



INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION IN RETAIL

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Abstract

Communication is a very important part of a manager's job. Every manager communicates with their team, colleagues and his/her manager. Effective communication in the organization is the basis for achieving the goals of the organization, motivating people and creating trust environment. If a manager is able to motivate his/her team, people are willing to do more for the company and themselves. Also, a trust environment supports achieving the company goals, working environment in a team and the whole company culture as well. People communicate nonstop, they share their ideas, opinions, discuss basic daily issues, talk to friends and family members and similar. Even if they do not talk, they communicate because they send non-verbal signals to other people. The best way of communication is face-to-face in real-time. Nowadays, there are many ways how to communicate using modern technologies. These technologies can help if there are long distances between people, e.g., for conference calls with more countries, but this paper focuses on interpersonal face-to-face communication. Communication should enable smooth cooperation with others, e.g., by active listening, managers may get more information about their team members than just listening without paying attention. No less important is non-verbal communication in the interpersonal communication process between two or more people. Different signals may improve added value to the whole conversation, highlight the main information, keep people interested in listening, and tell more than just expressing by using words. Communication is a complex process. Many researchers spend their lives researching this field and looking for ways of effective communication. Everybody can learn how to communicate more effectively and lead the team towards the company goals. The main goal of this paper is the identification of the effectiveness of communication in an international retail organization and to cover the gap in the literature that does not focus on retail. The research took place in its branch in Germany. This research used a questionnaire consisting of questions where respondents indicated answers on a Likert scale. Based on the research, it is possible to point out the strengths and weaknesses in the communication process between managers and subordinates. This paper shows how employees and managers communicate and their mutual satisfaction. 48 employees participated in the research of a total of 187 employees, which means the return rate of the questionnaire is 25.67%. The communication process in the selected organization is at a good level, however, with some deficiencies. Among the positive aspects, there is an openness in interpersonal communication and in the department as well, moreover a clear and unambiguous communication of the manager, active listening and understanding of messages that support the effective communication process in the organization. On the other hand, there are some deficiencies, for instance, employees lack more feedback, another issue occurs in the communication process between the manager and his/her team, which is about information flow, where only about a quarter of the information the employees receive from their manager. The benefit of this research is seen for HR professionals, managers and scholars who may get an overview of the pros and cons of interpersonal communication based on results from a questionnaire focused on the way of communication at the company and between supervisor and his/her team and team members.

KEY WORDS: Interpersonal communication; effective communication; active listening; manager; employees.

Introduction

Effective communication in the organization is the basis for achieving the goals of the organization. Through it, information is spread, opinions are exchanged, new ideas are created, it is negotiated, strategies are created and implemented, and similar. According to the latest studies of managerial competencies, communication represents a significant part of the skills needed for a successful manager. Hence the importance of communication in the work of the manager. Many, to be more successful, take communication training or courses so that they can properly pass out information to their employees. The content of such courses is verbal communication, non-verbal communication, barriers to effective communication, argument management, assertive conflict resolution and practical solutions to case studies. In any organization, effective communication is very important because it affects virtually every aspect of organizational behavior. Employees are motivated when information is provided to them clearly and when they can express their opinion. Effective communication supports the proper functioning of the company's organizational culture. Every

employee brings their own habits to work and each organization has its own differences. Many companies seek open communication. Open communication means that the communication partners share all the information necessary for them. It allows employees to be more engaged, motivated, perform better, understand the company goals, and needs and are willing to go beyond their daily work. Managers should encourage open communication in the workplace, they can ask employees for their input, respect their opinions and ideas, actively listen, and also engage on a personal level. Active listening keeps the conversation partner interested in the conversation, which can be seen by paying attention, providing feedback, showing that the person is listening and responding appropriately. Except of mentioned above, non-verbal communication plays a crucial role in the communication process. Non-verbal communication refers to the ways of communication without using words such as facial expressions, gestures, body language, proxemics (distance between communication partners) and others. It gives valuable information to communication partners about what is going on under the surface, how the person is feeling, how the person agrees or disagrees with what was said. Good communication can

increase teamwork and productivity. Hence, maintaining effective communication ensures the effective communication flow within the organization which means that the management and teams are working on the same goal. Communication is part of everyday life, but effective communication needs to be learned, therefore the main goal of this paper is the identification of the effectiveness of interpersonal communication in an international retail organization. This research was conducted due to a lack of literature focusing on interpersonal communication between managers and their teams in retail.

The structure of this paper is following: (1) Literature review – introduces the main topic of this paper and the latest results of research in this area. (2) Methodology – describes the data used in research and the whole methodology. (3) Discussion – presents the results of the survey. (4) Conclusion – shows concluding remarks about employee development and the limits of the research.

Literature Review

The word “communication” came from the Latin words “communicare” and “communis” which mean to share, participate or make common (Ansari, 2021). Communication expresses the sharing of words, messages, intents, ideas and emotions (Alshenqeeti, 2016; Lamichhane, 2016). People communicate their messages to their communication partners through verbal or non-verbal skills, which means interpersonal communication skills, which are essential for retaining a healthy relationship and smooth running of an organization (Ansari, 2021). It is an open-ended process, not only to pass out the information but also to create meaning (Lamichhane, 2016). The communicator’s acceptance of each other’s differences and different forms of messages that show the attitude is the base of interpersonal communication (Nehal, 2017). If verbal or non-verbal communication is missing, it can be a challenge to lead a meaningful conversation (Venter, 2019). There is a need to set communication rules for effective information exchange (Naumovski et al., 2016). Two-way communication is expected in the communication process as an indicator of effective communication (Lusiawati, 2019). Interpersonal communication can determine success in the future and is an important tool for understanding each other, delivering instant feedback, solves moments of misunderstanding, ambiguity or confusion (Purnomo et al., 2021, Naumovski, 2016). Effective communicators are able to recognize the needs of communication partners, generally, people who are engaged in communication hope for an outcome such as trust, psychological well-being or mutual satisfaction, each conversation can bring a positive or negative effect on the emotions and the manager can improve communication and employees’ feeling about their work (Naumovski, 2016). Effective communication is not about what makes the speaker feel good or passing out the information to another person or what sounds good or just about facts and data it is about goal-oriented, intentional and meaningful communication. It includes any engagement with an employee, even silence (Saadi, 2018). Another important aspect of effective communication is emotional intelligence. According to Nguyen et al. (2019), managers

should continuously improve their emotional intelligence because of its huge effect on communication, furthermore, it can positively influence communication with employees regardless of the complexity of the company structure. Executing the communication effectively is the base of an organization’s overall success. Emotional intelligence helps managers to use the right communication style while communicating with their team, regulate the flow and resolve the optimal communication towards employees who are then able to achieve the wished outcome. Deep diving into emotional intelligence topic advantages managers to become more effective managers and help organizations to be more successful. Whether the message is delivered and understood correctly is also influenced by emotional intelligence in the communication process. Continuously improving emotional intelligence leads to an increase in communication skills, productivity and better team environment. Another interesting aspect is the role of self-confidence in the communication process. Self-confidence is one of the factors that determine interpersonal communication, the persons having self-confidence will be more experienced in communicating. High self-confidence increases the ability owned by a person, including communication (Rais, 2020). It is good to remember that managers need to have more than the technical skills to be strong leaders (Nguyen et al., 2019). In the workplace, it is important to take employees seriously which requires to respect their point of view, curiosity to learn what is important to them and learn how to gain their trust. Effective leaders are able to connect with other people by acting according to their needs and interests (Saadi, 2018; Fred Garcia, 2012).

Methodology

The subject of the survey is the identification of the effectiveness of communication in the organization. This paper shows how employees and supervisors communicate and their mutual satisfaction. The survey was conducted in a selected international company in Germany.

This research answers the questions of how the managers communicate with their team, do they use active listening and non-verbal communication while communicating with their communication partner, are the team members able to understand what their manager says, what issues occur in the communication process or any misunderstandings, do the employees receive feedback from their manager. In order to gain anonymous answers to these questions from employees working at the company, for this research was created a questionnaire consisting of questions where respondents indicated answers on a Likert scale from one to five, where one indicated that they fully agreed with the statement and five indicated complete disagreement with the statement. As a part of pre-research, the questionnaire was discussed with HR professionals from the company. The collected data were analysed with data analysis, abstraction, synthesis, and deduction.

Of a total of 187 employees, 48 participated in the questionnaire survey, of which 32 were women and 16 men. The return rate of the questionnaire is 25.67%. According to the position in the organization, 9 team

leaders, 1 team assistant and 38 co-workers participated in the survey.

Results

The first part of the questionnaire focuses on the way of communication in the organization. The first questions highlight how employees obtain information in the organization. One way is to receive information from a supervisor, 27.1% of respondents receive information this way, 18.8% obtain information from their colleagues and the rest (10,5%) of employees obtain information on their own. The question followed the flow of information within the organization. Neely and Mosley (2018) found out that most managers assume they are effective in giving information to their team members, but the employees disagree and managers do not realize it. Effective communication can be developed by managers and their goals can be achieved through communication (Oladiran and Burghate, 2016). On the other hand, 70.9% of employees think that communication in their department is open. 79.2% of employees responded that they have the opportunity to speak openly with their supervisor. When asked if their supervisor provides enough information to perform their work, only 10.5% of employees responded that they do not receive enough information.

In the next section are provided answers to questions in which employees evaluate themselves as they think they are communicating. Self-reflection is an important ability of employees. Being able to evaluate oneself truthfully facilitates the work of the manager, who must give the employee negative feedback. Based on own self-reflection, a person is able to learn from own mistakes and bring corrective measures. In Figure 1, the answers “strongly agree” are shown by the dark blue bar (Answer 1) and the light blue bar (Answer 5) shows the answer “strongly disagree”. According to the answers, it can be seen that employees tend to evaluate themselves positively. They perceive their communication as clear and unambiguous (89.6%), and they also try to get rid of their own prejudices (84.4%) during the communication process. 75% of respondents will clarify what their goal is before the talk. In the area of non-verbal communication, they expressed that they are noticed by the conversational partner and they also manifest it. On the other hand, employees are not sure about the distinction between emotional and material aspects. Doubts also arose as to the acceptance of the other's needs, even if they did not agree with their content. Interpersonal communication is beneficial for enhancing cooperation, creating cohesion between employees and conducive climate (Hustagalung, 2017; Raut, 2011).

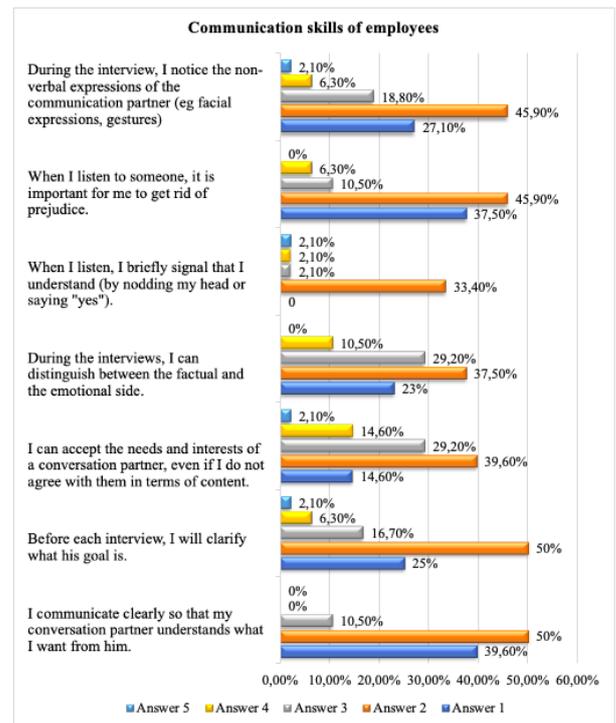


Fig. 1. Communication skills of employees

The following section is devoted to the evaluation of direct supervisors by employees, how the employees evaluate the communication skills of their supervisor from various points of view, such as clear expression, providing feedback, devoting time to employees, or accepting the needs of the employee.

First of all, it was found that the supervisor communicates clearly and distinctly because it is the basis of effective communication. 89.7% of employees agree that their supervisor communicates clearly. Moreover, the supervisors are able to accept the needs and interests of their employees. Providing feedback is an important factor in communicating with the supervisor. On the one hand, whether the employees received enough feedback from their supervisor about their work performance, their evaluation, satisfaction and dissatisfaction, and on the other hand, whether the employees noticed the supervisor's feedback provided through non-verbal communication. From the responses, it can be stated that 60.5% of employees would like their supervisor to provide them with more feedback regarding their work performance. 62.6% of employees in the communication process notice feedback from their supervisor mediated by non-verbal communication. According to research conducted by Neely and Mosley (2018), communication cannot be effective without feedback. Feedback is an important part of the communication process and managers should adopt it in their daily work. Feedback should work in two ways, it is important to seek feedback and increase the clarity of the message (Oladiran and Burghate, 2016). Furthermore, active listening is a key part of the daily business of every manager, therefore one of the questions asks if the supervisor is able to respond to the employee's questions, provide feedback and is able to paraphrase the employee. 79.3% are convinced that their direct supervisor listens actively to them in the

communication process. Active listening is higher and goes beyond the listening skills with the purpose to gain a better understanding of the message and whole context (Jonsdottir and Fridriksdottir, 2019). Listening is seen as a granted skill of managers and in the interaction between manager and their employees (Sharifirad, 2013). Welch and Mickelson (2013) confirmed in their research that listening competence is a key to the effective communication process. However, according to Lloyd et al. (2015), there are not enough empirical studies on active listening and its influence on managerial work. The study conducted by Jonsdottir and Fridriksdottir (2019) tries to gain an understanding of the manager's perception of active listening as an effective management tool in the communication process. According to their study, the participants agreed on the importance of active listening in managerial work and for an organization. Ala-Kortesmaa and Isotalus (2015) determined a positive relationship between listening competence and subjective perception of well-being at work. What is more, the managers should always keep in mind these factors for effective communication: the reason why they are communicating, paying attention to the communication partner, understanding and respecting the other side and keeping an open mind (Oladiran and Burghate, 2019). Regarding the time of sufficient time for a talk between an employee and his/her supervisor, 58.5% of employees agree that their supervisor always has enough time for them, while 16.8% stated that they do not have enough time for them. Time plays an important role in the work of a manager, so it is good to control own "time management". Despite the time stress, every manager should set aside time for his/her team, his/her co-workers. One of the questions focuses on whether the employee has a problem understanding the information he/she receives from his/her supervisor. The purpose of this question is to find out whether employees understand their supervisors correctly and know what is expected of them. A correct and unambiguous assignment is in the competence of the supervisor, who is ultimately responsible for the results of the entire team. 81.3% of employees have no problem understanding their supervisor.

According to the results, 50% of employees are satisfied with the way of communication in the organization, of which 2.1% are very satisfied. 18.8% of employees are on the interface, neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, 25% are not very satisfied and 6.3% are dissatisfied employees in the organization. Based on the results, the communication process in the organization would need to undergo changes to increase employee satisfaction.

Only 4.2% of employees said they did not understand the terms used by their supervisor. It follows that 89.7% of employees have no problem understanding the terms used by their supervisors.

Only 10.5% of employees encounter misunderstandings with their supervisors in the communication process. However, as many as 35.5% answered indefinitely, which is why they partially encounter this and do not partially encounter this problem. Over time, this can become a threat and the percentile can increase.

Conclusions

The research aimed to identify the effectiveness of communication in an international retail organization. The communication process in the selected organization is at a good level, however, with deficiencies present in every company. The openness of communication in the department is a positive aspect of the communication process at the company. Also, the clear and unambiguous communication of the supervisor, active listening and understanding of messages supports the effective communication process in the organization. In terms of deficiencies, employees lack more feedback, although the supervisors themselves admit that they would like to provide more, but due to time constraints, they are not doing well enough. On the positive side, supervisors are at least aware of this issue. Another issue occurring in the communication process between the supervisor and his/her team is that only about a quarter of the information the employees receive from their supervisor, on the other hand, the employees perceive it as sufficient.

This research has several implications for theory and practice. At the theoretical level, it complements research about interpersonal communications and provides a summary of the communication process in an international company in Germany. HR professionals, managers and scholars may get an overview of the pros and cons of interpersonal communication based on results from a questionnaire focused on the way of communication at the company and between supervisor and his/her team and team members.

This research required to address several limitations. Firstly, the present study has a small sample size. In particular, the survey sample consists of only 25,67 % of the company's employees, which may lead to skewed results. If the survey will be conducted repeatedly with a higher number of employees, it could verify the results obtained. Secondly, the survey was conducted before the COVID-19 pandemic crisis has started, therefore it is recommended to compare the current situation in the organization. Thirdly, although the questionnaire survey was designed to cover all necessary areas of research, there is still room for improvement and some questions could be examined further or need some explanation.

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