SUCCESS FACTORS AND LIMITATIONS OF EFFICIENT INTERNAL COMMUNICATION

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Summary

The article covers the key issues of internal communication within an organization. It highlights the benefits of implementation of transparent communication principles for a company. It identifies objectives and presents selected communication tools. In the article, also guidelines for carrying out research in the context of development of an internal communication strategy can be found. Selected research areas of the process of planning and implementation of strategic assumptions have been presented. Factors limiting effective implementation of an internal communication strategy have been discussed.

Communication means relationships

Contemporary organizations are witnessing important transformations and changes taking place in areas associated with human resources management. They themselves participate in this process actively, or more often, passively. The new role of human resources management requires from the management another quality which involves such a utilization of employee teams that an organization can achieve the expected competitive advantage (Dubois i Rothwell, 2004, p. 9–10). What is becoming quite a serious challenge and a problem in the whole process of human resource management is communicating. However, this is not just about unilateral top-down transfer of information, but a professional dialogue based on the exchange of information and leading to the understanding of intention, background of a decision, idea, or changes.

Communication is a basis for building efficient relations only when it is based on dialogue. Thus, what is very important in public relations is the feedback, as it makes it possible to control the recipients of a message, but it gives then (usually employees) chances for an active expression of their arguments and builds up faith in the possibility of understanding of an approach other than that of the management (Seitel, 2003, p. 169). Thanks to well-organized communication, it is possible to build an atmosphere of trust, coordination and cooperation in group are improved.However, good communication requires continuous work, care and the commitment of company managers and employees. Taking the above into consideration, it is worth pointing out here that problems in the process of communication can be observed much more frequently than model, or even just good solutions.

This article will present above all factors which determine the interest in the issue of internal communication not only among public relations specialists, but also, above all, among managers of organizations. Moreover, a set of benefits arising from the implementation of internal communication programmes in organizations will be presented. The goals of internal communication and, more generally, selected tools for the achievement of the mentioned goals will be discussed. In further part of the paper the problem of building communication strategy, with particular focus on the research process which should precede, or even form a part of the strategy-building process is discussed. Eventually, the set of factors

causing limitations of efficient implementation of the strategy of internal communication will be presented. The article contains a set of author's practical experiences, as well as conclusions from qualitative and quantitative analysis of the data acquired in course of internal research conducted in various companies and organizations.

Why are we focusing on internal communication?

One of the main themes of the interest in the subject of internal communication in companies is the fact that the significance of human resources has been changing, especially on the Polish market, where for a few years a substantial qualitative and quantitative drop in this area has been observed. Companies operating on the Polish market are experiencing problems in the process of recruitment and this doesn't concern only specialist professions such as: programmer, computer graphic designer, as many media sources report, but also as research results show[1]. This concerns also other professions, which don't require specialist knowledge and experience. Among them are, for example, soft professions, which require interpersonal skills and basic knowledge from the area of using computers, or IT systems. In times of new economy, employees, their knowledge and skills are becoming the most important asset of every organization. The mentioned research shows that there are also other elements which to a major extent determine employment are: practical skills, willingness to learn, engagement and availability[2]. Machines, equipment, without knowledge and a good team, won't work well in any organization, which is particularly apparent in case of service companies. That's why especially in the entities, where there is a need to base success on individual capacities, skills and qualifications of people, the problem of internal communication becomes a very clear problem.

Another theme which contributes to the necessity of analysing the problem of internal communication in companies and organization is the assumption arising from analyses and qualitative research showing that in Poland employees, or in other words an internal client, is neglected and not treated as a priority. This means that in many companies it is a permissible practice to quickly replace employees.

Another problem we should notice is the issue of the necessity to motivate employees by means of more than just the remuneration system.

Unfortunately, Polish social security and tax systems are constructed in such a way that companies, in order to develop their businesses, often have to limit expenses associated with employment. Burdens cause a reaction of employers in form of reducing salaries and other benefits associated with them. Obviously, this doesn't concern situations where there is a shortage of professionals, such as the above-mentioned shortage of programmers. Computer science is needed more and more and as a result, IT companies have to deal with a different problem, namely, the necessity to react to constantly growing expectations of young IT specialists with regard to salaries and in fact, major part of the process of human resources management in IT companies is focused on this aspect.

The last important theme of the interest in the issue of internal communication is the growth of possibilities given by modern technologies and their efficient, skilful utilization. They contribute to more efficient implementation of the assumptions and goals included in the strategy of internal communication.

Expected benefits from the implementation of internal communication programmes

Efficient internal communication means a series of benefits that a company, or an organization implementing programmes, or strategies in the area of internal relations can achieve. This way, in the group of effects that can be achieved, it is necessary to highlight, first of all, the changes in efficiency and devotion to work. In a situation where information reaches precisely defined groups of recipients in a planned way and in such a way that it can be fully and accurately understood, then it is easier to find in an employee a loyal craftsman devoted to work, a person associated with his workplace not only based on remuneration. Another benefit that the implementation of internal communication programmes can bring is avoiding, or limiting confrontations between departments, employees of various ranks and within departments. Animosity, confrontations between employees, concerning not only professional, but also private matters, which lead to internal crises, may cause deepening problems, eg. the drop of work efficiency, or the drop of effectivity. Eventually, they may lead to further problems, as a result of the so-called snowball effect. Conflicts in teams may also be

constructive in character. Especially, some managers realize that questioning each other's way of thinking makes it possible to better understand the choices, work out   broader scope of options, or make better decisions. (Eisenhardt, Kahwajy i Bourgeois, 2005, p. 181). Another benefit arising from well-designed and conducted communication is positive attitude to work, which in turn affects relations and the willingness to stay and continue one's professional career in a particular workplace. This makes employees demonstrate the initiative, get more involved in solving professional tasks, not only those commissioned by the employees' work contracts. The final benefit that should be highlighted is noticing chances, rather than risks in employees.

Here the following question arises: How to efficiently communicate in order to achieve the benefits discussed above? An organization which wants to have a stable, well-organized and qualitatively strong team should show respect for its employees, openly express opinions, express recognition, give employees the voice, encourage them to express different points of view, put internal communication on the top position, ahead of external communication. Here it is also necessary to remember that internal communication boils down to credibility which is the key to building relations and professional communicating (Seitel, 2003, p. 416).

Goals of internal communication

Among the basic goals of the process of internal communication, which is implemented in organizations in form of operational, or strategic plans, is building relations among employees. This way, it is expected that among employees in horizontal and vertical relations, there will be changes which will eliminate, or substantially reduce internal friction, misunderstandings and will contribute to achieving better effects of work. The goal of activities carried out in course of internal communication is also making employees identify themselves with their organization, which will take the form of shaping the attitude of loyalty, engagement and devotion. Identifying oneself with a company means also responsibility for its future and attaching company's success to own professional development, path of promotion, or aspects classified as incentives of financial character. Depending on the kind of conducted activity, companies may focus on team work, or individual work of employees. In the first case, the goal of internal communication is achieving an

effect in form of employees' mutual acceptance and their focus on the result achieved by a team they represent, or the whole organization. An important goal of the process of communicating based on dialogue is also raising trust for the decision made by the management on the strategic level. Eventually, one of important goals taken into consideration in case of changes made in course of the process of implementation of communication solutions within an organization is creating a good work atmosphere.

Research as a component of the strategy of internal communication

Every public relations programme, or solution should be preceded by research, unfortunately most often this is not the case.Instinct, intuition, or predictions naturally have their raison d'etre. However, organizations manager in a modern way expect and even require something more, that is, measurements and analyses, as well as assessments, not only at the end of particular actions, but at every stage and on many planes of management (Seitel, 2003, p. 113).

The goal of every research process is providing valuable data which can later be used in the decision-making process by members of the management, or representatives of executive units in a company. Thus, research is supposed to serve as an element of support for the decision-making process, support for optimum plans and creating solutions. Going further ahead, the research process is supposed to allow to learn the opinions, attitudes, engagement of teams in course of creating added value in form of products, services, ideas delivered to the market. This way, the gained support can serve the purpose of working out programmes concerning particular areas of management in a company, especially those which are most exposed to crisis, or which are already in crisis. Data collected in course of research will also make it possible to avoid intuitive functioning in a "decision-making vacuum". Taking the above into consideration, entrepreneurs need to remember that a components of every strategy, including the strategy of internal communication is the analysis of the starting point and good analysis contains also an element of research, regardless of the fact whether we rely on desk research method, or research which assumes the utilization of particular questionnaires constructed so that they will make it possible to obtain knowledge in areas which are sensitive from the point of view of the entities managing an organization.
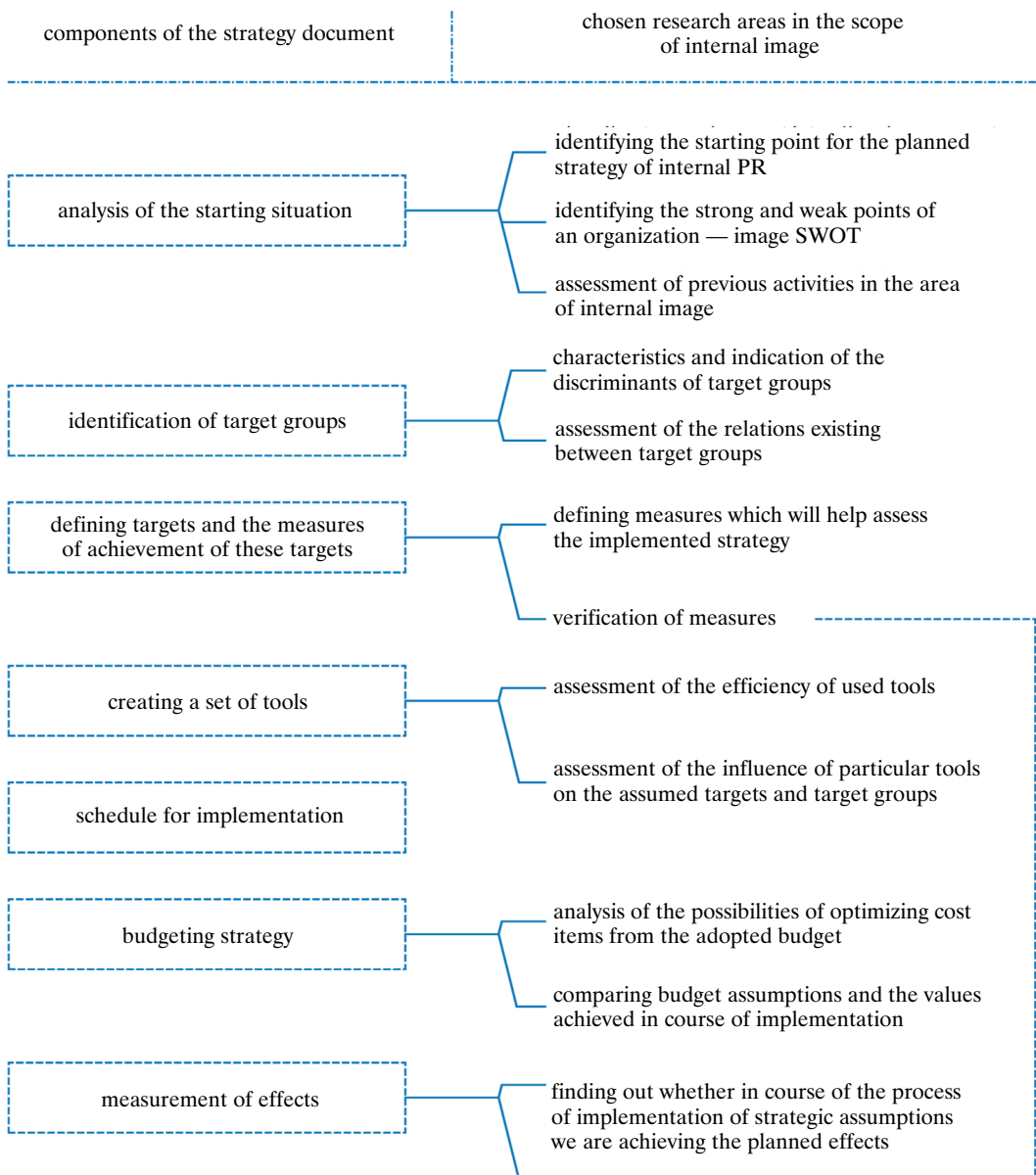
To sum it up, it is necessary to emphasize that with accurate data we are coming closer to working out directions included in the strategy document. Its basic concept boils down to applying the strong sides (advantages) of an organization where chances for success are most promising (Rumelt, 2013, p.17). That's why an analysis which provides not only a set of strong, weak sides of an organization, but also suggests directions for particular solutions seems so important.

What are we investigating?

Research can support the process of building the strategy of internal communication and later its implementation. Nevertheless, the management has to realize every time its expectations with regard to the research process. Conducting research without a well-defined target means costs, moreover, unsubstantiated costs. Thus, what should we focus on during the organization of the aforementioned research? These are mainly such problems as learning the assessments of the employees concerning their relations with superiors, concerning communication and flow of information, finding out whether employees are satisfied with their work, identifying the level of loyalty of employees to the company, learnings the level of employees' satisfaction with motivational aspects provided by the company up till now, finding out the employees' assessment of the conditions for development guaranteed by the company, learning the general sentiments among company employees, as well as learning the expectations of employees with regard to the company.

The results of research make it possible for the management to make decisions on human resources management. Thus, it is important: how big the group of people forming a team are fulfilling their professional ambitions in the company, what share of employees get thechance to use their skills, whether there is a balance between their free time and work time, whether they are optimistic about the future of the company, what their assessment of cooperation between employees and departments is and finally whether they regard their employer as a company with good atmosphere in the workplace. Moreover, looking at the process of communication alone, the management can assess the quality of flow of information. The management can also identify to what extent the assignment of tasks is comprehensible.

Picture 1. **Chosen research areas in the process of planning and implementing strategic assumptions**

| components of the strategy document | chosen research areas in the scope of internal image |

analysis of the starting situation
- identifying the starting point for the planned strategy of internal PR
- identifying the strong and weak points of an organization — image SWOT
- assessment of previous activities in the area of internal image

identification of target groups
- characteristics and indication of the discriminants of target groups
- assessment of the relations existing between target groups

defining targets and the measures of achievement of these targets
- defining measures which will help assess the implemented strategy
- verification of measures

creating a set of tools
- assessment of the efficiency of used tools
- assessment of the influence of particular tools on the assumed targets and target groups

schedule for implementation

budgeting strategy
- analysis of the possibilities of optimizing cost items from the adopted budget
- comparing budget assumptions and the values achieved in course of implementation

measurement of effects
- finding out whether in course of the process of implementation of strategic assumptions we are achieving the planned effects

Source: Tworzydło D. (2013). Badania komunikacji i relacji jako podstawa skutecznych działań w zakresie wewnętrznego public relations. In: K. Stasiuk-Krajewska, Z. Chmielewski, D. Tworzydło. *Public Relations. Nowe trendy*. Rzeszów: Wydawnictwo Newsline.

There is a whole range of areas which may be subject to research, in the context of discusses internal communication. On picture 1 the areas which may be subject to analysis in the context of the assumptions of strategic documents are presented.

Factors causing limitations of the efficient implementation of the strategy of internal communication

The efficiency of implementation of assumptions adopted in the strategy of internal communication is not only about the approach of the management, its acceptance for the whole process, but it also unfortunately involves a series of factors which to a smaller, or greater extent limit, or even make it impossible to achieve the intended results. Among the main factors hindering the implementation of the strategy are the resistance and ignorance of employees arising to a significant extent from psychological premises and in particular, worries about one's own security. It can be generally assumed that employees find it hard to accept any changes, especially changes they don't understand and changes which bring effects they can't predict, or imagine. Another determinant which influences the success of the implementation of the above-mentioned strategy is misunderstanding and lack of faith in success. Lack of communication, precise and clear information from the management, which concerns the implementation of the assumptions of strategy may cause negative assessments of the effects of changes.

Another hindering factor is certainly complex organizational structure (company/organization with departments). In such a situation problems associated with sharing information about planned changes are mounting and eventually this may lead to gossip and misunderstandings. This in turn may lead to escalation and even cause a crisis situation.

Another limitation of efficient implementation of the strategy is lack of acceptance for any motivational actions and actions aimed at building internal imageother than those associated with elements of remuneration. There are companies where generally nothing works, where no tools are accepted, or even tolerated. Meetings of the management with employees are regarded as a necessity, incentive trips are regarded as a pointless cost

and newsletters, orany other forms of conveying information are regarded as a waste of paper.

That's why, in order to eliminate the factors mentioned above, as well as other factors causing problems with efficient implementation of the strategy of internal communication, it is necessary to properly communicate changes, with particular focus on the plans of the management with regard to internal communication. Only openness and presenting the strategy from by means of the language of benefits from the point of view of employees give a chance to reduce, or eliminate barriers.

Conclusions

In order to efficiently implement actions included in programmes, or strategies of internal communication, it is necessary to apply particular rules. Among these rules defining targets takes centre stage. Without defining targets, any taken actions will be doomed to failure, as it would mean lack of coherence, or even logic. Here it isalso important to make sure that the defined targets result from research and analyses carried out before the implementation of programmes. In course of implementation, or after completion, research can allow to verify the assumptions, to make corrections, or modifications. The article highlights the employees' opposition to all kinds of changes as one of the barriers. In order to overcome this opposition, it is necessary, above all, to be open, communicate in many stages, and to conduct a dialogue. Employees have to be informed about changes on a regular basis and in a comprehensive way. On the one hand the flow of information cannot be big enough to put company secrets at risk, and on the other hand it has to be full enough to satisfy the need for information resulting from the employees' deficit of data. Another important aspect which determines the success of changes in the area of internal communication is the management's faith in the success of actions, which in turn leads to understanding, acceptance and even consent to changes in the team. However, this won't be enough as in every organization, in order to make changes it is necessary to have trust and to maintain the trust. The team has to understand the purpose of changes and their consequences.

References

[1] Over 40% of surveyed companies outside the IT branch and almost 60% from the IT branch in Podkarpacie region were looking for IT specialists in 2013 (programmers, network specialists, graphic designers. Over 60% of the surveyed had problems with finding employees — IT specialists.Companies are looking for and want to hire new employees, but at the same time on the labour market there is not a sufficient number of experienced IT specialists. In the remaining group almost a half of job candidates, according to the surveyed companies, have excessive financial expectations. Stowarzyszenie Informatyka Podkarpacka, Instytut Rozwoju Społeczeństwa Informacyjnego (2013). *Kadry dla informatyki na Podkarpaciu. Raport z badań*. Rzeszów. (author of the research project: dr Dariusz Tworzydło).

[2] Stowarzyszenie Informatyka Podkarpacka, Instytut Rozwoju Społeczeństwa Informacyjnego (2013). *Kadry dla informatyki na Podkarpaciu. Raport z badań*. Rzeszów.

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