COMMUNICATION AND LEADERSHIP.
PITFALLS OF ORGANIZATIONAL COMMUNICATION

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Abstract:
Communication is not limited to the process of giving or receiving dispositions, commands, directives it includes the transfer of knowledge and information which is power, soft power, and based on this transfer the accomplishment of commands and directives takes place. And consequently, the objectives are achieved. Actually, according to Johnson and Putnam organizational communication is the process by which organizing is being done and not something that occurs secondarily in an organization. The amount of information that circulates inside the organization is a means of power and control. Organizations are places of contradiction and struggle between and among various interests and forces in order to obtain and impose a position of power which is mandatory for achieving an objective. However, such power is not simple to gain because an organization is a large system made up of smaller systems or subsystems

Key words: communication, information, management, objectives, strategic ambiguity, organization.

1. Introduction

Organizations are places of contradiction and struggle between and among various interests and forces in order to obtain and impose a position of power which is considered mandatory for achieving an objective. However, such power is not simple to gain because an organization is a large system made up of smaller systems or subsystems which in turn, try to dominate their space. Power is multifaceted and it is the result of different actions and processes among which we find communication. Actually, according to Johnson [1] and Putnam [2] organizational communication is the process by which organizing is being done and not something that occurs secondarily in an organization.

2. Pitfalls of Organizational Communication

Organizational communication might seem a trivial and overly discussed topic, however it is an important element of the organizational mechanism. Apparently it is an easy task to communicate but when it comes to communicating efficiently there are many impediments like: distortion caused by subordination relationships, semantic distortion, distortion caused by preexisting beliefs and attitudes of the recipient of communication, distortion caused by superficial attention, distortion caused by the inability of expressing meaning and distortion due to resistance to new or different information.

Generally, organizational communication is subject to strong managerial control and the information provided is pauce therefore, messages are incomplete, information insufficient and meaning is never consensual, it is just a guessing game or what is academically named strategic ambiguity.

At a first glance, strictly controlled and unidirectional communication might appear useful for the management of an organization, individuals who are not part of the C suite (top management executives like CEO – chief executive officer, CFO - chief financial officer, COO – chief operation officer etc.) are guided by those who own the information and what they provide to the underling, under the pretense of not wasting time with unnecessary discussions, are only the pieces of strict necessity for performing their jobs. Actually, it is easier to control the activity when there are no initiatives or alternate courses of action, nothing to deflect from the established track.

At a second glance, the negative aspects of such an approach appear. Rigid management or authoritarian style is good to set the direction, to help and guide newcomers, but in the long run, the rigidity of the decision making process and the control eliminate initiatives and consume a lot of time because it turns into micromanagement. Sometimes, this type of management is ruled by the idea that communication control is necessary for better organizational control therefore, only top-down and strictly need to know basis communication accepted.

3. Management and communication

Communication is not limited to the process of giving or receiving dispositions, commands, directives, it includes the transfer of knowledge and information which is power, soft power, because through this transfer the accomplishment of commands and directives takes place and consequently, the objectives are achieved. Also, the amount of information that circulates inside the organization is a means of power and control. Most of the times, in their pursue of dominance, managers limit, select and control the information that is available to the individuals not pertaining to the C suite.

These limitations along with communication ambiguity have their positive, but mostly negative consequences. On the one hand we have the fact that information does not transpire and it is used for the designated purposes, but on the other hand information, which can be seen as a flux supporting the activity, does not circulate and does not reach all the individuals, thus causing shortcuts in their response to the commands.

Communication and organizational processes fail due to the reliance on such an outdated one-way model of communication and information sharing without taking into consideration the audience, its needs, its interests, its attitudes. The context of the audience is formed of their beliefs and attitudes towards the source. Meanings cannot be decoded neutrally, machinelike, strictly basing the decodification on a set of pre-established meanings. The source credibility is the main element on which the message relies, David Berlo said "meanings are in people, not in words" [3]. Meanings also surge from experience, previous similar events when the person having the power position, the manager, usually avoids saying things as they are, manipulates information by giving half truths. Fortunately, meanings are not fixed, they change along with experiences, for the best or for the worst, and we can rarely find two people having the exact same meaning for something.

The purpose of a leading manager should be wining the hearts and minds of the people they manage and the best form would be dialogue not monologue. Unfortunately, organizational dialogue is possible only where management accepts it. Generally, top managers feel hindered by other people's opinions, even ofended, especially when those uttering them are simple employees and their opinions are not in accordance with the line set by the management.

Dialogue which is „defined by an open and honest exchange of ideas between or among actors who agree to suspend judgement, speak honestly, and remain profoundly open to change" [4] happens only as an exercise, but actually, opinions which are not aligned to the official ones are disregarded. Acording to Jurgen Hubermas a dialogue is a symentrical interaction with „reciprocal expectations regarding the truth, appropriateness, and sincerity of statements" [5] and „an openess to being persuaded through the process of communication" [6]. Such conditions are hardly ever met in organizational communication between top management and lower employment levels. Therefore, open and fruitful communication is just an aspiration.

Open communication is part of the empowerment process practiced in organizations where the power of decision making is given to lower management levels, even to individuals with no management ranks, based on knowledge and expertise and on a case by case basis (specific projects, activities etc.). Empowerment also means dialogue, feedback and knowledge sharing in order to take better decisions.

However, empowerment does not mean lack of communication and guidance. It is an element of the participative management style which offers the members of the organization more freedom of action in tight connection with resposibility and communication remains mandatory. Organizational participants need to know the organizational objectives, resources they can use, deadlines and they must have periodic meeting to check on progress. Absence of information or vague information with regard to the mission and the objectives of an organization is one of the most frequent organizational problems. When there is no clear direction or no understanding of it, the employees are confused and lose engagement. Clear goals help in the process of establishing objective attainment strategies. Furthermore, goals must be communicated to each member of the organization, of course bearing in mind its role in the process of reaching the objectives, guiding them in order to obtain organizational success.

An organization is an ongoing interaction and interlacing of meanings and communication is the wiring of all organizational activities where the organizational participants are thinking individuals having specific goals [7]. Vertical, horizontal, formal or informal discussions with the internal or external publics put in motion this system.

Even if , explicit communication is an assumption for developing an activity, we cannot argue that it is an imperative. Managers can vary their communication along a scale of clarity ranging from explicitness to indirection depending upon the interlocutor and the situation [6] in order to accomplish different goals. The problem here is whether the hidden objectives are of a general, organizational or personal nature? This question leads to the aspect of ethical use of communication ambiguity.

Ethics in general refers to what is good and what is bad and praises honest and responsible behaviour and ethical communication is fact based, honest and accurate communication. It implies freedom of speech, diversity of opinions and dissent. At the same time seaker should take responsibility of the consequences their messages might have upon the audience. The complication appears when the ethical system differ or when the espouse-ethics and the ethics in use are in contradiction. Here we have the situation when a communicator would claim adherence to some ethical principles while aiming at gaining advantage without actually acting upon their words. Communication is ethical when both the ethics-in-use and actual behaviors are congruent with what was presented as ethical.

On the other hand we have the discrepancy between the communicators' espoused-ethics and their ethics-in-use which generate an inconsistency between behavior and espoused-ethics since communication is based on the ethics-in-use.

Strategic ambiguity can be considered ethical when communication is consistent with the ethical principles the communicator proclaims. Strategic ambiguity is unethical when the communicator's behaviour contradicts its stated ethics.

For the above mentioned reasons strategic ambiguity should be used attentively in communication. It can foster benefits for the senders of the messages by offering them the possibility of denying responsibility for their words so they can save face in difficult situations as well as for the recipients, who can have the freedom of deciding their actions when thre is nothing mentioned specifically. Unfortunately, the liberty of decision comes along with the bigger risk of being culpable misinterpreting the information received.

4. Conclusion

It is not easy to establish the best way to communicate, it depends on many variables: the communicators with their personal expertise, purpose and knowledge, the listeners with their beliefs, aspirations and background and the context in which communication occurs. How might communicators decide whether their communication strategies are the correct ones? Well through communication. Avoiding communication for no matter what reason is unproductive. Open communication encourages organizational engagement, breaks up the silos, speeds up activities and builds trust and commitment; it increases employee job satisfaction and morale thus smoothening the acceptance of change.

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