

METHODS OF ORGANIZATIONAL COMMUNICATION EVALUATION

MUSCALU Emanoil¹

Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu

Abstract

The study aims to emphasize the fact that communication is a very important element for the organization and that the quality of communication can improve the organization's activity. In order to develop an effective and efficient communication, must be enabled the internal communication evaluation.

The management should plan, monitor and asses communication inside organization and also take into consideration the external communication. Planning the communication evaluation activity it is crucial in order to be able to collect and analyze the information for achieving the final goal - improving the organization activity. Therefore must be identified and applied communication methods of evaluation.

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The management's communication particularities are generated by the goals, objectives and the role of communication, the frame and its organizational structure and by the organizational culture context. In the same time, management communication is subject of certain ethic rules that are established in organizational culture, organization's politics and also in the managers' self-ethics. Efficient managerial communication is a factor of competitiveness and a strategic advantage of the organization. (Candea& Candea, 1996)

¹ Sc.D., prof., Faculty of Economics, emanoil.muscalu@ulbsibiu.ro

The management should systematic plan, develop, monitor and asses the channels of communications inside an organization and should also take into consideration the communication between the organization and the exterior.

Smaller companies as well as organizations in the public sector may have reduced communication resources when compared to large companies. Efficient organizational communication is an essential precondition of effective management – without efficient communication, management becomes difficult or impossible. Organizations with more than one level of management suffer from communications problems that can interfere with almost any aspect of the organization. (Tripathi P.S., 2009)

The evaluation and application of the corrective measures have not always been embraced by organizations, on the one hand, due to the lack of understanding of the importance of efficient communication and the complexity of the subject and on the other hand, the lack of resources forced the management to focus on strategies that produce financial resources. Communication strategies, as special internal communication strategy is often not taken into consideration. Communicating with colleagues, how it is realized the communication and the way how information is shared inside the organization, often are overlooked aspects while everyone concentrates on reaching the organization's objectives. Even if the organization has a communication strategy, the strategy focuses on the external communication and neglects the internal communication which it is vital.

Internal communication relates directly to the organization - staff, management. Internal communication is the dialogue, the communication that occurs inside an organization.

Internal communication should identify, create and maintain mutually beneficial connection between the organization and its staff. (S. Cutlip, 1985) According to Bevan and Bailey internal communication is the process in which an organization shares its information, builds commitments and manages the changes. Communication has an important role in the competitiveness of the organization through motivation and performance of staff. (Bevan, Bailey, 1991)

We identified five levels of internal organizational communication:

- ✓ Interpersonal communication – is the process through which people exchange ideas through verbal and nonverbal messages being a two way process;

- ✓ Group communication- refers to the communication that takes place between a group and another group of people or inside the group;
- ✓ On the level of organization ;
- ✓ Between organizations;
- ✓ Mass communication;

Many specialists identified micro, mezzo and macro levels of communication; formal and informal communication; internal communication (meetings, presentations, work guidelines, etc.) and external communication (between organizations). Trying to define internal organizational communication Myers stated that communication is “the central binding force that permits coordination among people and thus allows for organized behavior” (Myers and Myers, 1982). Internal communications can be defined as transactions between individuals and groups in organizations at various levels and in different areas of specialization (Frank & Brownell, 1989 in Dolphin, 2005). *“All formal and informal communication taking place internally at all levels of an organization –the term internal communication is used in the plural because the goal is to capture all the communication processes that simultaneously take place inside an organization”* (Kalla, 2005).

Internal communication is operationally defined as the technology and systems used for sending and receiving messages in the way of newsletters, circulation materials, surveys, meetings, in-house television, face-to-face interactions, email, hotlines, suggestion boxes, internet, intranet, telephone calls, video-conferences, memos, letters, notice boards, formal presentations, reports, open forums, blogs, etc. (G. Altuntas, F. Semerciöz, A. Noyan).

The activities of internal communications reside in planning and completing effective internal communications, such as: collecting employee view and feedback, information sharing, protecting and developing the desired organizational culture and objectives, ensuring the support of the Human Resources Department, promote self- managed teams, continuous improving of monitoring and assessment activity which will create a coherent reward and recognition system; improving internal relationships and learning by establishing internal support networks, encouraging employees to talk to managers and recognizing examples of successful practice. (Dalton & Croft, 2003)

Inside an organization also occur some informal communication tools which the organization could use to improve and develop the formal communication tools.

Informal communication takes place outside formal communication channels, is spontaneous and interactive. The informal communication system is characterized by the lack of pre- definition or pre- specification. The information delivered, through informal communication system, it is not planned and then delivered to the recipient and the course of action it is not pre- scheduled and afterwards executed without modification. The information it is bilaterally exchanged, through meetings and dialogues, and the actions are completed taking into consideration the circumstances into which the actions must fit.

Formal communication inside an organization takes place through established and developed channels and includes all the paper- based documents and electronic communication available. Formal communication circulates through **formal documents** – newsletters, manuals, memos, official notices- ; **electronic communication** – e-mails, online meetings, virtual meetings; **meetings and events** – staff meetings, conferences.

Developing a fluent internal communication process and also evaluating the internal communication will enable the organization to reach its objectives. Establishing an internal communication strategy it is the first step in ensuring a durable organization focused on reaching its objectives.

We can list few elements that differentiate informal communication from formal communication.

Table 1. : Differences between informal and formal communication

FEATURES	INFORMAL COMMUNICATION	FORMAL COMMUNICATION
Time	Unscheduled	Scheduled in advance
Participants	Random participants	Agreed participants
Participants role	Participants out of role	Participants in role
Agenda	Unarranged agenda	Fixed agenda
Communication flow	Interactive communication	One way communication
Content	Rich content	Restrictive content
Language	Informal language	Formal language
Channels	Informal channels	Formal channels

The internal communication strategy should develop out of the overall strategic plan. Improving the internal communication requires creativity and

planning. Activities of monitoring and evaluation of internal communication should be taken into consideration, activities which should be integrated into the organization's strategy. Internal communication can improve the quality of the organization's activity and services provided by informing the customers about what the organization has to offer and how it will be offered and also understanding the customer's needs.

Evaluation activity should be a key part of communication activity and the result can and must be measured. The organizations should establish ways of measuring communication inside the organization – how informed the staff is, and outside the organization- the results of the communication campaigns. The organizations could improve communication through good evaluation. Without evaluation the organization doesn't know about the impact and the results of the communication efforts.

Very often, in the attempt of realizing evaluation inside an organization, it is not taken into account the necessary time of planning the process of evaluation.

The organizations usually plan the evaluation in order to produce useful information for the management but also for the community. The evaluation process produces different data which could be used in order to improve the activity inside the organization.

Inside an organization we can identify two communication evaluation systems: *formal system* and *informal system of communication evaluation*.

Managers can observe and evaluate the employees during daily activity, having the opportunity of observing the employees behavior, reactions and communication abilities. Cole G. mentioned that informal evaluation it is the continuous evaluation of the employees realized by the manager during the employee usual activities. This type of evaluation is realized ad-hoc, based on intuition but also on concrete results, therefore evaluation it is a secondary product of the daily relationships between manager and its subordinate. Informal evaluation makes use of observation, conversation or examinations methods.

The advantages of informal evaluation consists in the fact that it requires less time to be designed and applied compared to a formal evaluation program. Informal evaluation it is used especially when the time it is limited and the employees' activity interruption it is not possible. Small organizations tend to adopt an informal system of evaluation.

In order to serve the organization's purposes and objectives the formal evaluation must provide data or information as clear as possible. A system or a formal program of evaluation supposes an official contact between managers and employees. The formal evaluation program is continuous, systematic and can provide objective and useful results. The formal evaluation assumes the existence of an official methodology applied and the result are the written observations regarding the employees activity. (Manolescu A., 2001)

Sometimes inside an organization it is very difficult to measure communication and to demonstrate its value and effectiveness. Measuring communication efforts and effects could be possible before a project begins, during its implementation and after the project completed. An alternative of measuring the communication effect could be realized by establishing or demonstrating a correlation between the efforts and the institution's success through communication.

Planning the communication evaluation activity it is crucial in order to be able to collect and analyze the information and also to achieve its final goal of improving the organization activity. Developing a good communication plan is the first step. Developing an evaluation strategy will enable the management to have a clear view over the communication activities, the results of the communication, whether it is working or not and if are needed any adjustments. Having this information the management can focus on those areas that need improvement. Before starting the planning we have to answer some questions:

➤ **What are we trying to accomplish?**

Establishing clear goals before starting the project could provide ways of measuring the communication efforts. During an assessment it can not be evaluated every aspects or areas of the communication strategy that is why the management should focus only on one area but the decisions could be applied to other areas. Therefore it is important that the management to decide what aspect should be evaluated, for example could be taken into consideration the strategic initiatives or the tactical efforts.

The communication strategy and its objectives should be integrated into the organization's strategic objectives (objectives set in short term, medium or in long term) and should take into consideration that communication actions should follow the same path as the projects developed and other supporting activities.

Communication objectives set on short term and well defined are very important in guiding the communication evaluation. Clear objectives set in short term will be easier to evaluate and the evaluation will provide the necessary information whether the communication strategy leads to the long term objective.

A good objective should meet all the **SMART** criteria: *Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant* and *Time-specific*. Any objective should meet at least four of the five criteria. The objectives with a low score should be revised.

➤ **Define the target group.**

Usually the communication is trying to create a reaction of the target group/ audience therefore it is compulsory to get the feedback from the right source. The management must specify all the characteristics of the target group in order to be able to collect the necessary information. Defining the target group as “young people”, “women”, “general public” – these descriptions are too extensive that is why the audience should be narrowed to a well defined group.

➤ **How the information will be collected?**

Sometimes it doesn't matter how many times the message is sent, because if the message it is not received, read and understood it means that it didn't reached its goal. In order to make sure that the message was read and most important understood could be applied questionnaires, could be organized focus groups and/or interviews that will provide the required data. Creating the right questions is sometimes very difficult and the receiver of the questionnaire could encounter difficulties in answering general questions and in establishing percentages.

There may be many tools to help collecting the information- websites, online surveys, questionnaires, news data bases, control charts, design of experiments – tools that provide quantitative measures but it would be more useful if the evaluation should finally provide some qualitative measures also. On a website you can record the number of visitors and page views, and also the number of comments left by visitors if available this data enables a statistical analysis of the relationship between internal or external communication activities and internal or external changes.

The first step in applying an interview, as an assessment tool, is selecting a group of individuals who represent the base of the target group and asking the questions. Organizing a focus group will imply bringing together a

group of people to have a discussion about the communication activities developed by the organization. The focus group needs a moderator to lead the discussion and to allow the individuals to produce ideas and to discuss them creating a rich database.

Observation is one of the management techniques that could be used also in assessing the communication by monitoring the set group's reaction and responses to a certain message.

➤ **Who will collect the information?**

Depending on the resources of the institution could be chosen the techniques and tools that are less expensive and are able to provide the necessary data. If necessary, should also be taken into consideration working with a professional evaluator or providing training for the staff to apply the evaluation and to interpret the data.

If the organization intends to use, as an evaluation method, the focus group or interview professional help could be necessary to organize and conduct the activities designed to produce the needed data and also to analyze the results.

Even if the organization can provide efficient and competent evaluators or if it is hired an external evaluator the organization should provide to the evaluators written information about the objectives, tasks and responsibilities of every employee, clear information about the employee's performance and also to be able to communicate the evaluation's results.

➤ **How will be analyzed the information and who will write the report?**

To assess the organization's quality of communication can provide important information for the management and a better view over the organization's activity. The evaluation process is time consuming and the people that perform the evaluation, in order to achieve the final goal, must ensure objectivity and consistency. That is why it is recommended that the organization to take into consideration a collaboration with professional evaluators or organization that will provide the information about organizing, applying the evaluation methods, collecting the data and also an objective analyze of the results. If the collaboration with a professional evaluator or organization it is not possible from different reasons, the evaluation activity could be led by the well trained employees that are able to apply the techniques and to ensure objectivity and consistency.

➤ **What is the schedule?**

After establishing the evaluation method it can be estimated the time that will be necessary for each task and for each person involved in the activity.

Taking into consideration that the society and the technology changes very fast, and more communication taking place in virtual space, the institutions should be able to collect the necessary information, to identify the opportunities and the threats and to react by changing or improving the strategy and tactics. Evaluation can also be very helpful in determining whether the adjustments are creating success or produce delays and whether the communication is efficient or not. We also have to take into consideration that the resources inside an institution are limited and should be used as wisely as possible. Establishing the evaluation budget depends of the selected method of evaluation and the organization's resources. The main items on the budget should be: staff (full time staff, part time staff), external consultant fees (if applicable, the consultant should provide the estimated budget), cost of selected evaluation methods (some of the methods mentioned are available at no cost or very low cost for the organization), costs of design, editing, production and dissemination, etc.

The methods of evaluation are used to provide some answers to questions aroused during a phase of a project and will highlight the stage of the performance, the problems encountered and also could provide some solutions to the identified problems.

Monitoring, Data Collecting, and Use of Indicators

Monitoring a project, collecting information generated by the project and generating the indicators are elements of the evaluation process. Monitoring presumes the continuous evaluation of the program's key functions and developing a system of collecting the data for gathering the key data regarding the activities, the target group, intermediary outcomes and the outputs. Using the data collected could be developed the intermediary performance indicators, outputs and results, information will help guiding, revising the program and realizing the final evaluation.

Developing a monitoring system and setting the indicators starts by revising the program's logic model and out of the logic model are identified the key activities, target group, outputs and the expected outcomes. After establishing the elements to be evaluated should be set the strategies to collect the data, databases and the information technology used.

It is important to make the difference between *primary data* – data collected by using the surveys, meetings, interviews, discussions- and *secondary data* – data collected by other organizations, government or research organizations like organizational records, research reports, statistics, accounting documents, literature reviews, case studies. Using secondary data is time saving and less expensive. Before collecting primary data should be examined secondary data and in the evaluation should be used a combination between primary and secondary data to enhance each other.

A relevant evaluation of communication must combine *qualitative* and *quantitative methods* of data collection. *Quantitative methods* are objective and produce data in the form of numbers and *qualitative methods* are more subjective and produce data in the form of a script.

Table 2: Differences between qualitative methods and quantitative methods

<i>QUALITATIVE METHODS</i>	<i>QUANTITATIVE METHODS</i>
Focus groups, interviews and documents reviews;	Surveys, structured interviews, observation, records and documents reviews for numeric information;
Inductive process – “ <i>bottom up approach</i> ” – used to formulate the theory and hypotheses;	Deductive process – “ <i>top down</i> ”- tests pre-specified hypotheses that generated a theory;
Subjective character – records the personal view of a respondent;	Objective character- delivers the recorded effects of a program, project or condition;
Letric results;	Numerical results;
More detailed information;	Less detailed information;
Response options - unstructured or semi-structured	Response options- fixed;
No statistical analysis	Statistical analysis;
Less time consumer in the planning process but needs more time during the analysis of the information;	Needs more time in the planning process but doesn't need so much time during the analysis of the information;
Low generalization character	High generalization character;

Organizing *focus groups*, for assessing the internal communication, will provide information over few aspects which could be discussed during other focus groups or used in questioners. It could be organized focus groups at hierarchic levels, departments or units in order to provide additional information or even to test the information extracted from the questionnaire.

The **focus group** supposes to organize a meeting of six to ten people, carefully chosen, to discuss the established topics.

The moderator, must present the topics and ask the questions based on an plan prepare especially for the meeting so as to cover all issues of interest for the evaluation of the program. Moderators try to record relevant ideas while striving to understand why the focus group participants say or do certain things. Usually focus group meeting are recorded - audio or video. (Kotler. P, Keller, K, 2008)

The key to successful focus groups is to listen. It is absolutely essential to eliminate as much as possible the subjectivity. On the other hand, may occur many useful remarks during focus groups whose progress is well organized; but their validity can be questioned because the participants are exposed daily to a massive and diverse quantity of information and the formulated answers to the topic's questions could be influenced. The participants must feel as relaxed as possible but in the same time, must feel obligated to "tell the truth".

The **questionnaire** consists of a set of questions that the participant must respond. The questionnaire is by far the most frequently used instrument in primary data collection. Questionnaires should be carefully designed, tested and reviewed. When conceiving the questionnaire, must be careful in choosing the right questions, the right form, the content and their sequence in the questionnaire. The question's form might influence the answer.

In a questionnaire we can use the two types of questions: open and close questions. Close questions specify in their content all the possible answers and are easier to interpret and to arranged in tabular format.

Open questions allow to the respondent to express their own opinion and often are more revealing how respondents think. Open questions are especially useful in exploratory investigations, when investigators seek rather to understand how people think and not to estimate how many people think in a certain way.

The possible qualitative methods of evaluation are only limited by the investigator's creativity – **observation** – observing the employees during the process of communication, the use of channels of communication and the technology provided by the institution; **records of communication paths and channels** used by the employees; **structured interviews** – needs careful planning, the interview questions are predetermined and controlled, the

irrelevant information it is omitted and during administration are taken detailed notes.

The ***inductive process*** used to formulate the theory and hypotheses, starts with specific observations and measures, identifies the patterns and regularities, formulates some theories and hypotheses and concludes by developing a general conclusion or theory.

The ***deductive process*** starts from general information toward specific information. The process starts from the top - with an extensive area of information and descends – toward the bottom to a specific and more narrow conclusion. Combining these two methods will be facilitated statistical analysis

Peer review/ expert judgment is a qualitative assessment, opinions, solutions and advice from experts on the evaluated subjects based on established criteria. The method combines the information about a certain program with the experts' experience and focuses on addressing key questions about a project, initiative, topic, or other subjects of interest.

Peer review is the evaluation process of creative work or performance by the other people in the same field in order to maintain or enhance the quality of the work or performance in that field. The goal of peer review is to improve the assessed program and to communicate if and why the program worth implementing it.

Peer review communication evaluation process must fulfill few phases:

- Set the communication project to be assessed;
- Design and revise the assessment plan according to the recorded needs, establish the extent/ duration of the communication evaluation project, establish the evaluators and the budget, define the outputs;
- Disseminate the outputs and obtain intermediary outcomes;

Peer review is an affordable, highly applicable, and versatile evaluation method that can answer a diversity of questions.

The method it is used for arguing a strategic planning decisions, selecting projects and programs, for on-going project and program review, for reviews of publications, and for producing opinions about various subjects and the success and the results of a program; helps to answer to some questions about the relevance and the time lines; helps emphasize the risks, the management of other programs and the available resources for future projects.

Applying this method it enables rating the projects and making the decision of continuing, stopping or modifying the projects according to the recorded needs, and provide information for the managers in order to make the decision about the implementation, re-direct the funds or allocate new funds.

The first requirement is that the experts to be qualified and independent, should guide the evaluation using the objective criteria established and should address the specific questions set.

Evaluating the internal communication, by using this method, the general question that the experts should focus on is “*Are we communicating inside the organization right?*” and on a more extensive issue “*Is the communication system doing the right thing?*”

The quality of the evaluation depends on the selected experts’ quality, the questions and criteria used.

One of the most available and easy to apply methods of evaluation is the survey. The survey produces quantitative data that can be statistically analyzed.

A survey is any activity that collects information in an organized and methodical manner about characteristics of interest from some or all units of a population using well-defined concepts, methods and procedures, and compiles such information into a useful summary form. (Survey Methods and Practices, 2003)

Conclusions

The results of the evaluation should be shared inside the organization with the team, management, colleagues, but also outside the organization. The management should decide how the results should be communicated in order to prevent negative reactions of the employees.

The results should provide clear and structural information about the weak points; therefore the management should act in improving the communication activity according to the results of the evaluation and also to provide concealing and support activities for the employees and especially for those with weak performances in order to improve the necessary skills.

The ways of communicating are constantly changing therefore the evaluation methods of communication are changing.

For a successful communication, flexibility is vital.

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