Strategic Communication: Key Success Factor for Health Companies in Cartagena, Colombia

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Abstract

This research was carried out in health companies of Cartagena, Colombia. It aimed to identify the areas with the greatest communication problems and those where further study is needed. A descriptive research was carried out with a probabilistic sample of 152 users and administrators of these companies. Through survey and interview techniques, it was found that 57% of the staff of the institutions concluded that the administration has the most problems regarding communication. Another finding was that there is desynchronization in relation to: understanding, comprehension and group work, in favor of empowering processes; generating less efficiency and effectiveness of the organizations employees’ management, contributing to frustration, both in the administration and in each of the individuals who are part of the company and interact with it.

Keywords: Strategic communication, Strategy, Motivation, Effective communication
1 Introduction

Companies, like people, face daily problems and inconveniences that make the ideal development of planned activities impossible. Many of these obstacles are caused by the lack of effective communication. This factor is what determines the achievement or not of the established objectives, because, if there is no adequate understanding of the message, the necessary actions for each stage of the process will not be implemented [14].

Communication is a founding fact of relationships, which are established, maintained and fostered through it [16]. Communication is the central nervous system of the organization, the flow that crosses all its dynamics and processes [3]. Therefore, an organization needs to plan all its communicative actions in a way that retains a symbolic coherence that guides towards the objectives of the institution [13]; taking into account that whenever there is communication there is information [19].

Communication is necessary so that the organization obtains an intangible competitive advantage [12]. Hence, the added value of strategic communication as a fundamental basis for achieving business success. On the other hand, in order to achieve this maximum goal, organizations must overcome a number of obstacles, problems, and inconveniences, which will make it impossible to transfer the optimum of all organizations, often limiting the development of each one of them [6].

Scheinsohn [17], presented the movement of strategic communication, and affirmed that: "Communication must be articulated in an intelligent way through a global management with the application of an eminently strategic logic, carrying it out from the only territory that makes it possible, the territory of the Top Management". In this sense, Shultz, & Lauterborn [18] demonstrated the need to integrate different communication techniques at the service of meeting the objectives, Strategic Communication, Organizational Behavior, and Strategic Management, respectively [4] [9]. Scheinsohn & Saroka [17] postulate a novel movement called strategic communication; they state that communication must be articulated in an intelligent way through global management. On the other hand, Hallahan et al [7] defines strategic communication as the communication carried out by an organization, deliberately, in order to complete its mission.

Strategic communication is a tool which shows, from an external perspective, the deficiency in the communication handled within the organization, and aims to improve this factor. Thus, linking the different areas of the institution, and generating a synergy which helps with the achievement of organizational objectives, so business success can be achieved [2]. However, this synergy is affected in the interconnection of the different areas of the organization, bringing with it a rupture of the communicational process, and impacting the development
or fulfillment of the decisions and/or corrections emanating from the top management, and influencing the philosophical objectives of the organization. In that sense, Carrillo [1] explains that organizations are systems which must be synchronized, all members working as a team, to face the changing market in which organizations develop.

Ilas [8] explains the areas of intervention of strategic communication, which are identity and organizational culture. “The prestige and reputation of any brand or organization today depend less on the advertising effort and more on the integral approach that strategic communication implies”.

Strategic communication proposes a management method designed to articulate all tactical communications within the framework of a general strategy that encompasses them. The basic core of the concept of strategy within the perspective of communication, from the approach of the current context, does not allow traditional communication models in the company to have room for successful solutions applying the principles of the past, referring to "marketinian" reductionism or the other exercise of isolated communication actions [5].

The term strategy should be framed in the concept of "strategic thinking" as the way to combine the objectives to be achieved, in the long term, and the decision making that must be taken in advance, foreseeing future scenarios and possible environmental threats [10]. In addition, it must include the effects of other factors such as chance, which have to do with the environment [11].

In this way, strategic communication within business and organizational communication is the way to bring together different communication actions to achieve the strategic objectives of the company. But more significant than luck is the ability to recognize opportunities when they come up themselves, and to have clear ideas and the flexibility to take advantage of those opportunities [15].

2 Methodology

To carry out this research, a descriptive type research was used, with a probabilistic sample of 152 users and administrators of health companies in Cartagena. A confidence level of 95% for the veracity of data was considered. Interviews, surveys and direct observation were used as data collection techniques, in order to learn about the impressions that people who work at the organizations or companies have about the subject. This allows to identify the most problematic areas. Three strategies were established in complete sequence and dependence, since each depended on the execution of the previous one, in order to ensure the success of its development and be able to reproduce it in another scenario, so that it will enable and show the fluency of communication in each and every area of the organization.
3 Results and Discussion

The results obtained after collecting and analyzing the elements that affect communication in health companies are shown below.

![Figure 1. Areas of greatest problems](Source: Survey conducted to the employees and administrative staff of the health company Cartagena, 2016)

As shown in Figure 1, the Management variable obtained the highest percentage, with 74%, followed by Hospitalization, with 15%, Human Resources and admissions, with 7% and 4% respectively. With this, it was possible to identify the most representative types of problems in the institution, divided by work areas. One of the most representative problems was the lack of communication of the decisions that the management made, causing serious errors to occur, which made it difficult to achieve the goals and objectives. This fact goes against what the theory states.

![Figure 2. Information on activities and decisions](Source: Survey conducted to the employees and administrative staff of the health company Cartagena, 2016)
As it can be seen in Figure 2, the variable sometimes obtained the highest percentage with 56%, while 30% inclined for Always and 15% for Never. This agrees with the results obtained when they were asked if they knew the duties and responsibilities of their job, as shown in Figure 3.

![Figure 3. Information on activities and decisions](source)

Source: Survey conducted to the employees and administrative staff of the health company Cartagena, 2016

As shown in Figure 3, the respondents who only performed their functions because of their experience in other institutions of the same nature: the variable No obtained 55.6%, while 44.4% considered Yes. The above means a greater problem is not perceived in the labor relation in the company and they believe that the difficulties can be solved. Only clear and precise policies are lacking, which allow the ideal development of the processes.

![Figure 4. Employment relationship in the company](source)

Source: Survey conducted to the employees and administrative staff of the health company Cartagena, 2016

As it is shown in Figure 4, the variable Good obtained the highest percentage, with 51.9%, while 48.1% favored Bad. It shows that in order to develop the functions and direct them towards the achievement of the organizational objectives, it is necessary that these objectives as well as the mission and vision of the health companies be well known.
As observed in Figure 5, 85.5% of the respondents do not know the mission and 18.5% said Yes. This result confirms that most of the staff does not know the vision of the institution. This situation creates an environment of lack of commitment since the employees do not feel that they belong to the organization as Figure 6 shows.

As noted in Figure 6, 85.2% of the respondents do not know how the company plans are communicated, while 14.8% said Yes. This shows that a series of strategies should be built to minimize the negative impact that the lack of effective communication was causing in the institution. So it is necessary that strategies are established and committees are created, which facilitate the flow of information without having to involve many people. Since this produce a wear on the information. It also shows the need to maximize the use of information technologies, for greater communication use and transform the communication structure of the company into horizontal communication, where the information flows openly and reaches each worker, regardless their level of hierarchy.
4 Conclusions

According to the results of the study applied to the administrators and employees of health companies in Cartagena, it is perceived that the level of communication in the areas of the institutions is precarious. Due to the lack of coordination that is given to the flow of information, obstacles are created that prevent the adequate synergy between the areas or departments of the institution.

In addition, an atmosphere of individualism is perceived which makes impossible the adequate understanding of the different areas of the organization. It is clear that the lack of companionship is generated by the discrimination that occurs when the management does not share the information with all the staff. This can be compared to a stratification, in which only some people handle the information and believe themselves to be of greater importance than the other members of the institution. This increases the little effectiveness that is achieved through communication.

In all the areas in which the analysis was carried out, it was found that although there is no continuous and exasperating follow-up of the workers, and that there is a relaxed and joyful atmosphere, in many cases the desires to excel cause a series of comments and misunderstandings that break the chain of communication. Therefore, clear and concise strategies must be established to facilitate the flow of constant and accurate information.

Strategic communication needs to put all available forms of communication at the service of its objectives, the result being much more than the sum of partial "communication strategies". That is, communication does not necessarily have to be strategic. When it is, it must be managed communication, or what is the same, intervened in the direction that business objectives set at the highest level and not only up to isolated communication forms.

Within the recommendations, it is necessary that an organization which communicates horizontally be created, so that exchange of messages among colleagues (workers) of the entire organization will be improved, regardless of their hierarchical level. A sense of importance and commitment within the group of workers of the institution must be installed, since all of them will be participants of the changes, and will have, at hand, the necessary information.

Another strategy would be to maximize the use of information technologies, which implies a full participation of the management, since it will require training and installation of video chat such as Skype. Due to that the company will need to provide a number of tools that facilitate communication between different areas of the organization. These tools require an investment that must be approved by management and will undoubtedly facilitate the transfer of information.
Strategic communication is a transcendental factor when it comes to achieving success in business and creating added value in organizations. The aim is to cultivate the internal and external communicative resources of the organization to achieve the strategic objectives set.

This research does not end here. But it opens the space for a future work that should aim to strengthen the strategic elements specific to this sector; based on methodologies and programs to analyze the environment, as a starting point for any strategy that projects to succeed. It is also a challenge for academics and practitioners of communication in organizations, and it is proposed as a topic of interest for further studies. That is, to assess the process of building the strategy with those who may be involved in it; so more democratic models are proposed to companies to manage communication.

References


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