Role of Communication in Human Resource Management-An Explorative Study

Suparna Naresh
Associate Professor, Department of Media Studies, Christ University, Bengaluru

Abstract: It goes without saying that the act of communication is dynamic and impactful. It is said that communication can make or mar existing conditions in an institution/organization. Positive communication is often compared to a breath of fresh air, while negative communication is as vile as a minefield. Research has shown that people thrive and excel because of positive communication doled out in good measure. In recent years many organisations have shut shop because of a breakdown in the communication machinery and many businesses that were down and out have gone on to become highly successful, all because of the right kind and amount of communication. The present study tries to look at communication in the workplace and the dynamics there-of.

Key words: Human resource, Communication, Organization dynamics

1. Introduction

According to Neil Payne, Founder and Marketing Director of translation services company Kwintessential—“Communication is good, and as a result most organisations seek to promote it in one form or another at the heart of their affairs. However, as we all know, sometimes things are not as we would like them to be; communication can be inconsistent, non-existent or simply poor. The consequences are on the whole negative and can lead to an organisation with problems. HR functions at this point are often engaged by stakeholders to help solve issues and put into place solutions to improve communication. This can take many forms, from training solutions to structuring change management processes. In order to address the issues, it’s important HR practitioners approach communication holistically; to view communication from both a macro and micro level”.

One could strongly argue that effective communication is first and foremost driven by the organisation. Whether the organisation is an NGO, government body, a private company or a PLC (Public Limited Company) the success of the said entity will largely depend upon how it communicates. Government bodies are notorious for their bureaucracy, bottlenecks, hierarchy and protocol which frame vertical channels of communication, there is hardly any scope of communication to reach bottom upwards, and it is more or less top down communication. Private enterprise on the other hand is seen as having more horizontal structure allowing speed and flexibility. How an organisation is set up, its history, its geography, its size, its structure and its policies will determine how communication manifests in the said company. Consider, for example, the needs of a multinational with a matrix management system in comparison with a single-site manufacturer in the UK. How communication is framed and applied ultimately comes down to what the organisational body needs in order to express its identity and/or function on a day to day basis.

Someone once described culture as “the way we do things around here”. How an organisation does things is essentially a manifestation of their culture. This is influenced by many things including the organisation, the national culture, the sector it operates in and its mission or goal. Whether an organisation places value on face to face meetings, whether it allows subordinates to channel feedback to superiors or whether it encourages whistle blowing, all come down to its culture. The culture of an organisation isn’t always healthy and, although challenging, it is not impossible to change when change is deemed necessary. Understanding the culture, keeping the positive and removing the negative, can become one of the most powerful means of implementing a new approach to communication.

It is the people within an organisation that ultimately impact communication at every level. They are the ones putting into place policies and processes as well as the ones working within these frameworks. The one fact you are always going to have with people is that we all differ. Cultures, personality types, manners, communication styles, access to education, career expectations and a ream of other factors demand a constant flexibility from...
people when communicating with one another. This negotiation can be made easy or difficult by the organisation and the culture behind it. At its essence the people, organisation and culture are interrelated. Giving people the proper frameworks, support, guidance and skills helps an organisation achieve the culture of communication it aspires to.

The traditional model of colleagues being in the same building, speaking the same language and meeting face to face for meetings are gone. Today the platforms of communication are wonderful and varied. People are expected to work through emails, phone calls, virtual meetings. Platforms not only apply to means of communication but to the context as well; management meetings, annual appraisals and employee surveys are also to be considered as such. Sometimes these platforms are not conducive to good communication. It could be that the actual platform is not fit for the purpose, that the people don’t know how to use it properly or that it conflicts with the organisational culture. For example, video conferences may not be found to be effective within an organisation because the supporting technology isn’t good enough, the users may not understand how to adapt their communication styles to it or that the people don’t engage with it as their company is more about relationships and face-to-face interaction. It is important that platforms are audited to ensure their suitability, adoptability and adaptability.

The White Paper on Communication describes communication as follows—’It has been said that communication, like gravity, is recognized by everyone yet fully understood by no one. However, if there is a useful truism in the business and political mainstream today, it is that nothing can be accomplished without effective communication. No products can be bought or sold, no services dispensed, no candidates elected. Communication is the lifeblood of our society, serving to keep alive our system of commerce and government while providing the means to competitive advantages. A failure to communicate successfully can be devastating to an organization. Businesses and politicians live or die by the skill and ways with which they manipulate the communication process. More importantly, as we move deeper into this information age, the need for organizations to master appropriate techniques of communication increases as these techniques become more sophisticated and complex in this information-rich culture. More precisely, for businesses today, the capacity to instruct, to persuade, to market a product, or just to differentiate itself to targeted audiences is not a means to an end, but an end in itself.‘

2. Review of Literature

Leigh Richards, of Demand Media says this of communication—’Effective business communication is critical in today’s time, especially regarding the workforce-more than ever before. Business communicators have a variety of tools to choose from and must use those tools carefully and with consideration of their audience and their intended communication goals. Effective business communicators will find that their efforts pay off in better relationships and business success.’

He is of this opinion because ‘even in small organizations, it is wrong to assume that all employees will have the same needs, interests and desires when it comes to business communication. Effective business communication is segmented to meet the needs of specific audiences. Employees working in an administrative setting, for instance, will have different needs—and different access to information—than employees working in a manufacturing environment.’

When information is inaccurate it loses its credibility. The sender of the information also loses credibility. Effective business communication is accurate in terms of the content conveyed and in terms of simple things that include grammar, spelling and punctuation.

Employees need to know what is going on in their organizations—and in the external environment—that impacts them. In today technology-driven environment it is all the more challenging than ever before for businesses to communicate with employees in a timely manner, but it is critical for effective business communication, says Grensing-Pophal, communication experts.

It cannot be assumed that a message has gotten across if it is sent just one time. Effective business communication occurs frequently to ensure that it has been received by all employees. Employees leave, new employees join the company and employees transfer from one role to another, requiring new and updated information.

Effective business communication needs to be sent through a broad variety of channels to ensure that it is received by employees in different settings. Businesses, fortunately, have a variety of channels to choose from-right from the traditional (print, bulletin boards, meetings) to the new-technology (email, blogs, social media sites, chat-apps). Face-to-face communication is still the most effective, says Grensing-Pophal, and should be used
Whenever possible and practical. Of course, in very large organizations this can be challenging, but even then, alternatives may include video-conferencing or the use of webinars. Employees need the opportunity to share their feedback, opinions and thoughts with managers and employers. Effective business communication offers the opportunity for two-way communication to benefit employees and employers.

Effective communication is key to any organization's success - whether it's a small operation or a multinational corporation. Effective communication is a critical point for human resource leaders. They must be in sync with the organization's leadership and its workforce to support internal and external customer service, manage change within the organization and build the integrity of the HR department. While HR managers themselves must learn to effectively communicate with the organization's workforce, they also are obligated to strengthen the communication lines between HR leadership and HR staff. One of the uphill battles for HR managers is improving employee perception of HR, which for the most part has been likened to reporting to the principal's office for a reprimand. Many employees don't understand the functionality of HR and, even less, the purpose that an HR department serves, except when it comes to processing payroll via direct deposit. When an HR manager communicates effectively with his/her staff, they represent a team with a consistent mission that can establish HR's credibility throughout the organization.

HR leaders, especially the high-level ones, regularly interact with top management. In organizations that value HR and look to HR department leadership as the guiding force in creating a productive and engaged workforce, HR managers form partnerships with top leaders to develop the company's strategic direction. They communicate the return on investment in HR activities and justify the organization's support for functions such as training and development. Minus the ability to communicate with chief executives, HR risks not becoming a member of the team responsible for defining the organization's strategic growth and functional implementation of its strategic plan. An HR professional thus is highly dependent on good communication.

An HR manager's expertise is often demonstrated through communicating his/her job knowledge or know-how, HR best practices followed in the workplace and his/her professional vision for the HR department and the organization as a whole. Putting strategy into place requires functional implementation of steps, processes and procedures - mostly communicating to the HR staff how to serve the needs of the organization's internal and external customers. Internal customers are the organization's employees and external customers are applicants, candidates, vendors and experts to whom the company might outsource HR functions. The benefit of effective communication means that the functional implementation is appropriate for the strategic direction of the company and that the HR staff clearly understands how to move forward under the direction of the HR manager.

Effective leadership benefits from effective communication on the HR manager's part in interdepartmental concerns. HR managers who are capable of empowering supervisors and managers in areas such as being first responders for employee relations matters, relieve HR staff of handling many of the routine issues that arise within departments. HR develops and delivers leadership training, too. This provides supervisors and managers with the tools to be successful, whether it's conducting annual performance appraisals, learning to coach employees for high performance or assessing the strengths of emerging leaders for the organization's succession plan.

Organizations with disgruntled, unhappy employees subject themselves to costly workplace issues, complaints and lawsuits, but communication often resolves issues before they lead to litigation and settlements. Another benefit of effective communication through HR leadership minimizes the company's liability for unfair employment practices. Communicating the organization's policies on equal employment opportunities and substantiating employment decisions with proper documentation is one aspect of effective communication that ensures the organization is in compliance with federal, state and local labour and employment laws. Communicating these policies to both staff and leadership further ensures that the workforce understands the company's commitment to fair and equal treatment, regardless of sex, disability, race, religion and other non-job-related factors.

Tara Duggan in her article "Tips for Organizing an HR Department's Communication Plan" says about communication strategy: "A comprehensive communication plan establishes a strategy for sending messages, making announcements and publishing information for an HR department. Avoid costly mistakes and disorganization by aligning your initiatives using these tips for creating a communication plan for an HR Organization. Creating a written communication plan-1...
The need of the hour is doing the following things-
Identify the four elements of issues that make them personally sensitive? Utilize best practices for addressing sensitive issues with groups or individuals? Choose the most appropriate means for communicating certain types of issues? Address crisis communications with an honest, upfront style? Distinguish public conversations from those that must be held in private? If you are hesitant about your team's capabilities, enrol in this power-packed program today. Make sure your HR department knows how to approach delicate situations with poise and propriety. With the information provided in this one-hour audio conference, you will learn how to enhance HR's role when communicating and dealing with sensitive issues in the workplace. As an HR professional, you must be aware of the best ways to effectively relate sensitive topics to employees. This one-hour workshop can equip you with the strategies and techniques you need to anticipate and handle any difficult workplace conversation.

Guidelines for productively handling sensitive issues within the organization, within teams, and with individuals. Tips on how to create a sense of stability during difficult times. The four main areas of major sensitivity for employees — and the best approach for each. How to communicate major changes — such as mergers and acquisitions, layoffs, and cost-cutting — even when the full impact is not yet known. The most effective way to cultivate adaptability to change in your organization's culture. How to deal with emotions and negativity — within entire organizations or one-on-one. Ways to manage your own emotions — keep the stress and psychological impact of organizational and individual events from affecting you personally. Human Resource directors, managers, practitioners, and support staff; or any manager, executive, or business owner who wants to learn how to better communicate difficult topics to employees. Communication is used in human resources to relay information from directors to employees. This information pertains to company policies or goals. Effective communication increases productivity, which benefits employees and the company. Proper communication techniques can boost employee morale to create a positive work atmosphere. Keep all communication professional between human resources and employees. Employees should never be made to feel uncomfortable, but supported and respected. Human resources should not micromanage employees but communicate information and respect the professionalism of the employee to execute the task. Positive communication practices creates a work environment that reduces employee...
turnover. It is important to keep experienced employees within the company to help train and instruct others.

Communication in companies is key to having a successful organization. Those companies who communicate well with their employees end up with more loyal and motivated workers. Those that don’t communicate well, though, see increased turnover, absenteeism, dissatisfied customers, higher product defect rates, lack of focus on business objectives, and lack of innovation. Proper communication can result in a sense of belonging and self-worth, leading to less turnover and absenteeism.

Four main types of communications occur within a company: upward communication, downward communication, diagonal communication, and horizontal communication. Each type of communication can serve a different purpose in human resources, and many messages may be sent in a variety of ways.

Upward communication is when the lower levels of an organization communicate with the upper levels of an organization. Some examples might be an employee satisfaction survey using online survey tools such as SurveyMonkey. These kinds of tools can be used to determine the changes that should occur in a company. Oftentimes human resource departments may develop a survey such as this to find out how satisfied the employees are with things such as benefits. Then the organization can make changes based on the satisfaction level of the employees. Employees might also engage in upward communication in a given work situation. They might tell their manager their plate is full and they can’t take on any new projects. This is considered upward communication, too.

Downward communication is the opposite of upward communication, in that the communication occurs from the upper levels of an organization down to the lower levels of the organization. A manager explaining how to do a task to an employee would be considered downward communication. Development of training programs to communicate safety in the organization might be another example. A change in a pay or bonus structure would be communicated using the downward approach as well.

A diagonal communication approach occurs when interdepartmental communication occurs with people at different levels of the organization. When the human resources assistant speaks with the marketing manager about the hiring of a new employee in marketing, this would be considered diagonal communication.

Horizontal communication occurs when people of the same level in an organization, for example, a marketing manager and a human resource manager, communicate usually to coordinate work between departments. An accounting manager might share information with a production manager so the production manager knows how much budget they have left.

Within all the communication methods that have been discussed, there are a variety of approaches. Of course, the most obvious is the informal communication that occurs. An e-mail may be sent or a phone call made. Meetings are another way to communicate information. Companies can also use more formal means to communicate. A blog would be an example. Many companies use blogs to communicate information such as financial numbers, changes to policy, and other “state of the business” information. This type of information is often downward communication. However, blogs are not just for upper management anymore. Companies are using microblogs more and more to ensure that people in various departments stay connected with each other, especially when tasks tend to be very interdependent.

Companies also use social networking sites to keep in touch, such as Twitter and Facebook. For example, Alcatel-Lucent, a 77,000-employee telecommunications company in Europe, found that using social media keeps a large number of employees connected and tends to be a low or no-cost method of communicating. Rather than sending e-mail to their employees telling them to expect updates via these methods, the news is spread via word of mouth as most of the employees’ blog or use Facebook or other social media to communicate. In fact, Alcatel-Lucent has over eight hundred groups in its system, ranging from business related to ones social in nature. Use of this type of technology can result in upward, downward, horizontal, and diagonal communication all at once. Companies also use intranet to communicate information to their employees. An intranet is an internal website, meaning that others generally cannot log in and see information there. The intranet may include information on pay and vacation time as well as recent happenings, awards, and achievements.

In addition to the communication that occurs within organizations, each of us has our own individual communication style. Many organizations give
Our communication styles can determine how well we communicate with others, how well we are understood, and even how well we get along with others. As you can imagine, our personality types and our communication styles are very similar. Keep in mind, though, that no one person is “always” one style. We can change our style depending on the situation. The more we can understand our own dominant communication style and pinpoint the styles of others, the better we can communicate. The styles are expresser, driver, relater, and analytical. Let’s discuss each of these styles next.

People with an expresser communication style tend to get excited. They like challenges and rely heavily on hunches and feelings. Depending on the type of business, this can be a downfall as sometimes hard data should be used for decision-making purposes. These people are easily recognized because they don’t like too many facts or boring explanations and tend to be antsy if they feel their time is being wasted with too many facts.

People with a driver style like to have their own way and tend to be decisive. They have strong viewpoints, which they are not afraid to share with others. They like to take charge in their jobs but also in the way they communicate. Drivers usually get right to the point and not waste time with small talk.

There are those with a relater style who like positive attention and want to be regarded warmly. They want others to care about them and treat them well. Because relaters value friendships, a good way to communicate well with them is to create a communication environment where they can feel close to others. Still others with an analytical communication style will ask a lot of questions and behave methodically. They don’t like to be pressured to make a decision and prefer to be structured. They are easily recognized by the high number of questions they ask.

The responsibility of a supervisor is to communicate clearly and concisely to all employees and create an environment conducive to openness for others. As the staff become more diverse, one may have to take the extra time and effort to communicate to all staff members. To become a better communicator create an open communication environment in your unit. Encourage employees to talk about work issues; listen carefully and respond to questions or concerns with actions or answers. If an issue is outside your authority, pass it along to the appropriate person; then be sure to follow up.

Conduct regular staff meetings. Tell your staff about decisions that may affect them or the work they do and the reasons for those decisions. Use staff meetings to encourage feedback, generate ideas, solve problems, and gain support.

Set up individual meetings. Set some time aside periodically to meet one-on-one with employees. Group staff meetings are important; however, meeting separately with your employees shows concern about their individual work issues.

By doing the above mentioned activities and strategies human resource management can be made smooth and successful.

5. Conclusion

It is clear from the several sources of information that communication in the workplace plays a very important role in nurturing employee relationship.

Further communication is most vital for the growth of the organisation. The co-operation of the employees is seen to be built with the help of communication.

Communication can diffuse uncomfortable situations in the workplace creating for a conducive work atmosphere. Productivity is benefited by positive communication.

With proper channels of communication open situations laden with stress can be avoided helping ward of awkward moments. Hence communication is the bloodline for all institutions and human resource management thrives on this.

References
