ORGANIZATIONAL COMMUNICATION PROBLEMS SURVEY

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Abstract: Communication underlies all aspects of organizational operations. Success of an organization depends on the quality and effectivity of its communication system. Problems in communication directly affect the efficiency and effectiveness of the organization. In this paper, we present the results of research that was conducted in the period from 2008-2010 on the sample of 8605 employed respondents in the Republic of Serbia. Parts of the research that refer to problems in organizational communication are presented in this paper.

1. INTRODUCTION

Character, extent and forms of communication in organizations, but also the significance that was given to it, changed through time. By the 1930's of the previous century, the communications in organizations mostly had an informal character. Then, it comes to a sudden growth of presence of formal communication, primarily downward communication, as a consequence of increasing the complexity of organizations. Efficient communication is not only a need today, but it is also a challenge which the organizations are faced with. The first studies of communication in organizations were led by business organizations in the USA and countries of Western Europe, which had the need to study and improve their processes. On the territory of former Yugoslavia, the first studies of communication in organizations have been carried out in recent years. Standardized instruments for measurement and evaluation of characteristics of communication in organizations still do not exist on our territory. Studies that will examine the connections between communication and organization's characteristics, such as innovativity, knowledge management, conflicts management, changes management, will have to wait until the instruments for examining communication in organizations are developed.

2. ORGANIZATIONAL COMMUNICATION

Communication in organizations is a process of transferring information within formal and informal organization's structure and the foundation of its connection to the environment. Process of organizational communication is based on sending and receiving the messages and the feedback. Communication in organizations can also be observed as the function of organizations. The goal of this function is for the entire organizational communication to be aimed towards relevant target audiences, both internal and external (integrated organizational communication). Depending on the type of target audiences in question, we can distinguish two sub-functions. Communication that is aimed towards internal groups is mirror sub-function, and the one aimed at external target groups has the window sub-function.[1] Achievement of coordinated action is also one of the key functions of communication in organizations. The purpose of communication in organizations is to direct the action and make the others to act is a desired way. Individuals and groups in organizations need to coordinate their efforts and activities carefully. Communication is the key that underlies these attempts to coordinate. Without it, people would not know what to do and organizations wouldn't be able function efficiently, or they wouldn't be able to function at all. [2] Coordinated activity is achieved by systematic exchange of information. The interpersonal aspect of communication in organization shouldn't be neglected, and its

focus is on social relations that exist among the people (for e.g. making friends, creating confidence and acceptance). There are a few principles of communication in organization: 1) communication channels must be defined and well-known, 2) everyone needs to inform somebody and everyone must be subordinate to somebody, 4) communication line must be as shorter as possible, 5) established lines of communication should be used, communication line cannot be broken, 6) every communication must be confirmed. [3] Without open communication that implies a clear and precise formulation of what we want, sharing of the interpretations of realities, vision and knowledge is impossible. Organizational communication is „the essence of organization" and „social glue" that keeps all organization's parts together. [2]

3. ROLE AND MAIN CHARACTERISTICS OF COMMUNICATION IN ORGANIZATION

Communication underlies all forms of organizational operations. It affects the effectiveness of organization and achievement of its mission, vision and goals. All work processes in an organization are conditioned by quality and effectiveness of communication system. In organizational system, communication is a structure that affects the other structures where people appear as the elements of the observed systems. This structure shows the relations and roles of participants in decision-making. Basic characteristics of communication in organization are quality and effectiveness. Quality of communication in organization and quality of performance in the work process are directly related. In work processes, the participants work significantly more efficient and with greater pleasure if, besides complete comprehension of their own work, through communication system have good information about the work of entire group, department and organization. Lack of understanding, reduction of interests and overall effects in work is caused by inappropriate communication system. Quality of communication process in organization is determined by content of messages and responses, communication procedures, communication networks and intensity of communication. Effective communication can be defined as a process of forming and sending messages in a way that will enable the recipient to understand the meaning of the message. It is based on interpersonal understanding, abandoning pre-accepted prejudices and assumptions and understanding someone else's opinion.

4. COMMUNICATION FLOWS IN ORGANIZATIONS

Organization's structure affects the communication process and refers to officially prescribed scheme of interrelations that exist between various units within an organization. [2] Organizations are arranged in ways that dictate who can and who cannot communicate to whom. Every person in organization has responsibilities towards someone who is at a higher level and with whom it is related. Simultaneously, people are responsible (or they issue orders) to those who are subordinate to them.

Within formal and informal communication channels in organizations, we recognize the following flows: 1) **upward communication** – from lower to higher levels, 2) **downward communication** – from higher to lower levels, 3) **horizontal communication** – between the people at the same level, 4) **communication on the relation system – environment.**

Upward communication, i.e., communication in the direction subordinates – superior, implies the flow of information from lower to higher levels of hierarchical structure of organizations. This type of communication enables managers to be informed about what

takes place at lower levels of hierarchical structure. The information about work abilities of subordinates, reports on the effects of their work, messages of subordinates about the possibilities of improvement of the working process, also flow in the upward direction. These flows include attitudes, opinions, comments, complaints and requests of workers. Upward communication is used for clarification of orders, policy or procedures, for planning, directing and control of work results. It was established that upward communication occurs much less frequently than downward communication. Grinberg and Baron mentioned a study that has found that even 70% of workers on the assembly line start a conversation with their superiors once per month, at most. The other studies have revealed that merely 15% of managers' communication goes to communicating with the bosses. And also, when people are engaged in upward communication, their conversations are shorter than when they discuss with the people of the same level.[14] Problems that can occur in upward communication are: emergence of inaccuracies (workers emphasize their qualities and reduce the mistakes), hesitation while reporting some bad news (Mum effect), concealment of important new, regardless whether they are good or bad.

Downward communication, i.e., communication in the direction superior – subordinate contains the determination of organization's policy (information about policy and goals of organization), standard instructions for the subordinates (directives and instructions how and when something should be done) determined by organization's policy, procedures, jobs description, statements, reports, instructions, suggestions, information for understanding particular tasks, information about necessary work results, characteristics of products or services, evaluation of work characteristics – performance, quality, behaviour, requirements for participation in studying the possibilities of improving work process etc. Directives and instructions, aimed at the subordinate, initiate action, inform individuals about their tasks and activities. Downward communication will be realized if the subordinate can or wants to understand the message, if he believes in it, if he is able to understand the message (mentally and physically) and believes that the message is in accordance with his interests or the interests of the organization. The messages that go downward, especially if the information is uttered, going through various levels, often become less precise. In order to avoid imprecision, we apply direct communication with a person that the message refers to the most (for e.g. meetings of smaller groups and organizational publications meant for specific groups).

Horizontal or lateral communication takes place at the same horizontal level between the functions of organization, departments and workplaces. In horizontal communication, people from the same level are engaged. Communication is easier, friendly intonated and it is established more rapidly because there are very few social barriers between the persons engaged. Having in mind that formal organizational structure does not contain lateral communication channels, the need for communication at the same level is often neglected in real conditions of organizations. Horizontal communication is of informal character and it enables an increased degree of understanding the organization's policy. Problem that can occur in horizontal communication is development of antagonist spirit among the people, competition over valuable organizational resources.

Communication on the relation system – environment implies communication between organization (managers, workers) and environment, i.e. market, government agencies, local community, banks, development institutions, legal institutions, media, associates etc.

5. RESEARCH RESULTS

The sample consists of 8605 employees in organizations in the territory of Serbia. Of that number, 4119 respondents are male and 4485 respondents are female subjects, while one respondent has not declared anything on the issue of gender. In total, 2297 respondents were employed in organizations that have up to 10 workers, 1498 respondents work in organizations that have from 10 to 30 employees. 1861 respondents work in organizations that have from 30 to 100 workers, and 2947 work in organizations with 100 and more employees. 4505 respondents are employed in private organizations. In public sector, 1737 of them work, 1737 of them work in state service. Distribution of the observed set, depending on the education degree, is the following: respondents with elementary or secondary school - 4804 (55,8%), with college education - 1929 (22,4%), with university degree - 1683 (19,6%) and the respondents with MA or PhD - 150 i.e. 1,7%.

Within the research that we carried out in 2007 [5], the respondents were asked two questions of open type – *Identify key problems in communication of organization in which you work, Identify suggestions for the improvement of organizational communication in organization in which you are employed.* Based on the answers obtained, two closed lists were created that we have used in this research. Respondents could circle up to five answers that they consider key problems in communication in organization in which they work. On the list with offered solutions, the respondents were also allowed to choose up to five different answers.

23121 responses were obtained in total, i.e. more than 2,6 answers per one respondent. We can see that seven statements with the highest frequency refer to characteristics, habits and behaviour of employees, and the answer that refers to the very organization – i.e. its organizational structure is at the eighth place. In addition, if we observe the mentioned seven statements, we can observe that no statement except for the second one (Lack of management's interest for communication with employees) does not refer to any particular communication channel, but to the relations with employees.

Table 1 shows the results that represent frequencies of answers obtained from the part of respondents, while Table 2 shows the recommendations for improvement of communication in organization.

69,7% of respondents believe that there are persons in organization that will, for the sake of acquiring personal gain, conceal the information. 59,5% or respondents agree with the statement that there is a colleague in the organization who usually does all the opposite from what he speaks. 70,8% claim that they do not like to rely much on the others, but they prefer to do their job independently (only 12.7% have the opposite opinion).

Results of crossing the variables:

By crossing the variables, we have determined that there is a statistically significant difference in employees' attitudes, depending on organization's size:
1. In terms of avoiding public presentation of opinions at the meetings. As the number of employees in organization grows bigger, it comes to the emergence of restraint from public presentation of the opinions.
2. Regarding the statement that there are persons in the organization, who will, for their personal gain, conceal the information. As the number of employees in an organization grows – the number of respondents who agree with the attitude mentioned also grows.
3. Regarding the statement that there are persons in organization that usually do all the opposite from what they speak. This characteristic is directly proportional to organization's size.

Table 1. Problems in communication – respondents' answers

Answer	Frequency of answers	Percentage	Cumulative percentage
1. Disrespect, non-listening and intolerance of interlocutor	1835	7,94%	7,94%
2. Lack of management's interest for communication with employees	1489	6,44%	14,38%
3. Dishonesty in communication	1449	6,27%	20,64%
4. Machinations, vanity, personal contacts, envy, cynicism	1428	6,18%	26,82%
5. Mutual mistrust of employees	1301	5,63%	32,45%
6. Bad, anti-collegial or disturbed relations	1225	5,30%	37,74%
7. Indifference of others for cooperation and teamwork	1186	5,13%	42,87%
8. Complex or inefficient organizational structure	1171	5,06%	47,94%
9. Employees are overburdened with work	1145	4,95%	52,89%
10. Lack of downward communication	1142	4,94%	57,83%
11. Fear of possible consequences due to honest communication	1127	4,87%	62,70%
12. Negligence, carelessness, laziness and ignorance	1107	4,79%	67,49%
13. Disrespect of employees by management	1024	4,43%	71,92%
14. Lack of communication skills of management and employees	922	3,99%	75,91%
15. Slowness in communication	907	3,92%	79,83%
16. Lack of communication at all levels	861	3,72%	83,56%
17. Hiding the information from employees	530	2,29%	85,85%
18. Problems in horizontal communication	497	2,15%	88,00%
19. Problems in external communication	485	2,10%	90,10%
20. Too many reports	427	1,85%	91,94%
21. Spreading rumours	358	1,55%	93,49%
22. Inconsistency	313	1,35%	94,84%
23. Employment by party lines and kinship	267	1,15%	96,00%
24. Disorganization	223	0,96%	96,96%
25. Technical problems	175	0,76%	97,72%
26. Personality complexes of others	160	0,69%	98,41%
27. Unclear policy and business goals of organization	115	0,50%	98,91%
28. Inability of employees to advance within organization	112	0,48%	99,39%
29. Disguise of the urgent problems	78	0,34%	99,73%
30. Lack of meetings held	62	0,27%	100,00%

Table 2. Suggestions for improving the communication in organization

Suggestions	Frequency of answers	Percentage	Cumulative percentage
1. Change of organizational structure and better work organization	938	10,10%	10,10%
2. Everyone need to work on themselves individually	860	9,26%	19,36%
3. Meetings should be shorter and held more frequently	663	7,14%	26,50%
4. Education related to communication	589	6,34%	32,85%
5. Encouraging informal socializations between employees	567	6,11%	38,95%
6. Empowerment, rewards, motivation, stimulation of employees	553	5,96%	44,91%
7. It is necessary to fulfil the agreed	551	5,93%	50,84%
8. Increase the standard of employees	523	5,63%	56,47%
9. Replace political staff and bring professional staff	515	5,55%	62,02%
10. More precise definition of the role of each employee	442	4,76%	66,78%
11. Improve communication between superiors and subordinates	431	4,64%	71,42%
12. Reconcile those who quarrelled – bring positive energy	407	4,38%	75,80%
13. Public, systematic and accurate informing	373	4,02%	79,82%
14. Encouraging teamwork	354	3,81%	83,63%
15. Abolition of repression to those who speak the truth	340	3,66%	87,29%
16. Improvement of technical equipment	311	3,35%	90,64%
17. Abolition of medium management layer	307	3,31%	93,95%
18. Define clear goals of organization	284	3,06%	97,01%
19. Management should provide an example to the employees	278	2,99%	100,00%

4.   Regarding the statement that organization is open and honest in communication with its employees. With the growth of organization's size, the number of respondents who do not agree with this statement also grows.

5.   Regarding the statement that among the employees there are those who are ready to present somebody's idea as their own for the sake of acquiring personal gain. With the growth of organization's size, the percentage of respondents who believe that among employees there are those who are ready to present somebody's idea as their own in order the acquire personal gain is growing bigger.

6.   Regarding the statement that envy, vanity and hypocrisy are the characteristics of employees in organization in which they work. With the growth of organization's size, the percentage of respondents who agree with this statement is growing bigger.

7.   In terms of confidence in the superior. With the growth of organization's size, the percentage of respondents that have complete confidence in their superiors grows smaller.

6. CONCLUSION

If we start from the assumption that the key of successful communication is establishment of good, fair relations between communicators, flexibility of personality, effective listening, interest for the subject of communication and for the interlocutor, at the same time, then we should not be surprised by the fact that the most frequent problem in communication within organization is precisely the lack of that type of relations. The most frequent problems in communication in organizations, which we identified during the research, are *Disrespect, non-listening and intolerance of interlocutor.* Non-listening implies a passive participation in communication process, unwillingness of interlocutor to hear, understand, think about what he has heard and to send an adequate feedback. It is followed by misunderstanding and, therefore, the inability of understanding as well. Misunderstanding is a result of non-listening, disrespect and intolerance. Having in mind that the problem *Lack of management's interest for communication with employees* is in the second place on the list by frequency of appearance, we can conclude that one of the most expressed negative characteristics of organizational communication in the Republic of Serbia is non-effectiveness of downward communication, i.e. disinterest of management for employees, their opinions, attitudes and problems in work. This problem indicates the lack of responsibility of management towards employees. If we consider the other problems that most frequently appear in communication with organizations, we will see that they refer to personality traits, such as vanity, envy, cynicism and behaviours that are expressed in communication – machinations, conflicts development. Thus, the problems identified refer not only to underdevelopment of downward communication flow, but also the relations between the employees. Relations observed can be characterized as bad, dishonest, anti-collegial, disturbed, and the entire atmosphere in organization can be described as the atmosphere of non-confidence. When facing all these problems, we observe that bad communication climate, characterized by disrespect of moral values, such as confidence, dishonesty, truth, is a key obstacle to successful communication. Having in mind that moral of one community is, among other things, expressed in relations between the employees at all levels, we can say that ethical strength of the examined organizations is weak. Observation of these problems opens new research fields that will deal with the connection between communication and ethics of one organization. The first suggestion for the improvement of communication – *Change of organizational structure and better work organization* is in accordance with the number eight on the list of problems - *Complex or inefficient organizational structure.* If we accept Chester Barnard's statement

that *the structure, extent and scope of organization are almost always determined by its communication techniques* [2], the change of organizational structure necessarily requires the change of communication climate, introduction and improvement of communication techniques. Based on respondents' suggestion (the second one on the list) that for the improvement of communication it is necessary that everyone work on themselves and thus, we can conclude that each individual in responsible for the success of communication in organizations and, therefore, the success of the organization.

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