AUDITING THE COMUNICATION PROCESS IN A PRIVATE HOTEL

Liviu ROŞCA[1], Constantin BUNGĂU[2]

[1]"Lucian Blaga" University of Sibiu, Department of Economic-Engineering
[2]"University of Oradea", Department of Systems Engineering
e-mail: liviu.rosca@ulbsibiu.ro, bungau@uoradea.ro

Abstract: The paper presents the process of auditing the communication process in a new private hotel located in Sibiu city. Asked by the management of the company, the auditing process has been intended to provide answers to the registered deficiencies observed in the company and to allow an objective evaluation of the problems. By monitorizing the communication environment, the relationships among parts, the feedback and establishing measures and strategies, the paper reflects the results and recommendation of the study.

1. PRELIMINARY CONSIDERATIONS

The system approach of a company states that there should be a permanent change of information among its components if a company wishes to perform adequately [7]. Similarly, in the communication process the message containing information creates a relationship between the broadcaster and the receiver [3].

Van Kamm [6] states that the partners in a communication process participate also on a communication market. Is the market where the offer and demand meet, establishing on the spot needs and possibilities of negotiation and change. Therefore we may define the concept of communication market consisting of an information market and of an interest market.

Business communication is a complex process which concerns technical, organizational, psychological, economy and even ecology aspects of organization life. Therefore, the business objectives are highly dependent of the existing information quantity, quality, structure and opportunity.

Studying the business communication efficiency, the researchers have stated that the communication problems come all over the place: the broadcaster, the receiver and environment [3], [1]. More, to communicate is not simply to share information but also an attitude and emotions understanding of both sides. There are many situations in which people do not express in words what they really believe or feel about a subject. Albert Mehrabian [9] showed that verbal communication counts only 7%, vocal communication is 38% and visual component has 55%.

Based on these, the following recommendations have been issued for the managers regarding their employee relationships:
- to use more than one communication channels;
- to sequence the information flow;
- to offer continuous information of employees;
- to maintain a sincere message from top to bottom;
- to open the communication channels;
- to encourage the interchange of messages;
- to positive enforce the employees;
- to encourage the creativity;
- to publicly acclaim and privately offer criticism;

- to maintain a rigorous discipline.

Following the above recommendations, together with motivation and control, a healthy environment may be created.

Every organization can choose the communication means. The option is based on the "information ability". Daft and Lengel [2] define the system information ability as the measure in which the system determines the personnel to accept a change.

Communication depends also on the organizational climate. Haney [4] says that a good organization performs assuring a climate according to the needs of its members.

The achievement of organization objectives depends strongly by the information quantity, quality, structure, and opportunity and how efficient managers communicate this information. If they fail, all the organization suffers. On the other hand, often managers over estimate the communication accuracy and under estimate the communication barriers.

Rosemary Stewart [10], studying how managers spend their time, established that the 160 managers questionned more than 2/3 spent their time working with other people. The rest of their time was spend individually, mostly writing reports. So it may seem reasonable to say that most of the managerial time is spent communicating one way or another. Even the 33 low level managers said that more than 50% of their time was spent working with others. Therefore, managers should be able to communicate effectively to perform their tasks. However, not all the managers perceive correctly the importance of effective communication and do not see the complexity and importance of this process and the effects over their employee motivation, morale and work satisfaction.

The main communication barriers are mostly human related. The analysis of managerial practices [9] indicated that most of the communication barriers come from managers in first place, then employee and thirdly from the both parties auscultation skills. This is the reason of auditing first the organization personnel attitude about the communication network using interviews and questionnaires in order to improve later their communication skills. It is important for a company and its managers to find out the communication obstacles, the blocked communication lines, where distortions appear and why, etc.

The experience has shown that the way in which managers communicate like individuals, the organization policy regarding communication, the communication strategies in place, and the employee communication habits may have a positive or negative cumulative effect which affects the entire organization communication climate. Therefore managers should carefully select their messages and the messages presentation and they should also get feedback about how well their messages have been received and understood. In this respect, the managers should follow the main basic principles:

- to adapt the information level and quantity based on the person who gets it and her responsibilities;
- to plan and organize activities in advance;
- to create a friendly environment for a good communication;
- to identify the communication barriers and instruct the employees on them;
- to check the accuracy of the received message, using the feedback;
- to monitor what happens when action takes place.

The organization communication research has identified the following dependencies:

- there is a strong relationship between the communication quality and quantity and the organization performances;
- There is a strong correlation between the good communication satisfaction and the organization efficiency;

- There is a correlation between the communication climate and the individual creativity and between the communication climate and the communication commitment.

The communication climate is one of the defining elements of the organizational culture. The organizational culture may be evaluated using the following criteria:

- The participation to the decision making process;
- The communication sincerity or openness;
- The communication quality that circulates in the organization;

Therefore to evaluate the communication climate we should find out:

- The management perception about communication openness;
- The employee perception about the communication process and its quality;
- The employee perception about top-down communication;
- The level of trust of the employee generated information.

The literature defines two extreme forms of communication climate: a defensive approach and a cooperation (collaboration) approach [3].

The above-mentioned issues have formed the theoretical basis to the diagnosis analysis performed in Hotel Panoramia, from Sibiu, regarding the communication process.

2. HOTEL PANORAMIA – A SHORT DESCRIPTION

The Hotel "Panoramia[1]" has been built in year 2000. The organization consists of a hotel, a restaurant, a beerhouse, a night bar, a swimming pool, an opened-air beer garden, and a parking place. The hotel is dedicated to business tourism, but is opened to any other form of tourism. The hotel occupancy rate was between 60 to 70% in the last years, which means a good rate. The tariffs are about the business average. They vary between 35 and 89 EUROS/day based on the services offered. At the moment of study the hotel employed 43 people.

The hotel has a non-stop reception service which assures not only the room rental but also some complimentary or supplementary services like baggage transportation and manipulation, fast carrier, exchange office, brokerage, commercial services and many other services like cloth washing and ironing, car parking, supplementary room equipment acquisition, etc.

The hotel offers also recreation services through its fitness room, swimming pool and sauna. It may also organize receptions, reunions, contests and any other festivity activities. In general, the business is interested in selling services and not merely room rentals. Therefore, the hotel should be viewed not only as a hardware system, but through its environment and human participation as a software system too.

All the hotel personnel has been instructed toward a continuous quality improvement which presumes a better understanding of all hotel related activities like: a) selling the service; b) prepare and greet the tourist; c) monitor the tourist sojourn; d) help tourist to leave the hotel. In all these activities, the human factor is very important. The hotel management is looking for the improvement and optimization of the hotel activities, which means the seeking of all the implied factors and their relationships. It is believed that the clients' satisfaction degree is dependent of the social micro and macro-climate, which determines a better understanding of the human side of hotel activities, in their sociological and psychological perspectives.

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[1] To protect the organization, this is not the real name of the hotel.

3. THE COMMUNICATION DIAGNOSIS ANALYSIS PERFORMED IN HOTEL PANORAMIA

The diagnosis analysis has performed the identification of the deficiencies registered in the communication process and allowed an objective evaluation of these problems. The analysis comprised all the personnel, even though some questionnaires have been addressed to the management only.
The following phases have been addressed:
- The evaluation of the communication levels;
- The evaluation of the meetings efficiency;
- The analysis of the information flows;
- The analysis and diagnosis of the managerial communication climate;
- The identification of the managerial roles.

3.1. The evaluation of the communication levels

In order to evaluate the communication levels, each manager (on all levels) has been asked to fulfil a questionnaire (Seven questionnaires in total). The results, together with their suggestions are shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Question	Answer
1. I tend to presume that all the people around me always understand what I am talking about?	Yes – 71% No – 29%
2. It happens not to think logically and communicate clearly what I want to.	Yes – 43% No – 57%
3. Sometimes I miss the needs and interests of those around me, even then when I try to gain their attention.	Yes – 86% No – 14%
4. Sometimes I create a bad impression due to the wrong appreciation of the effects of my behaviour.	Yes – 43% No – 57%
5. Sometimes I have the tendency to listen only what I want to hear about?	Yes – 86% No – 14%
6. Usually I let the others the "pleasure" to discover what I mean in my speech.	Yes – 57% No – 43%
Suggestions: You're making progresses if …	
1. … you accept that people sometimes understand your words wrongfully.	
2. … you try to think clearly and logically before you communicate anything. Only who tries succeeds.	
3. … you realize that is important to take care of the others needs and interests, in order to capture their attention.	
4. … you agree that a better first impression (aspect, vocabulary, punctuality, etc.) facilitates better follow up communication.	
5. … you are determined to try to listen more and correctly.	
6. … you understand the necessity of others to perceive your messages correctly.	

The questionnaire has shown that there are perceived deficiencies regarding the communication on two levels: the receiver and the message level. The discussions based on these results have made the employees conscious of the importance of such elements as message encoding and decoding and type of messages (verbal, vocal and visual).

3.2 The evaluation of the meetings efficiency

The interviews of the meetings participants have generally revealed a large diversity of opinions, sometimes very critical, regarding the meetings organization. Opinions like: "I would rather not participated to this meeting and it would have been the same" (Chief of Reception), "There are a lot of meetings that have no connection with my activities" (The Chief of Human Resources) or "I do not see any benefits of such meetings (A Clerk) are very common in this organization. Therefore the following measures have been issued:
- The meetings are planned and announced well in advanced;
- Every meeting has and agenda and well-established goals;
- Only those involved in the agenda are participating;
- Every participant is granted the right to speak and encouraged to do it;
- The participants who come up with new ideas and suggestions are awarded if their contribution is effective;
- The clash of ideas should be encouraged and not the clash of personalities.

3.3. The analysis of the information flows

The analysis of the information flows has been done using the following methods:
a) observing a work place;
b) observing the message trail among the work places;
c) studying the information networks.

The use of the above methods has shown that some messages go on a very sinuous trail from the initial sender to the final receiver, sometimes much distorted and too late. Analysing the information network, we have observed that in only one department, the restaurant, there is a direct communication flow, which makes the communication more effective. Every employee of this department is well informed and offers feedback directly. In all other departments the indirect communication or network (multiple star connections) communication flows exists. These flows could seem more efficient but the message could be easily distorted.

To solve these problems, the following immediate measures have been issued:
- short meetings are organized every day. All the managers are invited to discuss the previous day problems, how they have been solved, how the tasks have been delegated and how feedback has been assured;
- each day, the in and out document folder is presented to the general manager;
- the workplace file has been updated, to state more clearly every responsibility and tasks;
- the organizational rules file has been updated;
- a new information flow model has been developed for the hotel.

3.4. The analysis and diagnosis of the managerial communication climate
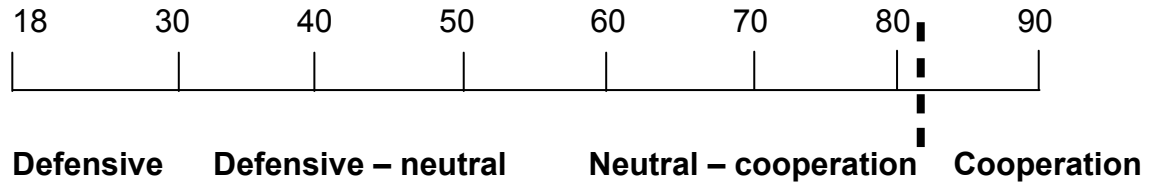
In order to identify the managerial communication climate, the auditors have used the J.W. Pfeiffer and L.D. Goldstein questionnaire, presented in ""The 1984 Annual: Developing human resources", San Diego 1984.

The visual analysis for the scores distribution for the defensive climate items and for the cooperation climate items has revealed no need for further complex analysis.
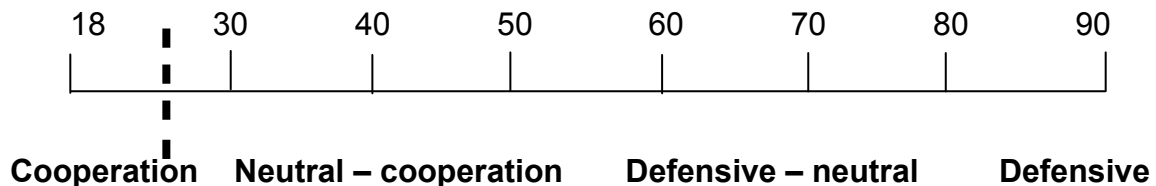
In this respect, the total scores obtained by the subjects regarding the defensive climate have been: 84, 78, 86, 87, 81, 83, 82, 81, 80, 83, and 80. The computed average

is 82.27. For the cooperation climate items the total scores have been: 20, 27, 18, 24, 32, 28, 29, 29, 25, 28, and 25. The computed mean average is 25.90.

(a) The following figure illustrates the interpretation of the mean average of the defensive climate items:

18	30	40	50	60	70	80	90

Defensive   Defensive – neutral   Neutral – cooperation   Cooperation

(b) The following figure illustrates the interpretation of the mean average of the cooperation climate items:

18	30	40	50	60	70	80	90

Cooperation   Neutral – cooperation   Defensive – neutral   Defensive

Based on these mean averages the following conclusions have been issued:
- the communication climate at the organizational level is based on flexibility and transparency;
- the managers respect the employees' value systems. They avoid very critical attitudes towards their employees and promote both-way communication, working to diminish the differences based on hierarchy and status;
- the managers care constantly the employees' point of views. This thing determines an active personnel commitment to the company development.

To preserve this communication climate, the auditors have provided the following recommendations:
- the managers should work to maintain a positive psychological contract with their employees;
- a clear definition of expectations from each part should be realized;
- the managers should respect the strategy of using transparent policies and procedures, and extend the transparency of the decisional acts which affects the employees;
- the managers should identify, stimulate and award the professional personal commitment of individual.

Avoiding a defensive climate should be a sine qua non condition of every well working company. The defensive climate is stress generating and is acknowledged that stress is an important counter-productive factor in companies. Stress affects employee performance, working environment, the decision quality and even the physical and mental health. The stress symptoms look different in every person. The communication audit has revealed three important symptoms: a) emotional, b) physical and c) bad habits generators (alcohol usage, intense smoking, etc.)

An efficient and common way to find out more about stress factors and stress feedback is proper communication. The identification and recognition of the stress factors can help managers to become more tolerate in uncertain or ambiguous situations, to become better prepared to change and complex situations, which reclaim intellectual and

nervous effort. If managers can control stress, they could make better and accurate decisions, in very different and complex situations.

It is well-known that stressed people tend to diminish their discomfort. Unfortunately, most of the stress releasers produce negative effects on human bodies. In this respect, we have found that the main strategies to avoid stress have been: "run out like hell", "worried but inactive", "endless hesitation", "slow down activity", "strong feeling seeking", "free emotions expression", "passivity and laziness".

To prevent the above situations, the managers of Panoramia have organized training with all the employees. The important stress reduction methods have been presented them, combining immediate results methods like physical exercises and good breathing techniques with long-term stress reduction methods like sleeping programs, health nutrition, and personal body care. Also, important stress reduction strategies have been mentioned in place, like situation evaluation methods, negative thoughts decreasing, problem isolation and real problem source finding.

3.5. The identification of the managerial roles

Henry Mintzberg has identified three managerial roles, a manager is playing in an organization together with the specialists in information systems [8]. These three roles are:

(1) **The interpersonal role,** the leadership and liaison role for and among the employees, and between the inner and outer bounds of the company;

 (2) **The information role,** which recognizes the importance of information in the organization and in the managerial activities;

(3) **The decision-making role,** which recognizes the managers as decision creator.

A questionnaire has been distributed among the employees of Panoramia in order to find out the managerial roles based on Mintzberg model.

The analysis has revealed the weaknesses of the employees having managerial roles in the hotel. The following tables (Table 2, Table 3 and Table 4) are showing the qualifications, each manager has obtained based on this analysis.

Table 2

Interpersonal Roles	Figurehead	Leadership	Liaison role
Hotel Director	*	**	*
Chief Restaurant	+	~	**
Bar Manager	**	~	**
Human Resources Manager	***	~	**
Chief Accountant	~	~	~
Reception Manager	**	**	*
Food-Area Manager	**	**	***
Public Relations Manager	**	~	+

Table 3

Information Roles	Information Monitor	Information Disseminator	Public Spokesman
Hotel Director	+	*	**
Chief Restaurant	***	***	~
Bar Manager	***	**	~
Human Resources Manager	***	**	****
Chief Accountant	**	**	~
Reception Manager	**	**	**
Food-Area Manager	***	**	****
Public Relations Manager	+	*	**

Table 4

Decision-Making Roles	Entrepre-neur	Disturbances Handler	Human Resources Allocator	Negotiator
Hotel Director	*	**	*	***
Chief Restaurant	~	**	~	**
Bar Manager	~	***	~	*
Human Resources Manager	~	**	+	***
Chief Accountant	~	**	+	**
Reception Manager	~	**	**	***
Food-Area Manager	~	**	**	**
Public Relations Manager	~	**	~	***
Legend:	~ - it is not important for this function; + - has obtained the maximum available score for this role; * - inssufficient ** - not satisfying; *** - weak; **** - very weak.			

Based on these observations we have suggested the following measures:
- the Human Resources Managers and Food-Area Managers should be replaced by some other individuals;
- the Chief Restaurant, the Bar Manager and the Reception Managers have been advised about the deficiencies they present in their work and deadlines to overcome them have been proposed;
- each manager has been invited to participate together with the top management in important decision-making situations;
- the delegation should be sustained and promoted, especially in low-level decision situations, but with better planning and followed by thorough information sessions;
- the importance of each managerial role, as it appears in the Mintzberg model, should be presented to each employee;
- the managers will emphasize the importance of improving the information roles in order to:
  - create and develop new links and contacts with the stakeholders;
  - analyse periodically what is happing in the organization;
  - better transfer the information in the organization;
  - create notes, reports, memos, short information briefings, etc. so every person in the organization is well informed;
  - write letters and inform all the stakeholders about the company activities.

4. FINAL CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study allowed the managers to evidence the main communication process problems in their hotel. The analysis has monitorized efficiently the communication climate, the relationships and interactions, the feedback issues and, finally has lead to the establishment of the strategies and measures to improve and optimize the information

flows. Beside all the described measures, the recommendation to repeat annually the analysis and disseminate among the employee the results has been issued.

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