Effectiveness of Internal Communication in Managing Ethnically Diverse Workforce: Case Study of Nakheel

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Abstract

This study is prepared to examine the effectiveness of internal communication in managing ethnically diverse work. To do this Nakheel development company from Dubai, UAE was chosen. To meet this purpose, the topic was examined from both managers' and employees' aspects. To examine how effective internal communication is in managing ethnically diverse workforce interpretivist approach is followed. Accordingly, the case study approach was followed as the study conducted within a single organization – Nakheel. In collecting primary data from the company, in-depth interview method was used since carrying out this study required exploring thoughts and experiences of managers in relation to managing diverse workforce and methods they use when communicating ethnically diverse employees. The findings suggested that managers at Nakheel are aware of the diversity in their workforce and the consequences of not acting on smoothing the differences. The company employs various channels to establish a good communication with its employees and implemented open door policy to hear their voice. However, it is found that the main concern of Nakheel is to overcome the language barriers and the company started to use English in an addition to Arabic which is evidently the proof of ineffective way of managing ethnically diverse workforce

Keywords: *diversity, managing diversity, employee management, Nakheel*

Etnik Olarak Farklı İş Gücünü Yönetmede İç İletişimin Etkinliği: Nakheel Şirketi Üzerine Bir Çalışma

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Öz

Bu çalışma, etnik iletişimin çeşitli çalışmalarının yönetiminde iç iletişimin etkinliğini incelemek için hazırlanmıştır. Bu amaç doğrultusunda, Dubai'den Nakheel geliştirme şirketi seçilmiştir. Bu amaca ulaşmak için konu, hem yönetici hem de çalışan yönlerinden incelenmiştir. Etnik olarak farklı işgücünün yönetiminde iç iletişimin ne kadar etkili olduğunu incelemek için yorumlayıcı yaklaşım izlenmiştir. Araştırma tek bir şirket özelinde gerçekleştirildiği için (Nakheel) vaka çalışması yaklaşımı kullanılmıştır. Şirketten birincil veri toplanırken, bu çalışmanın yürütülmesi için yöneticilerin farklı işgücü ve etnik olarak farklı çalışanlarla iletişim kurarken kullandıkları yöntemlerle ilgili düşünce ve deneyimlerinin araştırılması gerektiğinden derinlemesine görüşme yöntemi kullanılmıştır. Bulgular, Nakheel'daki yöneticilerin iş güçlerindeki çeşitliliğin ve farklılıkları yumuşatma konusunda hareket etmemenin sonuçlarının farkında olduklarını göstermektedir. Şirket, çalışanları ile iyi iletişim kurmak için çeşitli kanallar kullanmakta ve onların seslerini duymak için açık kapı politikası uygulamaktadır. Bununla birlikte, şirketin asıl endişesinin dil engellerini aşmak olduğu ve şirketin etnik olarak çeşitli işgücünü yönetmenin etkisiz bir yolunun kanıtı olan Arapça'ya ek olarak İngilizce kullanmaya başladığı görülmüştür.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *çeşitlilik, çeşitliliği yönetme, çalışan yönetimi, Nakheel*

Introduction

It is not uncommon to globally observe various nations sharing residential states. Incline in immigration evidently does not serve well for the local community that receives the immigrants due to the fact that with foreigners comes the responsibility to share rightfully earned employment with newcomers. Adler (2002) notices that due to originality of every single society or culture, alongside immigration emerges workforce variety that in turn creates more job opportunities for invalid, senior and rebellious people together with minorities, female population and different races. If the authorities of a company manage to develop a well-planned management system for their diverse workforce, the effort will echo in a competitively advantageous way (Wentling and Palma-Rivas, 2000). According to Johnston (1991), development of globalization and culturally diverse staff is going head to head, however the companies that do not fail to extract the best of these trends end up getting granted competitive and managerial eases.

According to Von Bergen, Soper and Parnell (2005) and Leveson, Joiner and Bakalis (2009) respectively, most of the organizations are on track when it comes to benefitting from newly found cultural differences, however acknowledging the positive influence of the new trend on administrative and social occurrences is not enough; it is inevitable for a company to run its objectives by hierarchical, official and unsanctioned bodies that are able to analyze the new plan of management by means of communication.

Furthermore, it is important to point out that communication between management and their staffs is vital to employee motivation and organizational success for the very reason that communication is a mean that is assembled by different beliefs, customs, actions, values and personalities. Failing to communicate a message is a direct misunderstanding that in turn directly leads to poor execution. Consequently, this research is interested in establishing the interaction of professional success of staff working in a culturally diverse organization and communication skills on the organization.

Examining the impact of internal communication on ethnically diverse force requires finding answers to several questions. The research questions prepared to be answered in this study are as follows;

- What strategies are in use in Nakheel in achieving effective internal communications among the employees?

- In what level ethnic background of the employees are considered by the company in forming internal communication strategies?
- What is the employee perception towards effectiveness of internal communications which takes into account ethnic backgrounds of the employees at Nakheel?
- To what extent current internal communications affects the performances of Nakheel's employees in achieving customer satisfaction?
- What needs to be done to improve effectiveness of internal communications in Nakheel?

Communication

The series of actions to generate comprehension by utilizing expressive and non-verbal signs is regarded as communications (Vecchio and Appelbaum, 1995). The communication actions operate by means of nodes that are the ways in which the communication occur. The transmission of communication emerges from the nodes to the receiver. Lastly, bidirectional communications and its impacts develop the process (Fill, 2013).

There are various ways to define communication. For instance, it is a social interaction among individuals through messages according to Tourish and Hargie (2004), while Oliver (1997) defines it with a more comprehensive concept as the exchange of idea and information by using signs to transmit the main idea of communication. In terms of organization, communication is classified in two concepts: internal and external. Cheney and Christensen (2001) state that due to unclear boundaries in companies, external and internal communications have been considered as having no definite boundaries anymore. But, external communication in the context of organization is in some issues in connection with marketing, public relations and management. Organizational improvement, missions and employee relations are main issues in internal communications. The objective of this research to analyze the effect of culture in defining the capabilities of communication in a company, internal communication is addressed.

Internal Communications

Internal communication is defined in various ways. Expanded study on public relations by Welch and Jackson, corporate communication and organizational communication resulted in internal communication defined as the analytic management of interaction and connections among employees at all positions within an organization (Welch and Jackson, 2007). These writers state that employees, strategic management, daily management structures, work groups and project tasks are the elements of internal groups (Yeomans, 2008).

According to Welch and Jackson (2007), the objectives of internal communication are related to commitment of workers, supporting the development of belonging sense, creating better conditions in the workplace and improving the comprehension of innovation to be in line with the changes in the global area. In the studies, the influence of abovementioned goals in companies and changes in companies that are regarded as influenced by internal communication in an important way (Elving, 2005).

According to several scholars such as Clampitt (2013), Tourish and Hargie (2004) and internal communication is seen in its transmission aspect and this is the area in which the transmission of data is considered as having high importance. In general, information is shared to transmit messages to the individuals within organization. But academicians and practitioners agree that the way to create a working environment with commitment and involvement is creating a communication structure transmitting (Clampitt, 2013) upwards (Tourish and Hargie, 2004) and in between managers and internal parties.

Yeomans (2008) considers the transmission perspective as it still exists both in between academicians and managers despite the approaches of decentralization and self-managing in companies.

One of the forms of handling internal communication is flow of communication and the transmission. However, this only occurs in an interpretive concept. In this context, the messages of management are regarded as the issue of negotiation by the individuals of various organizations. Yeomans (2008) states it in a more simplified way as an individual both understands the facts and comprehends information and then utilizes it with regards to the socio-cultural conditions within an organization. In terms of multi-culture, internal publics are defined by professional and occupational teams

with regards to the age, ethnicity and gender (Banks, 1995). According to Banks (1995), people who are managing communication are supposed to pay attention to cultural diversity through dealing with meanings and contexts. In this sense, context is the real world where individuals regard their performance as important. For this reason, internal communication can be considered as adopted in a social sense that creates an environment in which people and teams in a company comprehend the messages in various ways and times (Yeomans, 2008).

To conclude, Fatt (1997) states an empirical fact that a manager of an organization is supposed to pay importance to communication abilities since it creates respect and confidence. In this case, individuals will be enthusiastic to set objectives and work harder to reach these objectives. In identifying the elements of internal communication, Asif and Sargeant (2000) introduced a model by means of the application grounded theory. The model developed by Asif and Sargeant's (2000) internal communication consists of four issues: communication process, the means and methods for communication, moderation of variables which is related to the management and ways of communication and results performed by employees such as loyalty, their satisfaction, confidence, enthusiasm and vision.
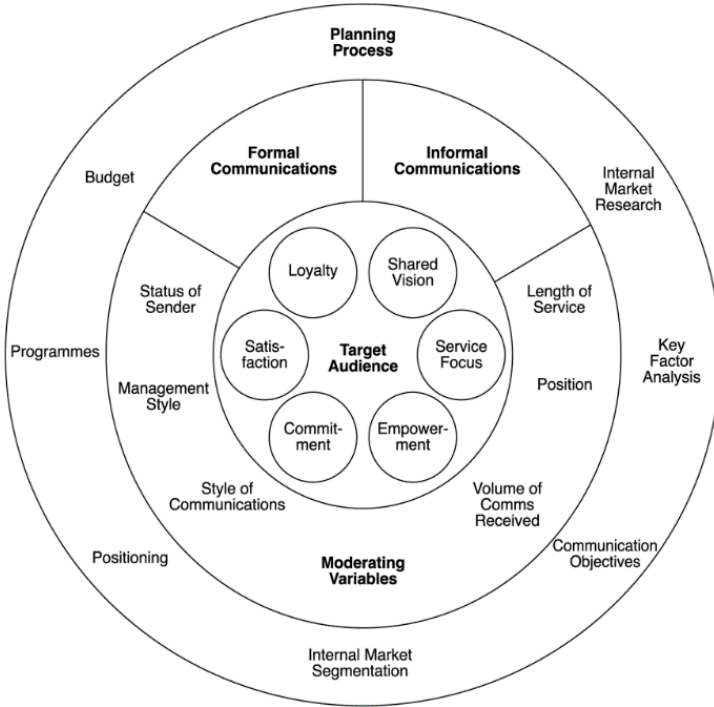
Figure 1. Internal Communication Model of Asif and Sargeant (2000)

In the assistance of this model, it can be seen that internal communication has a complex design and it defines the quality and influence of internal communication's impact on upcoming outcomes from workers. In this study, this model has importance since it clearly reveals the impact of culture on results of an organization due to communication and this shows the importance of culture and ethnicity in defining the communication.

The Influence of Culture on Communication Style

Variations exist among the perceptions, ideas and attitudes of people from various cultures in the world (Ozkalp and Kirel, 2000). This means that people expressions are determined through the qualities and culture of people based upon the values that are held concerning various areas of life and existence.

As a result, these values have an effect on the behaviors that are formed for a particular situation (Miroshnik, 2002). This is due to the fact that culture

is intrinsic to human life and serves as a method of communications in humans. Therefore, culture and communication are inseparable (Seymen, 2006). Rau, Li and Li (2009) state that personal communication creates understanding between people and contributes to the understanding of culture and customs as well as language traditions. Cultural characteristics that have significant influence over the way in which an individual-processes though and establishes judgement from values exists through communication. Therefore, communication is a significant aspect of the way people establish their life. Where communication contexts do not exists, misunderstanding can arise due to the different use of words which vary from person to person (Hinner, 2017). Additionally, context deals with the conditions and the environment supporting the primary message being communicated. This includes background, information and silent moments that are experienced during communication cycle (Armstrong and Ferguson, 2010).

Communication's success relies upon the specific context that exists between those who are communicating. As a result, context varies in communication in regard to both high and low context (Hornikx and Le Pair, 2017). In regard to the low, a context of less experienced communication exists. Therefore, it is important to use language in an appropriate setting with the most efficient meaning in order to deliver the correct message to others effectively.

Additionally, these types of communications exhibit more clarity when compared to the major types (Janelle, Bryan and Timothy Mcmahon, 1998). Anthropologists claim that Scandinavian, English, and German cultures show minor contexts and Latin American, East Asian, Arabic and Latin-European cultures show the major contexts (Hall, 1990).

The three primary communication features that exist show a strong relationship with regards to the cultural capacity contexts (face, facts and interpersonal relationships). In this context, the fundamental considerations for the contexts which are minor exists as the facts and information concerning numbers. However, within the major contexts, the technical reality and the actual reality are not seen as the same. Face is defined as the protection or enhancement of the esteem of the individual (Victor, 1992).

The outlook, respect, trustworthiness and public appearance are considered major characteristics of the major contexts. The final element of communication in this context is protection and enhancement of the interpersonal

relationships which are compatible. This is seen as a significant issue in terms of the major context cultures (Rau et al., 2009).

Chang and Tharenou (2004) offered a description on the necessary competencies required for managing a workforce that is ethnically diverse. The research conducted by Chang and Tharenou (2004) examined the three perspectives of management which include the ability to manage, leading and communication.

Additionally, five themes were identified through the management interviews of the study and included "personal style", "cultural empathy", "generic managerial skills", "learning on the job", and "communication competence" (Chang and Tharenou, 2004). In the study, it was concluded that the competencies are represented through these themes and have reached a consensus with management as to what is needed in order to manage a workforce that is ethnically diverse.

Methodology

To examine how effective internal communication is in managing ethnically diverse workforce interpretivist approach is followed. Accordingly, the case study approach was followed as the study conducted within a single organization – Nakheel. In collecting primary data from the company, in-depth interview method was used since carrying out this study required exploring thoughts and experiences of managers in relation to managing diverse workforce and methods they use when communicating ethnically diverse employees. The intention of following this path was to evaluate whether they have necessary competencies in managing diverse workforce.

Analysis

Nakheel's Approach To Diversity And Its Benefits To The Company

According to the survey, the managers state that the employees are the most valuable assets to the organization; therefore, the best employees are selected from the market. The best opportunity to work on some exiting development projects is given to these employees.

Additionally, it is explained by the managers that during the past few years the best people have been attracted to Nakheel from within the UAE

and worldwide. These employees have had the opportunity to work on some of the world's most exciting development projects.

The managers also believe that cultural diversity of opinion and perspective adds richness to decision-making; it allows a group to explore ideas that may be on the periphery but can be turn out to be valuable solutions to real-time problems. Moreover, the managers believe that large numbers of people working together are often required for success, requiring people from different cultures to join forces. According to these managers, this explains that an organization cannot survive solely on employing people from the same culture. A diversity of culture in needed in any organization for it to prosper.

The managers also state that one of the advantages of having a diverse workforce is that in any organization a diverse team comprising of different nationalities is going to approach every problem differently. Furthermore, everyone on the team will know that the opinions and strategies are going to vary per person. Additionally, the managers state that another advantage of having a diverse workforce is that each cultural group has unique strengths and perspectives from which all can benefit in solving problems and enriching community life. Lastly the managers state that having a diverse workforce may enable an organization to understand different cultures which will assist in overcoming and prevent misunderstandings, lost opportunities, and possible conflict at the present and in near future.

Managers' Management and Communication Skills

In terms of the skill of management, the managers believe that management is about ensuring that each employee realizes his/her full potential. The core value of management should be empowerment according to the managers, and it is the responsibility of management to make sure each member of employees is empowered to do their job. Additionally, the managers state that one of the most effective element or components of management techniques is teamwork. The management has stated that they have learnt to create the principle of trust that enhances the working of a team. In addition, teamwork is normally performed best when members can be decisively evaluative of the team's efforts without punishment.

This method, according to the managers, should be applied when dealing with subordinates and constantly empowerment and encouragement should

be made by putting forward their ideas of how success can be achieved at different levels. The managers state that with a different type of employees working in a team, effective and clear communication becomes even more important. The managers believe that employees must be kept top of the list when communicating change and new initiatives. Additionally, the managers believe that employees must be kept top of the list when communicating change, new initiatives and so forth. Also, the managers state that open communication should be encouraged with all staff. Different communication channels are explained by the managers of the survey as being utilized depending on the circumstance and the person.

According to the managers these may include one-to-one and group briefings, workshops, e mail, telephone and internal memo. The managers state that they promote open communication amongst all employees and thus enable employees to share opinions which might lead to better teamwork. In this regard, the managers claim to share opinions while trying not to offend others in the process of doing so.

Additionally, the managers also claim to promote a sense of trust and reliability which has enabled the staff to become better team players due to the fact that they trust and rely on each other.

Internal Communication Policy of Nakheel, and its Effects on Employees

According to the managers of the survey, the inter communication policy is as standard across many UAE-based companies. Additionally, they state that Nakheel promotes an open-door policy where employees are encouraged to speak their mind and be involved as well as give their opinions on matters that would benefit the company. Furthermore, the managers state that internal communication is a very effective way of communication. The managers state that they are comfortable communicating internally in number of ways, however they state that it is very important to decide that what kind of communication to engage in i.e. whether it should be Verbal or Non-verbal, Formal or Informal. The managers state that some general ways of communication internally are seen as Face-to-Face Interaction, E-mail, Telephone and Meetings.

The managers point out that in the initial stage, the open-door policy was an informal way of communication but as time has passed the management

at Nakheel has insisted and implemented the open-door policy as a formal way of communication. The managers have stated that they follow some formal processes, but the internal communication channels used by include meetings and discussions, use of internal memos, and email as a way of communication between all employees at Nakheel and the use of notice boards which are used to display information.

In terms of how this policy affected employees, the managers state that this policy affected the motivation and performance of the employees because internal communications aims to provide a flow of information between the company and staff. So, the result is staff feeling empowered and motivated when they are kept informed according to the managers of the survey.

Additionally, the managers state that employee motivation and performances has improved since the implementation of open-door policy as well as open discussions between the management and employees. One of the managers questioned stated that the open discussions have been very fruitful in getting the ideas from all employees and therefore has assisted employees in performing their work efficiently. Moreover, he states that through the use of open-door policy and open discussions, employees have been empowered thus improving decision making as well as improve motivation throughout Nakheel.

Consideration of Employees' Background in Internal Communication

According to the survey, the managers state that the employee's cultural backgrounds are taken into consideration because the company would not want to offend any employee from a different cultural background. Additionally, they add that it is important to know that employees at Nakheel are from many different cultural backgrounds and thus internal communication, although is predominantly in English there are some instances where the information may be translated into other languages.

The managers further explain that the team ensures that content and considerations towards various backgrounds and beliefs of all staff members are achieved. For example, the managers state that all material is produced in both English and Arabic.

According to the managers, understanding diversity begins with understanding yourself and your place in the world; your own uniqueness. One of

the managers surveyed states that for example, people from different cultures value certain things and have a certain cultural or ethnic heritage and that when a person encounters another person who is different from them or perhaps who speaks another language or wear their hair differently or have different ethnic or cultural heritage they make judgments about them based on their experience. The managers believe that different cultures have different ways of communication and thus a person should try to communicate in a way that can be understood by all listeners but at the same time does not offend anyone.

Effects of Internal Communication on Employees' Performance in Satisfying Customers

The managers of the survey agree that gentle behavior to the Customers, Timely response and knowledgeable staff are can be given as the main outcomes of good internal communication on the employee's performance.

Additionally, one of the managers interviewed stated that some of the factors that can have an effect on customer satisfaction include: lack of attentiveness, being impolite to customers, not being helpful towards the customer's needs, rudeness towards the customer, not keeping promises…etc.

The managers agree that these issues affect this company because the customer is valuable to the company and achieving their satisfaction is the company's motto. The managers state that staff must feel confident and knowledgeable when talking about their company to outside stakeholders.

Additionally, the managers surveyed state that customer satisfaction may be related to internal communication in that if employees are not informed and trained properly in regards to helping customers, then their incompetence lead to an unsatisfied customer.

Overall, the managers believe that effective internal communication should be implemented where the management will train employees and reiterate the importance of treating and satisfying their customer. Additionally, they state that continuous effective internal communication may be the key to improving employee knowledge thus indirectly improving customer satisfaction.

Improvement Areas in Internal Communication at Nakheel

When asked about the improvements that need to be made in terms of internal communications at Nakheel, the managers of the survey state that companies are always way trying to improve processes and procedures - The same is true for Nakheel, which is also constantly looking at ways to improve the staff communication. The managers state that Nakheel has an 'open door' policy and always welcome feedback from the employees as to how changes can be made for the better.

Discussion and Conclusion

In the literature diversity referred as the backgrounds of employees and claimed that people can vary on the level of capability, opportunity, financial and genetic blessing, linguistics, religion, traditions and of course education (Wentling and Palma-Rivas, 2000). Torres and Bruxelles (1992) and Kundu (2003) state that a good manager will has to make sure that his employees are not divided into conceptual groups where one group is preferred to another and therefore is presented more opportunities for a less problematic working environment. By nature diversity is a very beautiful concept because it brings people together in a productive arena, thus the essence of this concept has an immense potential for doing good (Kamp and Hagedorn-Rasmussen, 2004).

In addition to that, Seymen (2006) points out that various customer groups which all posses unique characteristics as a result of today's dynamism, gradually get served by companies. Thus, organizations benefit from the diversity in the workforce, and develop their skills in a way which allows them to have a better understanding of clients' needs and establish stronger relations with them. Accordingly, from the survey it was identified that employees are the most valuable assets to the Nakheel; therefore, the best employees are selected from the market.

Additionally, it is explained by the managers that during the past few years the best people have been attracted to Nakheel from within the UAE and worldwide. It is because the company understood the importance of diversity and its effect on the customer satisfaction. In fact, the managers stated that one of the advantages of having a diverse workforce is that in any organ-

ization a diverse team comprising of different nationalities is going to approach every problem differently as well as helping to create different strategies.

Although these findings, none of the managers stated the importance of diversity in creating flexibility, lowering absenteeism and turnover for women and minorities as well as improving organizational productivity (Jamali, Abdallah and Hmaidan, 2010). This showed that importance of diversity is not understood very well by the company.

In the literature it was also claimed that differences among the employees (diversity) tend to create obstacles for progress or success it is very important that the authority those people trust takes good care of creating situations that make it easier for the employees to overcome those obstacles and keep moving forward both, individually and professionally (Kundu, 2003). In this sense, importance of communication is stated in the literature review.

In terms of communication, managers only stated the importance of language and claimed that since employees at Nakheel are from many different cultural backgrounds and thus internal communication, although is predominantly in English there are some instances where the information may be translated into other languages.

From the explanations it was understood that surveyed managers believed that communication is good in Nakheel. In the literature Quirke (1996) stated that many managers understand that communication is poor throughout many companies, but do not believe that it is true for their organization which is a proof that there is a lack of management effectiveness in assessing communications. This statement is true in the case of Nakheel since managers only stated the language used while not stating the any other diversity subjects such as religion, culture, gender etc. in communication. This is clearly an inefficient way of communicating with diversified workforce. In fact, it was claimed in the literature that variations exist among the perceptions, ideas and attitudes of people from various cultures in the world (Ozkalp and Kirel, 2000).

This means that people expressions are determined through the qualities and culture of people based upon the values that are held concerning various areas of life and existence. As a result, these values have an effect on the behaviors that are formed for a particular situation (Miroshnik, 2002). This is due to the fact that culture is intrinsic to human life and serves as a method

of communications in humans. Therefore, culture and communication are inseparable (Seymen, 2006).

This means that management has to recognized the differences in communication styles of its employees and needs to revised its internal communication style in order to create more effective communication in the organization. By doing this, employee motivation and thus performance of the employees can be increased significantly (Kundu, 2003).

In fact, sadly, despite the efforts made by managers, it is found that consideration of ethnic background of employees at Nakheel is somewhat limited to the language barriers. To overcome the misunderstanding caused by linguistic differences, the company started to use both English and Arabic for its communications. However, managing diversity is not limited with language; it is developing an understanding on moral differences and acting on it to make people from different backgrounds in a harmony, also using these differences to add more value to the services offered. It is believed that Nakheel should reconsider its approach and a good diversity management policy to make its internal communication effective.

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