

Influence of Strategic Communication on Employee Relations within Rwandan Hospitals

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Abstract: *Researching on the Influence of strategic communication on employee relations within Rwandan hospitals presents a great importance since effective internal communication has been proved by researchers to be a key factor for any organization to succeed. Within Rwandan hospitals, initiatives like PBF have been introduced for trying to make happy and retain health sector employees. However, the MOH reports show that there is still a high turnover of employees which means that they are not happy with their job. This research project aims at examining the influence of strategic communication on employee relations within Rwandan hospitals. The sample frame of this research include Remera-Rukoma, Kabgayi and Kibagabaga district hospitals selected purposefully from 42 district hospitals due to having the highest number of employees within each one with a cumulative population of 901 individuals, among them 48 individuals are considered as employers and 853 considered as employees. From the employees, a sample size of 272 respondents was selected by using a stratified sampling technique for having an effective representation of all the categories of medical staff within district hospitals. For collecting data, the researcher used a questionnaire and an interview method. Data processing and analysis have been made by using both qualitative and quantitative approaches. The quantitative data analysis was done specifically through descriptive statistics and regression analysis by using SPSS. The research findings show that either independent variable is influencing the dependent. Strategic communication has an overall correlation with employee relations of 0.743 which is strong and positive. This means that approximately 74.3% variations of employee relations are explained by the strategic communication at 5% level of significance. Analysis of Variance shows that f -calculated is greater than f -critical that is $6.301 > 0.00$. This implies that the regression equation was well specified and therefore the co-efficient of the regression shows that there is a strong relationship between two variables. The results suggested that strategic communication is a statistically significant positive affect employee relation within Rwandan hospitals. Therefore, further studies in this field of communication influence on employee relations within Rwandan hospitals should be evaluated by other variables. Other variables include but not limited on communication with co-workers, communication with immediate supervisors, information on possible pay increasing, information about promotion opportunities, information about possible trainings and socialization at workplace.*

1. Background of the study

Institutions all over the world are nowadays investing in communication because they are already aware of its influence on their success or failure (Husain, 2013). Traditionally, organizational communication activities were separated and managed by different departments. The human resource department has primarily been responsible for internal communications, the marketing department has focused on communication to customers, and the public relations department has had the mission to build legitimacy and maintain good relations between the organization and its different publics (Falkheimer, 2014).

Today, a new concept of strategic communication which is a transboundary concept that captures, better than public relations does, the complex phenomenon of an organization's targeted communication processes is emerging. Thus, strategic communication defined as a purposeful use of communication by an organization to fulfil its mission (Hallahan, 2007), integrates organizational or internal communication as well as aspects of management theory and marketing and it allows to understand, explain and criticize contemporary communication processes within organizations (Vuori, 2012). In fact, strategic communication is a wider and more inclusive concept than public relations, integrating different aspects of goal-oriented communication and using a multi-disciplinary and management approach (Holtzhausen, 2008).

Actually, communication within institutions is driven as a key partner to their success or failure (Husain, 2013). But, this has not been the case for a long time back to the history of institutions management. Communication in its various aspects has been introduced in institutions lives end 20th and early 21st centuries when managers started using communication as a weapon for performance (Hallahan, 2007). This research topic on the influence of strategic communication on employee relations within Rwandan hospitals finds its meaning in this era when communication for achieving institutional goals is unavoidable at the workplace. Indeed, one cannot not communicate and this is true to the extent that even the absence of a communication message constitutes itself a significant message in the eyes of the interlocutor (Watzlawick, 2007).

At the beginning of this research project, it is important to mention that the concept of strategic communication was originally used in military theory and international relations (Falkheimer, 2014). For instance, the US Department of Defense recognizes the military prevalence in the field of strategic communication and describes it as focused US Government efforts to understand and engage key audiences to create, strengthen, or preserve favorable conditions for the development of the US Government interests, policies and objectives through the use of coordinated programs, plans, themes, messages and products synchronized with the actions of all instruments of national power (US, 2013). Furthermore, it was noted that strategic communication was placed very clearly at the defense-strategic level in USA and UK (Cornish, 2011). Thus, strategic communication was

limited to advancing national interests by using all defense means of communication to influence the attitudes and behaviors of targeted audiences (Cornish, 2011).

In the academic literature, the first academic work using the concept of strategic communication in the Middle East was published during the World War II where strategic communication was understood as a kind of transport system during the war (Bussy, 2008). Two decades later, the concept was also used in the Journal of Peace Research article about communication strategies for achieving nuclear stability during the Cold War (Falkheimer, 2014). Currently, there is much effort to demilitarize strategic communication, bringing it out of strategic military headquarters and turning it into a concept and a process close to the highest level of government communication or to the top management of any other institution regardless its weight (Bussy, 2008). It was end 20th and early 21st centuries that scholars started using strategic communication as a separated branch of knowledge in the field of communication (Mahoney, 2011). The increased interest toward strategic communication research was perceived as a result of the increased organizational uncertainty due to the global economic crisis of 2008/2009. Thus, studies on strategic communication in this period were perceived as one of the remedies against this global economic crisis (Mahoney, 2011).

Consequently, strategic communication became an international field of research with academic units and departments, professors, programs, courses, conferences and journals like The International Journal of Strategic Communication launched by the publishing house Routledge in 2007 to denote a new era in the field's development (Gail, 2015). Then, scholars started using the concept of strategic communication as an organization's conscious communication efforts to reach its goals (Falkheimer, 2013) or a purposeful use of communication by an organization to fulfil its goals (Hallahan, 2007).

Early 21st century, most of studies carried out in the field of strategic communication were focused on its influence on job satisfaction, engagement, retention and productivity variables (Pincus, 2010). Furthermore, strategic communication at workplace may result to employee a relation that is the development of relations between the employer and the employees which relations may generate in job satisfaction and retention (Mike, 2011). Studies conducted in USA, Europe and Asia has identified a positive correlation between the ways that communications flow within institutions and the employee satisfaction and retention (Gaither, 2012).

Today, being a manager implies taking communication as one's main instrument to achieve the institution's goals. Thus, in an institution, managers spend most of their time directly employed in one of the steps of communication. Even when they work alone, for instance when they are studying or preparing reports, they rely on others' attempts to communicate with them or prepare to communicate with others (Condruz, 2012). It is reported that managers spend more than 75% of their time implementing some of the communication techniques (Farzin, 2013).

Scholars consider this kind of communication carried out by managers as strategic because of being managed at the managerial level with a purpose of achieving the organizational goals (Hallahan, 2007). Therefore, line managers sit at the heart of the relationship between the employer and employee on the structure to create the right climate within the organization and to enable it to meet its objectives through its employees (James, 2012).

Interviews conducted by the Saratoga Institute with 20,000 employees who had just left an employer revealed that the supervisor's behaviour was the main reason for people to leave their jobs. In addition, a 25-year-long Gallup Organization study based on interviews with 12 million workers at 7,000 companies also revealed that the relationship with managers largely determines the length of an employee's stay in the workplace. A recent university study found that an abusive supervisor, rather than dissatisfaction with pay, was more likely to prompt employees to leave their jobs. Over 17,000 respondents found that most retention factors are within managers' influence. A good boss who cares about keeping good employees will help them find what they want from their workplace (Granirer, 2003).

As a response, in some modern organizational structures, the opinions and the needs of employees are given much attention for strengthening the employer-employee relationship. Actually, regardless the type of an organization, two-way communication is a model that maintains and sustains mutual relationships in it (Richmond, 2005). Contrarily, when communication within an organization is inadequate or when the employee communication competence is low, it results to lower job satisfaction and greater employee turnover (Gurnal, 2007). Accordingly, an organizational structure that encourages communication flow is important for employees' satisfaction and retention and for the organizational success (Tansel, 2013).

Unfortunately, researchers have found a prevalent culture of poor communication among health professionals resulting in important medical errors and employee turnover (Commission, 2018). This situation generates accurately to a matter of life or death in hospitals (Gaither, 2012). Strategic communication oriented to employee relations intervenes in such situation to raise employees' ownership of the institution they work for. The sustainability of that institution will depend on the extent degree to which employees are fully and freely involved in communication with their managers (Mulkeen, 2012). Internal communication practices that included sharing the institution's priorities, mission, vision, goals and values with employees were identified in high performing healthcare institutions which demonstrated quality outcomes (Gaither, 2012). In fact, smart managers know that happy workers are satisfied and retained workers and ultimately make benefits to their institutions (Waggoner, 2013).

In Rwanda, the Government has expressed the importance of strategic communication within organizations, public and private ones, by the adoption of the Access to information law whereby all public and concerned private organizations shall appoint or designate communication managers for

themselves and their branches, if there are any, to enable them to conduct effective communications internally or externally (Gazette, 2013). This is because an open and collaborative communication among managers and employees is vital for achieving the goals and missions of the organizations they work for (OAG, 2015). Internal strategic communications based on two-way dialogue model: listening to employees' ideas, concerns and suggestions for achieving results and improving services, and acting upon them, is as important as keeping employees informed about the goals and priorities of the institutions, or about developments, changes or new initiatives affecting their work. In doing so, the institutions increase employee satisfaction as well as reduce employee turnover (Tansel, 2013).

The Rwandan health sector indeed has adopted decentralization as a new system for governing both hospitals and health centers as well as PBF for the health human resources sector. Moreover, since 2013 all hospitals have appointed PR managers with the objective of having communications and related issues at both internal and external levels well managed. These new initiatives have somehow positively impacted health services and outcomes (MOH, 2015). However, there is still a lot of work to be done to increase employees' job satisfaction and overall management/coordination of those human resources by facing their high turnover due to lack of clear retention policy (MOH, 2015). Therefore, a research on the influence of strategic communication on employee relations within Rwandan hospitals will help to find new ways of increasing job satisfaction and retention among human resources for the health sector in Rwanda.

2. Statement of the Problem

Generally, internal communications have a high influence on employee relations which results into employee satisfaction and employee retention (Furuya, 2012). So far, a collaborative and engaging communication model in health sector is a necessity to keep top performing employees and to develop cohesive teams at workplace (Gaither, 2012). In Rwanda, there are new initiatives that have been put into place like decentralization in hospitals governance and PBF in the health staffing area to increase employee satisfaction and retention (MOH, 2015). These initiatives didn't bear much fruit in terms of employee relations, that's why so many health workers not being satisfied with their job, they are always running through different hospitals looking where they can get a favorable environment that can retain them for a long time (Gaither, 2012). Till now, reports say that there is a high turnover of health workers in Rwanda due to a lack of clear retention policy (MOH, 2015).

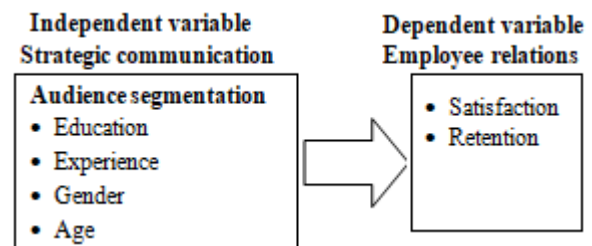
The Rwandan Ministry of Health recognizes itself that the influence of strategic communication on the employee relations in Hospitals is significantly ignored and yet its effect on employee satisfaction and retention is still unidentified (MOH, National Human Resources Information System, 2015) and while there many studies on the influence of internal communication on employee satisfaction conducted in large institutions around the world, empirical information about this topic is very limited in the healthcare

settings (Gaither, 2012). This research project has, therefore, examined and documented the influence of strategic communication on employee relations within Rwandan hospitals. Consequently, the findings inform the policy makers in Rwandan health sector on how taking advantage of strategic communication to increase employees' satisfaction and retention within hospitals.

3. Objective of the Study

To examine the influence of audience segmentation on the employee relations.

4. Conceptual Framework



Research Design

Research is defined as an "art of gathering knowledge for the sake of knowledge and research methodology is defined as science of using methods or techniques for conducting the research (Pavan& Kulkani, 2014). In order to provide the accurate picture of the situation of this study used both quantitative and qualitative research methodologies.

This research was used Descriptive Research design, as the name itself indicates, this research directly deals with description analysis. It includes different data collection like survey method and fact finding techniques (Pavan& Kulkani, 2014). This study adopted a descriptive research design in order to explore the influence of project execution techniques to project success and descriptive research was chosen referred to the objectives and research questions of the proposed study.

Population of the Study

The target population of this research project on the influence of strategic communication on employee relations within Rwandan hospitals is the entire aggregation of respondents that meet the designated criteria of inclusion in the research (Burns, 2014). Therefore, the target population of this research is composed of all the administrative staff, doctors, laboratory technicians, nurses/midwives, paramedical staff and pharmacists based in referral hospitals, provincial and district hospitals. All these targeted employees of hospitals are in public domain.

Sampling technique

The sample size was derived from a population of 853 people being targeted in the study. The researcher used Slovene's formula at a confidence interval of 95% and margin of error of 5% as described below.

$$\text{Where; } n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

n = the minimum sample size

N = the population from which the sample was drawn estimated at 853 staffs from those different Hospitals.

e = the margin of error estimated at 10%.

$$n = \frac{853}{1 + 853(0.5)^2} = \frac{853}{1 + 853(0.0025)} = 272$$

n=272 respondents

Data collection procedure

For the purpose of this research project, data were collected by using a direct communication with respondents through a questionnaire and an interview guide.

5. Data Analysis and Interpretation

5.1 Regression analysis on the influence of audience segmentation on the employee relations

The influence of audience segmentation on the employee relations, in general the below Table shows the view of respondent of how audience segmentation influence the employee relations in Hospitals.

Table 1: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.824 ^a	.697	.679	.67048

a. Predictors: (Constant), Employee relations

R-square of audience segmentation is equal to 0.697(69.7%), this implies that 69.7% variations in audience segmentation influence the employee relations of Hospital. have been captured by the model above, since the p value is 0000, this means that employee relations in relation to audience segmentation.

Table 3: Coefficient^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	95.0% Confidence Interval for B	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
1	(Constant)	1.094	.633		1.719	.090	.173	2.352
	Independent Variable2	.672	.035	.836	13.028	.000	.391	.532

a. Dependent Variable: Employee relations

From coefficient table above, the researcher came up with following regression equation in order to justify the study.

Y = Employee relations

B0 = Constant Term

B₂= Beta coefficients

X₂= Audience segmentation

Y= 1.094+ 0. 672X₃ (Audience segmentation)...Equation (iii)

The results indicate that audience segmentation have a relationship with employee relations. The significance is 0.000 which indicates that there is positive relationship (0.672) between audience segmentation and employee relation. These results provide reasonable evidence to the consistent view that, employee relations of the organisation justified by increase of audience segmentation. The beta of audience segmentation is .836 with a t-statistic of 13.028.

Table 2: ANOVA^a

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	76.303	1	76.303	174.532	.000 ^b
	Residual	32.817	126	.450		
	Total	109.120	127			

a. Dependent Variable: Employee relations
 b. Predictors: (Constant), Audience segmentation

This Table2 show the value of ANOVA, the Sig-value is 0.000, which means that audience segmentation influenced the employee relations in Hospital and the F-statistic 174.532 is greater that p-value.

Different audiences have different communication needs. And different segments of audiences have different communication needs. As PR has progressed from the days of mass communication, we have increasingly been able to target our messages to the needs of different audience segments – internally and externally.

A good example of the possibilities of audience segmentation is employee communication. Research consistently shows that employees are the most important audience to an organization and therefore it is vital making the effort to keep them engaged. Tailoring messages to their interests is one important way to do this. Employee interests can be measured by various instruments such as surveys, focus groups, telephone poles, and interviews of recruits and people exiting employment. Communicators realize that audience segmentation is a goal to aim for with employee communication, but many don't try to do this. Yet it is the logical thing to do, there is a captive audience, and email lists of employee segments can be easily collated.

6. Conclusion

This research intended to examine the influence of strategic communication on the employee relations within Rwandan Hospitals. The results suggested that strategic communication is a statistically significant positive affect employee relation within Rwandan hospitals. Furthermore, communication content, audience segmentation and communication channels affects employee relations. The findings of the current study partially supported the previous relevant studies.

7. Recommendations

This research on the influence of strategic communication on employee relations is the first of its kind within Rwandan Hospitals which are characterized with a high rate of employee turnover. The variables refuted the influence of strategic communication might have an employee relations.

The following recommendation pertinent to both policy making and for further research were put forward: In light of the findings and conclusion of the study, the following policy recommendations were made for action in relation to staffing and promotions in various hospital communication.

- Organizations should put in place staffing and promotion procedures as components of employee relations so as to improve on the performance of the organization.
- The government, non-governmental and the private sector should ensure that employee strategic influence communication of employee relation.

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