

Various Modes of Interaction in a Hospital and Methods to Improve Communication among Various Staff Members

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Introduction

The term communication is freely used by every one in modern society; including members of general public, organizational behavior scholars and management practitioners. In addition the term is employed to explain a multitude of segments both in the society as a whole and in work organizations.

Historical Background of the Role of Communication

Early discussions of administration and management gave very little emphasis to communication.

Foyal Contribution

Fig 1.1 shows how Foyal presented a simplified version of the formal organization. If the formal channels in this organization were strictly followed and if F wanted to communicate with P, the communication would have to go through E-D-C-B-A-L-M-N-O-P and back again. In other words, F would have to go through a total of 20 positions. On the other hand, if F could lay a "gangplank" to P,

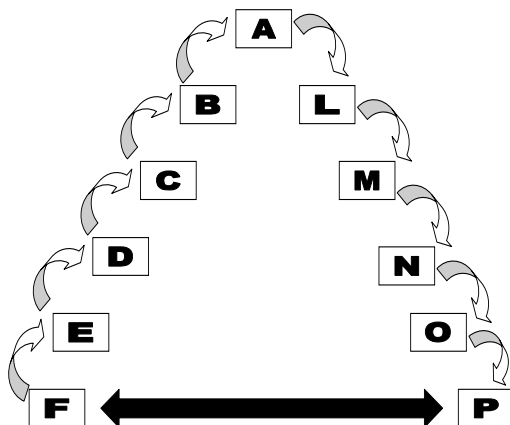


Fig. 1.1 Foyle's "gangplank" Concept

it would, in words of Foyal, allow the two employees F & P to deal at one sitting, and in a few hours would by pass words twenty transmissions. (1)

Barnard's Contribution

It was largely Chester Barnard in the late 1930s who fully developed communication as a vital dynamics of organization behavior. He was convinced that communication is the major shaping force in the organization. He emphasized that meaning and understanding must occur before authority can be communicated from administration to subordinate.

He listed seven specific communication factors, which were

1. The channels of communication should be definitely known.
 2. There should be definite formal channel of communication to every member of an organization.
 3. The line of communication should be as direct and as short as possible.
 4. The complete formal line of communication normally should not be used.
 5. The persons serving as communications centers should be competent.
 6. The line of communication should not be interrupted while the organization is functioning.
 7. Every communication should be authenticated.
- (1)

Modern Perspective

The real managers study combined direct observation of managers in their natural setting with self-report measures to try to determine how they communicated. The first dimension of the managerial

communication model represents a continuum ranging from the humanistic indicator (who frequently interacts both up and down the organizational hierarchy and exhibits human oriented activities) to the mechanistic isolate (who communicate very little except on a formal basis). The other dimension describes a continuum from the informal developer (who communicates spontaneously in all directions and exhibits activities related to developing his/her people) to the formal controller (with whom users formally communicate in scheduled interaction and exhibits monitoring/controlling activities). This empirically derived model deserts two major dimensions of managerial communication. (1)

Hospital Information System (2)

A Hospital information system must provide the needed information without spending unnecessarily the scarce resources of men, money and time. The Administrator has to know enough for various functions:

1. Administrative
2. Clinical
3. Financial

Sources of information

- Hospital statistics: All relevant data must be available and used judiciously.
- Surveys, which include attitudes of the community user. The surveys may be quantifiable or qualitative.
- Feedback from the staff and the management of hospital.

How does the information help?

Information helps the administrator to increase the efficiency in the delivery of services and avoid wastage. It can help to plan and implement priorities so that quality is assured.

Reports on the functioning of stores delivery lines and laundry, central sterile supply maintenance and personnel should be obtained periodically.

There are a host of other areas on which information is available and needed. A hospital administrator must be up to date with respect to the health policy of state and the country as also programs of health care. (2)

Barriers of Communication (3)

The subject of communication cannot be studied in isolation because it is fundamental to all hospital activity. The more complex an organization becomes, the greater is the need. For effective communication, there are many barriers to communication that must be overcome if communication is to be made effective.

Physical Barriers

Physical barriers are environmental factors, which prevent or reduce the sending and receiving of communication. They include physical distance, distracting noise and similar interferences.

Personal Barriers

Personal barriers arise from judgments, emotions and the social values of people. They cause a psychological distance between people. Psychological distance may entirely prevent communication, filter part of it or cause misinterpretation.

Semantic Barriers

Semantic barriers arise from the limitations, which may take any of the three forms: Words, picture and actions. Words have several meanings and they become meaningless unless they are put in the proper context. The basic problem in communication is that the meaning, which is actually understood by one person, may not be what the other intended to imply.

Non-verbal Communication

Sometimes called the "Silent language", non-verbal communication can be defined as "non word human responses (such as gestures, facial expressions) and the perceived characteristics of the environment through which the human verbal and non verbal messages are transmitted".

Body language and Paralanguage.

There are many forms of non-verbal communication, probably the most widely recognised is the body language. This form includes facial expressions and what people do with their eyes, feet, hands and posture. As explained by Preston (2&3) when an individual is excited or aroused, the pupils of the eye will dilate, when haggling over a price a buyer will

unconsciously signal an alert seller that a particular price is acceptable, some colors or shapes cause more excitement than others, and the reaction registers in the shoppers eyes. Besides the obvious meetings attached to things such as firm handshake or touching the other person when making an important point, few communication experts do agree that what the person does with the lower limit is the key to body language. Some times called *paralanguage*, these include things such as voice, quality, value, speech rate, pitch, non-flounces (saying “ah”, “um”) laughing and yawning.

Improving non-verbal Effectiveness

As the other forms of communication, these are specific guidelines that can be used to increase the accuracy in nonverbal behavior.

Here are some suggestions to improve non-verbal communication.

1. Look at what is happening in the situation. When non-verbal behavior is an emotional response, it reflects what is going on at the moment and can be used to better understand the person’s non-verbal behavior.
2. Canister the discrepancies between the non-verbal behavior and the verbal comments.
3. Watch for subtleties in the non-verbal behavior.(2)

Direction of Communication (3)

Downward Communication

This means the dissemination of information from superiors to their subordinates. In downwards communications, authority flows downwards.

Purpose of Downward Communication

Katz and lawn have identified five general purposes of top to bottom communication.

1. To give specific task derivatives about job instructions.
2. To give information about organizational procedures and purposes.
3. To provide information about the rationale of the job.
4. To tell subordinates about their performance.
5. To provide ideological information to facilitate the indoctrination of goals.

Media used for Downward Communication

Besides the increased use of communications technology, traditionally, downward communications systems relied on many types of print and oral media to disseminate information. Some examples of written media are organizational handbooks, manuals, magazines, newspapers and letters sent to the homer distributed on the job; bulletin boards items posters and information displays; and standard reports, description of procedures and memos. Examples of oral media used in the system are to directly pass on instructions from managers, speeches, meetings, closed circuit televisions programs, public address systems and telephones.

Ways to improve Downward Communication

Quality of information has often been sacrificed for quantity. Also the social psychology experiments over the years, have clearly demonstrated people’s willingness to ignore useful information and use useless information.

After an extensive review of the information communication research conducted, experts have found that the downward flow of informations can affect receivers in the following ways:

1. People are more open to messages, which are consonant with their existing image, their beliefs, and their values.
2. Messages, which are incongruous with values, tend to engender more resistance than messages which are incongruous with rational logic.
3. As people see the environment changing, they are more open to incoming messages.
4. The total situation affects communication; a message interpreted as congruous in one situation may be interpreted as incongruous in another.

If administrators understand these impacts of communications on subordinates and do something about them, communication can become more effective. (3)

Upward Communication

This is passing on of information from the employee levels to administration. Such communication is very important for efficient and successful management. Whereas the downward process is highly directive

giving orders, instructions, information about procedures the upward process is characteristically non-directive in nature.

Methods for improving Upward Communication

Some of the possible ways to promote more effective upward communications:

1. The Grievance procedure

Provided for in most collective bargaining agreements, the grievance procedure allows employees to make an appeal upward beyond their immediate manager.

2. The open door policy

It is a standing invitation for employees to come in and talk about any thing that is troubling them. Unfortunately, in practice the open-door policy is more fiction than fact.

3. Counselling attitude Questionnaires and Exit interviews.

4. Participative Techniques

This may be accomplished either by informal involvement or formal participation programs such as the use of junior boards, suggestion boxes, quality circles etc.

Large, bureaucratic Government have used such a concept primarily in Scandinavia to provide an Altus for persons who have been treated unfairly or in a depersonalized manner.

Type of Information for Upward communication

Overall, employees can supply basically two types of information:

1. Personal information about ideas, attitudes and performances.
2. More technical feedback information about performance a vital factor for the control of any organization. (3)

Horizontal Communication / Interactive Communication

This means the flow of communication amongst the personnel at the same level of organization. Most of the classical theorists saw the need to supplement the vertical with some form of horizontal system, as

Foyal did with gangplank concept. Horizontal requirement become more important as the organization becomes longer, more complex and more subject to the downsizing and flattening of structures.

However, as is the case with vertical (downward and upward) flows in the organization structure, the real key to horizontal communication is found in people and behavior. Because of the dynamic interpersonal aspects of communication, the interactive form seems more appropriate than just the horizontal form.

Purpose of Interactive Communication

1. Task coordination

The department heads may meet monthly to discuss how each department is contributing to the system's goals.

2. Problem solving

The members of a department may assemble to discuss how they will handle a threatened budget out; they may employ brainstorming techniques.

3. Information sharing

The members of one department may meet with members of another department to give them some new data.

4. Conflict resolution

The members of one department may meet to discuss a conflict inherent in the department or between departments. (4)

Interpersonal Communication

In interpersonal communication, the major emphasis is on transferring information from one person to another. Communication is liked upon as a basic method of effecting behavioral change, and it incorporates the psychological processes on one hand and language on the other.

Importance of Interpersonal Communication

There must be a sender and a receiver for interpersonal communication to take place. Feedback makes communication a two way process.

- 1. Intention:** Effective feedback is directed toward improving your performance and making the employee a more valuable asset.

2. **Specificity:** Effective feedback is designed to provide recipients with specific information so that they know what must be done to correct the situation.
3. **Readiness:** For feedback to be effective, employees must be ready to receive it.
4. **Climate:** Effective feedback must be clearly understood by recipient.
5. **Validity:** For feedback to be effective, it must be reliable and valid. (3)

Grapevine

Grapevine communication may be formal or informal. Formal communication consists of officially recognized methods such as departmental meetings, conferences, news bulletins etc. Informal communication consists of a complex network of informal man-to-man personal contacts, which takes place on the job. Any informal communication about official matters constitutes the grapevine. (3)

Modes of Communication

Various modes of improving the interaction among the different groups of the organization (here hospital) include the means that could pick up their interest and they could pay some attention to what is going on in the organisation (the hospital) and could feel a part of the assembly:

1. Notice board

There can be an effective method of communication provided they are well located and attractive to look at.

2. House magazine

This magazine can provide a platform for top management to communicate with its employees in informal and direct terms. If intelligently used, it can be one method of creating team spirit and building mutual understanding among employees.

There are two types of house magazines

- (a) The News Bulletin type wherein news and notes of topical interest are published.
- (b) The proper magazine type where articles, poems and news all find a place.

3. Suggestion scheme

Suggestion scheme encourages employee's participation and helps them to identify with the organization provided these schemes are properly administered.

The factors to be taken into account for the success of suggestion schemes are

- (a) A joint committee should be formed to operate the system promptly and efficiently.
- (b) Employees should be encouraged to give their suggestions about the problems of the organization.
- (c) Full information should be disseminated about the suggestions received. Transparency is essential for the success of this. The employees should trust the organization and should give the suggestions freely, thinking that their suggestions will make a difference.

4. Meetings and conferences

The truly effective conferences and meetings encourage two-way communication and involve a group of people putting forth their ideas and experiences.

5. Hospital and departmental letters

Letters sent from the chief executive of the hospital or department head to employees are generally used in special circumstances, such as any change in hospital policy, salary scales, fringe benefits etc.

6. Personnel policy manuals

Personnel policy manual should be designed to promote mutual understanding and co-operation so as to maximize the delivery of services in the hospital. (2)

Conclusion

The management of an organization should realize the importance of effective communication within the organization. They should know what information the employees would like to know from the management and what they should know from the employees through upward communication so that unnecessary bottlenecks of communication may be eliminated in the interest of organization and for the free flow of communication.

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