



Effective communication leads to productivity improvement in the organization

Rosliza Md Zani¹, Syukriah Ali¹ and Shuhaimi Saman²

¹Faculty of Business Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA P.O. Box 187, 08400 Merbok, Kedah, Malaysia

²Politeknik Seberang Perai, P.Pinang, Malaysia.

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received: 14 July 2011;

Received in revised form:

21 September 2011;

Accepted: 28 September 2011;

Keywords

Communication,

7Cs,

Organization,

Productivity.

ABSTRACT

As our life becomes more complex, effective communication is vital in our life. In an organization, communication is an essence. Communication means transference and the understanding of meaning or an idea that is transmitted and understood by others. This paper seeks to understand how effective communication plays its role in an organization. The concept of 7Cs in communication which include completeness, conciseness, consideration, concreteness, clarity, courtesy and correctness are discussed and how this concept can be used to improve communication as well as productivity of an organization. By understanding the concept of 7Cs, it will be a good use for the managers to apply this concept in communicating with the employees thus improving the productivity of an organization.

© 2011 Elixir All rights reserved.

Introduction

Communication is the heart of many interpersonal problems faced at any organization. It plays a major role in employee-employer relationship at work. People in organizations typically spend most of their time in an interpersonal situation; thus it is no surprise to find that at the root of a large number of organizational problems is poor communication. Effective communication is an essential component of organizational success whether it is at interpersonal, intergroup, intragroup, organizational, or external levels. The sole purpose is to learn to communicate better, more consciously, and more effectively, in a variety of contexts.

Communication is the process of exchanging information. Information is conveyed as words, tone of voice, and body language. Effective communication can be defined as conscious effort to use communication skills in order to achieve a win-win situation for both employers and employees in an organization whereby the customers receive the service or goods they need, the employees are happy and the employers achieve their professional goals (with as little stress as possible).

According to Bavelas & Barret (1951), communication is a process involving the transmission and reception of symbols having meaning in the minds of the participants. Robbins & Judge (2009), in their book "Organizational Behavior" defined communication as the "transfer and understanding of meaning." Communication is also the process of transmitting information from one person to another whereby a person or group evokes a shared or common meaning (Lewis, Goodman & Fandt, 2007).

Effective communication is vital which contributes to organizational effectiveness. Bavelas & Barret (1951) expressed it best in their classic article on organizational communication when they noted: "It is entirely possible to view an organization as an elaborate system for gathering, evaluating, recombining and disseminating information. It is not surprising in these terms that the effectiveness of an organization with respect to the achievements of its goal should be so closely related to its effectiveness in handling information... Communication is not a secondary or derived aspects of organizations – a "helper" of

the other presumably more basic functions. It is rather the essence of organized activity and is the basic process out of which all other functions derive."

The Concept of 7 Cs

7Cs, which include completeness, conciseness, consideration, concreteness, clarity, courtesy and correctness, serves as a comprehensive strategy towards promoting a much effective means of communication is widely used in business world (Murphy, Hilderbrandt and Thomas, 1999). It is a tool to mobilize people towards promoting better understanding in order to sustain coordination and linkages needed towards productivity improvement.

Completeness

Completeness in communication means providing all the necessary and complete information to the listeners as they desire (Murphy, Hilderbrandt and Thomas, 1999). Communicators differ in their mental filters; they are influenced by their backgrounds, viewpoints, needs, experiences, attitudes, status and emotions. Because of these differences, communicators need to assess their messages through the eyes of the receivers to be sure they have included all relevant information (Murphy, Hilderbrandt and Thomas, 1999). Completeness plays an important role in organizational communication. It is the function of providing needed information to personnel so they can do their jobs in an effective and efficient manner (Richmond and McCroskey, 1992). If information from a superior to his employees is complete, it will be easier for the subordinates to make decisions (Hitt, Middlemist and Mathis, 1983). Managers must recognize that many attempts at communication will be misunderstood or incomplete and thus hinder the purpose intended. The most effective method for assessing the receiver's understanding or the completeness of the message is to ask for feedback (Hitt, Middlemist and Mathis, 1983). Therefore, completeness is one of the important tools in communication and to know whether a manager is giving complete information or not, feedback is the best method. It is believed that a proper understanding of the role of communication would make it possible to structure the

organization and control its activities in a way that can enhance the productivity (Hitt, Middlemist and Mathis, 1983).

Conciseness

Conciseness is saying what you have to say in the fewest possible words, but to make sure every important information is delivered (Murphy, Hilderbrandt and Thomas, 1999). A concise message is complete without too much explanation and can avoid unnecessary repetition of information. In an organization, conciseness is one of the important tools in communication because concise information can easily be understood by employees, thus will make them easy to do their job. Communication effectiveness involves 2 conditions; (1) the processes of message sending and receiving are accurate and reliable, (2) the message receiver understands and responds to the message in the way that the message sender intends (Daniel, Spiker and Papa, 1997). Concise information will help employees to better understand what is required from them, thus will lead to a happy working environment. When the employees are happy with their work, this will result in an effective organization such as high productivity and high job satisfaction. When asked about the relationship between organizational communication and productivity, job satisfaction, turnover and absenteeism, communication became "one more variable" that figured into organizational effectiveness (Daniel, Spiker and Papa, 1997).

Consideration

Consideration means preparing every message with the message receivers in mind, try to put yourself in a person's or a target group's place. One person must be considerate, be able not to lose temper, no accusation, do not charge employees without facts. A manager must aware of the employees' desires, problems circumstances and emotions. Then handle the matter from their point of view. This thoughtful consideration is called "you-attitude" empathy, the human touch and understanding of human nature. In a broad but true sense, consideration underlies the other six C's of effective communication. (Murphy, Hilderbrandt and Thomas, 1999).

Concreteness

Communicating concretely means being specific, definite and vivid rather than general. Often it means using denotative (direct, explicit, often dictionary-based) rather than connotative words (ideas or notion suggested by or associated with a word or phrase) (Murphy, Hilderbrandt and Thomas 1999). Misunderstanding of words or information has produced tragedies in both war and peace in organization situation.

As members of organizations, we must possess adequate information to function productively every day. A tragic case happened involving the mismanagement of information exchange in a hospital. In this case, a deceased patient who was not immediately removed from his room was visited by his wife who upon finding her husband dead, collapsed and died of a heart attack herself. This tragedy occurred because rotating nurses in charge of the situation did not exchange clear information and failed to notify appropriate authorities the minute they knew their patient had died. Although most instances of misunderstanding of information exchange do not have such tragic outcomes, the smooth, timely and distorted flow of information remains an important for all organizations (Andrews and Baird, 1999).

Clarity

It is worth noting here the importance of clarity in communication. Too often it is avoided because people tend to

get confused between clarity with being overbearing, especially in business relations. In fact, nothing could be further from the truth. Overbearing is defined as rudely dictatorial (Murphy, Hilderbrandt and Thomas, 1999). Clarity is a simple stating of facts and of consequences to particular actions. Clarity lets all parties involved make better decisions. The primary purpose of communication is to move information from one person's brain to another's. Thus, clarity which is the extent to which listener and talker make their ideas understandable to each other and also to the audience is the most important aspect of any communication. If the other party or the audience does not understand what one person is saying, communication has no use. Ideas or messages do not get communicated in the way it was meant to be and misunderstanding occurs. Clarity is the presentation of facts or ideas in an appropriate way in communication.

Courtesy

According to a Royal Bank of Canada newsletter, "Courtesy is the lubricant that eases the friction arising from differences among human beings. By setting accepted limits on what people may say or do to one another, it prevents those differences from sparking strife." In another words courtesy simply means to be polite and to have good manners. It is to be considerate of others and letting them know that they are cared for, valued and respected. Incorporating courtesy in our communication makes every person feel important and acknowledged. No one feels taken advantage of or insulted. Without courtesy, people get the impression that others are rude, ignorant, or they just don't care about anyone or anything.

In an organization courtesy can be practiced by learning to talk or listening when others talk in polite ways. Using words like "please", "thank you", "excuse me" and "your welcome" shows others that you care about their feelings. In work, courtesy means listening to your superior when he/she is speaking, stopping what you are doing when he/she asks you to, and being considerate of your colleagues. By practicing courtesy in day-to-day communication, it motivates people to work together to achieve the group's goal. Thus on the overall, workers become more productive.

Correctness

According to The 7 C's of Effective Business Communication (Murphy, Hilderbrandt and Thomas, 1999), correctness in communication was suggested to be used is the right level of language (formal, informal or sub-standard), checking the accuracy of the information given and maintaining the right information given in acceptable writing mechanics. Therefore, to ensure an effective communication in the organization, the information given must be clear and distinct. As the most popular quote, "*If the words of command are not clear and distinct, if orders are not thoroughly understood, the general is to be blamed.*" (Conrad, 1990).

In an organization, the amount of correctness which includes an accuracy of the information is very essential for management's decision making and employees' motivation and control. The example how important the correctness of information can be referred as what had occurred in the Challenger Case in January 28, 1986. The immediate cause of the disaster was the failure of two O-rings, which are used to seal one of the three joints in each of the two solid-fuel booster. Conrad (1990) in his book, mentioned that The Presidential Commission on the Space Shuttle Challenger Accident concluded that "*the decision to launch mission was made based*

on incomplete and misleading information where there was a breakdown communication between the board of engineers and the management in the organization”.

The Application of 7C's in Communication

The application of 7Cs skill in communication is explained in terms of downward and upward communication.

Downward Communication

This channel of communication flows in the organization from one level to the lower level (Robbins, 2001). According Barra (1989) in his book 'Putting Quality Circles To Work', one of the cause and effect analysis reveals that the secrets of Japan's and American's companies success in quality and productivity lies in manpower area and manpower area refers to the emphasis of quality on education and training for managers, supervisors and non supervisors at all level in the organization. How this matter can be implemented efficiently and can be related to 7Cs skill of effective communication? The effective communication system in the organization can reduce the cost of operating in the organization and increase quality which subsequently lead to improvement in the productivity of the organization (Barra, 1989). The first step needs to be observed is the goal or mission in the organization which needs to be conveyed clearly and accurately by the management to the employees in order to ensure their commitment to productivity (Conrad, 1990). By using the technique of 7 Cs skills in communication, the management will ensure the information can transmit accordingly to their requirements.

In this case, the management needs to use the combination of concreteness, conciseness and followed by clarity in their messages. The reason is because with specific and definite vision, all the staff from top to lower levels (managerial, executives, supervisors and non supervisors) can identify the goal clearly (Brill and Worth, 1997). Moreover by applying conciseness where elimination of wordy expression and avoid repetition and follow by clarity which means choose precise, concrete, familiar words and construct effective sentences, shall reduce the time of proceeded or taken to achieve the goal that subsequently increase efficiency in the organization.

Then to enhance the effective communication, management will decide to provide training to managers, executives, supervisors and non-supervisors by establishing completeness, correctness and courtesy in communication (Dayao and Soo, 1998). This can be done by management, by ensuring the facilitators for the training uphold correctness and courtesy in communication when conducting the training. The skill of correctness in communication involves the use of right level of language by facilitators and the management must play their role effectively to ensure completeness in communication by providing all necessary information, answer all questions asked and give something extra when desirable. Therefore, with this preparation, the organization will have a proper and comprehensive training which lead to the reduction of time consumed to understand the goal (Champy, 1996). This is important especially for a big organization, the shorten time will increase productivity by reduction in cost of training to managers, executives, supervisors and non supervisors (Varona, 2002). As to ensure the employees will be motivated, the management also needs to prepare messages which focus on the employees benefits and emphasize positive and pleasant facts (Hayes, 1997). The consideration communication process will be involved in order to be able to understand their problems and emotions.

Upward Communication

This channel of communication flows to a higher level in the organization. The Upward communication provide feedback to higher-ups, inform the progress towards goals, and relay current problems and also keeps the management aware or sensitive of how employees feel about their jobs, co-workers and the organization in general (Robbins, 2001).

According to the research by US Chamber of commerce survey, conducted in 1981, three out of five executives think that explaining clearly to the employees is one of the most important factors to increase productivity (Conrad, 1990). The most important elements of communication are asking employees for their input on how to increase productivity and to satisfy communication more clearly as what is expected in terms of work output (Varona, 2002). In a typical organizational hierarchy, employees with limited power are naturally very cautious about discussing mistakes, complaints, and failing with the more powerful person. Fernando Bartolome, professor of Management at Bentley College, says that "one of limits on openness is self-protection." Openness depends on trust, and in many organizations there is lack of trust among people at different level which lead to reduction in productivity of the organization (Conrad, 1990). Therefore, to be effective in communication, the 7 C's skill is vital to be used in upward channel of communication, but the question is how the skill plays its role?

For example, given by Reece and Brandt (1993) in his book, *Effective Human Relation in Organization*, Pat Brunner, president of T.L.C. Child care Centers in US, takes her employee out for pizza. In this first hour, employees are encouraged to criticize anything and anybody, including management and the second hour is devoted soliciting positive comments and finding solutions (Reece and Brandt, 1993). As for the Management given in the example, in the first hour the most important 7C's skills of effective communication involved here are courtesy, consideration, conciseness, clarity and concreteness need from both sides. Courtesy and consideration in effective communication as explained before involves being sincerely, tactful, appreciative, show benefit and interest in the receiver which includes expression of respect, positive and nondiscriminatory. For the employees when they criticize the management the complaints must be sincerely and tactfully which means no personal interest and must be considerate (Varona, 2002). The comments must be concise and the unsatisfactory matters must be delivered to the management with clarity and concreteness so that it is no hearsay information. Meanwhile for the management they must be able to appreciate, to show positive reactions and respect the employees' ideas or comments (Hitchcock and Willard, 1995).

As mentioned in the example, the second hour allow management and employees to reconcile where positive comments and finding solutions.

Therefore, to be more effective the management must be able to use the skill of completeness and correctness in communication by gathering or taking notes all the positive comments, facts, figures ideas and information given. These information are important so that the Management will prepare all necessary feedback and improvements in the organization which can be rectified the problems arise as soon as possible and when the problems solved within the two parties, definitely it will lead to the increase of productivity in the organization (Reece and Brandt, 1993).

Conclusion

Communication is one of the important tools in measuring the effectiveness of a particular organization. Organization without effective communication will not achieve its goal, as it is a means of providing information to the employees. In this paper, effective communication is discussed by focusing on the elements or the skills that determine the effectiveness of communication and how this effective communication contributes to the productivity improvement.

The skill of 7Cs communication is the important measure in determining its effectiveness. The skill includes completeness, conciseness, consideration, concreteness, clarity, courtesy and correctness. These seven elements must be applied together in order for the communication in the organization to be effective. The effectiveness of 7 Cs in organization plays a major role in improving the organization's productivity. Improving productivity means changing the desired way to do something. Desired changes must be communicated. Communication should flow up and down in any business organization. An employee who cannot communicate clearly to co-workers and customers can affect the organization's bottom line. Improved communication skills can increase profits and productivity. With clear communication, clients or customers feel that their needs are understood and they perceive a higher level of competence in the staff. Improved communication will also enhance individual job performance. Clear communication opens the potential of advancement within the organization or within a field of work. Poor or ineffective communication between management and personnel results in a lack of cooperation and coordination, decrease productivity, decreased production and increased tension. It is our responsibility to ensure that accurate information is disseminated because our credibility is always on the line. If we lack of credibility, we fail to create a climate of trust and openness. We will find it difficult to recover if our credibility is damaged.

In the case of downward communication where the information flows from the top management to the lower level of employees, the 7 Cs is important to ensure all information delivered is understood, thus making everybody easy to deliver the job. So as the upward communication which provides the feedback from the lower level to the top, 7Cs are important to ensure that the management understands what the employees' comments and can reduce the gap between management and employees. Even though the application of 7Cs is important, most of the organizations today are not emphasizing on that skill. There are some organizations practicing this, thus making them effective.

References

- Andrews, P.H. and Baird, J.E. (1999), *Communication for Business and Professions*, John Wiley & Sons, London.
- Barra, R. (1989), *Putting Quality Circles to Work: A Practical Strategy for Boosting Productivity and Profits*, McGraw Hill, New York, NY.
- Bavelas, A. & Barret, D. (1951), *An Experimental Approach to Organizational Communication*, Personnel, Vol. 27, pp 366-371.
- Brill, P.L. and Worth, R. (1997), *The Four Levers of Corporate Change*, *World Executive Digest*, Vol 11 No. 6, pp 30-32.
- Champy, J. (1996), *Fast Forward: The Best Ideas on Managing Business Change*, Harvard Business Review Book Series, Boston, MA.
- Conrad, C. (1990), *Strategic Organizational Communication*, Holt, Rinehart and Winston Inc., New York, NY.
- Daniels, T.D., Spiker, B.K. and Papa, M.J. (1997), *Perspectives on Organizational Communication*, Champaign, IL.
- Dayao, D. and Soo, C. (1998), *Make Way for the CEO Clones*, *World Executive Digest*, Vol 20 No. 3, pp 14-16.
- Hayes, C. (1997), *Successful Team Management*, International Thompson Business, Boston, MA.
- Hitchcock, D. and Willard, M. (1995), *Why Teams Can Fail and What to Do about It*, Irwin Professional Publishing, New York, NY.
- Hitt, M.A., Middlemist, R.D. and Mathis, R.L. (1983), *Management Concept and Effective Practice*, Holt, Rinehart & Winston, New York, NY.
- Lewis, P.S., Goodman, S. H. & Fandt, P. M. (2007). *Management: Challenges For Tomorrow's Leaders*, South-Western, China.
- Murphy, H.A., Hilderbrandt, H.W., and Thomas, J.P. (1999), *Effective Business Communication*, Newbury Park, CA.
- Reece, B.L. and Brandt R. (1993), *Effective Human Relation in Organization*, Houghton Mifflin Company, New York, NY.
- Richmond, V.P. and McCroskey, J. (1992), *Organizational Communication for Survival*, Free Press, New York, NY.
- Robbins, S.P. (2001), *Organizational Behavior*, Prentice Hall, Eaglewood Cliffs, NJ.
- Robbins, S.P. and Judge, T.A. (2009) *Organizational Behavior*, Prentice Hall Inc. NJ.
- Varona, F. (2002), "Conceptualization and Management of Communication Satisfaction and Organizational Commitment in Three Guatemalan Organizations", *American Communication Journal*, Vol 5, No 3, pp 96-98.