

# Meeting the Challenges of Human Resource Management: A Communication Perspective

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**Abstract:** *In the present day world, communication is a vital skill for HR managers at all organizational levels and in all functional areas. This is so in regard to the important interpersonal component of their roles. This study thus aimed to amass understandings of thought leaders in human resource arena in regard to importance of communication as a problem solving tool in any organization. The significance of communication in the HR has developed over the years in response to the substantial increase in competitive pressures in business organizations which began to be experienced by the late 1950s as a result of such factors as globalization, deregulation, and rapid technological change. Presently, organizations more and more acknowledge the necessity of internal communications. Developing technology has changed the landscape forever for HR and communications. Technology is helping blow apart that traditional model of management control of all information. For instance, HR is using other technologies for recruitment, including SnapChat, Face book and LinkedIn. While communicating effectively has never been easy to do in organizations, there are some special challenges to communication in today's organizations. Some of these challenges include information overload, sterility of electronic communication technologies and the linkage between organizational communication and change. Every organization must adopt solutions to communication barriers which are viable to them. Some of the solutions include understanding the audience, the method of communication that serves it best and verifying the information being conveyed. In conclusion, communication skills especially in the HR departments can be used to meet most of the challenges encountered in any organization and thus it's crucial for all HR managers to be adept in communication skills.*

**Keywords:** Communication, Human Resource, Challenges, Organization

## 1. Introduction

In the present day world, communication is a vital skill for managers at all organizational levels and in all functional areas (Robbins *et al.*, 2013). Human resource managers are required to be adept communicators in regard to the important interpersonal component of their roles. As a pivotal tool in shaping organizational success, communication may be used in diverse ways to meet the challenges in human resource management while supporting its objective to augment the on-strategy contributions of employees. Considering the major functions in HR i.e. staffing functions, performance management, compensation and development, it becomes evident that even the customary functions of management are purely dependent upon strong and effective communication practices.

This study thus aimed to amass understandings of thought leaders in human resource arena in regard to importance of communication in problem solving. In addition, it endeavored to explore the intersections of literature, interests, theories, and perspectives in utilization of communication as a problem solving tool in the human resource domain.

## 2. HR and Communication: An Historical Overview

The phrase term "human resource management" has been frequently used in the last twenty years since World War II. Prior to that, the field was largely known as "personnel administration" (Price, 2011). Marosein response to the significant increase in competitive demands which business organizations began undergoing by the late 1950s because of factors as globalization, deregulation and rapid technological

change (Paauwe, 2004). The role of communications in HR was not much accentuated at these preliminary phases. This is mainly because the epoch was "agricultural age" where the role of a customer wasn't as crucial as thenowadays. However, in the late 60s to 90s (industrialization age), the role of the employees and the customer begun to be felt in the business realm (Debrah & Budhwar, 2001). Under such situation, employees became a requisite resource with a vital role in long-term success by means of their involvement and contribution in serving customers and achieving customers' satisfaction. Since then, the idea of satisfied employees for the benefit of satisfied customers was accepted and is being developed by both academicians and practitioners, through the concepts of internal communications and human resource management (Nishii, Lepak & Schneider, 2008).

In summary, the 1950s saw organizational communication centering fundamentally on the role of communication in bettering organizational life and organizational output. During the 1980s, the field transformed from being business-oriented to being communication-oriented the emphasized was redirected to the constitutive function of communication in business organizations. In the 1990s, the influence of critical theory on the field was experienced as organizational communication scholars concentrated more on communication's possibilities to oppress and/or liberate organizational members.

## 3. Classical Theories of Organizational Communication

There are two major classical theories of organizational communications namely Fredrick Taylor's Scientific Management and Bureaucratic Theory.

The Fredrick Taylor's Scientific Management theory was formulated by Fredrick Taylor in 1913 (Taylor, 2004). Scientific management is a management oriented and production-centered perspective of organizational communication. Taylor deemed that the reason why most organizations nose-dived was due to the fact that they lacked successful systematic management. He asserted that any occupation could be executed better if done through a scientific pathway. He created time and motion studies that resulted in organizational efficiency. His noteworthy factor about Taylor's scientific method is the style of communication. Taylor did not feel the need to build rapport among workers and also between management and the employees. Preferably, he felt that managers and supervisors needed to communicate and interconnect with employees in a candid and straightforward manner. Further, employees do not need to provide input; they just need to know how to execute their jobs. This theory was sternly criticized for lacking in the arrangements and machinery necessary for the actual voicing of the workers ideas and complaints and for the democratic consideration and adjustment of grievances (Kanigel, 2005).

Bureaucratic Theory was advanced by Max Weber and Henri Fayol (Doorewaard & Benschop, 2003). Max Weber deemed bureaucracy as the standards and/or principles in which any given organizations should aim for and aspire to achieve. They felt that organizational management should focus on role proficiency and impersonal relationships. According to them, all decisions, rules, regulations, and behaviors should be recorded. This information and communication should be shared in terms of the chain of command and thus, every issue is recorded and accounted for. There is no question in what needs to be done, because it is written down. They opined that relationships need to be uncongenial so that workers' individual thoughts or feelings would not affect decisions made or decision making process. Workers just need to work and they do not need to interact with others. Interpersonal relationships may jeopardize the organization's outcomes.

#### **4. The Importance of Communication in Fulfilling the Strategic Role of HRM**

Organizations more and more acknowledge the necessity of internal communications. As Argenti *et al.* (2005) emphasizes, since modern organizations "focus more on maintaining a happy and satisfied workforce with shifting values and different demographics, they have had to consider more earnestly about how they communicate with employees". Management these days needs to give audience and equal attention to those external to the organization (Sinčić & Vokić, 2007), and "communications experts have to acknowledge and appreciate the significance of integrating the internal message with those messages communicated externally" (Dolphin, 2005).

Internal communications can be defined as transactions between individuals and groups in organizations at various levels and in different areas of specialization (Dolphin, 2005). Kalla (2005) defines internal communications as "all formal and informal communication happening internally at all levels of an organization", while Orsini (2000) defines

them as "the full range of ways that people communicate with each other within the organization".

The role of internal communications is "developing and promoting employee relations, creating trust, providing timely and reliable information and thereby promoting motivation, particularly in times of change and stress" (Grunig, 2013).

Spitzer and Swider (2003) suggest that effective internal communications should have three basic objectives: (1) the information that is communicated to the employee audience is understood and accepted by the audience with respect to the content, intent, relevance, and merit of the message; (2) the goals of the communications with regard to motivating, directing, informing, or gaining the participation of the employee audience is achieved among the majority of employees; and (3) the end result of an improved internal dialogue is achieving improvement in one or more of the core success components: product quality, sales, profitability, workforce performance and satisfaction, and, ultimately, customer satisfaction. According to Elving (2005), the goals of internal communications in order of their importance are: (1) to create the sense that employees are an important asset to the organization; (2) to improve morale and foster goodwill between employees and management; (3) to inform employees about internal changes; (4) to explain compensation and benefit plans; (5) to increase employee understanding of the organization and its products, organization, ethics, culture, and external environment; (6) to change employee behavior toward becoming more productive, quality-based, and commercial; and (7) to encourage employee involvement in community activities and services.

#### **5. Key HR functions in relation to Communication**

Communication is a key factor in the activities or responsibilities of the HR. Internal communications are many, such as: planning and executing effective internal, protecting and championing the desired corporate culture; ensuring a continuing supportive role by the HR department; empowering employees (e.g. encouraging self-managed teams, monitoring and continuously improving measurement assessment, reward and recognition systems); and enhancing internal relationships and learning (e.g. establishing internal support networks, encouraging employees to talk to managers and recognizing examples of successful practice) (Dalton & Croft, 2003). In practice there are various combinations to whom the head of internal communications reports. It could be HR director, head of corporate communications department, head of PR department, marketing director, or even CEO. The type and size of the organization, organizational culture, managerial style, financial resources, staff, what the organization expects or demands from the function, or the volatility of the business environment may decide these approaches (Dolphin, 2005; Buffington, 2004).

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information. For instance, HR is using other technologies for recruitment, including SnapChat and LinkedIn.

Communications and HR both need to support their organization's business goals. They are even more powerful when working together to do it, and when they set measurable objectives that can demonstrate the difference they are making to the bottom line—whether through lowered recruitment costs, less turnover, more efficient work or helping reach other organizational strategic goals. Organizations that do a good job of blending change strategy with communication and sponsorship strategies are going to be infinitely more successful than those who don't think of communication and sponsorship as part of change.

## **6. The relation between Communications and HRM**

There are three perspectives on the relationship between internal communications and human resource management. The first perspective regards internal communications as a responsibility of HR, rather than marketing or PR, because of a number of reasons, including a greater focus on the link between behavior and business results; an emphasis on leadership, coupled with an understanding that good leaders need to be good communicators; and the development of "an integrated view of people" (Welch & Jackson, 2007). One of the reasons organizations position internal communications under the human resource department is the thinking that HR department "has the best understanding of what the community inside an organization needs and wants" (Buffington, 2004). Sims (1994) agrees, declaring that it is the responsibility of human resource management personnel to ensure that communications processes are fully functioning and that the human resource management function should be the primary conduit for open and integrative communications processes within an organization.

The second perspective does not offer clear boundaries between the fields. For example, Farrant (2003) says that "contemporary internal communications work towards winning people's participation and involvement in the enhanced achievement of the organization's goals", precisely what HR mission is. Argenti (1996) stresses that "more than anything else, communication is the key to getting workers to become more productive", while HR experts give evidence that it is HR goal (Boxall & Purcell, 2000).

The third perspective stresses the importance of human resources management and communication skills to be brought together for strategic advantage (Dolphin, 2005). As Argenti (1996) implies, although many of internal communications activities can be handled through human resource departments, "the communication itself and the strategy for communicating these ideas must come from communications experts in the corporate communication function". Even more, internal communications should be less a problem for the human resource department and more an opportunity for everyone to work for the greater good of the whole organization. The idea of strategic collaboration is supported by Buffington (2004), who states that human resource department needs to "direct the schedule and the

substance of what has to be released, but the communications department makes sure the language is in an appropriate style for the audience and decides the medium it will use for delivering the information". Ideally, both the corporate communications and human resource departments should have someone in charge of communications to employees (Argenti, 1996).

## **7. Communication Issues in Modern Organizational Structure**

All communication involves the transmission of a message from a sender to a receiver. Communication is central to organizational effectiveness and survival because the essence of organizations is cooperation, and no cooperation is possible without effective communication. While communicating effectively has never been easy to do in organizations, there are some special challenges to communication in today's organizations. Every organization must solve the problem of what pattern of communication shall be instituted, and what information shall be directed to what offices.

One issue in establishing such a pattern is information overload. There are limits to the amount of communication that can be received, coded, and effectively handled by any one individual. Every organization must solve the problem of what pattern of communication shall be instituted, and what information shall be directed to what offices. One issue in establishing such a pattern is information overload (Welch & Jackson, 2007). There are limits to the amount of communication that can be received, coded, and effectively handled by any one individual.

Another major challenge is sterility of electronic communication technologies. We live in a time of disruptive electronic technologies, some of which have led to new and powerful information and communication technologies. Data-based reporting systems, e-mail, voice mail, intranets, bulletin boards, Websites, and video conferencing are cost effectively breaking down large distances and providing information to huge numbers of people in relatively inexpensive but fast ways. Unfortunately, these mediums of communication are rather sterile and impersonal, and not as powerful or meaningful to people as more personal modes of communication. Because change initiatives can arouse strong and passionate emotions within an organization, these marvelous information and communication technologies are often not up to the task. Since visual cues are so important in all human communication, non-visual mediums disconnected from context, such as e-mail, just don't communicate well. Since human relationship is so important to communication, mediums that do not add to the relationship, such as electronic bulletin boards, can convey different messages to different receivers. And since impersonal "digital" communication is relatively fast and easier to do than more personal communication forms, senders are often not as practiced or as skilled in the more personal modes. In sum, electronic communication systems are invaluable to today's organizations, but they have considerable limitations when it comes to bringing about change.

An additional challenge is the linkage between organizational communication and change. Due to the aforementioned reasons, as well more traditional communication problems such as sender arrogance or receiver resistance to change, change initiatives often fail to meet their objectives. For instance, Dolphin (2005) flatly states that ineffective communication of the change vision is one of the primary causes of failed organizational transformations. Additionally, Judge (2011) assert that change-oriented communications are too often lofty, vague, and impersonal so the message is never really understood and therefore change initiatives founder. Most change communication lacks authenticity, so the rest of the organization doesn't trust what is being said and consequently the change effort stalls or goes in unintended directions. Unfortunately, there is much more written about how communication fails to support change than what works. Transformation is impossible unless hundreds of thousands of people are willing to help, often to the point of making short-term sacrifices. Employees will not make sacrifices, even if they are unhappy with the status quo, unless they believe that useful change is possible. Without credible communication, and a lot of it, the hearts and minds of the troops are never captured.

Also, many change consultants point out how pervasive rumor and innuendo are within organizations today due to the ineffective communication at work. For example DiFonzo & Bordia (1998) states that in the absence of communication from the leaders, the organization will seek information from other sources, whether those sources know what they are talking about or not. Your silence does not stop conversation; it just means you are not participating in it.

Unfortunately, many if not most of the communication prescriptions made tend to be overly simplistic or overly complex. On the simplistic side, some observers argue that all change communications simply need to be face-to-face, frequent, and informal (Roloff and Anastasiou, 2001). While these practices have merit, they do not consider such contextual factors as the organization's size and geographic diversity, the urgency of the change initiative, or the availability of communications technology.

On the other hand, some change communication prescriptions are overly complex. For example, one change consultant recommends that a formal change communication action plan be developed for every change initiative. These action plans were recommended to include (a) careful consideration of change targets, (b) deliberate change messages, (c) prespecification of change messages, (d) timing and frequency of the message(s), (e) establishment of ownership for the communication, and (f) measurements planned for the change. Of course, then the change leaders are supposed to execute this plan and iterate as necessary (Bennett, 2001).

## 8. Meeting the Communication Challenges

Effective communication begins with understanding the audience and the method of communication that serves it best. Each role player in HRM should seek to know the

audience, the questions that might be raised and any objections beforehand. Sound research can avoid issues with communication before they arise. Use the communication method best suited to the information being conveyed. Face-to-face meetings are better for important changes taking place at work.

Verify the information being conveyed before sharing it. If any information is unclear, confusing or flat out incorrect, the message sent will be wrong. Double-checking the information before sharing in the workplace is crucial to ensure its authenticity, clarity and correctness. When one shares information that is wrong or confusing, people will not receive the intended message.

One of the major communication problems at work is that there is usually not enough information, there is too much information or it is delivered after-the-fact. For communication to be helpful, it must be timely and in the amount needed for people to become knowledgeable without causing them to overreact or misconstrue.

When communication is vague or ambiguous, it can lead to misinterpretation or misapplication in the workplace. To convey material effectively, it must be concise, clear and to the point. Have a clear understanding of the facts, the order of information and its intended use before sending a message that can't be retracted.

Verbal communication requires focused listening skills of the audience. When you don't have the full attention of your audience, your message won't be received. For face-to-face meetings, a good practice is to avoid distractions during the meeting. Have people leave their cell phones at their desks and hold the meeting in a conference room or other quiet location. Allow interaction after the meeting to develop clarity and obtain feedback. Answering questions honestly can help to clear up any confusion or misunderstandings.

## 9. Conclusion

Communication effectively in speaking and writing is useful in all areas of business, such as management, technical, clerical, marketing, HR and social positions. Good communication skills have always given advantages to those who possess them. Organization's activities require human beings to interact and react, that is communication. So, communication is the lifeline of every organization. But in HR department it is most important mainly because it is related with hiring and motivating employees as well as other key roles in any organization. This means that in HR, communication is more important than other departments. Communication skills especially in the HR departments can be used to meet most of the challenges encountered in any organization and thus it's crucial for all HR managers to be adept in communication skills.

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