

COMMUNICATIONS IN ADMINISTRATION: ADVANTAGES AND CHALLENGES FOR EFFECTIVE CORPORATE MANAGEMENT

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INTRODUCTION

Some scholars have given various definitions concerning “communication”. However, we would limit ourselves to a couple of definitions given by some notable communication experts. For instance, R. Chappell and W.L. Read (1983) define communication “as a means by which a thought is transferred from one person to another”. Similarly, Rita Udall and Sheila Udall (1979) also define communication as “a process by which one person (or a group) shares and reports information to another person or group so that people (or groups) clearly understand one another”.

In another vein, E.C. Eyne (1983) also defines communication as “the transferring of a message to another party so that it can be understood and acted upon”.

The above definitions can be summarized as a process of sharing ideas, information, and messages with others in a particular time and place. It is also important to state that communication is not just giving of information. It is the giving of understandable information and receiving and understanding the message. Continuously conveying information, ideas, attitudes and feelings among individuals and among groups of individuals is an important communication tool.

a. Forms of Communications

Communication includes writing and talking, as well as non-verbal communication (such as facial expressions, body language or gestures), visual communication (i.e. the use of images or pictures, such as painting, photography, video or film), and electronic communication (i.e. telephone calls, electronic mail, cable television or satellite broadcasts). These forms of communication are conveyed as messages to be received and understood by the listener or receiver to elicit an action or otherwise.

b. Communication Tools in Administration

Communication is a vital part of personal life and is also important in business, education, and any other situation where people encounter each other. Businesses are concerned with communication in several special ways. Some businesses build and install communication equipment such as fax (facsimile) machines, video cameras, compact disk (CD) players, printing presses, personal computers, and telephones to aid the smooth flow of communication.

Other companies create some of the messages or contents that those technologies carry, such as movies, books and software. These companies are part of the media or telecommunications industries.

THE IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNICATION IN ADMINISTRATION

Communication in administration is very important in every business. People in organizations need to communicate to co-ordinate their work and to inform others outside the business about their products and services.

The ability to communicate effectively with others is a top attribute of a successful business person. Communication skills are vital to the success of the workplace. The ability to communicate effectively with customers, co-workers, subordinates, and supervisors is a sine qua non in career advancement.

It is important to state that job skills alone do not ensure success in business. The ability to communicate well with supervisors, customers, and co-workers are very important in business administration. Communication skills in the

form of a written document or a conversation reflect on the staff and the organization. The impression customers and business associates form about the staff and organization are important and lasting. Many of these impressions are based solely on the communication which is done.

Communication with others determines their opinion of the overall competence and integrity of the staff and the organization. If the communication skills of the staff are poor, others may question your abilities. Therefore, if you are extremely intelligent, talented, and knowledgeable but lack communication skills it could adversely affect your organization by putting away customers and potential ones.

In a further development, it is very important to ensure that we communicate well in writing. This is because many people judge the abilities and intelligence of staff specifically by the quality of their writing, which includes the accuracy of spelling, punctuation, and grammar. The memos, letters, and reports written demonstrate the ability to communicate.

Being ethical in your communications, oral or written is also very important because people may use it to evaluate your competence and judge your integrity. If one promises to do things but fails to do so, if one makes statements that are not factual, if one makes untruthful comments about others, or if one is careless in his/her writing, others will not trust him / her and people would become hesitant to work with him / her.

If one communicates as an employee, you represent the organization. Customers or clients would evaluate your organization based on their interaction with you. Marilyn L. Satterwhite indicates in her book "Business Communication At Work (2nd Edition)" that "goodwill is the positive feeling or attitude that you show or that customers have about a business that encourages customer loyalty." As an employee, you could strengthen or you could destroy that goodwill based on the manner in which you communicate.

Written communications are a permanent record of one's ability to write. People who read these communications form an opinion of both the staff and the organization. To present oneself very well in writing means that one would project a favourable image of the organization as well as promote successful business operations both internally and externally.

Communication of Ideas

Despite one's education or talent, if he/she cannot get his/her ideas across to others, he/she may not be able to apply his/her knowledge and skills. Ideas are commonplace, but the ability to communicate ideas clearly to others is very important. Learning to communicate one's ideas should be every administrator's thrust and concern.

As we communicate, we try to inform, or request, or persuade, or to build goodwill.

Apart from using communication to share and exchange information, we also put across ideas, facts, recommendation and proposals. These make business communication functional and useful. Without this, business could hardly exist.

ADVANTAGES OF COMMUNICATION IN ADMINISTRATION

Communication has tremendous advantages and can be done in several ways including the following:

Written communication – (i.e. letters, memos, reports, e-mails, faxes etc)

Oral communications - (i.e. one-on-one meetings, phone conversations, speeches, video conferencing, group meetings etc)

Non-verbal communications (i.e. eye contact, facial expressions, body language, and physical appearance etc)

Active listening – (i.e. listening with a high level of concentration; and listening for information)

All the above methods apply tremendously in carrying out effective communication. In contributing to how to carry out effective communication, T.S.P. N'yel (2006) indicates that communication is an instrument for social interaction, a tool for understanding others, and a means by keeping in touch with people. It also assists in establishing, extending and maintaining relationships, by giving orientation to staff and spelling out the goals of an organization. They maintain that communication is the lubricant that keeps the machinery of an organization going, and the means through which roles are identified and assigned. No organization can survive without communication.

a. Effective communication

Furthermore, to enrich communication and make it effective, the following principles should be carefully noted:

- i. Clarify your ideas before communicating. Good communication requires good planning. Think through the message and consider who will be receiving or affected by the message.
- ii. Examine the true purpose of each communication. Ask yourself what you really want to accomplish. Is it to obtain information, initiate action or influence someone's behaviour? Then prepare your message to reflect the purpose.
- iii. Consider the total physical or human setting. Take into account not only what is to be said but also the timing, physical setting and social climate involved.
- iv. Consult with others in planning communications. That is to say allow others to participate.
- v. Be aware of the tone as well as the content of your message. The tone or voice, expression, body language and receptivity to your receiver have tremendous impact on those you wish to reach.
- vi. Take every opportunity to communicate something of help or value to the receiver.
- vii. Follow up your communications. Ask questions and encourage questions to learn if you have succeeded in expressing your true meaning and intentions. Allow for feedback in all communications.
- viii. Communicate for tomorrow as well as today. Plan communication to serve immediate needs as well as longer-run interests and goals.
- ix. Make sure your actions support your words. The most persuasive communication is not what you say but what you do.
- x. Be a good listener. Often time when communication starts or is ongoing some people cease to listen. Concentrate on what is being said. Be an active listener by listening with a great deal of concentration.

a. Effective Listening

To make listening effective, the communicator should make eye contact, use positive body language, use the person's name and paraphrase what is said. Proper eye contact expresses interest and empathy. The use of positive body language expresses one's concern and willingness to be involved. By using a person's name you demonstrate a positive relationship and interest. You would also get the person's attention. To paraphrase or repeat what is said in your own words shows that you understand the issues correctly.

CHALLENGES OF COMMUNICATION IN ADMINISTRATION

As the business world changes, workers today are faced with some communication challenges. Some of the challenges may be increased use of technology, increased global competition, restructured management, increased quality emphasis and customer focus, and increased focus on legal and ethical problems.

The above challenges influence the communication process within an organization. Technology has had the greatest impact on how communication is done. Electronic mail, voice mail, teleconferences, computer network, fax machines, and the internet have expanded the methods of communicating. More workers talk to each other and share data as they use various technologies to search for, collect, prepare and report information. Computer communication is also used for activities such as group problem solving, consensus building, and group projects.

Technological advancement has changed the world in which businesses operate. We now live in a global economy. Businesses ought to compete in the global market place in order to be successful. To compete effectively in international business, communication should be couched in good grammar. Slang, jargon, and acronyms need to be eliminated. Organizations must become aware of different cultures and their unique communication processes.

Many organizations have restructured and invested in increased technology. Therefore employees should be trained or retrained to be abreast of these new technologies. And this comes with cost. The increase in technological advancement places greater emphasis on ethical and legal concerns for all employees throughout the organization. Workers should be conversant with the legal and ethical regime of the company and strive to comply with rules and regulations in their communications.

Working together adds a new dimension to the communication skills needed in businesses. Previously, most communications were developed individually. Now, several staff may have to work together in creating various documents and communications, a process requiring additional written and oral skills.

a. Communication Barriers

Other issues which pose communicating challenges in administration are: personal/human/psychological, organizational/structural, and environmental/physical barriers.

Personal / Human / Psychological Challenges

- i. Linguistic challenges – (i.e. semantic, grammatical, phonological problems etc)
- ii. Poor interpersonal relationships and negative attitudes
- iii. Bad listening
- iv. Distracting mannerisms during oral speech presentation

- i. Level of comprehension
- ii. Ethnic or cultural background, and blindness
- iii. Bad timing
- iv. Physical appearance (i.e. dressing) etc

Environmental / Physical Challenges

Challenges that affect communication can also be environmental / physical in nature. Some of them could be:

Physical loud noise – (i.e. by radio or flying aircraft etc)

Physical distance

Sitting arrangement

Information overload – (i.e. having more information to process)

Office location in the building – (i.e. the physical location one's office can affect communication)

Geographic location / distance – (i.e. the geographic location of a person or an organization can affect the flow of communication).

Organizational / Structural Challenges

Challenges which emanate from organizational/structural issues could also have an effect on communication. For instance, the following are possible causes:

Undifferentiated authority levels resulting in confusion over formal communication channels in terms of issuance and direction.

Hierarchy – (i.e. too many levels of management. This would promote by passing or short circuiting)

Filtering – (i.e. vetting information to reduce the quality and quantity of the original message or conscious manipulation of facts to colour).

Poor organizational climate – (i.e. results in rumour mongering or poor investment in communication equipment leading to lack of delegation).

Excessive decentralization may create confusion and ill-will.

Centralized pattern of communication discourages openness and honesty.

Self-contained work groups or units make it difficult for information to transcend that circus.

Poor Listening Habits

Excellent managers are good listeners. They take time to hear the problems of subordinates, colleagues, or customers.

There are many barriers to effective listening. A couple of them are: noise distractions, interruptions, differences of opinion, prejudices or bias, different priorities, busyness, no interest, limited time, thinking of other things, thinking someone is wrong, tiredness and perception differences. All these cause distractions and affect effective listening.

Listening can be hard work. According to Rick Conclow (1991), “unfortunately, few managers or people in general know how to listen effectively”. Often the reason employees say they do not feel appreciated is because no one listens properly. The lack of listening and poor communication skills cost businesses millions of euros in performance and morale problems.

“By listening to someone you are not necessarily agreeing with them”, says Rick Conclow. The major goal of the listening technique is to understand better the employee. In so doing, you express interest and concern in the employee’s problem or idea.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it is instructive to indicate that business or administrative communicators should as a matter of fact portray credibility, trustworthiness and truthfulness in their communications. They must also show fairness and objectivity. Sources of information should be duly acknowledged. What one writes or says can induce action and behaviour in others. Therefore, business or administrative communicators must exercise caution in their communication.

Business or administrative communicators should be culturally and socially responsible for looking at what is acceptable and appropriate for every occasion. Communication is powerful. Words can destroy. There must, therefore, be circumspection and integrity when communicating.

In public speaking, administrative communicators should communicate effectively by determining the purpose of communication, considering what the audience needs to hear for the communication to be effective, developing messages in a clear, concise, and logical manner, and maintaining positive attitude throughout the communication.

It is also very important to use gender-neutral language in communication. Words that reflect non-bias, such as “Police Officer” instead of “Policeman”, “Chairperson” instead of “Chairman” etc should be used.

Avoid using occupational phrases that indicate gender. For instance, use “his or her staff” instead of “his staff” or “her staff” in your communications to promote gender equity.

An administrative communicator should not deliberately misrepresent or mislead others in communication. All vital information that is relevant to the situation should be included. Caution should be taken against damaging another person’s name and reputation by making false accusations.

Regarding international business communication, the business or administrative communicator should know that people around the world have diverse values and beliefs and use different languages, and also their written and oral communication styles and formats vary. For instance, some styles are more formal than others. Non-verbal communication also varies widely – (i.e. gestures, body language, eye contact, and touch are all used in diverse ways by different cultures).

Therefore, a business or administrative communicator ought to be versatile and learn about the specifics of communication for other cultures. For instance, those of us who have learnt English as a second language have

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