



Strategic communication for managerial efficiency

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Abstract

Communication, the epicenter of human existence has played vital roles in virtually every aspect of human existence including the creation of the whole world. It is an integral part of the organizational process as the flow of communication in the organizational hierarchy has its effects on efficiency, decision-making and the morale of organizations. From observations over the past few decades, to achieve managerial efficiency, communication must be strategic. This paper investigated the role of strategic communication in managerial efficiency. No doubt, without efficiency organizational objectives cannot be attained. The paper has also established that strategic communication is an indispensable tool or skill for managerial efficiency and that it is wiser and more cost effective to minimize or prevent crisis in an organization than trying to manage it. This is what strategic communication does in an organization. Therefore, when effectively or judiciously utilized in an organization, the end result of strategic communication is managerial efficiency which brings about organizational growth. This is the hallmark of every result-oriented management.

Keywords: strategic, communication, managerial efficiency

1. Introduction

Communication is the epicenter of human existence and social process. It is the wheel that drives all human activities. Communication started playing vital role right from the time of creation. All the things in the world were created by God through “mere” communication. It is perhaps the central role of communication that is at the centre of all human controversy (Udeze, 2005).

There is no doubt that without communication life will be very boring and uninteresting, individuals will not interact and relationships between organizations, communities and nations will be very difficult to conduct. Communication is the foundation of creating and building relationships be it among individuals, groups, organizations and nations of the world. The absence of communication will lead to a breakdown of the social order. You simply cannot NOT communicate. Every activity of human existence revolves around communication.

By definition, Communication is said to be the transferring of information, ideas and attitudes from one person to another. This definition presupposes that both the sender and the receiver of such information have a common understanding of the language or symbols. As pointed out earlier, communication started from the earliest times and has continued to take different forms as modernity or civilization continues to grow and evolve.

Communication starts from an intrapersonal level which is the communication one holds with him/herself. Hence, the source and the receiver are the same. The next type of communication is interpersonal communication, in this type of communication, there is a source and a receiver. The message is sent from one person to another who is the receiver. This type of communication elicits immediate feedback. This type of communication comes in the form of exchange of ideas between two or more students, between a lecturer and students in a classroom situation and so on

(Udeze, 2005).

Effective communication according to Unogu, cited in Ella and Onwochei (2005) is the transfer of understandable information. We will succeed in our relationships and information in other areas when we fully grasp the fact that the essence of communication, the goal and ultimate aim of every exchange is the transfer of meaning with a specific aim or objective in mind.

Salami (1987) observes that communication is one means through which organized activity may be identified, behaviour modified, change effected, productivity enhanced and goals achieved, if properly conceived, designed, delivered to the right target and judiciously followed up to ensure that its purpose is achieved. Demake cited in Odetoyinbo (1998, p. 33) recommends four key questions about any communication situation:

1. To whom am I speaking?

As a communicator, there is the need to know whom your messages are meant for. The messages being communicated should not be seen as directly to the recipient alone, but sometimes, to others who will eventually see or have to act upon it or be guided by it. Therefore, the sender of the message must ensure that he knows who he is communicating with.

2. What is the value of communication?

Value here can be likened to the relevance of the message. What will the message actually do for the receiver? Odetoyinbo (1998) says that value is more important than the purpose and the value is most often different from the purpose. Remember, the purpose of the communication is to persuade and affect behaviour while value is the benefit that is derived from communication.

3. What is the point of conclusion?

This requires that the sender should give the receiver the substance of the whole communication (that is, what it is all

about). This helps the receiver understand the message quickly.

4. Can the substance of the whole message be immediately grasped by the receiver through skimming?

Conceptual Clarification

What is Strategy?

Strategy or to be strategic is a high-level plan to achieve one or more goals under conditions of certainty. Strategy generally involves setting goals, determining actions to achieve the goals, and mobilizing resources to execute the actions. It is also a consciously and purposefully developed plan, a pattern in a stream of actions, a position which is defined with respect to a competitor where there are many competitors or with respect to markets as well as a perspective, that is, a certain mindset as to how to perceive the world. Alfred Chandler (1962), defines strategy as the determination of the basic long-term goals of an enterprise, and the adoption of courses of action and the allocation of resources necessary for carrying out the goals.

Henry Mintzberg defines strategy as a pattern in a stream of decisions to contrast with a view of strategy as planning. He further explains strategy to mean the following:

- Strategy is a plan directing the course of an action to achieve an intended set of goals.
- Strategy is a pattern of past behaviour, with a strategy realized over time rather than planned or intended.
- Strategy as a position aims at locating brands, products, or companies within the market, based on the conceptual framework of consumers or other stakeholders.
- Strategy is a ploy or specific maneuver intended to outwit a competitor.
- Strategy is a perspective in executing based on natural extension of the mindset of an organization.

The four types of objectives in a strategy include the following: organization objectives, communication strategy objectives, communication objectives and the tactic objective.

Communication Strategy Objectives

Communication strategies, systems, and practices do play a central role in high-performance. Information, understanding, and knowledge are the lifeblood of the organizational body. A thoughtful and comprehensive communication strategy is a vital component to any successful change and improvement. The communication strategy sets the tone and direction of improvement efforts. Effective strategy links to organizational goals. Aligned strategies tend to enhance organizational performance. Communication strategies influence the energy levels for change and improvement. Strong communications keep everyone focused on goals and priorities while providing feedback on progress. Effective communication strategies, systems, and practices have a huge and direct effect on organization learning and innovation.

Communication is an integral part of the organizational process as the flow of communication up and down the organizational hierarchy has its effects on efficiency, decision-making and morale of organizations. Thus, effective communication is regarded as the foundation of organizations today (Witherspoon, 1997; Von Krogh et al.,

2000). Communication strategies are common in the business world, where they are used as part of a business plan, detailing how to communicate with various groups of people. A single business may have multiple strategies for different categories of people, such as clients, investors, competitors or employees. Some companies even have an internal communication strategy for communicating within the business itself. These strategies are used to determine things like what information to share with the clients or investors, as well as how that information should be presented. Communication strategy articulates, explains and promotes a vision and a set of well-defined goals. It creates a consistent, unified "voice" that links diverse activities and goals in a way that appeals to your partners, or stakeholders. According to the World Bank, (2001), "ultimate goal of communication is to facilitate a change in behavior to achieve management objectives". Communication is both a symptom and a cause of organization performance problems. Poorly designed organizations, ineffective processes, bureaucratic systems, unaligned rewards, unclear customer/partner focus, fuzzy visions, values, and purpose, unskilled team leaders and members, cluttered goals and priorities, low trust levels, weak measurements and feedback loops all causes of organizational performance problems.

To achieve good communications in an organization, management needs a strategy for its formal channels. The implementation of this strategy needs to be supported by continuous education and training in communication techniques and awareness. This should be also regular reappraisals of the way the communication systems of the organization are usually working. In taking decisions, about the design and operation of the formal communications system, the way they may actually work out and the impact of the inevitable informal communications should not be overlooked. There are four main areas in which decisions need to be taken and where problems can arise:

- **Awareness:** People need to be aware of the need to communicate.
- **Content:** People do not know what should be communicated.
- **Method:** People do not know how to communicate in the most effective manner.
- **Facilities:** Adequate channels for communication should be available. Strategy is the result of skillful planning. (Wofford, 1977). Obviously, the essence of communication strategy objectives is to avoid crisis or uproar.

Communication Objectives

Communication is an integral part of the organizational process as the flow of communication through the organizational hierarchy has its effects on efficiency, decision-making and morale of organization's stakeholders. Thus, effective communication is regarded as the foundation of organizations today (Witherspoon, 1997; Von Krogh et al., 2000). Communication strategies are common in the business world, where they are used as part of a business plan, detailing how to communicate with various groups of people. A single business may have multiple strategies for different categories of people, such as clients, investors, competitors or employees. It is the culture of some companies to have an internal communication strategy for communicating within the organization. These strategies are

used to determine things such as what information to share with the both the internal and external publics of the organization, as well as how that information should be presented. Communication strategy articulates, explains and promotes a vision and a set of well-defined goals. It creates a consistent, unified “voice” that links diverse activities and goals in a way that appeals to your partners, or stakeholders. Communication needs to be goal-driven. We do not communicate for its own sake: we communicate to achieve or change something. Public Relations tactics such as press releases, events and media relations activities can be straightforward to organize; the skill lies in ensuring that something useful happens as a result. Communications objectives need to be clearly defined, detailed, achievable and measurable. A good communications plan defines how the strategy will be expressed through practical public relations activities. It brings together in one document all of the fundamental ideas that should be driving communications, including objectives, audiences, messages, and an overview of how your goals will be achieved. Describe how communication affects team processes and outcomes. communication objectives determine the following:

- Describe how communication affects team processes and outcomes.
- Define effective communication.
- Identify communication challenges.
- Identify tools and strategies that can improve a team’s communication

Strategic Communication

Strategic communication is a high-level organizational communication plan with set goals or objectives, predetermined actions, and mobilizing resources to achieve them. According to Thomas and Stephens (2015), strategic communication is an emerging area of study in the communication and management social sciences. In other words, strategic communication sits at the intersection of communication and managerial efficiency. It is an intentional process of presenting ideas in a clear, concise, and persuasive way. A manager must make an intentional effort to master communication skills and use them strategically, that is, consistently with the organization’s values, mission, and strategy.

Emil Goldman, describes strategic communication “as a strategy influencing attitude and behaviour” (Koragoz,2015, p. 45). Strategic communication is not a passive, source-based communication process conveying the most favourable messages to the concerned audiences. Rather, it is an active communication process based on sharing determined messages with the public opinion in the frame of vision and goals, influencing and manipulating the perception of public opinion positively. Disciplines such as public relation, information management, the public diplomacy, the relation with media, perception and reputation management are used integrally in the strategic communication practices (Guncan, 2010, p. 105, in Ozkan, 2015).

Cinarli (2009) says, strategic communication is a notion that is generally used for describing the planned campaign. It means that tactical or planned communication is used for both business and other purposes. Argenti, Howell, and Beck (2005, p. 83) define strategic communication as,

“aligned with the company’s overall strategy, to enhance its deliberate positioning”. From the Public Relations perspective, it is described as “a bridging activity” between organizations that should be established.

Ozkan (2015) says, strategic communication; embodies planning, developing tactics, correcting coding to provide effective perception of the message, conveying the message to the target audience in the most smooth and effective way and using the most developed technology. These distinctive characteristics of strategic communication make it valuable and effective. Onat, cited in Ozkan (2015, p. 176) asserts that strategic communication has multi-dimensional structure and distinctive characteristics as follows:

- There is determined super- ordinate goal, target and a victory to gain that independent from communication processes.
- Communication tools are pre-planned with the messenger, message and message retriever.
- Alternative plans are studied to reach goals.
- Required tactic, methods and studies should be conveyed to have successful results after following determined strategy.
- The message is taken for the determined purpose. Perception, decoding and understanding should be controlled.
- The messenger should be prepared to convey the message properly.
- The most developed technology is used.
- The required measures are taken to prevent the use of message by unintended audience.

Why Strategic Communication?

Strategic communication aims to determine the weak rather than searching the solution after a problem emerges, to enhance and solve this at the beginning. It measures the effectiveness of messages conveyed to the target audiences and determine the perception level. Strategic communication emphasizes what to say, how to say it, when to say it, for what purpose and value. Its main aim is to avoid or minimize crisis rather than trying to manage it.

Jemison, cited in Thomas and Stephens (2005, p. 5) defines strategic communication as “the process by which the managers of organizations develop and use communication to co-align their organization’s competences, opportunities and constraints in the environment. Smircich & Stubbart (1985, p. 725) define strategic communication as “organization making- to create and maintain system of shared meaning that facilitate organized action”. Ozkan (2015) says, the reason strategic communication management is important is its guiding characteristic for determining “communication policies”. This decides the context of the message for the target audience as well as “What to say”.

Strategic communication is a living system. Strategic communication maximizes return on investment, forces disparate methodologies to work in unison and forces governance to protect assets. The strategic communication drive includes brand recognition, product recognition, customer acquisition and retention, employee recognition and retention, investor retention and reduction in outside influencers. Strategic communication enables measurable results and competitive advantage.

How to use Strategic Communication to achieve Managerial Efficiency

Knowing and creating the needed or required messages alone is not enough, it behooves on the strategic communicator to carve the messages such that its purposes and objectives will be achieved without causing crisis or pandemonium. Conveying the style about using all available vehicles or channels to get the messages across to the target audience is essential in strategic communication. Another way to use strategic communication is to ensure that short and core messages are patterned or arranged such that the main objective or organizational ideology are clearly and precisely captured as well as functionalizing the messages; that is, making the messages work towards the attainment of managerial efficiency.

Diplomacy

Every strategic communication has all the elements of diplomacy. Diplomacy is simply said to be the practice or art of allowing and holding negotiations to address issues concerning nations, organizations, relationships and so on. Diplomacy is the main instrument which consists of the broader goals and strategies that guide an organization's interaction with its stakeholders. Nicolson, cited in Sarumi (2018) defines diplomacy as "an ordered conduct of relations between one group of human beings and another group alien to themselves". Diplomacy is simply said to be the practice or art of allowing and holding negotiations to address issues concerning nations, organizations, relationships and so on. Ikupolati (2018) says, "diplomacy is also a mode of behaviour, a way of doing business, a certain professional style.

The importance of the convergence between communication and diplomacy cannot be over emphasized because of the role each plays in the achievement of managerial efficiency. Tran (1987) states that Communication is to diplomacy as blood is to the human body. This shows the importance of communication and diplomacy. Diplomacy is the art and practice of conducting negotiations between representatives of nations, organizations, institutions and businesses. It entails influencing the decisions and conducts of affairs through dialogue, negotiation, and other non-violent means. Put differently, diplomacy is an area of specialty that focuses on the study of tactical intra and inter organizational relationships aimed to advance organization's interest without being confrontational. Therefore, is it possible to have an effective strategic communication without diplomacy? The answer is "no".

Diplomacy requires tact and the ability to effectively negotiate for the interest of an organization or a nation. Knowledge and experience are key in the principles and practice of diplomacy. Consequently, having the right knowledge and experience equip the diplomat with the much-needed expertise to navigate the complex and multifaceted sphere that is not only in international relations but also in intra and inter organizational relationships. Diplomacy fosters strategic and tactical interactions and engagement among organizations.

Management

The meaning of management is multi-dimensional. Therefore, to give a precise definition, there is the need to examine the various aspects. Taylor (1911), emphasis is on engineering aspects. Mayo (2004), looks at it from the

human relation aspects. Davis (1951) focuses on the leadership angle. Richman (1987) stresses the integration and coordination aspects. These scholars summed up the diverse aspects of management; according to Taylor (1911), "management is the art of knowing what you want to do and then seeing that they do it in the best and cheapest manner". Terry says, "management is a distinct process consisting of planning, organizing, actuating, and controlling; utilizing both science and arts, and followed in order to accomplish pre-determined". Drucker (1974) states that "management is a multi-purpose organ that manages a business and manage managers and manages workers and work". Nile (2007) defines management as, "Good management, scientific management, achieves a social objective with the best use of human and material energy and time, and with satisfactions for the participants and the public".

Different scholars from diverse disciplines view management as follows. The sociologists view managers as part of the class elites in the society. the bureaucrats see it as a system of authority to achieve business goals. Management and leadership author describe the seven habits of management and leadership for personal and business growth. These Habits are: be proactive, begin with the end in mind, put first things first, think win-win, seek first to understand and then to be understood, synergize, and learn from previous experience. Management forecasts, plans, organizes, commands, coordinates and controls the activities of others in order to achieve management objectives.

Considering the ideas, views and opinions of these various scholars, management can simply be defined as the science and arts of putting into a systematic relationship all the elements or resources (men, money, machines, time and so on) which are essential for the achievement or satisfaction of a given purpose or goals by planning, fostering, coordinating and controlling the various departments of an organization. It entails combining all human actions such as labour, land, capital and organization to achieve a defined objective.

The communication must be tactical in order to achieve efficiency. Diplomacy is the communication system of the international society. The same applies to people within an organization which forms management. The primary goal of diplomacy is to prevent violence and maintain normal communication. Management entails human activities which are driven by communication. Therefore, strategic communication is more than the simple everyday communication efforts (Ozkan, 2015). It involves tactical and practical application of all communication skills with a specific goal in mind. It also involves a systematic follow up on the communication messages delivered to ensure that the information is not only received and understood, but that all the directives or instructions are also carried out to the letter.

It is noteworthy that in strategic communication, every thing said or not said communicates something. In the same light, everything we do and everything we do not do also communicates something. Therefore, strategic communication experts should understand that proactive and reactive messages or information must be handled with every sense of tact. In an organization, the expectations of both the internal and external publics are very high. It is important that such expectations are not met with disappointments. A prolonged silence about issues of mutual interest or issues that positively or negatively affect

the stakeholders or publics of an organization. Strategic communication addresses these and more. Taking into cognizance what to say, when to say it and how to say it and to whom are very important aspects of strategic communication.

Conclusion/Recommendations

Strategic communication skills for managerial efficiency has been extensively discussed, highlighting how strategic communication skills can be deployed to achieve efficiency in the management of an organization. Following the preceding explanations, strategic communication and diplomacy are like two sides of a coin that cannot be separated but, must be used together for achievement of managerial efficiency. Without efficiency, organizational objectives cannot be attained.

The paper has also established that strategic communication is an indispensable tool or skill for managerial efficiency and that it is wiser and more cost effective to minimize or prevent crisis in an organization than trying to manage it. Therefore, when effectively or judiciously utilized in an organization, the end result of strategic communication is managerial efficiency which brings about organizational growth. This is the hallmark of every result-oriented management which must be put into use by all managers of organizations.

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