

The internal corporate communication management essay



Review of literature applicable to this research focused on several significant areas. These areas included effective organisational and employee communication, employee development and participation, two way communication (feedback) between management and employees, language diversity as well as issues around change management in an effort to improve the communication processes.

Communication is defined as the process by which information is exchanged and understood by two or more people usually with the intent to motivate or influence behaviour (Daft 1997). Cutlip, Centre and Broom (2006) define communication as the interpretation, transmission and receiving of ideas, information, or transaction.

According to Koehler, Anatol and Applbaum (1981) communication as the mortar that holds the organisational structure together, plays a vital role in the growth and development of the organisation, because it provides the basis for coordinating the relationship between individuals to reach the ultimate organisational goals.

2. 2. INTERNAL CORPORATE COMMUNICATION

According to Grunig, Grunig and Toth (2007), effective internal communication is a crucial element for promoting employee engagement and has been widely proven to add significant value to the organizational structure; while Kotter and Cohen (2006) found that the environment was constantly changing and internal communication was vital towards having a thriving internal environment during change efforts.

Traditionally internal communication was about 'one way' traffic of management information.

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Corporate strategy decided by the top echelons of an organisation was converted into identifiable and consistent messages that were then distributed via various communication channels to those in the lower ranks of the organisational hierarchy.

However, in the knowledge economy organisations are increasingly looking to unlock the power of their people through greater two-way involvement and participation. This general movement towards a more participative style of management has generated a whole set of communication objectives (Quirke 2002) for the modern living organisation:

Numerous leadership studies such as the work of Sims and Lorenzi (1992), reaffirm the reality that managers in today's business organisation are required to develop a growing armoury of communication tools in order to bring meaning to increasingly complex business objectives. Sharing a common vision for the business and building a focus behind which all employees can move forward together requires a more enlightened use of organisational communication

Effective internal communications and open feedback are essential elements in ensuring a successful supervisor/subordinate relationship. J. Grunig, et al (2007) argue that open internal communications and employees participation are key components for building internal relations and further

said effective internal communications is a crucial element for having employee engagement and has been widely proven to add significant value to organisational structure.

Organisational potential is the product of powerful social and communicative processes (Burton 2006). He further said communications assist stakeholders to attain goals that are vital for decision-making, problem solving and change management processes.

Furthermore, Burton (2006) also found that communication needed to become the motivator towards building trust, creating relationships, and encouraging employee engagement. According to him, communication tended to build relationships and reduced the likelihood that employees will engage in negative actions.

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Obstacles towards effectiveness of communication involved individual characteristics, perception and other organisational processes (Gillis 2006).

Just as important, managers should also be aware of how to overcome those barriers and use this awareness as much as possible (Folger, Pool, & Stutman 2005).

According to Baldoni (2003), leaders need to give people ownership of the organisation's vision and internal stakeholders need to understand both external and internal issues facing the organization and be a contributor to the visionary process. Unless leaders comprehend and fully support the

principle that organisations must have a high degree of communication, the organisation will remain pretentious (Jablin & Putnam 2001).

A key ingredient to effective communication is taking responsibility to assert an atmosphere that allows suggestions from others to communicate more effectively (Schein 2004).

According to De Ridder (2004), organisational communication commonly has two goals.

The first goal of organisational communication should be to: inform the employees about their tasks and about the policies and other issues of the organisation.

The second goal is communication with a mean to create a community within the organisation.

Roughly, a distinction can be made between organisational communication as a means to provide information ("communicatio") and organisational communication as a means to create a community spirit ("communicare"); (Francis, 1989; De Ridder 2004).

Internal communication is essential to all organisations because it directs employees, fulfils employees needs, and improves decision-making capabilities (Hilgerman1998). Communication is the adhesive that collectively holds people together and a key driver in knowledge management (Baltoni 2003).

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Information control is a strategy that uses the process of filtering towards helping the person's cause (McFarland, Ryan & Kriska 2002). Researchers have found that people tend to filter or stop communication on the way up or down the organization's hierarchy (Goleman et al, 2002).

Senior executives need to meet directly with employees at all levels to understand departmental issues (McFarland et al, 2002). Managers need to have conversation with employees and promote methods that listen to opinions from a representation of staff members (Glauser, 1984). Direct communication helps leaders obtain a clear perspective and a faster understanding of internal organisational problems (Johansson, 2007).

Open and transparent communications help employees to understand decisions made further up the departmental hierarchy (Kotter & Cohen, 2006). According to Jacobson (1991) internal communication should be analysed along well established channels which run vertically, horizontally and diagonally throughout the organisation.

Above all, internal communication activities focus on better informing and engaging an organisation's workforce. The way in which such news and information is received, discussed and acted upon by employees will ultimately have a positive or negative influence on business performance.

Employees that feel better informed about their organisation become more personally involved in the business generating higher quality work. In fact, as well as higher quality, Clampitt & Downs (1993) identify the business of internal communication as being improved productivity; reduced

absenteeism; increased levels of innovation; fewer strikes and reduced costs.

2. 3 CHANNELS OF COMMUNICATION

Currently in the Northern Cape, there are different communication mechanisms to engage with members and channels such as staff newsletters and intranet sites inform,

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reinforce as well as to assists in building awareness of important business news and organisational information. However, the prevailing situation does not change people's behaviour in their own right.

Quirke (2002) maintains that to truly engage employees to a level that they change their behaviour, requires more comprehensive mix of communication mediums. The emphasise is much more on closer communication acts such as frequent one-to-one meetings or talkback sessions that encourage group debate and buy-in.

According to Kelly (2000), channels are needed to transmit information about performance, goals and achievements, procedures and practices, and to foster coordination and problem solving across the organisational boundaries. He goes on to say many ways have been developed to improve upward communication through, suggestion boxes, performance reports, attitude surveys; downward through videos, newsletters, briefings and meetings as well as horizontal communication through electronic networks, intranets and quality circles (networking)
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All employees, except those at the highest level of management must communicate upward. Most channels that are useful for downward communication are also used in upward communication. Koehler et al (1981) gives us a table of some of the most common upward communication channels used in organisations. Table 1: Upward Communication Channels

ORAL CHANNELS WRITTEN CHANNELS

Interviews Personal letters

Face-to-face Reports, internal memos

Grapevine Internal surveys

Social Events Suggestion system

Meetings and Conferences Documents

Research has shown that matching characteristics of the message to the channel can improve the effectiveness of communication. A complicated message should be sent through a " rich" channel such as a face - to - face meeting (Lengel and Daft 1988).

The concept of the 'communicator escalator' (Quirke, 1995) demonstrated in figure 1 shows the role a balanced range of internal communication channels have to play in developing employee awareness. Working together these channels can influence employee action in the form of positive behavioural change.

Figure 1: The Communication Escalator

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Channels (e. g.) Face - to - face (1-1) EMPLOYEE ACTION

face-to-face (groups)

Magazine / Intranet Involvement

EMPLOYEE AWARENESS

Different communication mechanisms achieve differing objectives.

Communication channels such as staff newsletters and intranet sites inform and reinforce - helping to build awareness of important business news and information. (Quirke 1995,) maintains that to truly engage employees to a level that they change their behaviour, requires a more comprehensive mix of communication medium. Closer communication actions such as frequent one-on-one interviews encourage people to get a better understanding in order to buy into messages and programmes.

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2. 4 COMMUNICATION BARRIERS

One of the main barriers hampering the development of quality internal communications seems to be lack of top management commitment (Coulson -Thomas 1996 :) and from there deficiencies arise in leadership and quality vision.

There are many barriers to empowerment, including lack of appropriate rewards, mistrust and lack of self-motivation on the part of front-line employees and leadership skills (Howard, 1997).

Another major barrier might be the fact that as organisations has introduced programmes of delayering and attempted to empower employees, many managers have found themselves " surface acting". Wickisier (1997) advised leaders to avoid quick-fix tactics and self absorption for survival but to take a long-term view of empowerment that involves commitment of the top management team to world-class excellence and the full utilisation of the employees through work teams and enablement

In Ivancevich and Matteson (1990) frame of reference has been regarded as an obstacles in communication because previous experience makes people encode and decode communication differently. For instance, a sender can encode a message using his own frame of reference and the receiver can also decode a message using his own frame of reference, meaning a comprehensible message must fall in the area where the frames of reference of both the sender and the receiver overlap. The larger the area of overlap, the better a message will be conveyed whereas a smaller common area will make the message difficult to understand.

Quirke (1995) argued that there was more to effective communication than just improving the way messages are sent. He further argued that instead of starting with the sender and their purpose and message, messages should start with the receiver and what the receiver needed or wanted to know.

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Quirke (1995) further said that a primary reason for break downs in communication was that managers and supervisors are not receiver-

oriented; they need to share more of the context of a message if a receiver is to successfully decode it.

The communicator may cause auditory disturbance because of an ineffective voice, or visual disturbance because of distracting mannerisms. Semantic disturbance refers to the communicator's use of language at a level which may be incomprehensible to their receiver.

Psychological noise refers to variables such as values, attitudes or frame of reference which could act as barriers to the successful interpretation of messages (Terblanche, 1989)

2. 5 EMPLOYEE DEVELOPMENT AND PARTICIPATION

The fact of the matter in the Northern Cape is to improve and ensure that the internal communication is effective and efficient, but one should have an understanding of who must communicate and what should be communicated and how the communication process must be handled.

The bottom line is that employees should play a pivotal role when it comes to communication, for such employees to be fully committed it is critical that they participate, empowered and become committed.

Banas (1988) held that employee commitment was the bedrock of all corporate strategies and that corporations' plans for the future would succeed or fail depending on how well the total employee team responded to them.

Banas (1988) further stressed that there was also great value in providing employees with meaningful opportunities for professional and personal development. It was a natural complement to employee cooperation and commitment. The better educated and developed a workforce is, the more vital it would be not only to employees' future but also for our nation.

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The concept of employee development (Tansuhaj, P., Wong, J., McCullough, J, 1987) advocates that employees should feel that management cares about them and tries to meet their needs.

- The stimulation of thinking, participation and ideas
- The involvement of all employees in improving processes
- The identification of ways of providing additional value to customers

The successful application of the concept is translated into positive employee attitudes towards their work including organisational commitment and job satisfaction (Tansuhaj et al, 1987)

Hogg (1996) has suggested that employee development could be the answer to gaining employee commitment, succeeding where traditional internal communication programmes have failed.

Employees are great sensors of the organisation's internal and external environment (Likert, 1987). Employee involvement has the possibility to improve the number of quality solutions generated (Shapira, 2000).

Senior executives need to meet directly with employees at all levels to understand departmental issues (McFarland et al, 2002).

Open door strategies will potentially diminish misinterpretations because executives listen directly to employees (Glauser 1984). Direct communication helps leaders obtain a clear perspective and a faster understanding of internal organisational problems (Johansson 2007).

Open and transparent communications help employees to understand decisions made further up the departmental hierarchy (Kotter & Cohen 2006). Participation methods found employees that are more inclined to put into practice the decision and are less apt to oppose changes (Blanchard 2007).

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Woodruffe (1995) defined employee development as treating both employees and customers with equal importance through proactive programmes in order to achieve organisational objectives. The concept of employee development advocates that management cares about them and tries to meet their needs. The successful application of the concept is translated into positive employee attitudes towards their work including organisational commitment and job satisfaction (Tansuhaj et al. 1987)

The greater the level of involvement a member has in change efforts the more increased the member's ownership or commitment to a particular decision (Dressler, 2006).

According to Baldoni (2003), leaders need to give people ownership of the organisation's vision. A key ingredient to effective communication is taking responsibility to assert an atmosphere that allows suggestions from others in order to communicate more effectively (Schein 2004).

Being well-informed about organisational issues (such as goals and objectives, new developments, activities and achievements) will enable members to discover the salient characteristics that distinguish this organisation from others (Dutton et al 2001).

There are three important reasons why organisations should not only conduct customer research but also get involved in employee research (Barry, 1993).

1. Employees are the customers of the internal service and are thus the only people that can accurately assess internal service quality.
2. Employees can offer insight into conditions that reduce service quality in the organisation.
3. Employee research serves as an early warning system. Based on employees' more intensive exposure to the service delivery system a system breakdown is often noticed before the external customer does.

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Empowered employees willingly take responsibility for the service encounter, they respond more quickly to customer needs and complaints (Barbee and Bott, 1991).

The organisation will experience lower labour turnover (Cook 1994), there will be high staff morale and employees will take responsibility for their own performance and its improvement (Barry 1993)

2. 5. 1 Impact of Employee Communication and Organisational Identification

Organisational Communication, also known as employee communication, is referred to by Bittel & Newstrom (1990) as " three dimensional communication in which the manager must furnish information downward to employees and upward to his manager; employees must communicate their ideas and feelings upward to the manager and horizontally to other employees."

Lee (1997) argues that communication within an organisation should resemble a conversation reaching up and across as well as down the hierarchy in a way that involves everybody in a rapid and candid exchange of information

Employees who identify strongly with their organisation are more likely to show a supportive attitude toward it (Ashforth & Mael, 1996). It has indeed shown that strong identification on the part of employees may positively contribute to a company's success (Mathieu & Zajac, 1990: Randall, 1990) and may explain the superior and sustained performance of an organisation.

In selecting appropriate tools to enhance identification, managers should know their employees' needs and motivations for identification with the organisation. From social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1982), two basic motives for identification can be derived:

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- the need for self-categorization which requires the differentiation between ingroup and outgroup and

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- the need for self-enhancement which requires that group membership is rewarding.

The fulfilment of the latter motive can be established by associating oneself with a successful organisation and would seem to be dependent on the attractiveness (Dutton, Dukerich and Harquail 1994).

Recently, Fisher and Wakefield (1998) have recommended different communication strategies for successful and unsuccessful organisations to strengthen member's identification. Less successful organisations, whose members cannot easily 'bask in reflected glory' (Cialdini, R. B., Borden, R. J., Thome, A., Walker, M. R., Freeman, S., & Sloan, L. R. 1976. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*) should increase members' involvement with the company mission and/or invest in strengthening the emotional bonds between members, whereas successful companies should emphasize their companies victories.

2. 5. 2 Employee Engagement and psychological Well-being

Research evidence suggests that high levels of psychological well-being and employee engagement play a central role in delivering some of the important outcomes that are associated with successful, high performing organisations. First, research has established that psychological well-being is directly correlated with performance.

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Generally speaking, information about the company will enhance the identification with the organisation because it adds to its visibility and distinctiveness and increase employees' awareness of being a member of that organisation.

Particularly with positively valued information, members feel proud to be part of a well-respected company, as it strengthens their feeling of self-worth (Ashforth & Mael 1996) and thus serves the self-enhancement motive.

2. 6 FEEDBACK MANAGEMENT

Feedback is information received about the consequences of one's perspective and allows a leader to have a broader point of view (London 2001). Feedback is an essential ingredient in motivating one's growth needs through the dissemination of good information about goal accomplishment (Eichinger 2004). Along with improving the quality of a decision, employee involvement tends to reinforce employee commitment (Dyer 1994).

De Greener (1982), cited many difficulties which result in communication problems within organisations. These include transmission problems, such as one sided (especially downwards) communication processes; suppression of information; mistakes in the facts communicated; grapevine and rumour mill; and purposeful distortion. De Greener (1982) also stated that interpretation and language used with different groups of staff will impact on the efficacy of a company's internal communication process.

One way to improve leadership effectiveness is by participating in a feedback process that paints an accurate picture of the strengths and

development needs of the leader (Cochran 2006). It is not clear at this stage whether there are mechanisms in the SAPS to ensure that members provide feedback. The low staff-morale in the SAPS could be an indication of lack of two-way communication. Feedback provides the context and the opportunity for employees to learn, and make sense of the information (Klimecki and Lassleben 1998).

Feedback allowed employees to reach a deeper understanding of the drivers of success, stimulated thinking and encouraged involvement in improvement processes (Quirke 1995).

Failing to engage internal stakeholders in the decision-making process can be detrimental to an organisation's effectiveness (Dutton, Ashford, O'Neil, Lawrence 2001). Leadership needed to take action on employee contribution and communicate actions that connect with the suggestions from subordinates. Decisions made by consensus often produce a higher level of support than decisions made by a popular vote (Forsyth 2006).

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2. 7. LANGUAGE AND CULTURAL DIVERSITY

Although SAPS strives to instil a common set of values and beliefs to all of its employees, it is unlikely that perceptions of the culture within this organisation will be universal.

Scholars studying organisational culture such as Keeton and Mengistu (1992) and Hofstede, (1986) found evidence that subcultures do exist within

organisations. Similarly, Nelson and Winter (1982) argued that effective
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replication of routines in multiple sections of an organisation is extremely difficult, and have large tacit knowledge components.

The Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC, 1995) found in its investigation into Intergroup Relations that " ineffective communications", even a total lack of communication, was in the past one of the main factors causing conflict to escalate to violence. The HSRC went on to note that 59.8% of blacks could speak neither Afrikaans nor English, while 91.8% of Whites spoke no black language. And it is said, therefore, that a critical factor in the lack of contact and communication between Blacks and Whites is the comparative lack of inter-cultural communication skills.

2.8 Benefits of Culture

Hodgetts (1991) indicated that organisation culture can provide certain benefits to the organisation. Culture can serve as a control mechanism because people will know what is expected from them and work accordingly.

Behaviour which deviates from cultural norms and values is discouraged by managers and others. Strong cultures create consensus regarding appropriate norms and they are strongly supported by all. Hodgetts (1991) further identified personnel commitment as another benefit for the organisation. Strong cultures make people identify with the organisation which then increases commitment and morale of the employees.

Commitment occurs through three phases (Hodgetts, 1991).

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- Compliance, employees allow themselves to be influenced by others in order to obtain external rewards,
- Identification, during which individuals accept the influence from others in order to satisfy their need for belonging,
- The last phase is called Internalisation, where individuals find the values of the organisation to be intrinsically rewarding and corresponding to theirs.

Being culturally sensitive is essential to successful business communication. People raised in different cultures may clash due to different definitions of basic elements of culture, such as values, norms, symbols, language and knowledge. With many possible barriers existing, how to achieve effective intercultural communication is definitely a new challenge to corporation managers. Ignoring such differences can reduce productivity and lower company morale and loyalty.

Managing communication in multilingual organisations such as the SAPS is very often a more complex task compared to companies employing only one nationality. In addition, suspicion and conflict may arise as a result of communication difficulties in diverse organizations. For example if some members hold conversations in languages that are unknown to others (Hofstede 1986).

Inadequate language skills in a common language will make it more difficult for individuals to share knowledge and develop social relations. Deficiency in language skills and socio-linguistic misunderstanding are not the only problems experienced in multilingual organisations emphasised (Hofstede

1986). It is therefore critical to address inadequate language skills within the organisations in an effort to improve the effectiveness of internal communication. Concurring with Social Categorization Theory (Tajfel and Turner 1986) language can be used in positive or negative differentiations. SAPS members may be prejudiced in some instances by lack of command of regional languages, eg Setswana, or Isixhosa, or Afrikaans.

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As such, language variations may be used as a marker, ethnic or nationalistic identity formations (Giles 1977).

An earlier employee survey revealed that respondents preferred to receive information through formal channels, via their immediate supervisor, rather than informally through the grapevine (Clampitt & Downs, 1993).