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COMMUNICATION AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION IN THE WORKING GROUP

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Abstract
The role of communication has strategic meanings. Therefore in terms of human resources this process must accompany orientation towards the accomplishing the goals. The purpose of this research is studying the communication process and the conflict within the work group. The research group is composed of 60 employees (Mage = 38.9, SD = 7.37). The instruments used in this study were The Communication Group Inventory, The Questionnaire of Professional Motivation and The Inventory for the Assessment of Conflicts. The results have shown that in terms of effectively communicating this is related with motivation and strategy of resolving conflicts through cooperation.

Keywords: communication; work group; conflict; negotiation; cooperation technique

1. INTRODUCTION

The role of communication in the working group has strategic meanings, given the fact that in terms of organization it must permanently accompany orientation towards the accomplishing the goals.

Groups represent "social formations in which individuals interact directly based on rules accepted and recognize themselves as members of a distinct entity, constituting them as the essential component of the global social system" (Cristea, 2015). Work group characteristics are related to the group task, cohesion and the integration level of social relations (Harrison, Price, Gavin, & Florey, 2002). Another feature is the temporal one, which refers to the age of the group through the "correlation with the level of integration and performance configures a derived parameter, which defines the speed of maturation and structuring of the group" (Cristea, 2015).

According to the researches each of these characteristics is conditioned by the set of processes and psychosocial group phenomena so that the group operates through a system of structural determinations, in which each factor may be successively or simultaneously the cause, condition or the effect (Gully, Devine, & Whitney, 1995). From the perspective of communication, the real effectiveness of a group can only be evaluated by taking into account the ratio of the actual cost of realizing and the minimal cost or by the number of strict necessary information that are required to fix the problem.

The work group consists of individuals united by relationships that have a communication network that is organized with complementarities (Ellison, 2007; Forsyth, 2009). In this situation the issues is raised by knowing how a particular group chooses a model for solving a task, adopting an optimal strategy for solving the issue based on the constraints of the network that it is placed (McGrath, 1984). Analyzing the content of communication will enable therefore the understanding of the triggered phenomena’s. The particularity of a group is given by the nature of the relationships that connect the individuals that compose it: direct communication, awareness of a common purpose and applying of organization, towards the fulfillment of a project (Sherif, 1966; Podsakoff, Ahearne, & MacKenzie, 1997). These are the characteristics that a group can be identified through (Hyatt, & Ruddy, 1997). If these issues are lost from sight then the group disappears, communication ceases, the whole group’s life source is annihilated (Blau, 1964). The communication source loses its status and the communication process deteriorates (McPhee, 1985).

On the other hand the conflict is a ubiquitous phenomenon and this ubiquity is accompanied by a variety, which is virtually, unlimited."Where there are many possible choices, there is a potential for misunderstanding" (Billikopf, 2009).

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The conflict represents the incompatibility of the goals, so achieving the goal by one of those involved causes by itself a chance reduction of the other person’s opportunities to reach their goal (De Dreu, 2008). Van de Vliet believes that "individuals are in conflict when they are obstructed or irritated by another individual or group and they inevitably react to it in a beneficial or costly way" (Janssen, & Van de Vliet, 1996). The definition of this author fails to mention the situations where one of the parties prefers to not be involved, run, abandon or reject the existence of the conflict (Janssen, & Van de Vliet, 1996). The three sides of a conflict, namely perception, affect (emotion) and action do not correlate with each other, increasing or decreasing the intensity of one of them does not provide information about the development of others (Lazarus, Cohen-Charash, Payne, & Cooper, 2001).

The conflict is presented along five distinct states: disagreement, confrontation, escalation, de-escalation and resolution, the principle of reciprocity (Janssen, & Van de Vliet, 1996). This supports the hypothesis that this principle is sufficient so that one of the parties can do something so that the other can already be in conflict, even if they do not know this yet. It is important to note that the emergence of the social conflict appears when two or more parts or systems, defined by individuals, groups, communities that are in interdependence are (or just perceived) different or even incompatible at the level of needs, goals, values, resources, differences or even incompatible which produce a tension that needs to be discharged (Tajfel, 1981). The evolution analysis of the conflict situations shows that the onset of conflicts involves the gradual accumulation of stresses over time (Staw, Sandelands, & Dutton, 1981).

Interpersonal conflicts occur between people with long-term relations, between close friends, between colleagues, between acquaintances or between people who did not know each other until the moment of the conflict (Knapp, Putnam, & Davis, 1988; Bass, & Ryterband, 1979). Researching the communication process as a source of conflict within the work group must take into account a crucial element, namely the transmitter who is holding the task control over the act of communication (Deutsch, Coleman, & Marcus, 2011).

From the perspectives of human resources the relationships established within a work group are not however exclusively positive and harmonious, but they can evolve into a trajectory crisis, or even conflict (Burke, & Greenglass, 1993; Pfeffer, 2007). Conflict is virtually an inevitable part of human relationships, and specialized studies have an increasing rate at supporting the becoming role that it can be applied, so that from a dysfunctional potential it can evolve into a functional one (Newstrom, & Davis, 1986).

When resolving conflicts (work related) is based on sources of communication, the discussions take place through the first stage of active listening - conversation technique whose main role is to communicate the speaker’s the meaning we attach to its message (Bass, & Stogdill, 1990). The main benefit of active listening is that it optimizes communication which is useful on the one hand in solving their interpersonal conflicts, and on the other in conflict mediation (Ernst Kossek, & Ozeki, 1998). Active listening has a threefold role, aiming to inform, reassuring the receiver/interlocutor and the answer. When members of working groups are in conflict, their power comes into play, whether they intend to or not (Medsker, Williams, & Holahan, 1994).

Another form of resolving work related disputes through communication sources, as an interactive form, is negotiation. Negotiation is a discussion between the parties to solve a common problem. It can be of the three types: informal, quotidian or professional, procedural, episodic. Negotiation is a dialogue between two or more persons through which they try to reach an agreement (settlement) which can solve a common issue (Bazerman, 2000).

The defining elements of a negotiation are the dialog and the orientation towards results, the solving intention. In reality, negotiating can take short forms, quotidian, as they are the instrument through which individuals settle their differences even when they are not acknowledged as such (Bruner, 1990). The negotiation can occur as an episode of an ampler movement towards solving a conflict, without constituting the only way to solve it, and without using the method sine qua non, since some conflicts come to an end without any negotiation (Lewicki, Weiss, & Lewin, 1992). In the resolution of conflicts, some situation may occur in which case some negotiations are not compatible with the conflict resolution processuality (the case of bargaining-project). In summary, the negotiation has three forms: official/formal, short and episodic (Moore, 2014).

2. METHOD AND PARTICIPANTS

Based on the assumptions presented, the present study aims to investigate the level of efficiency inside a working group based on the act of communication; another objective is represented by the study of relationships between communication and ways of solving conflicts within the working group. The research hypotheses are:

1. There will be a correlation between scores reported for interpersonal communication and those reported by the subjects investigated for the cooperation technique, as a chosen technique for solving the conflict.
2. The conflict resolution techniques and the professional motivation are considered predictors for the development of the communication quality within the work group.

2.1. Participants

The research group is composed of 60 employees, 15 of the respondents are female and 45 are male. They are working for a Construction Company in Bucharest. The age of the participants is between 22 and 51 years, with the mean age of 38.9 years and the SD of 7.37. The average age of the men is 32.27 years with a SD of 7.25 years and the average age of the women is 34.19 years with a SD of 8.89. The inclusion criteria’s in the research were: the agreement of the firm manager and their informed consent.

2.2. Instruments

The Communication Group Inventory was created to measure the perception of an individual’s potential about interpersonal and group communication (Chelcea, 1994). The CGI is a 20-item scale answered by using a 5-item Likert scale. The internal reliability of the CGI during this study was minimally acceptable (Cronbach’s \( \alpha = .671 \))

The Questionnaire of Professional Motivation was constructed to measure the level of satisfaction related to professional motivation, security, and rewards. The questionnaire contains 35 items and the internal reliability of the QPM during this study was also minimally acceptable (Cronbach’s \( \alpha = .663 \)).

The Inventory for the Assessment of Conflicts was inspired and adapted after Jay Hall’s Conflict Management Survey. This inventory assesses style/techniques of conflict resolution, which includes 12 items with five response options that reflects individual behavior. This inventory examines how people adopt certain styles and techniques that they then use when they are in a conflicted state. For this study the Inventory for the Assessment of Conflicts had, an acceptable Cronbach’s Alpha coefficient of .729.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Regarding the first hypothesis of the research, the Pearson correlation coefficient obtained, \( r(60) = 0.705, p <0.000 \) (2-tailed) indicates a significant positive correlation between total scores reported for interpersonal and group communication and those reported by the subjects investigated for the cooperation technique, as a chosen technique for solving the conflict. In other words, if the level of interpersonal communication between group members will be realized at an optimal level then the chosen conflict resolution technique will be one that is based on cooperation. The multiple ways of solving a conflict within the working group are influenced in this regard by the communication process conducted among its members. As we have seen throughout the research process and through the interviews conducted the situation encountered within the analyzed group revealed that the construction company employees report a high percentage (40%) of the existence of shortcomings in communication.

However, the technique of resolving conflicts - namely through cooperation - shows that those employees, be they workers, technicians, construction engineers, administrative staff, team leaders are all guided by the existence of a communication process that takes place with the main objective of solving the work duties.

The multiple regression coefficients calculation was used for the second hypothesis of the research. The results have shown that the prediction of the communication item can be made based on the global score of the professional motivation in a first phase. A second prediction model aims towards the same dependent variable, respectively communication, based on professional motivation (global) and rewards (as a technique to resolve conflicts). The obtained results show an \( F(2, 60)=56,184, p=0,000 \). The regression coefficient obtained for the model was \( R^2 = .675 \). The predictor model was able to account for 67% of the variance in effectively communicating R2 = .67, 50% CI [.34, .78]. The value of these coefficients indicates the fact that the better prediction is offered by the model which takes into account both the professional motivation questionnaire scores, as well as the scores obtained on resolving conflicts technique – cooperation.

4. CONCLUSION

The present study intends to be the start of certain investigations on this line, giving a theoretical and experimental openness that requires further study. The objectives of this initiative focused on the study of the relation between communication and ways of solving conflicts in the working group and identifying the professional motivation configuration and the interactions with conflict resolution techniques in determining an
effective communication. The research hypotheses were built in such a way that it would comprise the main coordinates of interest for the study: communication – conflict solving techniques – and the work group. Our results are congruent with those found in other studies showing that the quality of communication within the group is subjected to certain explicit-implied rules of a procedural order (Wall, & Callister, 1995; Medsker, Williams, & Holahan, 1994). We believe that within the communication process there is basically the power than can provide a smooth functioning of the working group, the results are materialized in ways of understanding and performing the work duties and the existence of balanced relations between constituent members without disruptions.

The communication process remains a particular case of the social process, which is continually subject to change (Lewicki, & Barcellos, 1977). The communication capacity doubled by the capacity differentiated between the members of the professional working group can lead to obtaining new performance results (Kelman, 1996). The optimization strategies required for obtaining an efficient communication are referred in general in reducing the barriers created by the different power and status levels in the professional group using an attitude of concern and interest showing by the manager in relation to his subordinates (Guest, & King, 2004).

5. REFERENCES