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**MANAGERIAL COMMUNICATION AND AUTHORITARIAN
LEADERSHIP STYLE**

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Abstract:

Communication is the process behind the process, it is one of the forces that shape and boost organizations. No activity can take place within an organization without the support of communication, be it verbal or written, formal or informal. Communication props up organizational activity and influences organizational performance. However, communication is always influenced by the source the characteristics of the emitter therefore, managerial communication of a specific organization will be shaped by the management style applied there.

Key words: communication; management; management styles; authoritarian management;

1. Introduction

Managerial communication, explained in a simplistic manner, represents communication at the workplace, communication flowing down from managers to subordinates, flowing up from subordinates to superiors and among peers, it is one of the most frequent, common and unavoidable activity taking place within an organization. In this paper we intend to demonstrate that the managerial style will deeply impact the way the communication process takes place in an organization, with the focus upon the authoritarian management style.

Chronologically, it is very difficult to pinpoint the moment communication became relevant for managers since it has always been part of every organized group interaction nevertheless, even if there was little research of the domain before the 40s, we can infer that it has been used as a management tool even before the concept was scientifically officialized. According to T.M. Lillico [1] the interest in this domain appeared together with the development of companies, the increase in the number of jobs, the clear distinction that started to be made between specializations, the world expansion of companies, the mobility of employed people, combined with the development of communication technologies (telephone, telegraph, radio etc.) which required better managed communication at the work place.

Leadership has been the preoccupation of people for thousands of years. We have Sun Tzu quotes regarding the qualities and skills of a leader [2], we have ancient Roman emperors [3] who bequeathed us their views on leading people and, closer to our century, in the 1840s historians such as Thomas Carlyle who developed a theory called the Great Man theory which says that leaders are born, not made, followed by the Trait theory, (1930s-1940s) which claims that leaders can be both born or made. This was the moment when scholars began a more thorough and systematic analysis of the characteristics that an effective leader needs to have and this scholastic development continued with the behavioural era, situational era, new leadership era, transactional and transformational era.



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2. Managerial communication and leadership styles

Kurt Lewin together with a team of researchers identified three leadership styles, authoritarian (autocratic), participative (democratic), delegative (laissez-faire), which were presented in a study, *Principles of topological psychology* published in 1939 [4]. These three styles remain the traditional styles alongside which, due to the development of organizations and of management as a science, other managerial styles were identified by scholars and added to the initial list: bureaucratic, pacesetter, visionary, coach, transactional or transformational style etc.. The focus of our paper will be on how autocratic leaders communicate and how this impacts the entire organization.

Autocratic leadership, also known as authoritarian leadership, is a leadership style in which there is only one individual, the manager, who controls the decision making process with little, if any, input from the group members. Autocratic leaders decide based on their convictions, considerations and interests and rarely accept suggestions. Autocratic leadership implies absolute control over the organization and, according to Cheng et al., it is “a leader’s behavior that asserts absolute authority and control over subordinates and demands unquestionable obedience” [5].

The autocratic leadership is the most basic style of leadership, but the most effective one from the manager’s control perspective because the authoritarian manager aims at attaining efficiency through a process of centralized decision-making. Imposing rank based authority, ignoring consultation and other people’s inputs creates a safe space for the manager. This usually happens due to the insecurity, lack of expertise, lack of trust in the other members as well as the desire to have absolute and uncontested power over the organization and the disregard for other individuals’ opinions and expertise. At a superficial level of analysis, we could say that it is a good approach because the process of decision making is short and simple when there is only one person involved in it. Also, since the control over the implementation of the decision is the attribute of the same person who took it, this person, namely the manager, has a very clear idea of how to do things and what the outcome should be.

On the other hand, such a strict and limited approach has its downfalls for example: too much information for one person to store and process and a very narrow perspective of how activities should be performed. As far as the employees are concerned, they will show a high level of disinterest because people who are not involved in the analyzing and decision making process will show little interest towards the implementation process thus, the activity they will perform will be rather superficial. In addition, highly skilled, experienced personnel might not be satisfied with the position of a simple executant and consequently, their engagement in the achievement of tasks might diminish. Unilateral decision making no matter how efficient might appear, has its flows and limitations like the narrow perspective on how different matters should be approached or the limited experience only one person can have. However, when managers consult their subordinates they not only widen their perspective on the matters in question, but also increase the chances of reaching a better decision.

Communication is an inherent part of any managerial activity and supports all managerial functions, it helps the transmitting and gathering of information for decision making, the passing on of decisions and it can trigger attitude changes, engagement, better understanding, and accountability on the part of employees. Flauto, in his article *Walking the talk: The relationship between leadership and communication competence* presented a study performed on 151 employees from nine organizations and the results highlighted the connection between the communication abilities a manager has and their leadership style and the fact the communication is mandatory for effective leadership [6]. Also it stressed the fact that leadership, is a social process involving a relationship between individuals which is executed through comprehensive, two-way communication.



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Open, two-way communication between managers and employees is essential for performance management, especially for larger organizations since the more complex the activity of organization is, the more important the communication process becomes. Therefore, autocratic leadership, which revolves around the manager and their decisions and which is a rigid and egocentric management style, will undoubtedly affect the organizational communication process, shaping it into a simple means of transmitting orders and receiving information on the achievement of tasks. The culture such leaders develop is called the Eiffel Tower Culture where the hierarchal structure is more important than the function, the leader is the boss and not a father figure. Also, the organization is highly bureaucratic, depersonalized, rules dominate, roles come before people, orders flow from top to bottom [7] and no feed-back is required nor accepted.

There is no real communication process within such an organization, employees are given orders and information related to their tasks only, no other information is shared and no consultations are held. Subordinates cannot question the orders received, the manager is the initiator of every communication activity and the employees are expected to provide only answers of acknowledgement. This type of communication which flows mostly from top to bottom and very rarely from bottom to top is called vertical communication. This type of communication even if it seems simple and efficient has some negative consequences upon the organizational activity. First of all, it provides a limited amount of information which reduces the possibility of action, it is a lengthy process and any message that goes through the numerous managerial levels will only echo down the information towards the intended audience. Furthermore, such a lengthy process of transmitting and retransmitting the message is prone to multiple distortions and the impossibility of providing feedback or asking for supplementary clarifications becomes an obstacle for the accomplishment of tasks.

3. Authoritarian communication and the organizational climate

When the leader behaves as the absolute authority in the organization, belittling and dismissing any contribution to the decision making process from the part of the employees, there are consequences upon the morale and the behavior of the employees. Both the morale and the behavior of the staff will change for the worse and the change will trigger in its turn negative effects upon the task accomplishment and therefore, the achievement of organizational objectives. The organizational climate, the perception employees have upon the organization, their work environment or the management, is one of the elements that help or undermine work performance and it is strongly affected by the leadership style. An authoritarian leader will impact the organizational climate through the distant, dictator-like style of management used, which happens because “subordinates of authoritarian leaders are likely to have low levels of trust-in-supervisor, organization-based self-esteem, perceived insider status, relational identification, and thus, little motivation to improve performance” [8].

Based on the analysis of specialized literature and personal observations we can state that the manner in which communication unfolds between a manager and their subordinates impacts dramatically the satisfaction of the employees and can lead to an increase or decrease in the work effort. Pavitt [9] argues that a collaborative approach from the part of the managers would create the possibility of a two-way communication channel and consequently, the employees would feel appreciated for their expertise and activity thus helping them internalize the organizational vision and become more engaged. In an authoritarian organizational climate the employees feel worthless, they have no motivation to do more than the basic effort.



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This leadership style rejects group communication the most and thrives in a rigid, disconnected organizational climate. Autocratic leaders encourage only one way communication based on giving orders and never explaining the reasons behind their decisions. They discourage cooperation among employees and perceive them as small elements of the big mechanism called the organization, who should never have a voice. They are aggressive communicators who use intimidation based on rank authority, they ignore other people's rights or needs, creating an environment of dark submission and resignation. Disconnected employees, people who do not talk are easily manipulated and cannot become a force, and this is one of the goals such a manager has. An authoritarian manager does not want a team, they need only submissive employees who do not dare to question their orders and who are afraid to stand or themselves. This is the easiest way to control people and destroy organizational spirit. Such leaders do not perceive communication as a powerful motivating factor and a great source of ideas and do not care because they are the power.

4. Conclusion

Communication depends more on the source's characteristics than on its purpose. So, when talking about managerial communication we can say that it depends on the managerial style of every specific manager. Authoritarian managers will never be open to debates and discussion, they will not accept nor request any feedback and they will consider that their hierarchical position entitles them to demand absolute obedience from the employees. Consequently, their communication will be strict, aggressive, demanding.

We cannot say that such an approach is completely useless, depending on factors such as the situation, the type of task the group is working on, and characteristics of the team members it can be used. However, it should never be used on a permanent basis because it annihilates any possibility of creating the sense of belonging, engagement and the drive to do one's best in the members of the organization

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