The role of organizational communication in structuring interpersonal relationships

Nicolae Mitrofan, Alina Bulborea *

University of Bucharest, Panduri 90, Romania
University of Bucharest, Panduri 90, Romania

Abstract

The efficient workplace communication gains increased importance in the success or failure of an organization, regardless of the specifics of the conducted activities. This study aims to highlight the influence that communication exerts on the structuring of interpersonal relationships. The study was carried out in a banking organization, with the main objective of identifying the possible influence of communication on the importance given to interpersonal relationships by those who worked in a front-office department and by those who worked in a back-office department. The obtained results lead us to propose the organization of an improving intervention plan for situations characterized by pronounced dysfunctions.

Keywords: organizational communication, interpersonal relationships, banking organization, front-office department, back-office department

1. Introduction

Organizational communication has been increasingly studied due to the multiple fulfilled roles, which are highlighted by different authors. Thus, some consider it the most important link of the organizational chain because the organization’s strength or weakness depends on its strength or weakness (Zlate, 2008). Others claim that the way in which an organization conceives or manages its communication says more about its culture than any other process element (Sanchez, Heene, 2007). The author refers to planning, budget, communication policies and involved personnel. Seitel (2004) cites a Fortune Magazine report in which it is shown that the 200 most

* Nicolae Mitrofan. Tel.: 0040-021-316-0187; fax: 0040-031-425-3452
E-mail address: nicolaemitrofan@yahoo.com
admired companies spent more than half of their communication budgets on internal communication. This was three times more than the 200 least admired companies spent. Colvin (2006), cited by Barling, Cooper (2008), states that the best 100 companies share the belief according to which efficient two-way communication underlies the employees’ motivation and the organizational success.

Organizational communication continues to evolve in this dynamic world characterized by the explosion of new technologies, by an intense competition on a global level and by sudden changes in every area. According to some authors, internal communication becomes an essential aspect of organizational changes. It is actually the key variable in all the efforts involving change and in all initiatives involving diversity and motivation (Harris, Nelson, 2008). According to others, organizational communication takes on the role of the most important driving force of business performance (Gay, Mahoney & Graves, 2005). As M. Zlate (2008) emphasized, there has almost never been a single thinker that did not refer, in one way or another, to the role of organizational communication, beginning with the classical theories, carrying on with the neoclassical ones and ending with the modern ones.

The results of multiple investigations revealed the fact that an efficient internal communication contributed to the increase of the employees’ workplace satisfaction, to their morale, to productivity, to commitment, to trust and to learning. It also improves the communicational climate, the interpersonal relationships and it increases quality and profits.

2. Purpose of study

In this study, we aim to identify the way in which communication influences the importance that employees give to interpersonal relationships, within a banking organization. We want to find out if there are differences regarding the way in which this influence manifests itself at the front-office employees’ level, as well as at the back-office employees’ level.

3. Research Methods

3.1. Hypothesis

In our research, we aimed to see if the following two hypotheses were validated or not: 1. there is a statistically significant connection between the communication at the employees’ level and the importance, which they give to interpersonal relationships; 2. there is a statistically significant difference between the front-office and back-office employees’ level of communication.

3.2. Participants

The conducted research had a non-experimental, correlation, qualitative, applicative design because it highlighted the link between the two variables, namely: communication and the importance of interpersonal relationships. In terms of subjects, we turned to a number of 66 employees of a banking organization, aged 23-48. All participants graduated from higher education institutions, 38 of them were females and 28 were males. One of the limits of this research was that the number of males and the number of females taking part in the study were unequal, the number of female participants being greater than the one of the male participants. Moreover, the sample was not homogenous in terms of age.
3.3. Instruments used

The following questionnaires were applied: 1. The importance of human relationships at the workplace (Chapman, 1983); 2. Your attitude is showing (SRA, Inc. Chicago, presented in S. Constant in, A.S. Constantin, 2002); 3. The art of conversation (Chelcea, 1997). All participants were trained in filling in the questionnaires. It was also mentioned that any information of a personal nature would remain confidential. The questionnaires contained only name initials, “f” or “m” for female or male and the initials “F.O” or “B.O” for front-office or back-office.

4. Results and discussions

The SPSS statistic program was used to analyze and interpret the data. The first step in the analysis consisted of calculating the average, the median and the absolute value for the two variables: communication at employees’ level and the importance of interpersonal relationships for employees.

The participants’ results distribution for the “importance of interpersonal relationships” variable is a unimodal distribution (Absolute value = 33, Skewness= -.435, Skewness Standard Error=0.295; Kurtosis=0.400; Kurtosis Standard Error=0.582), with the average=37.48, median=39 and the standard deviation=8.794. The amplitude of the distribution is between the minimum score of 13 and the maximum score of 55. By taking these elements into account, it can be considered that the scores obtained by the 66 participants are normally distributed in the case of the “importance of interpersonal relationships” variable, which bears statistical analysis parametric procedures.

The subjects’ results distribution for the “communication among employees” variable is a unimodal distribution (Absolute value= 2, Skewness= 0.512, Skewness Standard Error=0.295; Kurtosis= -1.077; Kurtosis Standard Error=0.582), with the average=5.53, median=5.00 and the standard deviation=3.812. The amplitude of the distribution is between the minimum score of 1 and the maximum score of 14. By taking these elements into account, it can be considered that the scores obtained by the 66 participants are normally distributed in the case of the “communication among employees” variable, which bears statistical analysis parametric procedures.

Table no.1 The Pearson Correlation of variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>The importance of human relationships test</th>
<th>Art of conversation bank test</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The importance of human</td>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>-0.421**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>relationships test</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Art of conversation bank test</td>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>-0.421**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (1-tailed).

The size of the effect for the correlation between employees’ communication and the importance they give to interpersonal relationships: - the Pearson variables correlation table shows that the conditions required to apply ‘r’ are met (Sava, 2004). There is a significant link between employees’ communication and the importance they give to interpersonal relationships (r = -0.421; DF= 64; p=< 0.001); Employees that fail to communicate efficiently also lack interest in interpersonal relationships; - the determination coefficient $r^2 = 0.18$ estimates that 18% of the two variables dispersion has a common evolution; there is a strong, statistically and practically significant connection between the employees’ communication and the importance they give to interpersonal relationships.
relationships. 18 out of 100 employees may show increased interest in interpersonal relationships if the communication level were improved.

After applying the „Importance of human relationships at the workplace” test to both the front-office and the back-office employees groups, it resulted that the mean of the first category (37.97) was almost equal to the mean of the second category (37.00). Practically, the difference is only equal to .970.

Table no. 2. The information from the output offered by SPSS in terms of the t test for the independent samples in the case of the “importance of interpersonal relationships” variable

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Levene's Test for Equality of Variances</th>
<th>t-test for Equality of Means</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>F    Sig.    t    df    Sig. (2-tailed)    Mean Difference    Std. Error Difference    95% Confidence Interval of the Difference</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equal variances assumed</td>
<td>.195</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equal variances not assumed</td>
<td>.445</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Levene test (see table no. 2) for equality of variances shows the fact that, in this case, the variances are equal because the value of p is 0.660. Therefore, it is statistically insignificant because it has a greater value than 0.05. The value of t for equal variances is 0.445, which has a (two-tailed) level of significance of exactly 0.658., with 64 degrees of freedom.

By analyzing the means of the two groups (the mean for the front-office employees’ scores for the values of the “Art of conversation” test is 5.24 and the mean for the back-office employees’ scores is 5.82), we can notice there is a difference between them, even if it is not a great value.

Table no. 3
The information from the output provided by SPSS in case of the t test for independent samples regarding the communication variable (The Art of Conversation)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Levene's Test for Equality of Variances</th>
<th>t-test for Equality of Means</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>F    Sig.    t    df    Sig. (2-tailed)    Mean Difference    Std. Error Difference    95% Confidence Interval of the Difference</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equal variances assumed</td>
<td>.179</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equal variances not assumed</td>
<td>-.611</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In this case, the Levene test (see table no. 3) regarding the equality of variances shows the fact that the variances are equal because the value of p is 0.647. Therefore, it is statistically insignificant because it has a
higher value than 0.05. The value of $t$ for equal variances is -0.661, which has a (two-tailed level of significance of exactly 0.544 with 64 degrees of freedom.

Conclusions

The efficient communication at the workplace is important for the success or failure of an organization. By building tight relationships of interpersonal communication between subordinates and managers, the activity within the organization can improve in the long term. Open communication, whether between subordinates and managers or management and employees, helps the formation of some better interpersonal and professional relationships. This will determine the employees to feel truly valuable and they will be more loyal to the company. A friendly organizational environment will always promote good interpersonal relationships between employees.

The study aimed to identify the way in which communication can influence the employees’ perceptions on the importance of interpersonal relationships. The negative correlation of the relation between the two variables, namely communication and the importance of interpersonal relationships, is statistically significant ($r= -0.421; DF= 64; p=< 0.001$); therefore, the first hypothesis of the study is confirmed. (There is a statistically significant connection between the communication at the employees’ level and the importance given to interpersonal relationships). The employees, who fail to communicate efficiently, do not give a great importance to the interpersonal relationships either.

Regarding the second hypothesis, (There is a statistically significant difference between the front office and back office employees’ level of communication) a certain difference was noticed (the mean of the front-office employees’ scores for the values of the Art of Conversation test is 5.24 and the mean of the back-office employees’ scores for the values of the Art of Conversation test is 5.82).

New research directions could aim the communication differences at the level of the employees in executive positions vs. management employees and the role of managers in mediating the conflicts between subordinates or the implication of the organizations in developing interpersonal relationships etc.

References