Organizational communication: the merits and demerits essay example

Law, Evidence

Abstract

Communication is often a good thing in a business organization. This is true to the extent that what is communicated is well perceived by both the sender (communicator) and receiver. Since communication involves message, the message must then be well perceived by the people involved in the communication process. This paper focuses on organizational communication as an important strategy based on what it is able to contribute at every hierarchical order in an organization. Thus, it focuses on both the merits and demerits of communication in the context of an organization. In so doing, this paper tries to understand the different sides of organizational communication; its advantages to the overall well-being of a company and the limitations it poses on existing structures and/or strategies. This is important since understanding communication in an organization is always a complex situation. Though the majority may opine that it is of absolute good, there exists still a considerable amount of evidence that points to the demerits of organizational communication due to the possible gaps that exist in virtually all communication theories. The scope of this paper focuses on organizational communication as brought out in representative modern theories based on three approaches: postpositive; interpretive; and critical/postmodern approaches.

Keywords: organizational communication, theories, postpositive, interpretive, critical.

Introduction

Important modern theories exist that describe organizational communicational and its development. The modern theories, as the paper will focus, are based on specific approaches that target the general approach of identifying problems in organizational communication. Each approach - in identifying these problems – is defined by its individual ontology (how things exist), axiology (what is worth knowing), and epistemology (how things can be known). Each approach is further developed by its own specific philosophical obligations that span out the specific theories of organizational communication. These theories have both merits and demerits of organizational communication since each theory addresses a gap left behind by another or rather an innovative strategy to add up on the aspects of communication in an organization. It is therefore important to study these merits and demerits of organizational communication, extracting evidence from these theories in support – or otherwise – of our central topic.

In reference to the systems theory (based on the postpositive approach), it is evident that communication is vital for a business organization. This is brought out by the theorization that an organization resembles an organism; in this way, the organization looks like an open system that heavily relies and interrelates with its immediate environment. This happens so that the organization can acquire the various resources it needs to grow and sustain it. This happens in a manner similar to that of an organism, which interacts with its environment so that it is able to acquire its nutrients for growth and sustenance. In this case, the organization inherits all systems similar to an organism. Just like an organism, an organization consists of multiple parts

with a hierarchical ordering (Scott, Corman & Cheney 1998, p. 305). These parts are interdependent and rely on one another in order to function better. By virtue of attaining interdependence, an organization achieves holism (the whole part is greater than the sum of its parts). This creates a scenario where there is managed communication in a company; further, this managed communication serves better in adding up to the overall benefits of communication in an organization.

Further, organizational communication achieves its own merit through interpretive approach. In this approach, an organizational system (or how an organization is aligned) comprises various human practices, which are understood to be patterns of activity that relay meaning to the participants. In this case, the organizational system is not taken to represent the various departments in an organization that form the organizational hierarchy; rather, it reflects the patterns of practices in that specific organization – from the way purchase orders are handled to the way meetings are conducted. Structure, then, is used in reference to the different interrelationships that exist between various human practices. This forms the basis of structuration theory, which solely supports this argument. In other words, communication in a business organization is important in the creation of structures through actions. The structures established by organizational communication act as a medium as well as an outcome of a social deed. In structuration theory, it is the people who create structures through their deeds (or actions). Not only do they create them, but they also reproduce (or perpetuate) the same structures by acting within them. Therefore, structurational processes are crucial since they govern how things ought to be interpreted, what stands

out as moral, and how power in an organization should be distributed (McPhee & Tompkins n. d., p. 155). This supports the very essence of communication in any serious organization.

Despite the above merits, communication in an organization can turn detrimental, especially when proper management in the flow of information is flawed. In any mode of communication, information is critical to the process. As much as we have seen the theories supporting the merits of communication, there are serious demerits that are also supported in these theories. One classical example of this is in the constraint of actions. Communication may serve to constrain actions as depicted by the structuration theory. With the ability of the theory to switch on and off any action, it then comes out clearly that any action deemed by people as not beneficial may be disregarded in place of other unimportant actions. In this theory, it is clear that people play a very important role in decision-making on the actions that should be produced and reproduced. They can therefore be biased in trying to simulate certain actions that are jeopardy to an organization (Weick 1995, p. 32). This, in turn, creates a negative outlook of the entire organization.

On the other hand, communication can introduce complexity in an organizational system. An organization comprises of various systems (or departments) that carry out specific and distinct roles and duties. Moreover, organizational communication comprises information and material resources that play a vital function in the communication processes of that company. From the late twentieth century, information has continuously grown complex due to the introduction of systems that heavily borrow from

interdependence and interrelations between various organizational departments. Sourcing concrete evidence from the systems theory, it is clear enough that this has made traditional routines and rules - that governed communication – obsolete (May & Mumby, n. d., p. 184). By creating such complex information channels, organizations are forced to endorse their individual internal information culture. This means that each individual member of an organization enacts their personal information culture, and as a result, they have to give out the different interpretations of what their environment yields or means. This creates complexity in the selection of the best interpretations and their subsequent retention for future selections and endorsements.

Lastly, there is also the issue of entropy. This arises in cases where an organization does not receive feedback from outside. Such a scenario may arise due to the complexity of communication processes, forcing the organization to enact its own internal information culture. It can also arise in such cases as when an organization consists of absolutely rigid boundaries such that there is no interaction with its immediate environment – as pointed out by the systems theory. In such a scenario, there is a lack of resources needed by the organization for its growth and survival (Katz & Khan 1966, p. 180). Ultimately, the organization suffers from entropy (a state of self-feeding and exhaustion of resources available). The systems theory stipulates that absence of a feedback mechanism results into entropy.

In conclusion, therefore, it is important to note that communication can be perceived as a double-edged sword. On one side, communication serves as a very important tool for the management of information in an organization.

On the other side, it can turn detrimental to the extent of an organization collapsing. This is true in cases where information is unmanageable or in situations where no feedback mechanism exists due to rigid boundaries that prevent interaction. It is therefore important to first evaluate the context of communication in any organization before coming up with channels or systems to govern that communication.

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