

THE ROLE OF COMMUNICATION IN THE BUSINESS ORGANIZATION

Ritu

G-193/102,S.G.M.Nager, NIT

Faridabad-121002

E-mail: rituranga570@gmail.com

Abstract: Communication is the most vital ingredient of an organization. In fact, an organization cannot be conceived of without communication. An organization is a group of persons constituted to achieve certain specific objectives. The achievement of these objectives largely depends upon a proper co-ordination and integration of human effort in an organization. The people working in an organization are interrelated; their activities are also interrelated because all activities are performed only to achieve the organizational objectives. Co-ordination and integration of various human activities are possible only if there is an effective system of Communication in the organization which provides for exchange of information and sharing of various ideas. The more effective the system of communication is, the better are the relations between the workers, and between workers and the management.

Keywords: Communication, Information, Business Organization

1.0 Introduction

Communication is the passing of information and understanding from one person to another at the same level or at different levels. It is the process by which the management reaches others in managing its work.

Since managers work through others, all of their managerial functions pass through the bottleneck of communication. One person can initiate the process but he alone cannot complete it. It is completed only when it is received by others. The effectiveness of management largely depends upon the effectiveness of communication. It is communication which gives life to the organization; so, it can be likened to the life blood of an organization. The communication system serves as the vehicle by which an organization is embedded in its environment. It not only integrates the various sub-units of an organization but also, in a systematic sense, serves as an elaborate set of interconnected channels designed to sift and analyses information imported from the environment. It also exports processed information to the environment.

The role of communication becomes more critical as the organization grows in its size, complexity and sophistication. So, the system should be adjusted according to the needs of the organization from time to time. If you are like most of us, you spend more time communicating than doing anything else. Probably you spend a large part of each day talking and listening. And when you are not talking or listening you are likely to be communicating in other ways reading, writing, gesturing and drawing. Or, perhaps you are just taking in information by being, or feeling, or smelling. All of these activities are forms of communication;

And certainly you do them throughout most of your conscious moments. Something we do as much must be important. Probably it is the most important of all our activities. It is easy to see that communication is the most important activity which has enabled us to develop the civilized society we have today. It is one activity which we human beings clearly do better than the other forms of life on earth; and it largely explains our dominant role. It is the activity which has enabled us to organize to work in groups. It is through organization that we have been able to sustain to our existence which individually would not have been possible. But there is no need to discuss further how communication contributed to the development of us human beings. Its role is obvious.

We need only to conclude that communication is extremely vital to our success and well-being in civilized society.

2.0 Communication Meaning and Definitions

Communication is the nervous system of an organization. It keeps the members of the organization informed about the internal and external happenings relevant to a task and of interest to the organization. It co-ordinates the efforts

of the members towards achieving organizational objectives. It is the process of influencing the action of a person or a group. It is a process of meaningful interaction among human beings to initiate, execute, accomplish, or prevent certain actions.

Communication is, thus, the life blood of an organization. Without communication, an organization is lifeless and its very existence is in danger.

The term communication has been derived from the Latin word 'communes' that means 'common' and thus, if a person effects communication, he establishes a common ground of understanding. Literally, communication means to inform, to tell, to show, or to spread information. Thus, it may be interpreted as an interchange of thought or information to bring about understanding and confidence for good industrial relations. It brings about unity of purpose, interest, and efforts in an organization.

3.0 The Frequency of Communication

Just how much communicating a business organization needs depends - on a number of factors. The nature of the business certainly is one. Some have much greater need to communicate than do others. The organization plan of the company also affects the volume of communication, for much of the information flow is determined by the structure. Also, the people who make up the organization affect the volume of communication. As we shall point out later, every human being is different. Each has different communication needs and abilities. Thus, varying combinations of people will have varying needs for and produce varying volumes of, communication.

Although the communication needs vary by company, people in organizations communicate more than most of us suspect. According to one generally accepted estimate, between 40 and 60 per cent of the work time spent in a typical manufacturing plant involves some form/ kind of communication. Of course, these percentages are only averages.

Some employees spend much more of their time communicating. In fact, the higher up the organization structure an employee is, the more communicating he or she is likely to do. Typically, top executives spend from 75 to 95 per cent of their time communicating. Unskilled laborers, on the other hand, need to communicate little to carry on their work. Without question, communication is important to the business organization. Because it is important, it stands to reason that business wants its communication to be well done. But all too rarely is business satisfied with what it gets. Unfortunately, to use the often quoted words of an authority in the field, "of all the things business executives do, they are worst at communicating."

4.0 Main Forms of Organizational Communication

The importance of communication in business becomes even more apparent when we consider the communication activities of an organization from an overall point of view. As we can see from a review of Ram's half hour at the Jean, these activities fall into three broad categories of communication: internal-operational, external-operational, and personal.

4.1 Internal-Operational Communication: Internal-operational communication consists of the structured communication within the organization directly related to achieving the organization's work goals. By "structured" we mean that such communication is built into the organization's plan of operation. By the "organization's work goals" we mean the organization's primary reasons for being — to sell insurance, to manufacture nuts and bolts, to construct buildings, and the like.

The Jean Company, to use by now a familiar example, has as its major work goals the making and selling of jeans. In achieving these work goals, it has an established plan of operation, and communication plays a major role in this plan. More specifically, each of Jean's employees has an assignment in the plan. For the plan to work, some communicating must be done. In some of the assignments certain working information is needed. And, so that all assignments may be performed as a harmonious and unified effort, certain co-ordinating information must be communicated. All this information flow is internal-operational communication.

Specifically, internal-operational communication is carried out through any number of structured activities. In the Jean Company, for example, much of the internal-operational information is entered into the company computer to become a part of the company's data base. From the data base, programmed reports are developed to give each

operations department the information it needs. For example, sales reports and inventory records combine to communicate reduction needs to the production planning department. Then the production planning department communicates this need to the various production departments through a strategically planned work schedule.

Within each production unit and between production units there is, of course, additional communicating that must go on. The superiors make decisions and transmit them to the subordinates. Departments exchange information, and workers communicate working information with each other. Memoranda are written, reports are prepared, and conversations are held, all in the process of co-ordinating efforts and supplying the information needed to achieve the organization's goals. In every division of the company and in every activity, similar internal- operational communication occurs.

4.2 External-Operational Communication:

External-operational communication is that part of an organization's communication structure which is concerned with achieving the organization's work goals. It deals with people and groups outside the organization. It is the organization's communication with its public — its suppliers, service companies, customers, and the general public.

Into this category fall all of the organization's efforts at direct selling the sales representative's sales talk, the descriptive brochures, the telephone callbacks, the follow-up service calls, and the like. Included also are all of an organization's advertising efforts.

For, what is advertising but a deliberate, structured communication with an organization's intended recipients. Radio and television messages, newspaper and magazine advertising, and point-of-purchase display material obviously play a role in the organization's plan to achieve its work objective. Also falling into this category is all an organization does to enhance its public image. This includes its planned publicity, the civic-mindedness of its management, the courtesy of its employees, the condition of its physical plant.

All these and many more communication efforts combine to make up the organization's external-operational communication.

The extreme importance of an organization's external communication hardly requires supporting comment. Certainly, it is obvious that any business organization is dependent on people and groups outside itself for its success. It is an elementary principle of business that, because a business organization's success is dependent on its ability to satisfy the needs of customers, it must communicate effectively with these customers. It is equally elementary that in today's complex business society, organizations are dependent on each other in the manufacturing and distribution of goods as well as the sale of services. And this interdependence necessarily brings about needs for communication. Just as with international communication, these outside communications are vital to an organization's operation.

4.3 Personal Communication:

Not all the communication that goes on in an organization is operational, however. In fact, much of the communication in an organization is without purpose as far as the organization is concerned. Such communication may be classified as personal.

Personal communication is all that incidental exchange of information and feeling which human beings engage in whenever they come together. Human beings are social animals. They have a need to communicate, and they will communicate even when they have little or nothing to express.

Much of the time friends spend with each other is spent in communication, for it is simply the thing to do when people get together. Even total strangers are likely to communicate when they are placed in a position together, as for instance on a plane trip, in a waiting room, or at a ball game. Such personal communication also takes place in the work situation, and it is a part of the communication activity of any business organization. Although not a part of an organization's plan it can have a significant effect on the success of this plan. This effect is a result of the influence personal communication can have on the attitudes, opinions, and beliefs of the members of the organization. Attitudes of the organization's members towards the organization, their fellow employees, and their assignments directly affect the members' willingness to do their assigned tasks. And the nature of conversation in a work situation affects attitudes. In a work situation where heated words and flaming tempers are often present, the

participants are not likely to make their usual productive effort. Likewise, a rollicking, jovial work situation is likely to have an equally adverse effect on productivity. No doubt the idea productive attitudes lie somewhere between these extremes.

Also affecting the organization members' work attitudes is the extent of personal communication permitted. Absolute denial of this emotional privilege could lead to some degree of emotional upsets, for people hold dear their right to communicate. On the other hand, excessive personal communication could interfere directly with their work effort. Probably somewhere in the middle-ground area lies the optimum policy toward personal communication.

Personal communication can also help to form attitudes and beliefs, which are stronger and have more lasting effects on the mind than opinions. As was illustrated in the preceding account of Ram's workday at the Jean, Ram and his chartered bus friends spent some of their conversation time discussing a proposed new promotion policy for the Jean. And in talking, each helped to crystallize the opinions of the others. It is in this way that all members of an organization determine much of what they think about their organization, their co-workers, and their work situation in general. What they think can affect their relationships with the organization. And what they think can have a direct influence on productivity.

5.0 Communication Network in the Organization

It looking over all of an organization's communications, we see a very complex mass of information flow. We see an organization literally feeding on a continuous supply of information. More specifically, we see dozens, hundreds, or even thousands of individual members engaging in untold numbers of communication events throughout each working day. The picture of this network of information flow is infinitely complex.

In a simplified form, this infinitely complex information flow in a modern-day organization may be likened to the network of arteries and veins in the body. Just as the body has arteries, the organization has well-established channels of information flow. These are the formal and established channels of communication — the main line of the organization's operational communication. Included here are the reports, records, and other forms which supply working information to the various parts of the organization; the orders, instructions and messages which flow up and down the organization's authority structure; and the letters, sales presentations, advertising, and publicity which go to an organization's intended clientele. These main channels do not just happen; they are carefully thought out, or at least they should be. In the modern office, these channels are formed by computer information systems. Information from work stations is fed into the company's data base; and, from the data base the information can be retrieved at the work station needing it.

Our overview also shows us a secondary network of information flow corresponding to the veins of the body. This is the network made up of the thousands upon thousands of personal communications which take place in any organization. Such communications follow no set pattern but rather form an intricate and infinitely complex web of information flow, linking all of the members of the organization in one way or another.

The complexity of the network cannot be overemphasized, especially in the larger organization. Typically, it is not a single network at all. Rather, it is a complex inter-relation of small networkers made up of groups of people. The inter-relationships are made even more complex by the fact that the people in the organization may belong to more than one of these groups, and group memberships and the linking's between groups are continually changing. Truly, the network structure in a large organization is so complex as to defy description.

Known as the "grapevine" in management literature, this informal communication system is far more effective than a first impression might indicate. Certainly it consists of much gossip and rumor, for this is the nature of human conversation. And it is as fickle and inaccurate as the human beings who are a part of it. Even so, the grapevine carries far more information than the formal communication system; and, on many matters, it is more effective in determining the course of an organization. Wise managers recognize the presence of the grapevine. They learn who the talk leaders are; and they communicate to them the information that will do the most good for the organization. That is, they keep in touch with the grapevine, and they turn it into a constructive tool.

6.0 Effects of Changing Technology in Print Scenario

From the preceding review it appears that much of the communication that goes on in organizations is written communication — letters, memoranda, reports, and such. Thus, it is vital that we address a question

that is sometimes heard. It is the question of the role of written communication in the years ahead. The evidence suggests that we are moving rapidly into the age of automated communication the age of the paperless office. This will be a time when there will no letters, no reports, no files. Instead, each work station in an organization will be equipped with a computer terminal, or perhaps a PC. As a result, internal- operational communications will be done primarily through computers. In the short-run, a company's written external-operation communications will be done through the word-processing capabilities of the computer; and they will be in paper form. But in time, company-to-company computer link-ups will develop; and, in more time there will be consumer- to-company link-ups. The result will be that computer-to-computer communication will replace conventional letters.

Although it is impossible to say with certainty what the future holds, it appears reasonable to say that computer technology will bring about revolutionary changes in communication. In fact, revolutionary changes are occurring right now; and probably they will continue to occur at an accelerating rate. But we must keep in mind that these changes are primarily in the nature of the transmission — not in the messages communicated. There is no evidence that even remotely suggests that the needs for the messages communicated in letters, reports, and memoranda will decrease. And, of even greater importance, there is absolutely no evidence to suggest that these messages can be handled in a way which does not require the basic writing skills. Clearly, business writing is here to stay. In fact, the increasing complexity of the technological world of the future is likely to require more, not less, of it.

7.0 Conclusion

The foregoing block merely skims the surface; yet, hopefully, it has given an appreciation of the importance of communication to yourself and to business organizations. It has shown how extensive communication is, how it permeates every segment of the organization in a most intricate and complex way. And it has shown that good communication is vital to the successful operation of an organization. These conclusions, combined with the convincing evidence that most organizational communication is not well done, should lead you to yet another conclusion: that communication is an area deserving increased study by those concerned with improving the operations of an organization.

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