Relationship between Organisational Communication Flow and Communication Climate

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ABSTRACT

Communication is identified as an important variable that contributes to failures or success of an organisation. It is held responsible for rise and fall, success and failure , progress and regression of any organisation. Hence, an ideal communication climate is a must in an organisation. The Quality Communication creates ideal communication climate. Communication climate influences and gets influenced by the communication patterns chiefly within the organization. The organizational communication flows in different directions: vertical, horizontal and grapevine. Out if these the dimensions of vertical communication are most important predictors of organisational climate. Besides, centralised and decentralised governance also govern communication climate. This paper aims to present the study of the relationship between communication climate and internal patterns of communication with main focus on vertical communication against professional and organisational background. The paper clarifies the concepts with the help of real life short case studies and generates a few questions for better understanding. Examining communication climate will enable one to obviate counterproductive communication patterns and understand the significance of effective communication which can help individuals reach both their own and organizations' communication goals. Generally, three critical processes are evoked within an organisation- coordination, information exchange and perpetual feedback. Focus on downward communication helps us understand the senior's role in organization's communication and steering all the other kinds of communication and activities.

Keywords: Organisational communication; Vertical; downward; climate; openness
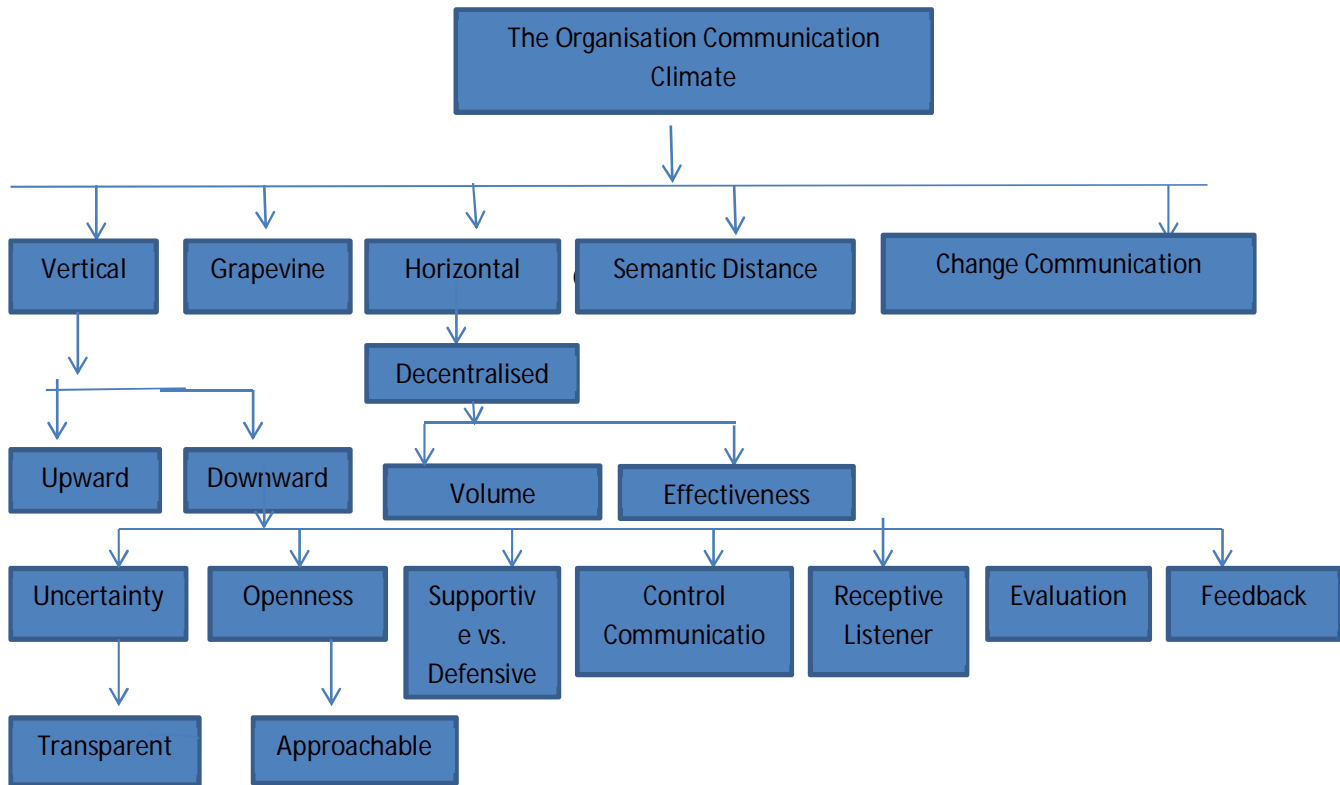
1.Introduction

The effective and positive organisational communication is an indispensible requirement for the good health and success of any organisation. Quality Communication is directly related to employees' mental peace as well as mental pressure , their job satisfaction , motivation and performance. communication factors are commonly identified as important causes of and contributors to failures or success. Bikson, T., & Gutek, B (1984) concluded in their studies that less than 10 % of the failures in the companies they studied were due to technical problems. Considering human factors have been found to be the main causes of implementation failures, an important question would be why this is so? An answer might be found when looking into the process of communication. "Communication is fundamental to organizing" (Farace, Monge & Russell, 1977) .Further ,with the fast pace of changes in the business environment and tough competition in the market, innovative changes are the need of the hour and changes require effective communication to convince. In situations where an open dialogue between superiors and subordinates is present, a high degree of trust to the change process will be created (Mac, 1999).Organisational communication is a very wide area .We, however, focus attention on communication climate with particular reference to vertical communication.

2.Organizational Communication Climate

Communication is one of the important variables , held responsible for rise and fall, success and failure , progress and regression of any organisation. Hence, an ideal communication climate is a must in an organisation. Communication climate is determined by communication flow which in turn is determined by kind of governance. Hence all these are closely associated. The concept of "an ideal communication climate" was hypothesized by(Redding ,1972). According to him the following dimensions were important : (1) participative decision making (2) supportiveness (3) trust, confidence and credibility (4) openness and candour; and (5) high

performance goals. These are , no doubt, the foundations of organisational system . Hence, with reference to these as foundations and various other dimensions from our professional surroundings, we shall discuss the superior – subordinate communication styles and their effect on and relationship with other kinds of organisational communication. Superior-subordinate communication is called vertical communication, further divided into downward and upward communication.

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                        The Organisation Communication
                                    Climate

   Vertical    Grapevine    Horizontal    Semantic Distance    Change Communication

                            Decentralised

  Upward   Downward                Volume        Effectiveness

Uncertainty  Openness   Supportive   Control       Receptive   Evaluation   Feedback
                        vs.          Communicatio  Listener
                        Defensive

Transparent   Approachable
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3.Vertical Communication

It is held between or among people who are on different levels of authority within the organisation. It occurs between hierarchically positioned persons and involves both downward and upward communication flows. The communication environment in any organisation generally remains dominated by downward communication flow. Larkin and Larkin (1994) suggest that downward communication is most effective if top managers communicate directly with immediate supervisors and immediate supervisors communicate with their staff. A wealth of evidence shows that increasing the power of immediate supervisors increases both satisfaction and performance among employees. In an organisation it is downward communication that plays the most imp role. It determines upward communication style, sets background for horizontal and grapevine communication and is also responsible to a large extent for establishing ideal or non-ideal communication climate. Downward communication is determined by numerous factors and determines several kinds of communication and Communcation climate.

4.Downward Communication

In this kind of flow information is transmitted from higher to lower levels. The downward flow of communication relates to multiple issues i.e. directives, instructions, and information regarding procedures and policies etc., to give directions for implementing goals, strategies and objectives. For example: "The new teaching pedagogy using case studies and audio video clippings is mandatory to follow. We must improve the quality of student learning if we are to succeed." ,to fix accountability, to explain how the job relates to other

activities of the organization, to take performance feedback regarding departmental progress reports, individual performance appraisals, and to tell departments or individuals about their performance standards and goals.

4.1.Uncertainty and downward communication **:**The research made by Hannaway (1985) found evidence suggesting that hierarchical level and environment uncertainty may affect the communication behaviour of organization   members . Under conditions of high uncertainty, the senior managers take more part in conversations and meetings than do lower level managers.

Case Study 1.:Uncertainty and Meetings : The new director, Mr Rohtas sensed some kind of politics in the environment. The strong lobby of old director was trying to fail the system. For one month Mr Rohtas simply observed the situation. A kind of uncertainty prevailed in the environment. He started with meetings . The old lobby deliberately avoided . Gradually , he held meetings after meetings where he showed concern for their advice as well. i.e. " Hello Ms Anu! what is your suggestion ?" or "What kind of administrative role ,you feel you can handle and do wonders, Mr Vikas?" Soon, the things improved and environment became congenial to a great extent. Wasn't communication through meeting an effective way to normalise the environment of uncertainty? Wouldn't this methodology help in different ways make working conditions better?

4.2.A.Openness in Superior-Subordinate Communication

The first factor, relating to superior-subordinate communication, that is worthy of considerable attention is how superiors receive and respond to messages which are transmitted by subordinates and directed upward. There is a substantial research and literature dealing with effects of openness in communication relationships. One of the foremost researchers in this area is Jourard (1971) who suggested that "the tendency toward openness is probably one of the best indicants of healthy personality" (Jourard, 1964 p. 179). But genuineness and reliability of information received from subordinates and colleagues should be checked as several times upward communication and opendoor policy may be injurious as well. The senior must be able to check the genuineness of the communication. Further, there must be trust, confidence and credibility regarding information from both the sides.

4.2.B. Approachable **:** For positive communication climate in an organisation the basic requirement is the approachability of the seniors. For clarification of any thing related to work policy etc, for approvals, for guidance, for impleting any innovative idea and for many other things subordinates need to approach their seniors . It is possible only if seniors are approachable. For this downward communication should be oriented toward asking or persuading in contrast to demanding or telling. The communication   should contain Professionalism as well as sensitive attitude to the needs and feelings of subordinates .

4.2.C. Open and Transparent Communication : The senior's open, transparent, nonbiased information communication to subordinates creates a healthy atmosphere , otherwise, some kind of frustration prevails in the atmosphere and may prove dangerous for the overall growth of the organisation.

Case Study 2. **:** In ABC institute of Management the director calls his flatterers – Mr Sabbarwal, Mr Nitish. Mr Vivek Ms Sonam and Ms Bhawna.
Director : " This year there are four foreign tours of students.You decide among yourselves the place of your choice so that I could recommend your names."
Mr.Sabbarwal : "Sir, but there are thirty professors. There may be an objection."
Director : " Why to inform every one about this? Let us finalise. By the time they will come to know, they themselves would feel it is too late to say anything ."
The list was finalised. The director's favourite went on foreign tour .What would be the grievances and reaction of the rest twenty six professors? What kind of climate would it create?

5. Supportiveness vs. Defensiveness

This dimension of superior-subordinate communication is related to whether the employee feels the leader is open and supportive. While accentuating the significance of leader's attitudes and behaviour for the communication climate in organizations Gibbs (1961) identifies two poles - the supportive and the defensive. The supportive climate is motivating for the subordinate, whereas the defensive climate makes the individual react defensively while communicating with boss. The superiority attitude communication of the senior ,generally imposes decisions and creates defensive climate on the part of the subordinate . For example, "This report ,with all required information must be ready by today evening. I don't want to listen any excuse." This implies the feeling "Do, whatever is asked or face the repercussion." The subordinates facing this kind of attitude and communication will avoid approaching the seniors with a problem. A senior with superiority attitude communication is generally seen pointing towards the weaknesses and mistakes by discouraging statements . These are discouraging for the employees.

6. Control Communication vs. Solution Orientation

The superiority attitude communication creates a climate of control communication. It involves a senior's attitude and tone of communication. It indicates that instead of empowering the subordinate, he is trying to influence the subordinate or imposing things upon him.

Case Study 3. A conversation between the Director and Dr. Shyma, regarding setting up of Communication Lab goes on :
Director : "Why don't you purchase software A instead of software B?"
Dr Shyma : "Sir , software A is outdated while software B is far advanced."
Director :   "But the approval for software B will take time, while I have to show on papers that lab has been established." The tone here is non-cooperative and of an accusation. Obviously, it will create a defensive climate. A climate of control implies that the senior's view is the only valid one.
Solution oriented communication **:** The better way of communication would have been-
"O.K. In that case you make a proposal, explaining the advantages of software B over software A and let us forward the proposal."This way the supervisor proposes a solution. This attitude of openness creates a cooperative and supportive atmosphere and can prevent friction, accusation and resentment. Moreover this attitude will also offer the employee a sense of satisfaction as they contribute to completing the task .Thus, doesn't control seem a major obstacle to a supportive communication climate.

7.Willing, Receptive and Empathic Listener

Listening skills play a very important role in communication. Openness in superior-subordinate communication is directly related to the fact that both the interactants- sender and reciever should be willing and receptive listener . Wheeless and Howard (1984) suggested that subordinates' perceptions of the superiors' openness in message receiving are also a powerful predictor of workers job satisfaction

Case Study 4 :In ABC Institute of Management, Dr Priya reached the class late by two minutes. The director on round pointed out. "Madam what is this? You are late by two minutes.This will not be tolerated."Sir! I have two lectures in continuation. Shifting from 2nd floor to 5th floor takes some time." "No Excuse". Is this communication driven by superiority complex.? Does it lack in listening skills and empathy.Is it solution driven ?
The opposite pole – the equality attitude may be indicative of mutual concerns and be helpful in solving the dilemma by remarking: In the above example the Dean's answer - "Ok. That means Time Table is at fault not you. It needs change." or "Looks like we have a problem here." Would have been professional, humorous ,empathetic and solution driven. Wouldn't this equality attitude communication keep the employees in mental peace?

8.Evaluation Tone

These days the evaluation has become the part of managerial analyses. This essential role of seniors , if analysed from the communication angle , can produce unintended defensive comunication . Evaluation sets up defenses if done through passing judgement or by using blaming tone or by questioning standards, values and

motives. Employees are often reluctant to approach the supervisor for fear of making a bad impression. As a result of this the subordinate will try to send up the only information that makes him or her look good. Gibbs (1961) calls it "filtering phenomenon". Same evaluation made in a positive tone or negative tone makes lots of difference.

Case Study 5 :In ABCIM Associate Professor Dr Hemant is called by the ditector .
The Director : "Mr Hemant, how much of the project is left? The progress is slow. Is it because you are slow or because you are incapable?"
Dr Hemant : " Sir, the approval for required instruments and then their delivery from Banglore delayed things,"
The Director : "This also indicates you are slow to follow up."

Wouldn't it be demotivating? Wouldn't it have been better to ask, "Mr Hemant! Any hurdle in carrying on the project ?

9. Feedback and Communication

9.1. Feedback and goal setting: Evaluation is a kind of Feedback from senior to subordinate and in the absence of goal setting feedback has no necessary relationship to performance(Latham and Locke (1991) .The research analysis regarding evaluation communication trend suggest managers tend to probe for the causes of failure among poor performers by asking attribution-seeking ("why") questions, while they tend to ask high performers "what-do-you think" or "how" questions (Gioia & Sims, 1986).
Moreover, there is close connection between feedback and centralised and decentralised governance.

9.2.Centralised Governance and Less Feedback **:** It is said 'feedback completes communcation'.In my professional surrounding regarding the relationship between centralization and communication, I find the following views of Hage et al. (1971,) quite relevant:
"There is less need for feedback when power is concentrated at the top of the organization hierarchy, since the role of subordinates is to implement decisions rather than to participate in the shaping of decisions. Therefore, as the concentration of power becomes greater, and consequently as the degree of participation in decision-making by lower participants becomes less, we would expect inhibitions on communication in an organization" (p. 863)

9.3.Less Feedback and High Error Rate **:** Centralization sometimes may contribute to speedy performance, , but it may also result in high error rate obviously because two-way communication or feedback is discouraged.

10. Upward Communication
It flows from junior to senior. **It** may be related to : problems and exceptions to routine work in order to make the leader aware of difficulties; Suggestions for improving task-related procedures; periodic reports regarding individual and departments performance; different kinds of Grievances. As we have seen in all the above cases, communication from juniors to seniors does not flow as freely and smoothly as communication from seniors to juniors. The senior's attitude and communication plays a critical role in the upward communication flow. If the senior is really concerned and really listens, upward communication improves. Besides, above mentioned barriers other barriers to effective upward communication are: senior's failure to respond properly; Administrators' defensive attitude about less-than-satisfactory actions; Physical barriers, long time gap between the communication and the action ,long delays to approve a staff member's suggestion because of various levels of administration.

The effectiveness of upward communication can be possible by following a few strategies. The administration can encourage open door policy. This means that the senior's door is always open to juniors. It invites staff to come in and discuss any problem they may have. In reality, the open-door policy is rarely used. The administrator may say: "My door is always open," but in many cases both the staff member and the administrator know the door is really closed. Typically, this does not occur in a learning organization (Reason, 2010; Senge, 2006) . One to one counselling sessions can greatly facilitate upward communication .The

Participative techniques can be very helpful. Group decision making can generate a great deal of upward communication.

11. Grapevine : Informal Communication : Gradually, the organizational theorists realised that the formal organizational structure failed to cover several important aspects of communication in organizations, so, they emphasized the role of informal or grapevine communication (Barnard, 1983; Follett, 1924) . Although leaders may be reluctant to use the grapevine, they should always listen to it. The grapevine is a natural phenomenon that serves as a means of emotional release for staff members and provides the administrator with significant information concerning the attitudes and feelings of staff members. Stevenson and Gilly (1991) found that managers tended to forward problems to personal contacts rather than to formally designated problem solvers, thus bypassing the formal network. Similarly Albrech and Ropp (1984) discovered that "Workers were more likely to report talking about new ideas with those colleagues with whom they also discussed work and personal matters, rather than following prescribed channels based upon hierarchical relationship". The issue does not remain confined to managers or workers rather extends to any employee a any level in any organisation.

*Case Study 6.:*Whether centralised or decentralised governance, one pattern was common. Whenever people got time, they share their ideas, ambitions, frustrations and various other professional issues with their friends or colleagues and avoid formal channel. In ABC I nstitue,with earlier dean, there was only discouragement and with the changed dean, every responsibility was imposed upon the person who went with any positive or negative issue.i.e. "You are empowered" "You tell the solution" "What is the solution?" "work for passion not for reward" "Don't look at people who are not working". The result was in both the cases upward communication became restricted for one reason or the other. The people started discussing their disappointments among themselves. There were different kind of reactions. Some enjoyed the frustration of the individual, some enjoyed things going against new dean, some ,in order to be in the good list of the boss presented the things in a spicy manner before the boss. In all the cases the environment was suffocating.Is it possible to conclude that management through clever use of this communication can be benefitted? Can it be injurious to organisation?

12. Horizontal Communication

Horizontal communication flow exists to enhance coordination. This horizontal channel permits a lateral or diagonal flow of messages, enabling units to work with other units without having to follow rigidly up and down channels. These communications are informational too, but in a different way than downward and upward communication. Here information is basically for coordination — to tie together activities within or across departments. This can be intradepartmental as well as interdepartmental as several times task accomplishment remains related to issues related to other departments. This kind of communication increases more in decentralised power.

12.1.Decentralised Power and Horizontal communication

12.1.A. Increase in Communication volume **:** . The first important dimension is increase in the volume of communication in all directions : vertical, horizontal and grapevine. For getting work done solely by an individual or a group , accountability compels people to communicate with different people. Hage et al. (1971) explores , "If power is dispersed in an organization, not only does volume of communication increase, but the flow of communication across departmental boundaries is also increased (p. 896)". Miller (1987) found that decentralization of strategic decision making resulted into more interaction. Yammarino and Naughton (1988) also supported this co relationship, and agreed that increased autonomy was accompanied by reports of more time spent communicating with one another. **:** Physical decentralization can have important effects for communication processes, including the frequency of face-to-face interactions, telephone usage, and the communication characteristics of meetings (e.g. Goddard, 1973; Pye, 1976).

12.1.B. Decentralised : communication effectiveness **:** member cooperation or participation foster effective communication and help integrate employees into communication processes and induce effective communication supporting,. Increase in communication and different kinds of communication flow leads to second dimension that is - communication effectiveness. Macey, Peterson and Norton (1989) revealed that a participation program led to increased influence by members, group cohesiveness, organizational involvement and clarity of decision making which according to Trombetta and Rogers (1988) led to communicative openness and adequacy. ?

12.1.C.Decentralised : Growing Feedback **:** In addition , decentralization through autonomous work groups leads to growing feedback(Pearson ,1992).With the decentralisation though power and accountability are delegated, every concerned person is required to give the feedback and inform about the status of the work to final senior authority.

Study 7. With the introduction of decentralised power, different groups were held accountable for different responsibilities.I n ABC institute A new software was introduced. All the work was to be completed within two days only. Only a few were very comfortable with it while most were not. Teams were formed. Deadlines were fixed. In this kind of circumstances what kind of skill are required? Doesn't it require lots of coordination? Doesn't coordination mean increased interaction? Is this kind of communication always smooth or it requires certain strategies to handle different situations? Will it lead to more interaction , feedback , and consequently to communication effectiveness, group cohesiveness and organisational involvement

13. Semantic-Information Distance
The term semantic-information distance describes the gap in information and understanding that exists between superiors and subordinates on specified issues (Jablin, 1979, p. 1207). It is frequently observed that large gaps in understanding exist between superiors and subordinates on even simple topics like job responsibilities

14. Organizational change and communication

Organizational change can be seen as a communication-related phenomenon. Transformation needs more than the compliance of followers. It involves shifts in the beliefs, needs and the values of followers. According to Burns (1978) transformational leaders obtain support by inspiring followers to identify with a vision that reaches beyond their immediate self-interest. In all these communication and language play the vital role. The article has provided an insight into the patterns within an organization Communications flow in different directions. It shows that some deterrents may prevent a good communication flow, but compels us to think of the ways to promote more effective communications climate. Communications flow in three directions— downward, upward, and horizontally.But it is downward communication that influences other communication patterns within an organization. Dimensions of vertical communication are important more for organisational identification, whereas dimensions of horizontal communication are important more for professional identification.Thus, a strong and effective communication system is required to succeed in the highly competitive environment If people unintentionally adopt counterproductive communication patterns, the results may be disastrous.[business examples]. We can conclude that the communication system at an organization is both a reciprocal, dynamic process and a structural construct, determined by a set of internal factors,enabling horizontal, vertical, and diagonal information flow throughout the organization and also effectively and efficiently operating a number of communication categories with the aim to help individuals reach both their own and organizations' communication goals, creating synergy among communicators.

Future Scope: The paper opens the way for the investigation ,analysis and research of multifarious associated communication issues which are central to effective organisational functioning system.

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