Organizational Culture through Employee Narratives: An Analysis of Internal Communication Practices

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Abstract

The manner of communication highly impacts the culture within an organization. It plays a pivotal role in shaping how employees view their workplace environment and level of engagement within the company. For example, when companies have open lines of communication in place, employees tend to grasp the values and norms that define the organization. However, in workplaces, there is often a disconnect between the desired culture and what employees experience, from the employees' perspective. This research aims to bridge this gap by examining how employees perceive culture based on their interactions with communication practices. Many studies emphasize the significance of communication in molding culture but sometimes overlook the insights offered by employees from their own experiences and perspectives, as seen in story-driven research works. This research employs a method focusing on narratives to explore spoken accounts from employees within a company to identify themes and trends in how internal communication influences the culture within the organization. The results indicate that employees' viewpoints can shed light on whether there is harmony or discordance with the organization's core values, which could highlight areas where transparency and inclusivity could be enhanced. The study's findings suggest ways to improve communication strategies that enhance employee experience within a culture and provide insights for organizations to align their projected culture with the employees' experiences.

Keywords: Organizational Culture, Internal Communication, Employee Narratives, Qualitative Research, Narrative Analysis

Introduction

Company culture is essential as it encompasses the shared values and behaviors that create the atmosphere within an organization. It greatly influences how employees behave and perform at work by aligning their efforts with the company objectives and promoting unity among team members (Schein, 1984). Communication within a company involves sharing information among its members. It shapes the workplace culture by influencing how employees view and engage with their work environment. Good communication fosters trust and unity among staff members, and studies indicate that organizations with internal communication practices tend to have more productive employees committed to their work (Argenti, 2003). Nevertheless, there is still much to learn about how these communication

methods shape culture within a company, from the perspective of its employees. This emphasizes the importance of exploring employees' personal stories to reveal their experiences within the culture.

Several studies have dwelt on company culture and internal communication methods in organizations. Take for example Czarniawska's work in 2004, which highlighted the importance of storytelling in analyzing organizations by pointing out that the employees' narratives provide insights into how people interpret company values and procedures. Likewise, Argyris and Schön's (1978) research delved into the learning concepts, proposing that a culture of transparent communication nurtures settings where learning and flexibility flourish. Despite making strides in studying how leadership and official communication tactics influence culture through the years, there is still a gap in understanding how employees view these practices. Current research often overlooks how employees carry out and look at internal communication, as many studies primarily focus on evaluations rather than looking into the perspectives of those at the grassroots level.

The current research aims to fill this void by investigating howemployees feel and perceive organizational culture through their stories while emphasizing communication methods in particular.Employee narratives offer valuable perspectives on the real culture within a company, showing how communication practices either match or conflict with the intended organizational principles. It is crucial to grasp these viewpoints as disparities between the culture communicated by the organization and the culture perceived by employees can result in diminished trust, lower engagement levels, and a disjointed organizational image (Kreps 1990). This research assumes importance as it seeks to present a rounded perspective on culture by including input from staff members and gaining a thorough insight into how internal communication influences their perception of culture.

The main goal of this study is to examine employee stories to understand how internal communication methods affect perceptions of company culture. The study's focus determines how employees view the influence of communication practices on the culture in their workplace. By exploring this aspect, the research aims to reveal employee perspectives and observations regarding how communication methods either support or question the core values, norms, and standards that shape the culture.

The expected impact of this study is twofold: examining accounts from employees can give an insight into the essence of organizational culture as something experienced firsthand rather than just imposed from above; and secondly, by offering practical suggestions for organizations to enhance their internal communication strategies, which could lead to a more united and encouraging work environment. Overall, this study aims to narrow down the differences between what organizations aim for and how employees perceive it, thereby promoting a comprehensive and all-encompassing strategy for creating a favorable organizational culture.

Problem Statement

The culture within a company influences how engaged and satisfied employees feel. This is often influenced by how well information is shared internally with transparency and quality in mind. Despite the importance of communication in building a culture within an organization, there's still no understanding of how employees view these communication practices and whether their experiences live up to what the organization aims for in terms of culture. This research project aims to bridge that

knowledge gap by looking at employee stories to see whether the way internal communication is handled either supports or clashes with the company's culture goals.

In particular, this study aims to address the following research inquiries:

1. How do employees describe their experiences with internal communication practices within the organization?

2. What recurring themes emerge in employee narratives about organizational culture and communication?

3. To what extent do employees perceive alignment or dissonance between the organization's communicated values and the internal culture they experience?

Review of Literature

Researchers have described culture in manners, emphasizing its intricate and multipleessences. Gonzales Limas et al., and Hofstede (1997 as referenced in Bajaj, 2009) characterize culture as the collective values, beliefs, assumptions, and behaviors that define an organization's identity, setting it apart from others. Schein (1983 as quoted in Bajaj, 2009) explains it as a series of acquired assumptions that steer group conduct within a company. A study from 2018 that delved into more than a hundred definitions of culture discovered several key themes, including values and beliefs, attitudes, identity, business practices, and learning—all crucial aspects that shape an organization's atmosphere and impact communication methods. Cacciattolo (2014) elaborates on this by introducing models from Johnson and Scholes and Charles Handy, along with categorizations by Hofstede, Schein, Trompenaars, and Deal and Kennedy. Each provides frameworks to explain how values and behaviors correspond with objectives.

Schneider and colleagues (2009) highlight the significance of grasping culture and climate in an organizational context where culture signifies the fundamental values and beliefs ingrained within the organization, and climate depicts how employees perceive their work environment. These studies emphasize the impact of communication on molding and mirroring organizational culture by illustrating that culture isn't solely transmitted through official policies but also intricately woven into the day-to-day exchanges and stories shared among employees. By delving into employee stories about culture, we gain a perspective on how internal communication methods either support or deviate from the intended culture of an organization. This insight helps to reveal the harmony—or discrepancies—between professed values and real-life encounters within the organization.

The establishment of culture is a journey from the founder's original vision. This vision impacts how the team tackles obstacles and establishes standards. The founders are pivotal in instilling aspects that steer interactions and choices while molding the organization's fundamental beliefs and presumptions. As the company expands its operations and reaches further into markets and territories over time; these core principles start to manifest through items, like objects or traditions that are widely recognized within the organization, such as emblems or shared narratives that embody their essence and provide a foundation for internal interactions (Barnhill et al., 2018). Pettigrew (1979) emphasizes the significance of occurrences and the role of individuals known as "social influencers" in shaping and upholding the organizational culture, especially during crucial junctures in its evolution.

Moran and Volkwein (1992) suggest that organizational climate is formed by employees' perceptions of their workplace as influenced by interactions and the company culture. This connection highlights how organizational culture evolves through dynamics and external factors, as Schein (2007) emphasized. When we consider all these points collectively, an analysis of culture through employees' stories offers insights into how communication practices either support or differ from the organization's core values. This helps shed light on the actual influence of culture on daily life within the organization.

The culture within an organization is crucial for facilitating transitions and maximizing the worth of its employees (Baker's study from 2002 highlights this). Cultures establish identities for companies that enable them to flourish in challenging environments (as noted by Aalateeg in 2017). Even though culture may not be easily quantifiable or visible externally at times, it undeniably impacts how employees behave and perceive change initiatives. This ultimately determines their adaptability to approaches and the effectiveness of change implementation efforts (Belak &Ušljebrka's 2017 research touches upon this aspect). A flexible culture is crucial for navigating the uncertainties of today's world (Tănase, 2015). Managers need to be skilled in recognizing and shaping company culture to align with objectives and make cultural adaptations (Baker, 2002).

Before changing the environment or practices, leaders should carefully assess the context to ensure that new values agree with positive attitudes and trust in leadership (Belak &Ušljebrka, 2017). A strong organizational culture is vital for success. It needs to be supported by strategies and frameworks to achieve desired results (Baker, 2002). This study investigates how internal communication methods can reflect and strengthen values through employee experiences and offers insights into how the organization aligns with these important cultural aspects.

The organizational culture has an impact on both the performance of a company and the behavior of its employees. This influence is shaped by the interplay between leadership and employee input (as mentioned by Năstase in 2009 and Schein in 2007). The founders and leaders hold a position in instilling their beliefs and values into the organization – these then serve as guiding principles for how employees are expected to perceive and address challenges (Schein, 2007). When new team members come aboard, these aspects eventually become standard responses that dictate how the organization collectively approaches problem-solving and adaptation. Managers also play a role by creating a "managerial culture" that shapes the attitudes and actions of employees, in the broader organizational environment (adapted from Năstase's work in 2009).

However, for a shift to be effective, it is essential to have the involvement of employees. Dhingra and Punia (2016) highlight the importance of transparency and willingness to address issues as aspects of culture affecting employees' preparedness for change, stressing the significance of inclusive methods to promote active participation. Their study findings regarding differences in readiness, for change based on demographics, indicate that a varied workforce can support transformations by offering viewpoints that improve flexibility. The research emphasis on employee stories provides a glimpse into the impact of communication methods on interactions within the organization.It sheds light on how the viewpoints of both leaders and employees influence and uphold the organization's cultural essence.

Research findings have widely acknowledged the importance of communication in influencing culture and boosting employee engagement. Good internal communication practices have been linked to improved results and organizational resilience while fostering employee dedication (Yates, 2006).

Despite being identified as an aspect of business management, internal communication may not always receive the attention it deserves from top-level executives, which could hinder its impact on strategic objectives (Clutterbuck & James, 1997). Global businesses that thrive employ communication strategies within their organizations—using connections across teams and departments from top-down and bottom-up approaches—to ensure smooth information flow (Peña Acuña et al., 2017). In Spain specifically, prominent companies are embracing tools like brand advocates and internal apps to enhance employee satisfaction and ease transitions—a recognition of the crucial role effective communication plays in fostering commitment and adapting to change (Castro Martínez & Diaz Morilla, 2019).

In relation to the above literature, this study aligns nicely with the research focus on employee stories,which investigates how internal communication methods either uphold or question culture by offering insights into how communication avenues and tactics correspond with or differ from the everyday culture that employees encounter.

Methodology

This paper employed a qualitative method to address the problem and answer the research questions. Semi-formal interviews and group discussions were chosen as tools for gathering data since they enabled participants to express their stories and offered detailed insights into their perspectives. The semi-formal interviews allowed for exploring encounters in a manner, while group discussions captured shared opinions and interactions that helped identify common themes among the participants. Employees, from different levels and departments in the selected organization, were surveyed for their insights on communication practices based on their experience with the organization.

After the data-gathering process within the organization's offices or via the platforms suitedfor the flexible schedules of participants, data analysis was carried out using thematic analysis methods that involved coding and spotting patterns in responses to uncover themes relevant to the research queries like the harmony or discordance between employees' perceptions and the organizations stated values. Ethical aspects were considered, such as seeking consent from participants, ensuring data confidentiality, securely storing information, and promoting participation to prevent any form of coercion. The findings were shared and explored through a discussion focusing on key insights using actual quotes as examples, along with an analysis comparing alignment and discordance themes to provide practical suggestions for improving internal communication practices in line with the company's culture.

Results and Discussions

The data gathered yielded valuable insights into the object of the study, providing relevant answers to the queries pursued, as shown by the following results:

Respondents' Demographic Characteristics:

The participants in this research came fromrepresentative positions and departments within the organization, offering a perspective on the internal communication methods and culture in the company. The demographic makeup consistsof a mix of entry-level employees, along with those in mid-level and senior positions on average, who have been with the company for five years. This time spent within the organization has enabled the participants to share perspectives influenced by experience gained during

their tenure. Employees from departments including Human Resources, Marketing Operations Finance, and IT shared their perspectives representing their functions within the organization, each with distinct communication requirements. Most survey participants had encountered both office-based and remote work setups, providing valuable insights into how internal communication performs in different work settings.

Thematic Discussion with Key Insights:

In the thematic analysis, the data collected from employees' feedback on communication practices and cultural aspects revealed how they perceive alignment or mismatch between organizational values and internal culture.

Experiences with Internal Communication Practices

Workers often expressed a variety of views on their communication encounters. Some are good and some are not so good. There was a lot of talk about the importance of communication from management. Many workers liked hearing updates on company changes and goals; one worker mentioned feeling more connected to the vision when management explained the reasons behind their decisions. However, some workers felt left out and distrusted due to transparency. One worker noted that significant changes are often only communicated after they've already occurred which can make employees feel excluded from discussions and decision-making processes." Furthermore, team members reviewed the accessibility and efficiency of communication mediums such as email chat platforms and town hall meetings, with some finding them useful for receiving updates; others found them overwhelming due to the sheer volume of information to sift through.

Common Patterns in Company Culture and Communication

The analysis of themes conducted on the data collected from employees' perspectives on communication practices within the culture revealed distinct insights into their experiences and perceptions.

Transparency and Trust

One thing that many people talked about was how important it is for leaders to communicate openly and honestly with everyone in the organization. People liked getting updates about what's happening in the company and its goals. One person mentioned that when management explains the reasons behind their decisions, it makes everyone feel more connected to the company's vision. Some people felt that there were times when the communication wasn't consistent, which made them question things and lose trust. One person noted that significant changes are typically communicated only after they have occurred – this can make individuals feel excluded from the dialogue.

Availability of Communication Channels

Across departments, within the organization, there were differing opinions on the impact of communication methods such as emails and internal chat systems as well as town hall meetings. While many staff members found communication tools to provide quick updates efficiently, a few pointed out challenges related to excessive information and feeling overwhelmed by the volume of messages. One employee expressed frustration by stating that sometimes important messages tend to get buried in a

flood of emails. On the other hand, some individuals enjoy attending town hall gatherings. They mentioned: "I love town halls because it allows me to receive communication from leaders, making it feel more authentic and intimate."

Adherence to the principles of the organization's values

There were reactions regarding how the internal communication within the company aligned with its stated values. Several employees recognized that the organization endorsed principles such as honesty and inclusivity; however, some doubted if these values were consistently demonstrated in day-to-day interactions. A respondent noted, "The values are present, in writing. At times the delivery of messages doesn't seem to align with the organization's ethos." This perceived lack of harmony led to a sense of unease among departments that felt neglected.

Support for Employee Engagement and Well-being

A significant topic discussed was the impact of communication on promoting involvement and happiness in the workplace. Staff members reacted favorably to programs that promoted discussions and feedback; one individual mentioned that "When bosses seek feedback from us, it demonstrates their concern." Nonetheless, some individuals observed that even though mechanisms for feedback were in place, the subsequent actions were insufficient. "It's interesting how they always ask for our opinions but it's hard to tell if anything happens as a result," commented a colleague who noticed a lack of follow-up in the feedback process that might affect how content they feel about our work in the long run.

Perceptions regarding the harmony and discordance between expressed values and internal culture:

The level of alignment perceived between the values of the organization and the communication methods employed internally differed among departments within the company. Some staff members believed internal communication methods were in harmony with values such as honesty and diversity, contributing to a feeling of togetherness and shared goals. For instance, teams that received updates and transparent communication expressed a sense of connection to the overall mission of the organization. One employee mentioned, "When we are kept informed and provided with explanations, it gives us a sense that the company genuinely upholds its core values." However, some of the workers noticed a mismatch between the values stated by the company and their own experiences, especially when feedback was not acted upon or seemed insincere. One respondent mentioned: "While the values are written down, sometimes the way information is conveyed doesn't align with what the company represents," indicating a feeling of inconsistency that was particularly noticeable in departments that felt neglected or not given priority in communication. This belief led to a sense of detachment and skepticism when there were delays or inconsistencies in updates when the organization's core values were not aligned.

Practical Suggestions for Action:

To act upon these observations and cultivate a communication environment that is in sync with values and goals, here are some suggestions:

Improve the Uniformity of Transparency

Implement communication routines between departments to guarantee that all staff members receive prompt and clear updates from management. Providing updates with explanations for decisions can enhance employees' sense of participation in organizational transitions and help them align with strategic objectives.

Optimize Communication Channels

Streamline communication by assigning channels for important updates and minimizing the flood of messages being received daily. Bringing all updates to a platform or summarizing them weekly can assist a team in handling information and decreasing the chances of missing crucial updates due to information overload or channel exhaustion.

Enhance the Feedback Processes and Ensure Proper Follow-Up

Establish a defined system for following up on employee feedback to acknowledge and incorporate suggestions for making adjustments within the organization's operations. Publish regular reports showcasing modifications made in response to employee feedback to showcase the organization's appreciation for input and foster trust while enhancing staff contentment.

Appoint representatives from each department to facilitate communication

Appoint individuals within each department to serve as communication liaisons in customizing messages from leadership to effectively suit the needs of teams and ensure that the information is relevant and meaningful to each department's particular context. This approach would enhance collaboration and strengthen the connection between overarching principles and the day-to-day realities faced by diverse teams within the company.

Conclusion

This research offers perspectives on how employees perceive communication methods in the workplace and highlights the varying aspects that influence organizational culture and adherence to stated principles. Workers typically shared a range of views on their communication interactions, appreciating openness and clear messages from management while at the same time acknowledging inconsistencies thatbred doubt and unease sometimes when significant shifts were announced abruptly without context. The analysis of themes revealed that the factors of transparency and trustworthiness shape how employees view the organization's communication culture. Employees value conversations and feedback channels and feel disconnected when follow-up on feedback is lacking. Furthermore, how the company's beliefs match its day-to-day operations affects how employees perceive the organization. Departments that receive clear updates tend to feel more aligned with the company's mission, whereas those with communication may feel excluded, leading to a stronger disconnection from the core values. These results highlight the significance of encouraging communication practices that support organizational principles and boost employees' feelings of connection and involvement throughout all areas and levels of the company.

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