

Management Communication: A Case Study of Interpersonal Manager-Subordinates Communication at Three High Schools from Bihor

Mircea, Remus SABĂU¹
Nicolae, Aurelian BIBU

Abstract

A plethora of studies, analyses and practice in communication management has emerged considerably over last years, and experienced a massive shift in form and function within a rapidly changing environment. Lately, the role of communication in management tried to solve the puzzle of the communication upheaval by offering a comprehensive mechanism to ease a communication process. Based on a case study of three high schools, this research has two objectives. First, to present a conceptualized framework of the integrated role of communication in combination with the management process is mapped out. In the same time, it tries to investigate some depth of understanding of the manner how the executives perceive the communication process in the three high schools in order to reveal the manager-staff communication. Second, such a framework has been theoretically explored and empirically demonstrated to examine the process of strategic formulation of institutional communications in accordance with diverse phases of management to the three high schools. Quantitative analysis and numerical data analysis with major managers are duly conducted. Last but not least, implications are discussed.

Keywords: *communication, strategy, high school management, educational effectiveness*

JEL classification: D83, M10, N3.

Introduction

In a highly competitive environment, in any large organizations, communication becomes indispensable for greater success and excellence. Information and communication networks became an essential component of each daily activity and have a fundamental role in the future global development (Petrescu *et al.* 2011:331). Most leaders and top executives in various organizations have been vigilant toward the modification of business strategies along with “effective and continuous” communication changes up to reach their potential. Additionally, currently, pressures for using communication strategies are not merely stemmed from the organizational elements but also the national forces

¹ **Mircea, Remus SABĂU**, “Vasile Goldiș” University of Arad, Romania,
E-mail: remus.mircea@yahoo.com, Telephone: +4 0746 026 027
Nicolae, Aurelian BIBU, West University of Timisoara, E-mail: nicubibu@yahoo.com,
Telephone: 0745405500

galvanized by the notion of globalization, technology, and competition. Therefore, revolutionary communications have been prioritized as one of the most important agendas needed for discussion in a parallel relationship with other management issues. The aforementioned aspects, determined the author's interest to conduct research on how the communication strategies help effectively facilitate management processes, especially in the educational context.

According to Lunenberg and Ornstein (1991:185), "communication is the lifeblood of every school organization". Therefore, the questions that need to be answered are: how is the lifeblood pumping through these three high schools from Bihor? Are there any locations where the arteries are clogged? And in these locations, what role do managers have to play and what instruments do they have to use as linguistic pacemakers? Thus, in providing answers to the questions above and in finding successful linguistic blood-pressure medication this research looks at three high school employees' perceptions of communication in order to explore both managers' and staff members' perceptions of current communication practices in the organizations and to make them offer suggestions for possible ways of enhancing communication practices between managers and staff. The research questions guiding this analysis are:

- What are the roles that managers and employees consider communication plays in their work relations and in what manner do they use communication in their every day working lives?
- What do managers and employees understand as effective and ineffective communication strategies?
- What strategies may they suggest that could be used to promote or enhance effective communication?

In answering these questions the author uses a methodology that interacts in a personal, individual manner with the subjects under research. Questionnaires are used for achieving perspectives from those who manage or are managed in high schools circumstances.

This research aims to shed light on the activity of communication between high school managers and employees in order to find clues that can guide managers towards a more strategically effective process of management- communication.

The author's intention in this case is not to prescribe a manner of managing, or a manner of communicating, but to find out what works and what doesn't, from the points of view of those involved in these daily actions, and to offer these findings so that managers in high school institutions, and not only, can look at them and question themselves "What am I doing in comparison with the subjects in this research and what could I make better?"

1. Literature review

1.1 The role of communication in management

The communication concept can be defined as the process of disseminate data and common understanding from one individual to another (Keyton, 2011). Ever since the 1970's, the interest in communication in management has rapidly grown. Since interest in the matter has grown, so has knowledge of what turns it

into a success. Nowadays, in the 21st century and in the so called “information age”, human knowledge of communication has attained a point where, as Haslam puts it, “communication has never been more important than it is now. It is at the crux of global development, business, politics and commerce” (2002:20). Scholars have finally recognized “the value of quality internal communication and its relationship to organizational efficiency and effectiveness” (Quinn and Hargie, 2004:146) and communication starts to be finally considered as one of the core components of the managerial process, according to Hellriegel *et al.* (2001:16). Therefore, communication is a key element. (Ilieş *et al.*, 2010:45)

Many researchers acknowledge the role of managerial communication. Rasberry and Lemoine (1986: viii), Quible *et al.* (1996:1) and van Staden *et al.* (2002:12) agree that communication plays a major role in an organizational environment. Indeed, many researchers, among which can be mentioned: van Staden *et al.* (2002), Reuss and Silvis (1981), Tourish and Hargie (1998) agree that communication is a core compound of the managerial activity. Accordingly, good work relations can not occur without communication, (Kenan Spaho, 2011:390) the same way as effective communication is “very important for the creation of a successful” (Kenan Spaho, 2011:392) institution. Also, every individual’s communication skills have a great impact “on both personal and organizational effectiveness” (Brun, 2010; Summers, 2010).

Other researchers focus on the minimum efforts necessary to manage people and to manage their communication within an institution (Bach & Sisson, 2000; Orlitzky, 2007). The changes in the economic and demographic structure of the developed nations, such as the increased role of knowledge, the ageing of the workforce and the decreasing flux of entrance for the new workforce, all have contributed to the growth of the available human resources management’s role (Grigore, 2008).

Several scholars assess the role of communication as a means of increasing competitiveness for the organization. Thus, according to D’Almeida & Libart (2000), communication is definitely a strategic side of an organization, bringing major competitive contributes for organizations. This opinion is shared by Smith (2008), who considers that promoting organizations’ competitiveness can be made through organizational communication.

According to Thomas J. Lee (2004) the basic aim of communication in an institution is to enable and motivate employees to fulfill its strategic intent. It is thus primordial for institutions to have the ability to quickly perceive, send, receive, and understand strategically important data. Also, when taking decisions, the challenge of communication must be carefully looked into, and communication must be organized so that it works effectively, this representing a part of the organization’s strategic priorities.

1.2 Communication in the circumstances under study

Bearing the above mentioned in mind, the need for communications study is greater than ever before. Not only do we need to think of communication for better understanding ourselves, but educators have a responsibility to better

comprehend their practices. In educational institutions communication is indeed the primary business, since education occurs by transmitting knowledge through language. Educational institutions, more than other institutions, have to reflect on their communication strategies as part of what they do. Teach without knowing to communicate is both ignorant and problematic.

Educational institutions are currently going through a phase of extreme turmoil in Romania. While they seem to have survived the government's continuous reforming and changes, in practice educational managers and their employees are turning into frustrated academics who even if they want to teach are not able to offer real quality teaching due to increased pressure on their already strained programs.

In two of the high schools under study (H2 and H3) communication does not yet seem to have been counted as a core part of formal management. When this study started, no formal policies, documentation or committees on communication existed at the two institutions under research, requiring the need for a higher focus on organizational communication. Only one high school (H1) proved to have efficient communication techniques. The need for higher quality and consistency must encourage high schools to try and maximize effective communication in their communication policies, procedures and management of human resources, as well as encouraging managers and staff members to better understand their proper communicative practices.

1.3 Communication problems

All communication goals of an organization must be strategically aligned with the identity of the organization and to be reasoned considering the diversity of audiences who will receive that very same communication (Van Riel *et al.*, 2007, Argenti *et al.*, 2005).

Jackson (1959:158) argues that managers have communication problems, as well. They are concerned, of course, about better understanding among all persons. They are interested in overcoming barriers to communication between members of the public and their own particular industry. They are especially concerned, or should be, about problems of communication within an organization, since educational management by its very nature is a collective enterprise, and individuals in this profession must spend their days in organized groups, or organizations.

According to Elgin (2000:9), misunderstandings can often happen, especially between those of unequal power like managers and their subordinates. The disparities in status between higher and lower human resources in a vertically managed organization, often have a high impact on the nature of their communication and this position difference "inhibits the free flow of information vertically (upward and downward)" (Lunenburg and Ornstein, 1991:205).

Karen C. Kaser & M. Johnson (2011), consider that "effective communicators are aware of the communication process and the barriers that interfere with the successful communication of messages". Thus, an effective

communication implies four steps: the first one, knowing the barriers to communication, the second one, forecasting when those barriers can take place within any given communication process, the third one, identifying those barriers when they do take place, and the fourth one, promoting strategies to solve them.

2. Methodology

The conducted research occurred within three high schools, which will be named as H1, H2 and H3. One thing must be noted, that before the research, a preliminary study was made and its' results proved that H1 is a well positioned high school within the community, with vey good results at exams. H2 is a medium high school with the community; meanwhile H3 is an institution with low results in exams. To conduct this research, it was used a non-probabilistic sample, composed of 90 teachers from the three high schools of Bihor.

For this study, was used a questionnaire composed of 10 questions, with pre-defined answer options and free responses. The questionnaire was administered collectively and the data were processed using Excel program.

3. Findings

The conducted research occurred within three high schools, which will be named as H1, H2 and H3. One thing must be noted, that before the research, a preliminary study was made and its' results proved that H1 is a well positioned high school within the community, with vey good results at exams. H2 is a medium high school with the community; meanwhile H3 is an institution with low results in exams. To conduct this research, it was used a non-probabilistic sample, composed of 90 teachers from the three high schools of Bihor.

The first questions (1-3) tried to find out the role of communication within the three high schools.

The most representative question is presented due to space limits. Different responses were received. Thus, managers and employees from H1 considered the importance of communication as very high (29%) and high (71%). On the contrary, H3 rated communication as of low importance (87%), and 13 % preferred not to answer. H2 was somewhere in between, with high importance of communication (70%), medium (10%) and no answer (17%).

I would argue that the mixed responses to these questions prove the different perspective on communication between the three high-schools' managers and staff. Only for H1, the role communication plays in manager-staff relationships is definitely emphasized and simultaneously its vital importance is highlighted.

Questions 3-6 were designed to find out how managers and their employees talk to one another. Email is more frequently used than face-to-face communication, what other manners of talking are there used in the three high schools? The most representative question is presented due to space limits.

Different responses were received. Thus, managers and subordinates from H1 considered that formal (56%) and informal (37%) communication is

preponderantly used. By informal communication, respondents understood communicating outside working location, the uses of hi-tech communication facilities (such as internet messaging programs like yahoo/ICQ/msn messenger) were also considered as major elements to successful communication. On the contrary, H3 rated written documentation that is not email as the most commonly used means of communication (54%), and 43 % considered that telephone communication was the most frequent, which was rather disappointing from the point of view of what efficient communication means. H2 was again, in between, with written documentation that is not email as the most commonly used means of communication (46%), informal communication (37%), and communication by phone (17%).

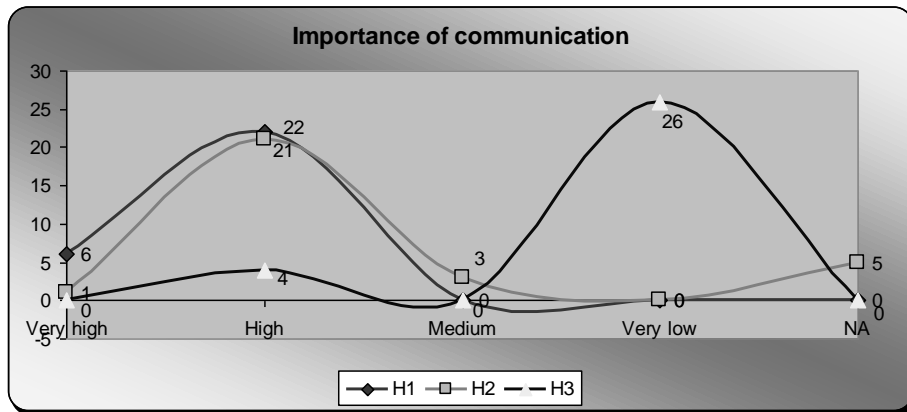


Figure 1 Importance of communication within the three high schools

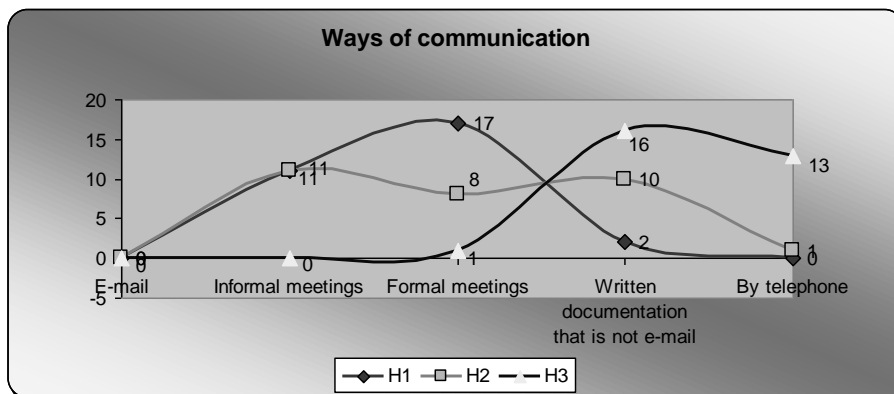


Figure 2 Ways of communication within the three high schools

These questions in the questionnaire revealed the significance of face-to-face discussion in the context of H1, as well as the major role that meetings play in successful manager-subordinates communication relationships. Promoting an open-door policy, taking the time and offering the opportunity to discuss personal

problems or topics not necessary related directly to work issues (as happens during informal meetings) as well as being able to communicate things openly and immediately are also unseen success secrets that conduct to effective working relationships.

Questions 7-10 were designed to find out Tried to establish whether managers and subordinates thought communication in their section or division was effective or ineffective, and if which were its' strengths and weaknesses. The most representative question is presented due to space limits.

Accordingly, managers and subordinates from H1 considered that communication within their high schools was effective (100%). On the contrary, H3 rated communication as ineffective (100%), and this was really troubling. H2 rated communication as ineffective (73%), and 27 % considered it effective.

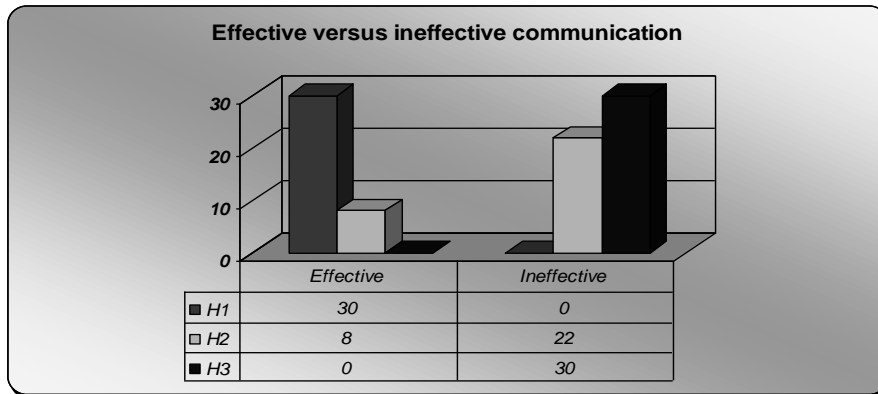


Figure 3: Effective versus ineffective communication within the three high schools

In this part, open-ended questions offered more meaning. Having chosen either yes or no, respondents were asked to comment on their answer, which proved a benefit for those who felt communication was successful in their high school to appreciate their relationships. Form these open-ended questions weaknesses and strengths were revealed. Some respondents considered that regular and open meetings are important, as well as personal relationships. Some (H2 and H3) believed that communication simply did not happen enough. Some considered that there is always room for development (H1). Others noted that discussing problems, communicating openly and often, functioning as a team, without being scared to contradict team members and using the grapevine effectively lead to a successful communication environment (H1 and H2). Still, other problems that were raised consisted in the barriers in communication when managers were often away from the office (H3).

Conclusions

It appears that managers and subordinates from the three high schools under study are communicating differently and perceive communication in various manners.

Within H1, both managers and subordinates are incredibly happy with the communication relationships they have with they consider that this success is due to multiple factors, some of which were assessed in detail in the study findings. Firstly, having an open relationship including an open-door policy, where a person could talk to the executive as frequently as necessary, also encouraged a positive communication environment. Second, both managers and subordinates felt that it was very important to listen to one another. In the same time, third, using technology effectively also had a positive impact on receiving messages. Lastly, making a team, animating open discussion, welcoming criticism and encouraging people to be involved in decision-making activities were also successful in motivating subordinates and encouraging them to communicate openly. Aspects of manager-subordinates relationships that discouraged open communication were a lack of time (H2), and difficulties with physical space (H2 and H3).

References

1. Argenti, A.P., Howel, R.A. & Beck, K. (2005). "The strategic communication imperative". *Mit Sloan Management Review*, pp. 83-89
2. Bach, S. (2000), *From performance appraisal to performance management*, in Bach, S. & Sisson, K. (eds.), *Personnel Management: A comprehensive guide to theory and practice*. Oxford, Blackwell
3. Brun, J. P. (2010). *Missing pieces: 7 ways to improve employee well-being and organizational effectiveness*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan
4. D'Almeida, N. & Libaert, T. (2000). *La communication interne de l'entreprise*. Paris: Dunod
5. Elgin, S. H. (2000). *The gentle art of verbal self-defense at work*. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall
6. Grigore, A., M., (2008). "Human Resources - Quo Vadis?", *Revista de Management Comparat International*, Nr. 4/2008, ISSN 1582-3458, pp.155-165
7. Haslam, J. (2002). "Learning the lesson – speaking up for communication as an academic discipline too important to be sidelined". *Journal of Communication Management*, 7(1), 14-20
8. Ilieș, L., Crișan, E. & Mureșan, I. N. (2010). "Best Practices in Project Management", *Review of International Comparative Management*, Volume 11, Issue 1, March 2010
9. Jackson, J. M. (1959). "The organization and its communication problems". *The Journal of Communication*. 9, 158-167
10. Karen, C. K. & Johnson, M. (2011). *Removing Communication Barriers Through Course Instruction*. Proceedings of the 76th Annual Convention of the Association for Business Communication, Montreal, Quebec, Canada
11. Keyton, J. (2011). *Communication and organizational culture: A key to understanding work experience*, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage

12. Lunenberg, F. C. & Ornstein, A. C. (1991) *Educational Administration: Concepts and Practices*. California: Wadsworth Publishing Company
13. Lee, T. J. (2004). *The twelve Dimensions of Strategic Internal Communication*. Available at: http://www.mapnp.org/library/mrktng/org_cmm.htm [accessed 10 April 2012]
14. Orlitzky, M. (2007). "Recruitment strateg". In P. Boxall, J. Purcell & P. Wright (Eds), *The Oxford handbook of human resource management* (pp. 273-299). Oxford: Oxford. University Press
15. Quible, Z. K., Johnson, M. H. & Mott, D. (1996). *Business communication. Principles and applications*. New Jersey: Prentice Hall
16. Quinn, D. & Hargie, O. (2004) 'Internal communication audits: a case study'. *Corporate Communications: An International Journal*. 9(2), 146-158
17. Petrescu, M., Popescu, D. M. & Sîrbu, N., „The Challenge of Ensuring Business Security in Information Age”, *Review of International Comparative Management*, Volume 12, Issue 2
18. Rasberry, R. W. & Lemoine, L. F. (1986). *Effective managerial communication*. Boston: Kent
19. Reuss, C. & Silvis, D. E. (1981). *Inside organizational communication*. New York: Longman
20. Spaho, K. 2011. "Organizational Communication as an Important Factor Of Company Success: Case Study of Bosnia and Herzegovina". *Intelligence Journal Business*, 4 (2), pp. 390-393
21. Summers, D. C. (2010). *Quality management: Creating and sustaining organizational effectiveness*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall
22. Tourish, D. & Hargie, O. (1998). "Auditing staff-management communication in schools a framework for evaluating performance". *International Journal of Educational Management*. 12(4), pp. 176-182
23. Van Staden, E.; Marx, S. & Erasmus-Kritzinger, L. (2002). *Corporate communication: getting the message across in business*. Pretoria: Van Schaik.
24. Van Riel, C. B. M. & Fombrun, J. (2007). *Essentials of corporate communications*. New York: Routledge