Use of anonymous questionnaires with the aim of improving interpersonal relationships in work environment

Andrea Russo¹, Senka Borovac Zekan², Ivan Peronja³

a,b University Center for Professional Studies, 21000 Split, Croatia

Abstract

How to improve internal communication within our own organization and stimulate employees to perceive a company in which they work as their own and strive for joint success? In order to achieve effective internal communication, it is important to involve employees in all company’s actions and give them a chance to express their views and opinions. It is necessary to listen to the individual needs of people and continuously work to improve internal communications.

Business communication is a very important part of business, and refers to the transmission of messages, exchange and processing of information and contacts with business partners and the public. The communication within the organization involves all employees, while communication outside the organization involves only few. Vertical communication takes place within the organization from higher to lower organizational levels (authoritative atmosphere) or in other case upward from subordinates to superiors. This kind of communication is not command and contains feedback. Horizontal and lateral communication among employees involves exchange of views and information from the private sphere. This communication has a significant influence on attitudes and behavior of employees, work ethics and productivity.

Key words: Communication, interpersonal relationships, work environment
1. Introduction

Leadership and management are interdisciplinary fields that include scientific fields of organization and management, communications, economics, computer science, pedagogy, sociology, and psychology. Entrepreneurial managers are characterized by behavior that always wants to take advantage of a favorable entrepreneurial opportunity. Besides these entrepreneurial qualities, it is required to be able to manage employees. Entrepreneurial behavior is a constant process of research, analysis, decision making, risk taking, and making profit.

2. The communication process

2.1. The internal communication

Without good communication, it is not possible to achieve management functions: to establish and implement goals, make plans, organize people and other resources needed, select personnel, and take care about their development, to lead, motivate, and create a positive climate and objectively evaluate the accomplishments of individuals and organization in general. Internal communication is important due to the fact that employees want to know what organization they work for is like, its goals and plans, the way of their realization, the role of the team they work in, and what is expected of each of them on the individual level [1].

Employees appreciate and want to be part of a system that makes sense. In a situation like this, they perceive themselves and their work meaningful, which is very important for work motivation and thus for the work performance [2]. However, the situation in practice is far from ideal. Few of managers in fact explain to the employees their job description, their power position, and responsibilities expected. No one explains the role of their team in the organization or the role of the organization in the market. Every day they receive assignments that are not placed in a broader context, so they don’t see a clear connection between what they do and the success of the team or organization. On daily bases they see their managers rushing to important meetings, which leaves them feeling unimportant, or that the real work takes place elsewhere. They are not informed about the meetings’ outcome unless it comes to criticism or announcement of cutting costs.

If the organization uses the tools of internal communication, employees have the opportunity to be regularly informed about events in the organization (through bulletin boards, intranet, newsletters, electronic mail, etc.). They feel important and see the meaning of their work. However, regardless of the development of various communication channels, employees perceive the first source of information related to their work – their direct superior [3]. There often occurs a paradox: executives believe that, due to the existence of the department of internal communication, they are released of their role as communicators and informants towards employees. On the other hand, the employees may feel a bit cheated: while their organization, through the central office of internal communications, gives them importance, their manager fails to give them specific information regarding their operations. They cannot feel good in general if they feel bad in everyday work. Information about great success of their organization doesn’t mean much if their team’s and individual role in it is not clear, as well as their position in accomplishing goals. Employees want to receive feedback in order to know where they stand in relation to their goals and what they need to do more to accomplish them [4]. That is what they expect from their manager who is responsible for organizing business department and for its success. Ignoring the work of employees by managers (through failure to provide feedback) is a direct message to them that they are irrelevant, which has a very negative effect on motivation.

2.2. The role of manager in the communication process

It is therefore extremely important for every manager to be aware of his role as an internal informer for his team [5]. He is obliged to inform his department regularly about its goals and how those goals fit into the overall objectives of the organization. Manager must also clearly present to each team member what is expected of him to do at the moment, on which standards and what are his authorities and responsibilities. Employees should be regularly informed about their performance [6, 7] and thus given the opportunity for continuous development and motivated approach to work assignments [8, 9]. Besides informing, it is important to ask employees for opinion on all matters important for them personally or for the team, and for improvement of organization’s success in general. For, an honest and effective internal communication is always - two sided.

Employees should be acquainted with the situation in the company [10] - honestly and bluntly. If management tries to hide the real picture from employees, there is a risk they will learn information in different ways. That encourages a climate of distrust. Employees will search for the reasons of not being acquainted with...
the truth [11] and whether the situation is much worse than it currently seems like. Negative news is certainly required to be presented along with recommendation of actions to be taken in order to overcome difficulties. Moreover, the employees should be included in consideration of potential actions [12, 13]. In this way they will be involved and will have the impression of contributing to determining the fate of the organization, and therefore their own destinies.

The most appropriate tool for creating a sense of commitment is the impression that we control our lives. In this way we work as if working for ourselves and in the end that is the truth. If the organization is operating badly, we are also uncertain facing potential future of going to the labor exchange. It often happens that the management would rather avoid talking about the negativity, especially if they are not sure how to overcome them, with the aim as not to be taken incompetent.

At the same time, with such behavior they send the opposite message – that they are keeping quiet for not knowing what to do. Employees attribute this kind of behavior mainly as a lack of managers’ skills. Capable individuals, who do not doubt their quality and whose criterion for good performance is to give the maximum in every moment, do not fear of sharing negative information among their employees [14, 15]. They know anyone can make mistakes, and encourage an atmosphere of open communication through which they build partnerships with employees. In such an atmosphere, employees are trying to give more due to the fact they are aware their contribution is very important for a better functioning of the organization, which brings them the desired security.

3. Team work

3.1. Team work benefits

The company that relies on individuals and ignores the joint work of all employees will succeed much harder than one that values and insist on teamwork. Teamwork brings employees together, creates a positive atmosphere and encourages workers to take more ambitious projects [16, 17]. It would be much easier for the employees to participate in a demanding project knowing they will have the support of other employees, as well as their supervisor. Teamwork should not be limited only to employees, but also on the managers. They should, through mutual interaction, talk about the upcoming tasks in order to successfully complete them. In such an environment, people understand and believe that the results are better when they jointly plan, make decisions and implement action.

Employees are aware that 'none of us is as good alone as we are all together'. Inclusion of all employees and their departments enable people to make decisions about their work independently. Certainly, managers must coordinate the entire process, but individuals should be given more freedom to demonstrate their abilities. Working together, “team building” atmosphere and independent decision – making all increase loyalty to the company, which is ultimately reflected in its expertise and ability to effectively carry out tasks in the shortest time possible. With good atmosphere in the company and employees feeling good about themselves, outflow of personnel is much smaller, even when they get an opportunity to transfer to better paid jobs [18].

For a large number of people working environment means more than salary [18]. If an employee gets an opportunity to go to another company with a slightly higher salary being aware of leaving a positive and efficient work environment, there is a strong possibility that he will reject the offer. On the other hand, poor working environment, lack of communication among colleagues and silent corridors, will push workers to another company, even with a lesser salary [19, 20].

3.2. The managers role in teamwork building

In order to create an environment of teamwork, certain factors must be covered [21, 22]. The superior must clearly point out that teamwork is beneficial and that the employee is expected to embrace this way of working. Executives and company leaders should model the teamwork and mutual respect among themselves and with the rest of the organization. Teamwork should be recognized and rewarded so that employees understand that it is important. Talks on previous successes confirm the importance of teamwork in the previous period. When the organization meets these factors teamwork has all the prerequisites for success and becomes a running wheel of the company. Good team work does not necessarily require excellent interpersonal relations and friendship among the employees. It is not necessary for employees to socialize off - hour, although this would be an advantage [23, 24]. What is important is the correct behavior that will result in better operating outcome.

3.3. Does manager’s behavior make difference?

In the business world, decency is not sufficiently represented, and executives are the least decent. This is an impression of employees. Having an intense desire to bring out the maximum from their workers managers has forgotten how to inspire commitment among the employees. Manager’s failure to express gratitude is not necessarily the result of arrogance or evil intent, but the assumption that the subordinate "are certainly aware of" how much their efforts is appreciated [25].
However, it matters whether managers say thank you. A study published in the American magazine Journal of Personality and Social Psychology [26], found that people react significantly different depending on whether one of their efforts received gratitude. In the study, 69 patients received the task to respond to a letter from the student Eric, who sought advice regarding compiling CVs and job applications. Eric's character has been invented, and the researchers themselves stood behind him, but the respondents did not know it. Once they have submitted the required response, the participants received another letter from Eric, in which he sought additional assistance. Half of the respondents received a letter in which Eric express his gratitude for the effort, while the rest received a letter of neutral tones without gratitude.

Experts wanted to see the effect of grateful and cold neutral response on the participants. They were probably not surprised by the result: only 32 percent of those that Eric failed to thank agreed to provide him with help once more, while as many as 66 percent of those to whom Eric expressed gratitude were willing to send him additional advice about job applications. Obviously, verbal appreciation doubled the percentage of those who had the motivation to continue to help strangers.

Every manager needs to consider whether to forget the simple and free method in the effort to encourage the employees’ diligent work. In accordance with previous studies[27, 28], which found that the "carrot" in the workplace works better than a "stick", managers draw form employees more by expressing gratitude than with indifference and silence.

In further research, psychologists have found what kind of emotion encouraged those who have received gratitude to provide additional assistance [29]. It turns out that increased motivation was not the result of booted ego, but of a sense that they are valuable to society. “Gratitude provides the sense of being valuable and motivates to continue with this behavior”, concluded researchers. Certainly, carrying out the work is not doing favor but duty to be paid. However, the factor of gratitude still plays a role in addition to the motivation provided by the salary (and this might not be sufficient). "Express gratitude to the employees and spread the culture of gratitude! Its positive impact on teamwork in your organization will astonish you „recommends Derek Irvine, vice president of U.S. Globoforce consulting company [30].

It is advised to carry out anonymous surveys within organization [31, 32]. In this way employees are offered an opportunity to express themselves without fear and they are shown that their opinion is important. Nevertheless, most important is the early detection of problems, especially in interpersonal relations. Potential problems can be influenced promptly and escalation of conflicts, dissatisfaction and other behavior that eventually can lead to work harassment/mobbing are likely to be prevented.

4. Measurements

Anonymous questionnaires can, of course, be used for the examination of other factors in work environment, such as contentment of individuals with their position within the organization or need of changing the physical working environment [19]. Survey would presumably be conducted with the aim of increasing the profit, which in 21st century is achieved primarily through satisfied employees. There are five possible answers on the scale: 1 – not at all; 2 – 3-4 times in 12 months / very little; 3 – once a month / medium; 4 – twice a week / more; 5 – every day / very influential. Every day or frequently (scale 3 – 5), yes, but seldom (scale 2) and never (scale 1). The validity of three scales was tested by factor analysis. Factor analysis was made, one for each section of the questionnaire. In all three cases factor analysis was used on the common factors. Screeed test was also used (22) as a criterion for the extraction of a sufficient number of factors. Factor analysis, performed in correlation matrix of questions related to exposure, showed that in all 44 questions common factor was unique and explains 26,5 % common variance (first five values were 12.33, 3.09, 2.28, 1.94, 1.73).

The coefficient of reliability of exposure scale (Cronbach coefficient α) was 0.93. Factor analysis, performed on the correlational matrix of questions regarding the testimony of abuse also showed the common factor (first five values were 15.62, 3.53, 2.10, 1.78, 1.58). This factor explained 34.22 % common variance and all questions were saturated with it in the range from 0.19 to 0.80. Internal stability of reliability of testimony scale (Cronbach α) was 0.95. Factor analysis of questions regarding disabilities due to ill treatment also showed unique common factor (first five values were 18.92, 4.23, 1.85, 1.70, 1.48) which explained 41.7 % of common variations. All questions were saturated in the range from 0.50 to 0.77; internal stability of reliability of testimony scale (Cronbach α) was 0.97.

The relation of gender, age and three kinds of abuse: personal experience, testimonies and how much it disturbed, was examined. We used 2 (gender – male, female) x 2 (abuse – no, yes) analysis of variance, where age was used as dependent variable (in statistical terms only). This analysis was used to examine the extent of harassment regarding age and gender of examinees, when these two factors are taken into account simultaneously. Significant interactive effect of gender and exposure to abuse was obtained (F =5; P=0.019).

5. Analyses and Results

Based on analysis of data obtained through factor analysis and reliability analysis and with descriptive statistics and discriminate analysis, evaluation of the results of prevalence of personal experiences and testimonies of psychological abuse in elementary and secondary schools, forms of this abuse, emotional disorders which experiences of some forms of harassment in the exposed persons challenged, relations between age, gender and work experience of examinees, the consequences were such that they were unable to get to work, compared to the type and size of the school to abuse, the quality of relations in individual schools, we
made a questionnaire with 36 particles which would, in a relatively simple manner, quickly and reliably judge the possible presence of abuse in a school setting. Final selection of particles depended on the fact to what extent were the examinees bothered by a certain behaviour.

6. Conclusion

The results of this study indicate the crucial role of managers in internal communication within the company. In order to achieve effective internal communication, it is important to involve employees in all company’s actions and give them a chance to express their views and opinions. It is necessary to listen to the individual needs and desires of employees and try to incorporate them into a common vision. Joint effort to improve internal communications will ultimately lead to greater employees’ motivation that will finally lead to their better performances.

References

[21] www.moj-posao.hr


