

Managing communication in an organization



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Marks Spencer plc is a British retailer chain which specializes in selling of clothing and luxury food products. It is one of the leading retailers of UK with 703 stores in the United Kingdom and almost 400 stores spread across more than 40 different countries. The brand is also recognized by the names: Marks and Sparks, M&S, Marks's or just Marks. Its head office is in North wharf Road in Westminster city, London.

It made a reputation in the market by selling only British made goods. This policy started in the early 20th century. For this purpose it entered into long term relationships with British manufacturers. But in 2002 this policy was discontinued and now its business plan focuses in becoming a truly multinational retailer chain.

Marc Bolland is the CEO of the organization and Robert Swannell is the chairman. It has 68000 employees in UK and millions worldwide. It serves almost 3 million people every day. It is a public limited company therefore, key stakeholders of M&S are:

Employees

Suppliers

Shareholders

Senior executives

M&S is a retailing company, in this business information and data flow management is of vital importance. In 2002 M&S faced a great crisis. Declining market share and losing customers were agendas which needed to

be solved. Shareholders lost \$2 billion and the brand value decreased. It was communicated with the stakeholders that the company intends to return their loss. News about the brand, being a supporter of Israeli and Jewish charity harmed its business. Many decided to boycott products sold by M&S. The circumstances kept getting harder for M&S. Therefore, M&S used public relations tools to rebuild customer relationships. This needed effective communication and spreading positive information about the brand. It publicized the factor that as a multinational brand it had to maintain strong trade relationships with other countries. The fact that M&S source food product and clothing from Israel does not mean it source financial investments from Israel. And M&S sourced far greater amount of products from Arab countries than Israel. It maintains only professional relationship with countries across the world. Sharing such knowledge and information helped the brand recapture market shares.

Managing communication

Communication is a process which creates scope for exchanging knowledge and share opinions. Effective communication is a great tool to influence people and to trigger favorable behavior (Donnell King, 2002).

the_communication_process. png

Figure: The Communication Process. Source: (Donnell King, 2002).

Communication in an organization can be of two types. It can either be external communication or internal communication. However the entire process of communication is directed towards achieving the strategic goals of the organization. Communication motivates stakeholders and it is source <https://assignbuster.com/managing-communication-in-an-organization/>

of information. Communication ensures that the decisions made by the stakeholders are solid instead of being whimsical. Communication eventually alters individual's attitudes and assists in the controlling process. Following image shows the managing process of communication in an organization:

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Figure: New organisational thinking. Source: (Donnell King, 2002)

Communication integrates new organizational thinking with goals of the organization. Effective communication creates organizational environment in which new technologies and work practices are accepted properly (Friedman and Miles, 2006)

1) Information and knowledge communication within Marks & Spencer plc:

The main aim of information and knowledge communication within Marks & Spencer is to increase sales and image of the brand. Public relation is a tool to communicate information with prospects. Human resource management involves the internal communication process (Gupta, et al., 2011).

Key information and knowledge requirements

Stakeholders are those groups of people who are affected by decisions made by the organization. Therefore primary, secondary and key stakeholders require information and knowledge for making the right decisions and for investing their efforts in the organization. M&S operates in an environment which is diversified and different types of stakeholders want to know

information about different matters which they think might affect them in the long run.

Customers of M&S require information about the authenticity and quality of products. Customers require information about offers and new product information as well. At the early ages M&S started giving the cash back offer if the customers were not satisfied with their products. This practice was a rare one in the market at that time. Such type of offers and discount and promotional activities need to be communicated with prospects.

Employees need regular communication the most. Otherwise there will be misinterpretation of strategies and confusion everywhere. M&S considers motivated employees as assets. For managing millions of employees all around the world M&S uses different communicative media and tools. Employees of M&S require information about the firm's strategic goals, employment plans, payment option, appraisal method and rules and regulations of the company. M&S makes its employees efficient by launching training programs for them. It ensures employees have clear idea about what exactly is expected from them.

Suppliers need information about product requirements, delivery date, expected quality, credit terms etc. M&S manages long term profitable relationships with local British suppliers. For this purpose they maintain regular contacts with their suppliers. M&S emphasize on the fact that without effective communication with their suppliers it might lose its suppliers to competitors.

M&S helps their investors by providing them with up to date information. The company demands that it provides the actual news instead of creating a fake image of false profitability. Investors require information about strategic plans, financial plans, long term goals, policies, profit margins and market share. M&S collects information about the investors as well. Investors personal information help the firm keep track of them and judge the profitability of the investor.

Systems used for communicating information

M&S uses communication systems which are basically collection of individual communication networks. All these individual communication networks are interconnected for forming an integrated communication system. The following image shows tools of communication used by the organization:

images. jpg

Figure: United Communication. Source: (Friedman and Miles, 2006)

All those communication tools are used for internal and external communications by the brand.

M&S uses their website for providing information to stakeholders as well as its promotional activities. The website provides information about the outlets of M&S. This helps consumers to find out convenient outlets. The website also provides information about share prices and employment opportunity. Moreover it provides information to students for preparing projects as well as employment information.

Television advertisements are used by M&S for communicating their brand value. These advertisements help M&S for launching new products and reach a large crowd.

M&S uses mobile/phone communication to contact with their suppliers.

Mobile communication is also used to inform prospects about offers.

It prepares reports for communicating with senior level executives.

Memorandums are used by employees of the same branch to communicate among themselves.

Word of mouth is a process via which employees communicate and share information. Monitoring word of mouth is a great way to collect information by higher authorities.

M&S online provides continuous assistance. Suppliers and consumers can contact via the brand's online service.

Billboards are used by M&S to communicate with prospects about its products. M&S signs celebrities like David Beckham to enhance connectivity with consumers.

Potential barriers to Effective communication

M&S is a multinational brand. So it uses effective communicative channels for different circumstances. But unwanted situations are unavoidable sometimes. This happens due to the existence of some communication barriers. These barriers can be internal or external or a combination of both (Susan, 2004). Such as:

Lack of planning before communicating caused M&S a huge loss in the past. Without proper planning communicated factors can be negatively interpreted.

Leaving scope for unclarified assumptions. This refers to communicating with consumers assuming that they already know about the product. Advertising message of M&S may not be interpreted properly by prospects due to this barrier.

As a multinational brand M&S faces semantic distortion. The same phrases or facts can be interpreted differently by people of different demographic region.

Use of excessive impersonal communication with consumers weakens the bond with consumers.

Sharing too much information causes information overload

Irregular staffs are also another barrier to effective communication as the miss out important information about M&S's communication plans.

2) Factors that impact workplace communication

2. 1) Influence of values and cultural factors

Communication with stakeholders is influenced by the value M&S creates and the cultural environment it works on. M&S believes in creating higher value for the customers which eventually ensures higher profits for stakeholders. The core value is described by the tagline “ Quality worth every penny”. M&S's ethical stance depends on the value proposition. Its campaigns are organized to meet and create maximum value for customers.

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So all the communicative tools like advertisements, public relations, and campaigns depend on the value the brand wants to create for their customers (Colquitt et al., 2011). When, where and how communication will be done is dependent on the value the brand wants to create. Cultural factors influence communication of M&S in the following ways:

Storing diversified products of different cultures

Different approaches in advertising

Using different language and approaches to communicate with employees of different nations

Selection of different convenient places for opening up branches depends on spending habits of people in that culture.

2. 2) Uses of technology

Significant technologies that help M&S are given below:

M&S uses Enzyme Technology in production of textile materials. This technology ensures the durability of product of M&S.

M&S uses radio frequency identification tags (RFID) technology in 120 stores spread nationwide

Power use of M&S stores across the UK and Eire are monitored centrally. It is possible because of the innovative power conservation programmed introduced by M&S

Uses an upgraded in store ordering system

Uses “ extranet” to exchange information with suppliers.

M&S is also facing some technological hindrances. Such as:

A huge amount of M&S is spent for extensive use of technology

Disruption in internet and extranet networks due to overall interruption of the system.

Lack of security and privacy issues while sharing information

Technical problems of hardware operations

Ethical issues occur in using technology.

2. 3) Impact of policies and procedures

Policies and procedures form the overall communication network. Internal and external communication policies are different in every aspect. Internal communication is discussions that help M&S achieve its goals. Employees among themselves and with senior managers communicate through memorandums, pagers, reports and meetings. While communicating one party of M&S sends the message other party receives and response to the message. It includes media for sharing information and feedback for making decisions. Procedures are launched to deal with noise factors such as technical errors, perception differences and time issues (Armstrong et al. 2013). Thus policies and procedure affect the overall communication system of M&S.

3) Interpersonal Communication

I collected information about the organization by:

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visiting their outlets

speaking with employees

interviewing managers

collecting and analyzing annual reports

Researching online about the brand.

For collecting information I needed to apply interpersonal communication skills.

3. 1) Effectiveness of own communication skills

The effectiveness of my communication skills can be evaluated based on the following factors I applied while communicating:

Initiating conversations with small talk

Using open ended questions while researching

Keeping in mind that conversation is always a two way flow of speeches. So while collecting information I not only listened but also participated by reminding information I collected from internet research

Making eye-contact while talking

Showing empathy with speaker while communicating

Disagreeing agreeably by showing respect to other party's ideas

3. 2) Theories of interpersonal communication

The research of M&S derived from “ Uncertainty reduction theory”. Personal communication was needed for reducing authenticity lacking of secondary information. The “ Social exchange theory” helped me exchange views with others properly. People seemed reluctant to share certain information they considered to be personal. Social exchange theory considers this factor and by applying this theory I prepared appropriate questions for gaining information from individuals. “ Coordinated management of meaning” theory helped in forming perception while making a conversation. Constitutive and regulative tools are two components of this theory. While collecting information coordinated management theory helped in building mutual understanding. RDT (Relational dialectics theory) helped me to reduce tensions occurring due to opposing tendencies while communicating.

3. 3) Feedback from Others

I received positive feedback from potential customers as well as staff of M&S while collecting information. None of the parties shut me down rather they were eager to share information with me. Senior managers of the outlets found my questions very thoughtful. While collecting information I kept in mind personal information issues and avoided asking offensive questions. I tried not only to listen to the answers but also to trigger emotional factors in order to gain more information.

3. 4) Plans for improving communication skills

My plans for improving communication skills include:

Improving verbal communication

Improving body postures while communicating by practicing in front of the mirror

Improving comprehending ability by listening to audio records then to write short synopsis.

Practicing to talk with more confidence as well as positive facial expressions while communicating

Reviewing communication within M&S

Reviewing communication within M&S is done by

4. 1) Communication Audit

Communication audit is the process of evaluating effectiveness of communication process in an organization. It helps to identify lacking and changes of the entire communication system. Communication audit verifies the policies and capabilities of M&S's communication channel. M&S's communication audit shows the following factors:

M&S is committed to communicate the right thing to the right party at the right time.

M&S applies SWOT analysis to eliminate threats and weaknesses of the entire communication system

M&S maintains after sales communicative relations with consumers to build strong customer relationship

So far M&S maintains proper communication with various parties.

M&S was awarded responsible retailer of the year (2012) at the event of World retail awards. This shows the commitment of M&S in communicating properly with stakeholders.

4. 2) Applying Theories of organizational communication

Theories applied by M&S for organizational communication are as follows:

Structurational theory is applied to form the communicative structure of M&S

Organizational control theory is used to control the overall flow of information sharing

M&S uses enactment theory for creating scope and application of communication

Sense making theory is used to create meaningful internal and external communication

Contingency theories are used to control influence of internal and external factors in the communication process.

4. 3) Plan for improving workplace communication

M&S plans for improving workplace communication by increasing investment in communication technology. The brand plans to introduce new methods of upward and horizontal communication locally as well as nationally. It plans to train employees more effectively so that employees may participate in improving the communication channels. It plans to use stakeholder feedbacks for improving workplace communication.

4. 4) Measures for evaluation

Measures to evaluate the success of the plan depend on the impact or results the company is expecting. Evaluation can be done in the form of:

A year-end summary

Program reports

Monthly report about progress

Briefings of senior executives

The important thing for evaluating is keeping in mind the fact that communication efforts are interdependent.

Conclusion

In the end it can be said that managing communication efforts for an international brand like M&S is a difficult and challenging task. However, the basic rules for communication remains unchanged. Innovative ideas and technologies help to channel proper communication and eventually the firm gains competitive advantages.