders.
- The whole system of communication and its main purpose is not clear to the employees and part of line management. Thus, potential problems with precise and accurate communication could evolve.
- There were indicated several conflict points in communication between divisions, e. g. in case of personal division and marketing and PR division; financial division and personal and PR, respectively research and development division. These problems are persistent despite the efforts of management.
- Managers feel certain reserve and distance of employees during communication with them. Thus, the bottom-up communication tends no to be fully open and honest.
- Problematic seems to be the utilization and exploitation of potential of Intranet and internal helpdesk system, mostly in the way of repeatedly occurring problem-solving.
- Respondents also expressed desire to strengthen the semi- and informal communication tools and activities. In this regard, teambuilding activities, creation of rest zone in the organization (this could serve as well as a kind of creative zone), better support of semi- and informal communication by management.

Regarding above-mentioned findings, it was synthetized a SWOT analysis of communication system in the organization (see table 3).

Table 3: SWOT analysis

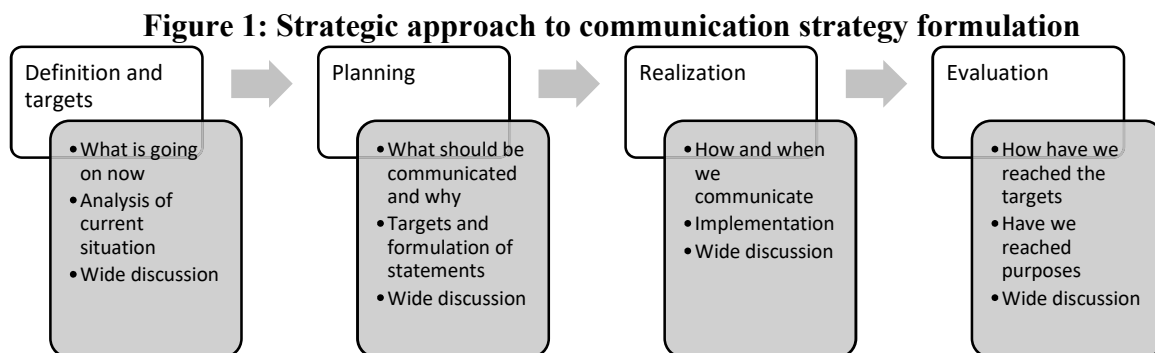| Strengths	Weaknesses
Regular meetings of management and employees	Information sharing between top management and employees
Clear working-duties communication	Unclear system of formal communication and missing vision
Wide range of information tools implemented in organization	Identified conflict points in inter-divisions communication
Information and knowledge sharing, good level of teamwork	Problems with effective utilization of Intranet and helpdesk system
Politeness and appropriate level of communication culture	Lack of semi-formal and informal communication activities (e. g. teambuilding; rest area in organization)
Relevant feedback of managers and colleagues is provided	Reluctance of employees to openly and honestly communicate to management
Positive environment and good interpersonal relations	
Opportunities	Threats
New technologies and communication platforms introduced in organization	Uprise of communication barriers and conflicts
Desired changes in communication strategy of organization	Negative informal but also formal information murmurs; misunderstandings
Formulation of communication strategy	Negative approach of stakeholders to changes in communication
Education of managers in communication topics	

Source: Own elaboration based on interviews with stakeholders

Based on briefly introduced empirical analyses, we formulate following proposals and model of their implementation into organization.

1. Formulation and implementation of communication strategy of the organization
The very first proposal to be implemented in organization is formulation of communication strategy. This material is important for clarifying the vision and targets of the organization, ways how to build up consistent and strong communication system that would be able to provide desirable information sharing and strengthen the loyalty and friendly environment in the organization. One of the cornerstones of communication strategy formulation and implementation is going to be a strategic approach and wide discussion throughout whole organization. Thus, the acceptation and understanding are going to be ensured.

The approach to formulation and implementation of communication strategy is going to follow recommended methods and tools of strategic management, according to current professionals and academics (see, e. g., Cornelissen, 2004 for summarization of that issue). The string of formulation and implementation is as follows:

Figure 1: Strategic approach to communication strategy formulation

Definition and targets		Planning		Realization		Evaluation
• What is going on now • Analysis of current situation • Wide discussion	⇒	• What should be communicated and why • Targets and formulation of statements • Wide discussion	⇒	• How and when we communicate • Implementation • Wide discussion	⇒	• How have we reached the targets • Have we reached purposes • Wide discussion

Source: Own elaboration based on Carnelissen (2004)

Let us highlight that formulation and implementation of communication strategy would also solve the communication problems, weaknesses respectively, that were indicated during the interviews with stakeholders (see above).

2. Rebuilding of Intranet system and creation of online module for information sharing

This proposal reacts on relatively often mentioned issue of not fully effectively developed and used Intranet system and helpdesk. The aim of the proposal is to rebuild the Intranet into modern and attractive shape that would provide platform for information sharing and quick communication between stakeholders of the organization. The system is going to be newly accessible also from other places than the organization network (via VPN access). The new function, that is going to substitute current helpdesk system, would provide the possibility of teams-creation; online sharing and modification of files and documents; online communication via chat or video. Important issue is also the participation of management, that is going to share the important information and outcomes of their meetings, decisions etc. Strengthening of management-employees relationship is expected.

3. Creation of process diagrams for inter-division communication

To solve the problem of some conflict-points in inter-division communication, the creation of process diagrams is going to be realized. The visualization of processes, activities, duties and responsibilities would contribute to more fluent and clear cooperation and realization of processes. Accordingly, friendly environment of the organization is going to be enhanced.

Creation of process diagrams is going to follow modern approaches of process and change management, according to current professionals and academics. Wide discussion, cooperation, clarification of duties and responsibilities during the process of diagrams creation are the basic cornerstones in this regard.

4. Realization of regular teambuilding activities

The enhancement and effectively introduced system of semi- and informal communication is very important, among other, for friendly environment of the organization. It helps not only to build good relationships and loyalty, but also to prevent misunderstandings and negative approaches of stakeholders, change resistance etc.

Teambuilding activities are going to be held on regular basis. Thus, every month one afternoon is going to be dedicated to the activity voted by employees (e. g. bowling, outdoor sport activity, picknick or similar). Twice a year is going to be held larger activity – summer

weekend and Christmas party. These activities are going to be financed by the organization itself.

5. Building of resting area

Last proposal relates to overall environment of the organization, good relationships and semi- and informal communication. It is going to be built the resting area with relaxing elements (like fatboys, lounge, minibar with small refreshment, gym ball etc.).

Let us mention, that the resting area is not only the tool for relaxing and meeting of employees and managers, but also the tool for creative thinking and change of environment of the office. These issues are in current professional sphere evaluated as highly beneficiary for development of organizations and reaching their aims as well.

To implement above-mentioned proposals, we create the model of their planning and realization. The model respects the modern approaches to strategic management and communication within organizations. This model was adopted by the top management of the organization and used for proposals implementation. The model is presented in figure 2.

Figure 2: Model for implementation of proposals
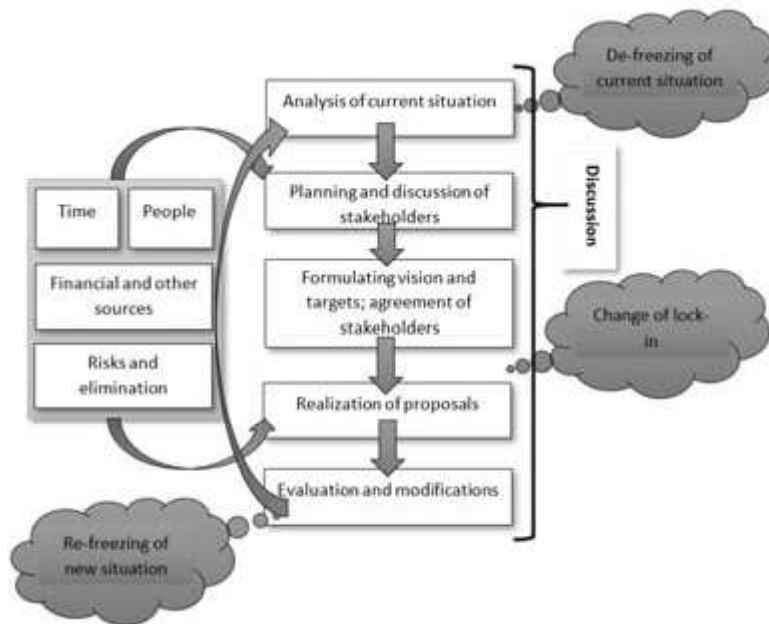
Source: own research

Let us highlight the issue of several elements of the model – firstly, discussion and communication of all aspects during the whole process; secondly, the cyclic character of the process (the evaluation and modifications should connect with the beginning of the new analysis); thirdly, exhaustive consideration of four types of sources during planning and also during realization; fourthly, consideration of ideas of change management in the way of de-freezing a re-freezing of desirable situation and lock-in overcoming. These points we understand to be of a high importance and innovative in the way of thinking about proposal implementation in the organization.

4. Conclusions

After a half year from implementation of proposals formulated in our case-study-based research, we realized the evaluation of the whole process. This evaluation was based on the interview with the top management of the organization. Primarily, our aim was to contribute to the better inner communication and information sharing within the organization and strengthening of loyalty and friendly environment.

Top management indicated following findings, considering the introduced proposals:
- Communication strategy was broadly discussed during its preparation and lots of valuable suggestions from employees were raised up. Thus, every employee feels the belonging with the document and understands the targets of the organization. The strategy is available through several communication canals (Intranet and websites of organization, printed version in the building, Bulletin of the organization). Management, according to this very good experience consider the formulation of other strategic documents (personal strategy, career development strategy, marketing strategy).
- Using the Intranet system and the new online module for communication and information sharing is highly appreciated. All stakeholders use the module for communication and there exist several working teams that flexibly reacts and solve problems. According to the feedback of employees, they highly appreciate better information sharing in the top-down manner and communication of managerial decisions throughout the organization.
- Implementation of process diagrams solving identified communication conflict-points contributed mainly to the responsibilities clarification. On the other hand, some conflicts and problems persist, even the management tries to solve them intensively. Thus, individual approach is going to be applied.
- The last two implemented proposals, according to the managerial feedback, are appreciated and meet the targets. Friendly environment and better communication are the main outcomes of these actions. Especially the new and modern resting area is intensively used.
- Interestingly, the fluctuation of employees (mainly in marketing and PR and personal division) decrease during the last period. This issue the management, among other, connects with better and more friendly environment and fluent adaptation, thanks to better information flows.

Altogether, the proposed actions contributed, regarding the feedback from the organization itself, to better communication and information sharing. Thus, the main purpose of our case-study-based research was reached.

We are fully aware of limitations of this paper, that is based on the research in one organization. For further research, it is possible to recommend the extension of studied entities. Furthermore, the model for proposal implementation is going to be advanced and furtherly developed.

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