

Identifying Factors Fostering Organizational Communication and Organizational Empathy: A Study on Employees of University of Medical Sciences, Ilam, Iran

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Abstract

The present study is a descriptive correlational research which seeks to identify the factors affecting the improvement of communication and organizational empathy. The statistical sample included 164 employees of University of Medical Sciences, Ilam, Iran, who were selected according to Cochran's formula. The data were collected through questionnaires and were analyzed in SPSS based on descriptive-inferential statistics including Pearson's correlation coefficient at the level of $\alpha=0.05$. Factors affecting organizational communication were divided into three groups: human, organizational and communicative. The groups totally covered 9 items. The findings indicated that the three aspects of human, organizational and communication as well as their sub-groups (regardless of directions of communication) affected organizational communication.

Keywords: human factors, organizational factors, communication factors, organizational communication, organizational empathy, Ilam University of Medical Sciences

Introduction

Communication is an important factor in developing an organization. A desired level of organizational communication between and among individuals can build grounds for sound and productive interaction which may bring about organizational and individual excellence. One of the topics frequently addressed in every management system is organizational communication. Communication

in an organization, because of the wide breadth of intra-organizational, inter-organizational, or even international activities, is among basic and essential topics. The need for mutual understanding to accelerate the achievement of goals and objectives and the establishment of efficient and systematic communication is now an ingredient of management. Although communication is not always an objective in itself, it is present in every managerial function as an important tool, playing an important role in organization management by giving feedback. Thus, identifying different factors of organizational communication and effective elements for its improvement is a highly significant topic for both management and organization.

In fact, gaining knowledge about every kind of organizational communication and its components, as well as the factors improving it and barriers to establishing it can help organization management to minimize conflict and foster empathy and mutual understanding at all levels.

Significance of the study

Henry Mintzberg recognizes communication as one of the most important factors in managers' decision-making. By establishing a proper communication channel between managers and employees, the following five goals can be actualized:

1. Clear guidelines are given to employees to successfully perform their duties.
2. Employees become aware of organization's operations and procedures.
3. Employees are convinced about why their role in the organization is important.
4. Employees are given feedback about the

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performance, job instructions, and improvement tips.

5. Employees are given necessary information to be aware of organizational goals.

From the above discussion, it can be inferred that all duties performed by managers depend on effective communication. The very existence of an organization depends on communication while managers spend most of their time on establishing contacts. It is important to establish coordination among material and human aspects of the organization in form of an efficient network for the purpose of setting up communication, because when communication cannot be established, organizational activities remained halted. In fact, a productive manager relies on establishing communication.

Most if not all cases in which managers and organizations, maintain organizational or managerial uniformity, or introduce innovation and fulfill expectations and obligations, would depend on making efficient communication.

Thus, identifying various factors in organizational communication and those improving it are especially important is such a way that gaining knowledge about every kind of organizational communication, actualizing its components, fostering it, and recognizing obstacles to it, can all help the organization create a dynamic environment with empathy and cooperation to reach its objectives.

Objectives of the study

Communication is not always an objective in itself, but as the overriding management tool, it plays a role in every managerial measure, while the feedback of organizational communication enables managers to implement management properly. Thus, the purpose of this research is to help organizational management to establish useful and effective communication in the organization and gain awareness about effective factors in the improvement of communication so that through empathy conflicts may be resolved.

Many organizations and institutions can draw on the findings of this study including universities of medical sciences, regional administrations, education departments and administrations, and so on.

Research hypotheses

- There is a significant relationship between individuals' personal characteristics and the im-

provement of organizational communication and organizational empathy.

- There is a significant relationship between individuals' social characteristics and the improvement of organizational communication and organizational empathy.

- There is a significant relationship between individuals' communicative skills and the improvement of organizational communication and organizational empathy.

- There is a significant relationship between organizational structure and the improvement of organizational communication and organizational empathy.

- There is a significant relationship between organization culture and the improvement of organizational communication and organizational empathy.

- There is a significant relationship between communication channels and the improvement of organizational communication and organizational empathy.

- There is a significant relationship between communication styles and directions and the improvement of organizational communication and organizational empathy.

- There is a significant relationship between communication content and the improvement of organizational communication and organizational empathy.

Research variables

In the present research, improvement of organizational communication and organizational empathy is the dependent variable, and human, organizational and communication factors are the independent variables. The correlations among these variables could be put into a model called "the conceptual model of organizational communication" as illustrated in figure 1.

A. Independent variables: include human, organizational and communication factors, each of which containing some items:

- Human factors:

- Individuals' personal characteristics
- Individuals' social characteristics
- Individuals' communicative skills

- Organizational factors:

- Organizational structure
- Organizational culture

- Communication factors:

- Communication channels
- Communication styles
- Communication directions
- Communication content

B. Dependent variable: the improvement of communication and establishing organizational empathy.

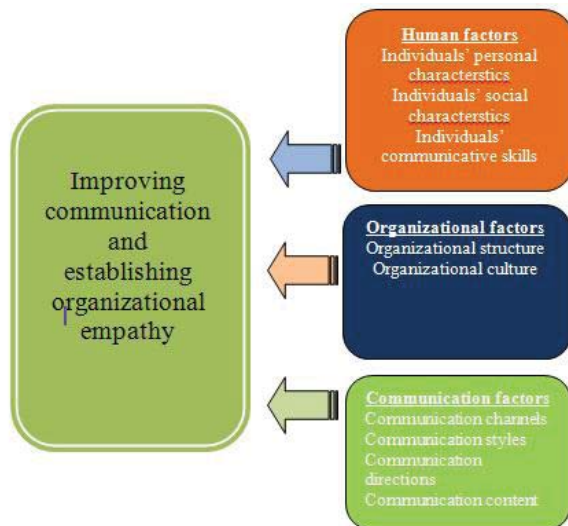


Figure 1. Conceptual Model of the study

Definitions of key terms

Communication: is a process through which a person transfers his or her thoughts, beliefs and emotions to another person. Communication can be an intentional or unintentional process whereby feelings and opinions are expressed, send or received as verbal or non-verbal messages. According to another definition, communication is the process of transferring messages from a sender to a receiver, provided that sender's intentions are perceived by the receiver and vice versa (Berko et al. 2007).

Organization: is a social phenomenon constituted by a group of individuals capable of cooperating and trying to achieve shared goals through establishing various relations. What all organizations have in common is the principle of work division and conformity and cooperation for the purpose of obtaining goals determined for definite needs (Amirkabiri, 2005).

Communication channels: human beings through communication channels can converse with each other. Communication channels are divided into three sections in organizations or among individuals: face-to-face, written correspondence, and online contact (Ghilichli & Imanpour, 2007).

Communication styles: refer to people's behaviors toward each other and are divided into formal and informal types (Miller, 2007).

Communication directions: include vertical, horizontal and diagonal communication between and among individuals in an organization (Miller, 2007).

Communication content: is further divided into three types: duties, social and initiative (Miller, 2007).

Review of literature

The origins of organizational communication dates back to 1920s when managers were trained to give speech, and its emergence in verbal communication studies was parallel the introduction of this type of communication to social sciences. Patnam believes that organizational communication is composed of three basic modes of verbal communication: (a) public speech, (b) persuasion, (c) interpersonal communication, small group's communication, and mass communication.

The following studies are among the very first ones conducted on organizational communication:

Research in 1920s: this period saw the publication of materials about general communication in industry, media, communication, and meanings of organizational messages.

Collins's research (1924): included surveys on general commercial communication course in business management schools.

Research in 1950s: surveys on industrial courses in Pennsylvania State University.

Research in 1960s: studies about commercial speech in Missouri University.

Fisher's research (1965): analysis on persuasion strategies in utterances and speeches of 500 individuals including top managers made it clear that they used clichés and overused

Nep's research symbols as techniques for persuading the audience.

Research in 1970: it was found that intermediate managers fear incorrect quotes and was sharply dependent on their own hand-written notes for giving speeches.

Deil's research (1954): merging written and verbal modes will help create effective communication tools.

Materials and Methods

This is a descriptive-correlational research in which the population included all of employees of

Ilam University of Medical Sciences (476 individuals), and 164 were selected according to Cochran's formula. To collect data questionnaires were used which included technical questions about investigating and recognizing the effective factors in the improvement of organizational communication and breeding organizational empathy. The questionnaire was formulated according to Lickert's scale. To test the validity of translations, content validity method was used, and to test the reliability of the tool, Cronbach's alpha was calculated. To analyze the data, descriptive statistics (i.e. frequency tables, mean, variance, and etc.) were used, while inferential statistics such as t-test and variance analysis tests at the level of 5% were used. To test the correlation among the variables, Pearson's correlation coefficient was used in SPSS.

Results

As it is clear from table 1, the following results were obtained:

- There is a significant relationship between individuals' personal characteristics and the improvement of organizational communication and organizational empathy.
- There is a significant relationship between individuals' social characteristics and the improvement of organizational communication and organizational empathy.
- There is a significant relationship between individuals' communicative skills and the improvement of organizational communication and organizational empathy.

- There is a significant relationship between organizational structure and the improvement of organizational communication and organizational empathy.

- There is a significant relationship between organization culture and the improvement of organizational communication and organizational empathy.

- There is no significant relationship between communication channels and the improvement of organizational communication and organizational empathy.

- There is a significant relationship between communication styles and directions and the improvement of organizational communication and organizational empathy.

- There is a significant relationship between communication content and the improvement of organizational communication and organizational empathy.

The results showed that there is a significant relationship of such variables as personal characteristics, social characteristics and communication skills, communication channels, and communication content (as dependent variables), to the improvement of organizational communication and empathy (as the dependent variable) ($p < 0.05$), while there is a relatively high correlation among them ($r > 0.66$). Yet, communication channels did not show any significant relationship to the improvement of organizational communication and empathy ($p > 0.05$), which reveals that communication channels did not affect organizational communication.

Table 1. Correlation among human, organizational, communication, to improvement of organizational communication and organizational empathy

Independent variable	Dependent variable	Pearson's correlation coefficient	Sig.
Human factors	Personal characteristics	0.778	000.0
	Social characteristics	0.872	000.0
	Communication skills	0.783	000.0
Organizational factors	Organizational structure	0.822	000.0
	Organizational culture	0.673	000.0
Communication factors	Communication channels	0.602	190.0
	Communication styles and directions	0.808	000.0
	Communication content	0.739	000/0

sig. $p < /05^*$

Generally speaking, the findings suggest that all three groups of human, organizational and communication aspects as well as their components (excluding communication channel) had an impact on organizational communication, which is a factor that can help improve cooperation spirit, inspire enthusiasm in the environment, and increase utilization.

Conclusion

Because according to the results there is a significant relationship between personal characteristics and the improvement of organizational communication and organizational empathy, organizations are recommended, while employing, assigning and promoting their employees, to consider their individualistic characteristics such as perception and understanding, psychological and moral dimensions, and physical aspects, or hold in-duty courses to improve these variables.

Because according to the results there is a significant relationship between social characteristics and the improvement of organizational communication and organizational empathy, organizations are recommended to hold programs to enhance the social aspects of employees.

According to the results there is a significant relationship between communication skills and the improvement of organizational communication and organizational empathy. So, organizations are recommended to educate employees about verbal and non-verbal communication skills, effective listening, and sharing feedback. Also, while assigning managers, their communication skills should be taken into account.

As the results show, there is a significant relationship between organizational structure and the

improvement of organizational communication and organizational empathy. So, it is important for employees and lower positions to participate in decision-making, considering informal relations in the organization.

As the results show, to create organizational communication and inspire organizational empathy, more consideration should be given to breed friendship among managers and employees, and employees' quality of life should also be taken into account.

Considering the results, organizations are recommended to hold regular meetings for top managers and subordinates to share their views, express their criticisms, and highlight points of weakness and strength.

As the results show, needs, wants and informal relations of managers and subordinates should be taken into account. Further, it is important to pay attention to employees' personal and group needs, as well as their social issues.

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