

Impact of Communicating ‘Vision’ on Organizational Communication Effectiveness

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to examine the interrelationship between vision communication and organizational communication effectiveness. This research assumes importance as it explores the possibility of positing vision as a potent driver in the process of organizational communication. Further, it attempts to gauge the impact of vision communication on organizational communication effectiveness. Thus it demonstrates the importance of vision communication in organizations and its contribution towards overall organizational functioning.

The study seeks answers to four research questions. Data is collected from 249 respondents through a questionnaire. Results indicate that vision communication is significantly related to communication effectiveness. Further, an above average degree of positive correlation is found between vision clarity and quality of written communication. While a moderate degree of positive correlation is found between vision clarity and level of motivation. Furthermore, the study also found a high degree of positive correlation between vision clarity and overall communication in the organization. Clarity of vision emerged as an important contributor towards communication effectiveness. This research assumes importance because of lack of similar research and an increasing interest in the communication of vision in the Indian diaspora.

Keywords: Leadership Communication, Shared Context, Vision Communication, Communication Effectiveness.

1. INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

The paper examines the interrelationship between *vision communication* and *organizational communication*. It explores the possibility of positing *vision communication* as a potent driver in the process of organizational communication by attempting to gauge the impact of *vision communication* on organizational communication effectiveness. It also demonstrates the importance of *vision communication* in organizations and its contribution towards overall organizational functioning. It is a well established fact that communication; the backbone of information flow in any organization is in reality the core process of organizing (Weick, 1979). Organizations do not exist independently of their members, but are created and recreated in the acts of communication between members (Iedema and Wodak, 1999). Communication then becomes the central means by which individual activity is coordinated to devise, disseminate and pursue organizational goals, an approach subscribed to in this paper. Further, professional communication is seen as intentional communication that

has the objective of achieving strategic goals within organizational or professional contexts. In this context *vision* gains great significance in enhancing goal directed behavior. However, it is often seen that the vision of an organization remains restricted to “something the leaders developed”, rather than a goal most employees strive to achieve. To ensure that the vision of top management percolates to the grass root level, there is often a need for a communication environment and system that involves, informs and engages everyone in the organization authentically and effectively.

Communication research has emerged as an important area of organizational studies (Bavelas and Barret, 1951; Simon, 1976; Kelly, 2000; Simon and Violani 2011). Research in this area has attracted considerable attention, as its outcomes seem to increase our awareness and ability to perhaps improve the way we communicate. Further, within communication studies ‘vision communication’ has received considerable attention (Tichy and Devanna, 1986; Conger, 1989; Quirke, 1995; Kelly, 2000; Abu-Tineh et al., 2008; Schraeder & Self, 2010; Hastings, Sugden and Grindle, 2011).

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Bennis and Nanus (1985) define vision as the "...projected mental image of the products, services, and organization that a business leader wants to achieve". Further, House and Shamir (1993) define vision as an ideal that represents or reflects the shared values to which the organization should aspire. As noted by Kelly (2000) the process of communicating the vision contributes to building a shared context in two ways. First is that the communication and expression of the vision increases awareness of what is expected, thereby focusing energy, providing direction, and affirming an individual's purpose and position in the organization's direction (Bennis and Nanus, 1985; Bennis, 2010), vision raises self-confidence and arouses motivation. Second, the process of communicating vision also helps build commitment to, and pride in the organization and its central values.

According to Kouzes and Posner (1987), "leaders find the common thread that weaves together the fabric of human needs into a colorful tapestry. They seek out the brewing consensus among those they would lead. In order to do this, they develop a deep understanding of the collective yearnings. They listen carefully for quite whisperings in dark corners. They attend to the subtle cues. They sniff the air to get the scent. They watch the faces. They get a sense of what people want, what they value, what they dream about." As noted by Yukl (2005, 295) a number of writers have attempted to describe the essential qualities of a successful vision (Bennis and Nanus, 1985; Tichy and Devanna, 1986; Kotter, 1990; Nanus, 1992; Kouzes and Posner, 1995; Bennis 2010). "A vision should be simple and idealistic, a picture of a desirable future...it should not be a wishful fantasy, but rather an attainable future grounded in the present reality a successful vision should be simple enough to be communicated clearly in five minutes or less". As noted by Beach (2006,51), visions offered by, among others, Winston Churchill, Franklin Roosevelt, J F Kennedy, and the "I have a dream" speech by Martin Luther King Jr are dramatic in their sweep and inspiring in their eloquence. they are movingly stated and they address changes of magnificent proportions an adequate vision lies somewhere between mundane problem solving and idealistic dreaming. It sets an agenda that possibly might not be reached but that is so close to being attainable that it inspires the attempt to achieve it."

In an organizational context, *vision communication* refers to the process of building a vision for the organization and communicating it to all the employees in the organization. It gives a purpose of existence to the organization in terms of where to reach and how to reach. According to Collins and Porras (1991) a good vision is characterized

by ideology which the company stands for and brings out the *raison d'etre* for its existence. It is also an envisioned future state that the people aspire to reach. Vision is also important in the era of accelerating complexity because it provides meaningful direction and focus to people and organizations. In fact, vision creation should be pursued as part of an active process. Leaders must ensure visions are connected to the values and beliefs of others (Clawson, 2006) and that influences and opinions from others are incorporated into the visioning process (Kakabadse et al., 2005) to attract commitment and action (Abu-Tineh et al., 2008). Leaders communicate their visions in various ways including written statements and personal communication (Kouzes and Posner, 1987). Kantabutra (2003; 2009; 2010) proposes that various vision attributes facilitate the vision communication process between leader and followers.

Further, vision is a central concept of transformational and charismatic leadership (Sosik and Dinger, 2007; Sheard, et al. 2011; Searle and Hanrahan, 2011. Kark, et al., (2003) defined the term inspirational motivation as the creation and presentation of an attractive vision of the future that demonstrates optimism and enthusiasm. The benefit of visioning is that it provides the rationale as to why individuals should strive to achieve goals (Densten, 2005; Searle and Hanrahan, 2011). McCann et al. (2006) described transformational leaders as exceptional and having extraordinary effects on their followers, primarily by being able to commit them to the leaders and organization's vision.

It is also important to note that sometimes there is a distinction between the personal vision of the leader and the organizational vision, since his vision does not always become the shared vision of his organizational partners. In order to spread and implement his personal vision within the organization, the leader must maintain an open dialogue with organizational members, and examine how his vision of the organization is received in the existing context by his partners (Yoeli and Berkovich, 2010).

Further, inspirational motivation has received a lot of attention in transformational leadership research. It emphasizes the charismatic influence of leaders and the empowerment of subordinates as key tenets (Zaccaro, 2001; Moss and Ritossa 2007). Transformational leaders have been found to possess charisma, inspiration and intellectual stimulation (Bass, 1985; Conger and Kanungo, 1998; Searle and Hanrahan, 2011; Boyatzis and Soler, 2012). Garcia-Morales et. al (2008), described inspiration as the ability to motivate followers primarily through communication. Kantabutra, (2009) defined

vision operationally, a mental model that each leader defines, given that it is the leader's actual mental model that guides his/her choices and actions. Despite its clear importance, vision is still not defined in a universally agreed upon manner (Kantabutra, 2010; Kantabutra and Saratun, 2011). It is frequently confused with or even deliberately combined with, mission, goals, strategy, values, and organizational philosophy. This paper delves into the extent to which vision percolates within organizations.

Furthermore, as mentioned in Baum et al. (1998), Kirkpatrick and Locke (1996) empirically separated vision and charismatic personality and found that vision was far more potent than charismatic personality in terms of its direct and indirect effects on follower performance and attitudes. 'Vision' has been extensively studied for its importance and effect on different aspects of organizational life. Larwood et al. (1995) studied vision extensively but did not relate vision attributes to organizational effectiveness. Baum et al. (1998) examined the effects of vision on the performance of the organization as a whole. They also examined one process through which vision could affect organizational performance-vision communication. They examined the relation of vision and vision communication to venture growth.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

The purpose of the study as mentioned earlier is to examine the interrelationship between vision communication and organizational communication effectiveness. As is reflected in the title "Impact of Communicating 'Vision' on Organizational Communication Effectiveness" the study focused on two aspects viz. communicating vision and communication effectiveness. With this in mind, the following three research questions were framed:

- Q1. Are the employees clear about their organizational vision?
- Q2. What is the extent of association between the degree of clarity of vision and the effectiveness of written communication?
- Q3. Is 'vision communication' significantly related to 'communication effectiveness'?

The survey population for the present study was taken from six organizations selected through convenience sampling technique. The organizations were so selected that both manufacturing and service sector were covered. These organizations were located in and around Delhi. Data was

collected through a Questionnaire (Sethi and Chaturvedi 2006) administered to the employees in the organization. The questionnaire comprised of 23 questions (on a five point Likert scale) which provided an insight into various parameters such as degree of clarity of vision among employees, effectiveness of written communication in the organization, effectiveness of communication and motivational level of the employees and thus it was found suitable for the study (op.cit). This questionnaire sought to provide an answer to the above mentioned research questions. Additionally, as the questionnaire also dealt with the motivational level of the employees, the researchers also examined this aspect through an additional research question, namely:

- Q4. What is the relationship between clarity of vision and the motivational level of employees in the organization?

In all, 249 valid responses were obtained from the employees. All three managerial levels were covered. All respondents have been working with their present organizations for more than 5 years. A brief profile of the respondents is given in Table 1.

3. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

In order to find answers to our first research question, namely, Q1. Are the employees clear about their organizational vision?; the respondents were asked to rate on a 5 point scale the following statements - giving 5 points to maximum agreement and 1 point to disagreement.

- I am clear about my organizational vision
- The vision of the organization is clear to the bottom most employee of the organization
- I am clear about my role in the implementation of the vision
- At the end of the induction program when I joined I was clear about the job responsibilities.

A cumulative 'clarity of vision score' is calculated. The vision clarity scores can range from a minimum of 0 to a maximum score of 20. For the sake of convenience three categories of vision clarity scores are constructed viz. Low (Scores in the range 0-5), Average (Scores in the range 5-15) and High (Scores in the range 15-20). The following table (Table 2) summarizes the distribution of respondents (all three managerial levels) in the three categories. The results show that of the 66 lower managerial level employees, about 41% are clear about the overall organizational vision and the role

Table 1 Classification of Respondents according to Managerial Level and Organization Type

<i>Management Level</i>	<i>Organization Type</i>		<i>Total N=249</i>
	<i>Service</i>	<i>Manufacturing</i>	
Lower	27 (23.1)	39 (29.5)	66 (26.5)
Middle	36 (30.8)	51 (38.6)	87 (34.9)
Senior	54 (46.2)	42 (31.8)	96 (38.6)
Total	117	132	249

Figures in parenthesis represent percentage

they are expected to play in contributing towards the achievement of the vision. Middle managerial level and senior managerial level employees also showed a similar trend. The respondents who fell in the average category, also, by and large were concentrated towards the higher end of the category. The results indicate that both, the organizational vision and their role and responsibility are clear to majority of the employees. Further, a Chi square test was carried out to test whether there was significant difference in the degree of clarity of vision between these managerial levels as reflected in the mean weighted score. The Chi square value $\chi^2(28, N = 249) = 112.37, p = .001$ indicates that there is a significant difference in responses regarding overall clarity of vision between the managerial levels. However, delving into the possible reasons for this was beyond the scope of the study.

To get an indication of the effectiveness of communication in the organization, one of the parameters taken is the written communication practice prevalent in the organization. Based on the responses of the employees a written communication score is calculated for each respondent and answers as sought to the second research question viz. Q.2 What is the extent of association between the degree of clarity of vision and the effectiveness of written communication?

To judge the extent of association between the degree of clarity of vision and the effectiveness of the written communication, correlation between the two is calculated. Value of $r(247) = .64, p < .01$ indicates an above average degree of positive correlation between *vision clarity* and *effectiveness of written communication*.

It is expected that if vision is being communicated effectively then there would be communication effectiveness. To get evidence to substantiate this statement, a correlation coefficient between vision clarity score and the communication effectiveness score is calculated. A value of $r(247) = .73, p < .01$ was obtained. This value indicates high degree of positive correlation between vision clarity and overall communication in the organization. Thus clarity of vision is an important contributor towards communication effectiveness. This answers the third research question.

Further, another parameter that is considered is the level of motivation of the employees. It is expected that clarity of vision would contribute towards a higher level of motivation (Bennis and Nanus, 1985). This is tested using correlation between the vision clarity score and motivation score. The motivation score is calculated based on the responses of the individuals to related questions in the questionnaire. The correlation coefficient value is found to be $r(247) = .56, p < .01$. Value of .56 indicates

Table 2 Clarity of Vision Score

<i>Level of Management</i>	<i>0-5</i>	<i>5-10</i>	<i>10-15</i>	<i>15-20</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Mean Weighted Score</i>
Lower Managerial Level	3 (4.5)	3 (4.5%)	33 (50%)	27 (40.9%)	66	14.39
Middle Managerial Level	0	21 (24.2%)	36 (41.3%)	30 (34.5%)	87	13.79
Senior Managerial Level	0	0	60 (62.5%)	36 (37.5%)	96	14.65

moderate degree of positive correlation between vision clarity and level of motivation, thus answering the fourth research question.

One of the limitations to the research is that the questionnaire is not standardized at the current stage of the research. The results though encouraging are only indicative.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, we found that *vision communication* is significantly related to *communication effectiveness*. An above average degree of positive correlation is found between vision clarity and quality of written communication. While a moderate degree of positive correlation is found between vision clarity and level of motivation. Further, the study also found a high degree of positive correlation between vision clarity and overall communication in the organization. Thus, clarity of vision emerged as an important contributor towards communication effectiveness. This research assumes importance because of lack of similar research and an increasing interest in the 'communication of vision' in the Indian diaspora. The results though encouraging are still only indicative. It is hoped that these findings will encourage further research in this important area.

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