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# THE ROLE OF IDENTITY FOCUSED COMMUNICATIONS IN PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT

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## **Abstract**

*The report addresses the issue of business communication and its role in organizations in the aspects of personnel management. We study how communication influences the retention and good performance of personnel. Communications are an integral part of the activity of organizations. Communications largely determine the effectiveness of personnel management. Well-designed communications reduce the time of problem solving and of adaptation of employees, help in conflict resolutions etc. In spite of obvious importance of the communications in organization the studies of this problem require new approaches and methods. We explore mechanisms that help to keep the staff in organization and to create a desire to continue its activities in this organization. On base of social identity approach (H. Tajfel, J.C. Turner) and business psychology approach (S Benton, N. Ivanova,) we studied the Identity Focused Communication (IFC). This type of communication realizes, through integrated work of organization, the development of cognitive, value-motivational and behavioral characteristics of social identity. IFC can be considered as a human development technology which helps employers in clear understanding of values, professional and social role and pattern of behavior in organization. On this theoretical basis and case studies method in different organizations we observed the role of IFC in the development of organizational culture for rising of personnel engagement and loyalty. Results of this research can be useful for business counseling and business management process, development of personnel identity, loyalty, and performance. The results allow us to see new aspects in communication, develop training programs and staff development, and improve internal communication. Our results can develop the understanding of the semantic core of effective communication's strategy of organization which include corporate "picture of world" and image of the organization. We can add the knowledge of professional values and patterns of behavioral and social roles. The data obtained can be considered as a pilot to build new hypotheses and further research on a broader sample and with the use of experimental procedures.*

**Keywords:** *business psychology, identity focused communication (IFC), personnel management, loyalty, adaptation of personnel, social identity, strategy of communication*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The modern model of personnel management is impossible without effective communications. Within the frame work of the concept of quality management, communications are effective when they create conditions in which all participants of the process have the same access to the necessary information. Everybody has possibilities to communicate productively with others. Effective communications provide the optimal conditions for the decision-making, conflict resolution and team performance. In the same time effective communications in organization help people in self-determination and desire to demonstrate good performance and commitment to the organization.

One of key and painful problems for many organizations is staff turnover. A high rate of staff turnover does not allow forming permanent and well-coordinated professional team; create a favorable atmosphere to work and as a result to decrease the performance. That is why it is very important to study how we can avoid this situation and find good instruments to influence on personnel desire to work in organization and to realize professional aims on higher level of performance. We explore mechanisms that help to develop communicative strategy and tactics to the way of professional and social values, income and standards of behavior. All this acidity should give managers new instruments which are useful for maintaining relative stability of personnel and improving the level of their performance.

Our research addresses to the communications in organization by the new approaches to effectiveness of one. On base of social identity approach (H. Tajfel, J.C. Turner), business psychology approach (S Benton, N. Ivanova,) and communication models (Shannon-Weaver's model, GCS model), we created the Identity Focused Communication (IFC). This type of communication realizes through integrated work of organization for development of cognitive, value-motivational and behavioral characteristic of social identity. IFC can be considered as a human development technology which helps to employers in clear understanding of values, professional and social role and pattern of behavior in organization.

On this theoretical basis and case studies method in different organizations we observed two case studies the role of IFC in the development of organizational culture for rising of personnel engagement and loyalty.

### 1.1. Communications in organization

The value approach to the management of organizations, represented by theories and concepts of corporate social responsibility, organizational development, social identity, social management, consists in building social and labor relations based on organizational values. Not by chance since the beginning of the XXI century managers began to show interest to the development of corporate culture.

The traditional managerial approach to the use of values in the management of organizations is presented in the works of F. Harris and R. Moran, E. Schein, R. Waterman, T. Peters, K. Cameron and R. Quinn, D. Cotter, D. Heskett et al. (Cameron K., Quinn R., 2001; Andreeva, Betina, Kosheleva, 2008). The authors viewed the process of forming and managing organizational values as an element of maintaining organizational culture. They established a relationship between the level of employees' understanding and possession of organizational values and the successful development of an organization.

The establishment of organizational values, their understanding by employees forms the behavioral norms and standards of communication in each specific organization. The results of numerous studies make it possible to understand the role of organizational values in the management of employees' activities, the formation of a certain type of organizational culture that

can restrain or stimulate the development of an organization, and determine its success in the market.

The value of corporate culture for the development of any organization is determined by a number of circumstances. First, it gives employees an organizational identity, being an important source of stability and continuity in the organization. Then, knowledge of the fundamentals of the organizational culture of their company helps new employees to correctly interpret the events occurring in the organization, defining the most important and essential in it. Finally, an intraorganizational culture, more than anything else, stimulates the self-consciousness and high responsibility of the employee while performing his functions.

Two important factors determine the strength of an organizational culture: the degree to which the organization members accept the core values of the company and the degree of their commitment to these values.

The difficulty of maintaining the required level of organizational culture is explained by the fact that newly recruited employees bring with them not only new ideas and individual approaches to solving professional problems, but also their own values, attitudes and beliefs. Individual personal values of employees can significantly shake the prevailing cultural values within the organization. To maintain the existing system of cultural values of the organization, it is necessary to constantly influence the formation of the value orientations of employees in order to maximize their convergence with the values of the organization itself. And here organizational communications play an important role.

Corporate culture is linked with communications in the organization. The organizational culture influences the means of communication, and vice versa, the established and accepted methods of communication exert their influence on the culture. Moreover, the organizational culture manifests itself through various types of communication, and the corporate culture, aimed at correcting or initiating new processes, externally conducts these changes through new communication forms.

Communications are an important lifeline in every organization. Many of the problems that occur in organizations are the direct result of people failing to communicate (Armstrong, 2008). Organizational communication is the source of information used by managers in making decisions that affect the organization. Managers use communication to get the information necessary to decision-making, to transmit the results and intention, ideas and values important for an effective functioning of the organization.

Effective communication processes lie in a background of every company that wants to be successful in a long term (Purves, 2005). Communication fosters personnel motivation by clarifying to employees what is to be done, how it should be done and what can be done. Communications encourage commitment to organizational objectives. Organizations are social entities that rely on communication to exist. Simon puts it quite simply: "Without communication, there can be no organization" (Simon, 2015).

In our work, we investigate the role of organizational communication in formation of social identity on the basis of social identity approach and the business psychology approach.

#### Communication model

A successful activity of an organization is largely related to its communicative competence, i.e. ability of the organization to build effective communications. Communicative competence is the ability of an organization to:

- define the goals of organizational communication;
- to take into account the intentions and methods of communication partner;

- to choose adequate communication strategies;
- to evaluate the success of communication; to change communicative behavior as necessary.

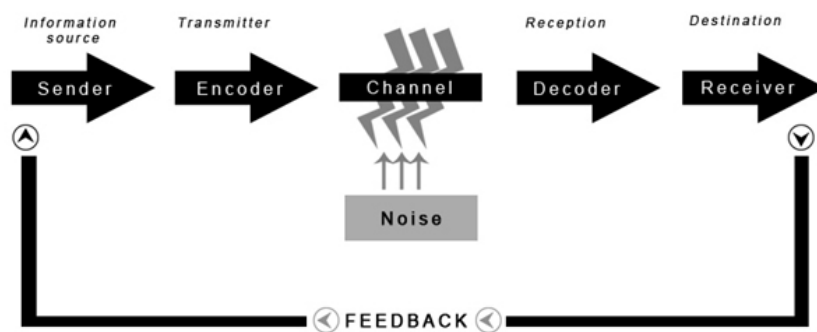
Initially, in the organizational theory, communications did not receive as much attention as we can observed now. For example, F. Taylor, a representative of the “scientific management” school, understood by communication no more than a “one-sided, vertical process directly connected with the transfer of a work task”, implying that communications are exclusively formal, planned, hierarchical (Miller, 2014).

The human relations school had a completely different position, considering communications as a factor directly influencing the motivation of employees. Its representatives (E. Mayo, D. McGregor, F. Herzberg and others) attracted attention to communications in the organization, focusing on the importance of their informal form and the development of communication skills of a manager.

Finally, the social systems approach to organization (C. Barnard), combining already existing ideas, defined communications as “a process that ensures the interdependence and consistency of the functioning of all internal parts of an organization, outlining the external boundaries of the system”.

Following the Shannon-Weaver’s data transmission model (see Fig. 1), we can outline some essential stages of communication process:

- encoding of the message in a certain form, or media;
- choosing the way of interaction with the audience, the channel of communication, depending on the characteristics of the group;
- decoding / interpretation of the message by recipients, depending on their existing value settings and group membership.



SHANNON-WEAVER’S MODEL OF COMMUNICATION

Figure 1 Schematic diagram of the Shannon-Weaver model

Here important are: 1) senders (communicators) and receivers (recipients) of informational messages; 2) the manifestation of communication means (codes used in symbolic forms, information flows), channels of communication (means of information transfer); 3) the subject of communication (knowledge); 4) “effects of communication” that are the consequences of communication expressed in changes in the internal state of the subjects of the communication process, in their relationships or in their actions” (Balandina, 2017).

These “effects of communication” will be crucial in the formation of social identity, the transmission of organizational values, in the formation of employee commitment and involvement.

## 1.2. Identity focused communications

As we mentioned early a modern trend of study of communication is the search for interdisciplinary approaches to understanding their mechanism in an organization on the base of interdisciplinary approaches. Our research based on the business psychology and social identity approaches.

Business psychology approach developed as combined the psychological and managerial basics. The problem of communication is the important issue in business psychology research and practice (Benton, Ivanova, 2016). According with this approach communication consider from the perspective of personality, organization and business as a whole. It means that results of the business psychology research should be useful not only for the personal development, but in the same time for the management of business. It helps to understand of the psychological nature of communication as a result of deep processes in personality. In the same time, it will be useful for development of new methods of management in organization.

According to the theory of social identity group membership is supported by a system of intra-group and intergroup attitudes and actions, therefore, social identity may be a factor of behavior individuals and groups in organizations (Taifel, 1982, Tajfel, Turner, 1986). In this approach considered as the most important psychological structure, through which is refracted the perception of the social world and following behavior (Augoustinos, Walker, 2012.).

We assume that communication focused of identity help to the self-determination process of personality and the identity formation. Actualized identity is a cognitive basis for the understanding own professional level and competence, and to receiving the values and behavioral standards in organization. All of these are important for commitment and performance in organization.

Our suggestion is that IFC in organization support and forming different aspects of social identity of employers relevant to the organization. This can be manifested in different aspects of social identity, such as loyalty, engagement, awareness of own aims and benefits etc.

Using the well-known approach developed by the international group Government Communication Service (GCS) (Government Communication Services, 2015) we can suggest a model of IFC consisting of the following parts:

1. Definition of the main policy of the communication (Organization / Policy Objectives), based on which the goals and objectives of communication are formed (Communication Objectives);
2. Evaluation and use of input resources (Inputs), i.e. the totality of everything that the organization does before and during the achievement of goals;
3. Production and dissemination of ideas in forms that will be perceived by the target audience (Outputs) and can be quantified;
4. Practices of consumption by the audience of messages (Outtakes), or everything that the audience thinks, feels during the initial perception of the information received information;
5. The immediate results of communication (Outcomes), expressed in informing and changing the behavior or attitudes of the target audience;
6. The model also assumes that at each stage it is possible to use the Feedback that helps to evaluate the results and to correct the actions to improve the process of information transfer and the achievement of the objectives.

Now let's "shift" this model to the phenomenon under study and its real aspects (Fig.2). According to the theory of communication and of social identity, we can say that the main objectives of organizational communication (Communication Objectives) will be the formation of the employees' desire to continue working in a specific organization (personnel retention) and the maintenance of a personal engagement, motivation and perceived loyalty of the personnel. On this basis, as input data (Inputs) we will understand values, patterns and standards of behaviour, motivational and cognitive elements. In turn, the "Outputs" of such "inputs" will be various forms and practices of intraorganizational communications, existing job instructions, different corporate events. In other words, these are all the many channels of communication that convey a message about the specific organizational culture which can be measured quantitatively. Speaking about Outtakes, we will have in mind the totality of employees' attitudes to the corporate culture and different forms of organizational work practices. The immediate effect (Outcomes) of IFC is a creation of a new social identity of the personnel of an organization.

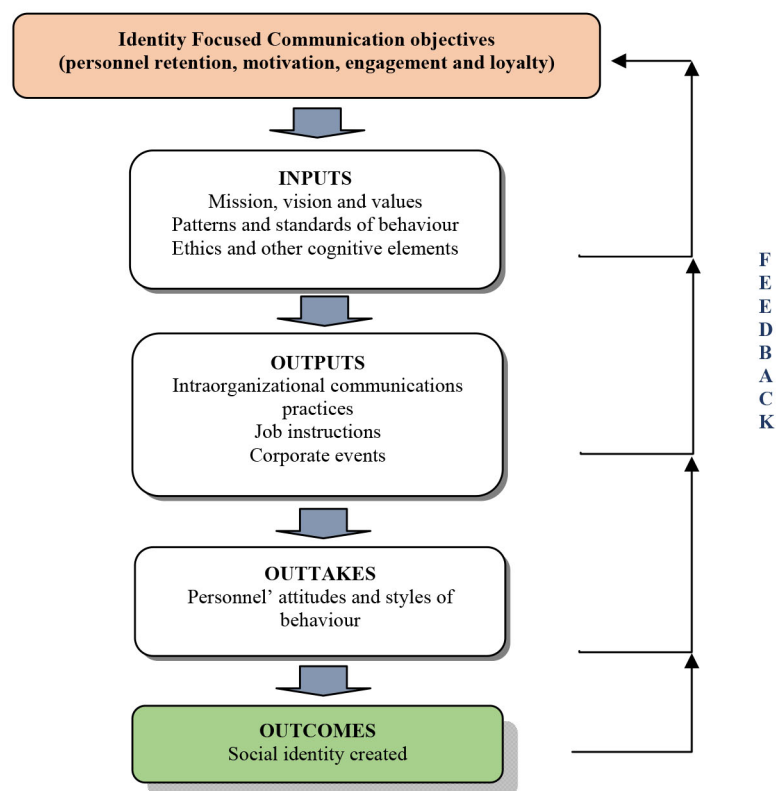


Figure 2 Identity Focused Communication Model

### 1.3. Model and Data

The aim of the empirical study was to determine the role of IFC in maintaining the desire of staff to continue its activities in the company. In particular we have studied the role of IFC in the adaptation of personnel, engagement and loyalty.

We used qualitative methods with partial use of quantitative data. The main method was the case study.

The study was conducted in two stages. At the first stage we choose the organizations which lived problems with staff turnover and which undertook measures to retain staff. Among two organizations first realized the project of corporative events; second – developed the program of reducing staff turnover. Moreover, these organizations (or some of their departments) have formed communications close in sense to IFC. Management has developed programs of staff



retention and used some indicators for understanding the results of their activity such as: loyalty (first case), and engagement (second case). We studied in those organizations how these indicators are related with the IFC. Leaders of the first organization believe that effective management of loyalty leads to reducing staff turnover, to incising the competitiveness of the company in long term etc. The leaders of the second company believe that it is necessary to increase the level of the employees' engagement to reduce staff turnover and incise the level of performance.

At the second stage we compare the indicators of behavior which every organization used. The general sample of our research (N= 356) included participants from three organizations: first (N=79), second (N=277).

Methods: observation, analyses of documents, authors questionnaires, statistic analyse (SPSS, Excel).

To study the level of engagement: Gallup Q12 Personal Engagement Survey and the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES). To study the level of loyalty: The technique of staff loyalty to the organisation (L. Pochebut).

## 2. FORMAT GUIDELINES

### 2.1. IFC and loyalty (first case study)

For the purpose of staff retention, the management of the first organization (trade company) used different corporative events. The organization has spent a lot of money for events during last 3 year. But the result in staff performance and stability hasn't satisfied the management. We studied how IFC can help to change this situation.

All staff (N=94) was asked to mark the events they attended and liked (in the collecting of dat took part Ms. M. Balikoeva). There were tree main types of events: first was aimed on the development of narrow professional skills – hard skills (such as training of professional operations), second – on the development of communication skills – soft skills (such as training of public speech, communication with special clients), third – on the development of general social and professional competence (such as team professional game). Employees liked 16 events which took place in 2018. We named this event as favorite (table 1).

Table 1 Number of favorite events in organization during 2018 year (total = 16)

Type of events	Hard Skills	Soft Skills	General
Number	6	4	6

This result shows that people in organization participate and prefer events of different types. Comparison of the level of correlations between loyalty and number of participation in events was non-significant ( $r=0,208$ ). It means that frequent participation in corporate events is not related to the level of loyalty to the organization. There was a significant but low correlation between hard and soft skills favorite events and loyalty. But the correlation between general favorite events and loyalty was highly significant ( $r= 0,778$ ).

Results show that general events play the most important role for the supporting and development of loyalty. This type of event reflects what we mean by the IFC (through observation and content analyses of the events programs). Every general event included cognitive information about some aspects of profession, current tasks, leader's position, social norms, social values, personal impact to the organizational life and other cognitive elements of IFC. Moreover, all these events were conducted with positive emotional attitudes to the company, its leadership and good example of personnel performance.

This case study showed that IFC can be an organizational resource for development of loyalty of employers. Our practical recommendation to the personnel management was about possibilities to use IFC communication in every type of events which is also important for some reasons. IFC can help in the optimizing of the cost-benefit ratio of the events.

## 2.2. IFC and personal engagement (second case study)

In second organization (local zoo) personnel management worked with the problem of the staff turnover. Observation and employer survey showed that there are some important problems in personnel management based on difficulties in communications. In the frame of the current organizational culture leaders seldom communicate with staff, there are a lot of mistakes and misunderstanding in priority tasks. As a result, some employees do not perform their work well enough. Moreover, the level of turnover increases during last years. We studied how IFC can be useful for changing this situation.

In this organization leaders believe that it is necessary to incise the engagement of employees to reduce staff turnover and incise the level of performance. They know that main personnel have high level of interest in their profession and job in general. But they observe that the level of performance and performance of tasks important for the whole organization is very pure. That is why we analyse the results of the big research devoted to the employers involvement. All staff (N=277) were tested by the Gallup Q12 Employee Engagement Survey and UWES. After this we compared the level of engagement in different departments of the organization. Results show that there some departments with low level of engagement and with low one (table 2).

Table 2 Average level of staff engagement in the departments (N=277)

Departments/average level of engagements	Q12	%	Q17	%	Δ%
Administration	8,2	68	5,1	85	+17
Finance	10,7	89	5,4	90	+1
Veterinary	9,3	77,5	5,4	90	+12,5
Outdoor	8,3	69	4,8	80	+11
Ungulates	9,2	77	4,4	73	-4
Small primates	7,8	65	5,0	83	+18
Research and information	7,3	61	4,1	68	+7
Ornithological	8,7	72,5	5,1	85	+12,5
Tropical World	6	50	4,5	75	+25
Predatory animals	7,5	62,5	4,9	82	+19,5

From these data we can say that there are similarity dates about many departments. The level of engagement is heterogeneous. Only one department has a high level of engagement: the financial office.

This study allows us to say that only in financial department the IFC obtained its goal – a high level of engagement and high level of performance.

Results show that the IFC major differences concern the strategy of competition. Personnel with professional identity demonstrate much higher level of competition strategy compared with the general sample. We assume that it can linked with the characteristics of the sample. Sampling personnel were younger. It is also possible that it reflects specific features of a method of identifying the strategy which is in the nature of a situation: clear and predictable working condition or uncertain and difficult.



But at the same time, the results raise important questions: How to develop the IFC in other departments? Which kind of support will be useful to change the communication culture in this organization? These and similar question formed the basis of the training program for the personnel in the organization.

### 3. CONCLUSIONS

We emphasize that the research was pilot in nature. But the results of this study show that business psychology (a comprehensive view of communication factors) and social identity approaches (understanding people behavior in organizations through their identity structure) help us to find new type of communications in organizations which we named identity focused communications (IFC). The model of IFC include following components: cognitive elements (information about profession, social roles, perspectives etc.), values (information about moral norms, ethic, mission, vision as well as emotional background of interactions), behavioral (personal brand, standards of conduct).

We consider communications as an important factor of specific influence on the motivation and behavior of employees. Effective communications in organization help people to clearly define themselves, understand their place in professional and social environment and behave accordingly. These communications increase with high probability the desire to continue working in the organization. On the contrary, inefficient communications in this sense create uncertainty and reduce this desire. Development of IFC in organization helps to create a psychological basis for the retention of staff. Any projects in which employers are involved can be useful for the purpose of retention of staff by using of IFC. In this article we presented two examples from the organization's life, which clearly demonstrate that IFC contributes to the staff retention. High level of staff engagement were observed in the department where all components of IFC worked. Corporate events conducted on the model of IFC led to an increase of organizational loyalty. And main factors of new staff adaptation reflect the result of IFC.

The results allow us to say that the communication is the main instrument of self-determination. IFC helps people in organization to self-define in professional and social aspects. Result of this self-definition process are a clear social identity and self-esteem in accordance with organizational norms. This process is the basis of the employee's deep understanding of his/her professional and social role, and acceptance of the organization and its members as such. Therefore, the analysis of the IFC in organization can be an important resource for personnel management in the organization. The development of this approach will be the development of IFC techniques and of training program for HRs and managers of the organization.

We developed approaches which allows us to outline an empirical research program aimed to determining the characteristics of effective communications for retention of personnel in organization. Unlike manipulative communications, IFC (and social identity approach as well) can give to personnel a feeling of contentment and harmony. In the organizational context IFC can give new opportunities to develop the new corporate culture and achieve high working result.

Results of our work can be useful for consultants and coaches who work with the problems of development of social and professional identity, loyalty, and performance. The results will be usull for the personnel management in understanding of new functions of communication, developing training programs based on IFC model. Moreover, as we believe, our results can be usefull to create a communication's strategy in organization addressing professional values and patterns of behavioral and social roles.

The data obtained can be considered as a pilot to build new hypotheses and further research on a broader sample and with the use of experimental procedures.

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