Communication culture as a defense system in the midst of crises

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Abstract:

This study explores the concept of positive communication culture as a unifying approach within organizations, aiming to strengthen human resource behaviors and business systems. Through an analytical descriptive approach, the study emphasizes the importance of this culture as an interactive communication pattern, an excellence criterion, and a defense system against crises. The results highlight the significance of an administrative pattern based on culture and behavior in achieving a positive communication culture. This culture, characterized by transparency, governance, and empowerment, acts as a barrier to safeguard the organization's gains.

Keywords: communication, communication culture, crises.

الملخص:

تسعى المنظمات من خلال ثقافتها التنظيمية إلى إرساء قيم مشتركة لتكون منهجا تتوحد من خلاله سلوكيات مواردها البشري وتتعزز في إطارها نظم العمل، كما تحاول وضع قواعد سلوكية تزيد من تماسكها وتعكس الثقافة الاتصالية بالنسبة للمنظمة متانة بيئة العمل وجودة علاقاتها.

تهدف هذه الدراسة بمنهجها الوصفي التحليلي إلى تسليط الضوء على مفهوم الثقافة الاتصالية الإيجابية كنمط اتصالي تفاعلي ومعيار للتميز وأساس بناء نظام دفاع ضد مختلف الأزمات، وتوصلت النتائج إلى أن الثقافة الإتصالية الإيجابية تتحقق بوجود نمط إداري قائم على الثقافة والسلوك، هذه الثقافة بأبعادها ومحدداتها نظام هام يمكنه الوقوف كحاجز دفاع عن مكتسبات المنظمة إذا ما اتسم بدرجة من الشفافية والحوكمة والتمكين.

كلمات مفتاحية: الإتصال، الثقافة الإتصالية، الأزمات.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Organizations operate in a constantly changing environment, which makes their ability to adapt to new developments and variables an effective weapon in crisis management. The degree of adaptability and resilience depends on the information and communication system they possess, as well as the robustness of their work environment and the quality of their relationships with their human resources, which is an integral part of their strategic orientation. When communication systems are flawed, crisis management becomes weak, and effective communication becomes essential in facing crises.

Crises that occur within an organization are nothing but sudden changes that occur in the internal or external environment, and a favorable crisis climate exploits the weak communication between the organization and its human resources. In order for an organization to manage and confront crises, the internal environment must be prepared to deal with them by strengthening a positive communication culture and making it an important system that can act as a defensive barrier to protect the organization's achievements. This should be accompanied by a certain degree of transparency, governance, and empowerment in order to understand the intricacies of the subject. It is important to ask the following main question : **How can the foundations of a positive communication culture be established to enhance the defense system of organizations during crises ?**

To answer this main question, the following sub-questions have been formulated :

- What is the relationship between communication culture and organizational culture ?
- What is the concept of positive communication culture, and how can it be established within an organization ?
- What role can communication culture play during crises ?

This study was prepared based on the descriptive-analytical methodology. To answer the above-mentioned questions, three main axes were adopted. The first axis was dedicated to defining communication culture as a concept that cannot be separated from organizational culture. The second axis examines the method of establishing the foundations of a positive communication culture in the organization. The third axis attempts to analyze the important role that communication culture can play in overcoming the crises facing the organization. The study concludes with a set of conclusions and recommendations.

2. Concepts and definitions :

2.1 Organizational culture:

Organizational culture is a values-based, ethical, and behavioral framework adopted by an organization in its various interactions. It is influenced by three key issues: (Al-Ghalbi & Al-Amiri, 2010, p.182)

- The business environment may require either a dynamic culture or a stable and mature culture.
- The strategic leaders within the organization.
- leaders' expertise and previous experiences.

2.2 Components of organizational culture:

Organizational culture encompasses values, which are a special type of beliefs held by members of the organization, indicating what is acceptable and unacceptable. These values define the accepted or rejected behaviors and beliefs that represent deeper levels of culture. It includes all the knowledge and ideas that influence and shape behavior within the organization. It also includes assumptions that are not visible and form the basis for behavioral norms within the organization, as well as symbols, rituals, standards, traditions, and communications that are responsible for conveying the organizational culture to various stakeholders in a formal or informal manner: (Al-Ghalbi & Al-Amiri, 2010, pp.185-186)

- Values: Values are the core beliefs and principles that guide the behavior and decision-making of individuals within the organization. They reflect what is considered important and desirable by the organization and its members. Values shape the overall culture by setting expectations for how people should act and interact with one another.

- Beliefs: Beliefs are the specific ideas and assumptions held by individuals in the organization. They represent deeper levels of culture and influence how people interpret and make sense of their experiences within the organization. Beliefs can be conscious or subconscious and play a significant role in shaping attitudes, perceptions, and behaviors.

- Assumptions: Assumptions are the underlying, often unspoken, and unquestioned beliefs that form the foundation of behavioral norms within the organization. They are deeply ingrained and shape the way people think, interpret situations, and approach their work. Assumptions are typically shared by members of the organization and are often influenced by its history, traditions, and organizational values.

- Symbols: Symbols are tangible representations or manifestations of the organization's culture. They can include logos, slogans, artifacts, physical spaces, and other visual elements that convey meaning and represent the organization's values and identity. Symbols serve as powerful reminders and communicators of the desired culture within the organization.

- Rituals and Traditions: Rituals and traditions are repetitive actions, ceremonies, or practices that are performed within the organization. They reinforce the shared values and beliefs, create a sense of belonging, and establish social norms and expectations. Examples of rituals and traditions can include regular team meetings, annual celebrations, recognition events, or specific ways of doing things that have become embedded in the organizational culture.

- Communication: Communication plays a crucial role in shaping and transmitting the organizational culture. Effective communication channels and practices are used to share information, reinforce values, and align behaviors across the organization. Formal and informal communication processes, such as internal newsletters, town

hall meetings, mentoring programs, and team-building activities, help disseminate the desired culture and foster a shared understanding among employees.

- Standards and Norms: Standards and norms represent the expected behaviors, attitudes, and performance levels within the organization. They define what is considered acceptable or unacceptable behavior and guide the interactions between individuals and groups. Standards and norms can be formalized through policies, codes of conduct, and performance expectations, as well as through informal social dynamics and peer influence.

By understanding and actively managing these components, organizations can shape and reinforce a positive and effective organizational culture that aligns with their vision, mission, and strategic goals.

2.3 communication culture:

Communication culture refers to the shared values, beliefs, practices, and norms related to communication within an organization. It encompasses how communication is perceived, approached, and practiced by individuals and groups in the organizational context. Communication culture influences the way information is shared, received, and interpreted, as well as the overall effectiveness of communication processes within the organization. (Martic, 2023)

A strong communication culture fosters open and transparent communication, encourages active listening, promotes clarity and understanding, and values constructive feedback. It emphasizes the importance of effective communication channels, encourages two-way communication, and supports the sharing of information, ideas, and knowledge among employees at all levels.

A positive communication culture also encourages collaboration, teamwork, and respect in interpersonal interactions. It values diverse perspectives, encourages inclusivity, and promotes a sense of psychological safety where individuals feel comfortable expressing their thoughts and opinions. (Martic, 2023)

Furthermore, communication culture encompasses the use of both formal and informal communication methods, such as meetings, emails, memos, instant messaging, social media platforms, and face-to-face conversations. It also considers the appropriate tone, style, and language used in communication to ensure clarity and alignment of messages.

Organizations with a strong communication culture benefit from improved internal collaboration, enhanced problem-solving, increased employee engagement, better decision-making processes, and a more positive work environment. It contributes to building trust, fostering a sense of belonging, and aligning employees towards shared goals and objectives.

2.4 crises:

The multiple definitions that have addressed the concept of crisis as a direct result of rapid and successive internal and external environmental changes, within which organizations operate, whether they are productive or service-oriented, have led to the occurrence of crises that require efficient and effective management by these organizations

in order to minimize their negative consequences and benefit from their positive outcomes. (Salim, 2013, p.70)

A crisis is considered a critical and decisive moment that determines the fate of the organizational entity experiencing it. It represents a challenging problem that poses a severe difficulty for decision-makers, leaving them in a state of profound confusion. As a result, any decision they make becomes uncertain, influenced by a lack of knowledge and a blur of causes and effects. The successive cascading of events further increases the level of uncertainty in the evolving developments that may result from the crisis. (Jadallah, 2010, p.6)

Crises can take various forms, such as natural disasters, public health emergencies, financial downturns, security threats, reputational crises, or organizational failures. They can arise from internal factors within an organization or external factors beyond its control.
During a crisis, there is often a heightened sense of urgency and a need for swift decision-making to mitigate the negative consequences. Crises can pose significant challenges, including risks to human life, damage to infrastructure, disruption of operations, loss of reputation, financial instability, and psychological stress.

3. Communication culture as an integral concept of organizational culture:

The concept of organizational culture, as defined by Pettigrew in his article, laid the foundation for the concept of organizational culture. Burnett defined it as "the set of values, beliefs, assumptions, symbols, rituals, behavioral standards, communications, traditions, and customs prevailing in the organization." (Al-Ghalbi & Al-Amiri, 2010, pp. 182-186) This concept encompasses the element of communication, which is the lifeblood of the organization and the link that unifies all members of the organization towards different issues. It is an essential part that cannot be ignored in establishing the organizational culture that reflects the exchange of opinions, ideas, information, proposals, orders, guidance, and decisions.

Communication is an administrative, social, and human activity that involves the efforts of various individuals within an organization to achieve the best work formula. It is not merely information sharing but has become the primary determinant of positive interaction in a work environment that has become more dynamic and complex. (Al-Amiri, , & Al-Ghalbi, 2007, p.492) This necessitates saturating the communication culture with the fundamentals of organizational culture, as they are inseparable parts.

Under the organization's vision and strategy outlined to achieve its goals, the organizational culture is defined in all its aspects to establish the building blocks and rules that structure the general system that should prevail and operate. Within it lies the effective communication tools that allow the flow of a communication culture saturated with values and operational systems, establishing principles and behaviors in the human resources and ingraining their responsiveness to plans and practices that serve the organization and defend its organizational culture.

The alignment of human resources around the foundation of organizational culture

and their conviction in the organization's strategic vision, through receiving information and data in a timely and optimal communication manner, makes them constant partners in the decision-making process, proactive in finding appropriate solutions during crises, and an important barrier against breaches and threats that may affect the organization.

4. Establishing the foundations of a positive communication culture in the organization:

Communication is the artery that connects various parts of the organization, and the communication culture allows members of the organization to share ideas and information, providing impetus for establishing correct and agreed-upon work principles, unifying behaviors that lead to success, achieving goals, and realizing the common interest of the organization. However, establishing a positive communication culture in the organization requires awareness of important factors that can be summarized as follows:

4.1 Appropriate managerial style:

The managerial style that feeds on the communication culture should prevail in the organization. It is the responsibility of nurturing the cultural element and focusing on the interaction of human resources through unifying behavior. A study conducted by Peters and Waterman demonstrated the success of organizations that rely on a management style based on culture and behavior, implementing them through managerial practices that allow for the following: (Saddam, 2004, p.35-36)

- Encouraging creativity and innovative solutions, and increasing skills.
- Professionalism in managing organizational members.
- Adopting transformative leadership with a shared vision and perspective, enabling the organization's ability to face and endure ambiguity, critical situations, and crises.
- Transparency and flexibility in work, particularly in a dynamic and rapidly changing environment.
- Enjoying self-control, self-commitment, and initiative among organizational members.
- Promoting mutual trust, adaptation, and flexibility.

Successful management today is viewed from the perspective of effectively managing the communication process. Every aspect of failure and misunderstanding in crisis management and repeated misinterpretation within the organization is attributed to a failure in communication between managers and employees. John Enger, citing Jay Hall, President of Teleometrics and a professor at the University of Texas, says, "The problem lies in the gap between managers and workers, not in the workforce, advanced technology shortages, or lack of funding. Management has created a counterproductive work environment, and that is the problem simply." (Aldairi, 2004)

4.2 Transparency:

Administrative transparency is considered a modern administrative concept closely associated with successful administrative development and its contribution to building a sound administrative organization capable of facing new challenges and surrounding changes. Many management thinkers have called for efforts to address administrative problems and identify obstacles to administrative development, such as administrative corruption and ambiguity in work methods and procedures.

Attempts to apply transparency in administrative processes are important factors that

should be considered in administrative practices. (Al-Lawzi, 2002, p.141)

Transparency refers to sharing information with stakeholders through open communication channels that allow for the free flow of information, increasing understanding and expanding discussion on important issues within the organization to make the right decisions at the right time. (Ghathman, 2014) Transparency has long been seen as a tool to reduce uncertainty among employees and encourage crisis management, as well as to enhance the relationship between management and the human resources (Yun Li, Sun, Tao, & Lee, 2021) it relies on. When transparency prevails in dealing with internal stakeholders, it positively impacts the robustness of the work environment and the quality of relationships. Sharing information transparently through upward, downward, and horizontal communication within the organization increases trust and motivates collaboration in problem-solving. Lack of transparency, on the other hand, leads to employee dissatisfaction and strengthens their affiliation and loyalty to the organization, thus enhancing their awareness and creativity.

There are two ways to increase transparency in workplace communication. The first method relies on the necessity of timely communication, while the second method involves aligning communication and procedures with assigned tasks. Transparent communication in the workplace creates happier employees in a more collaborative environment, allowing the unit's work to be accomplished more efficiently. (https://workplace.msu.edu/transparent-communication., n.d.)

Transparency refers to the practice of openly and honestly sharing information, data, and decisions with stakeholders. It involves providing clear, accurate, and accessible information to individuals or groups who have a vested interest or are affected by the actions and decisions of an organization. some key aspects and benefits of transparency: (Al-Sukarna, 2011, pp.203-206)

- Information Disclosure: Transparency involves actively sharing relevant information about the organization's operations, performance, policies, practices, and decision-making processes. This includes financial reports, strategic plans, performance metrics, governance structures, and any other pertinent information that stakeholders may need to make informed judgments or assessments.

- Open Communication: Transparency encourages open and two-way communication channels with stakeholders. It creates an environment where individuals feel comfortable asking questions, raising concerns, and providing feedback. Organizations that prioritize transparency foster a culture of trust, collaboration, and engagement with their stakeholders.

- Accountability and Trust: Transparency fosters accountability by ensuring that organizations are held responsible for their actions and decisions. When information is shared openly, stakeholders can assess the organization's integrity, ethical standards, and adherence to regulations and commitments. Transparency builds trust between organizations and their stakeholders, establishing a foundation for positive

relationships and long-term partnerships.

- Stakeholder Engagement: By practicing transparency, organizations actively involve stakeholders in decision-making processes and solicit their input. This includes seeking feedback, conducting surveys, hosting public consultations, and involving stakeholders in relevant discussions and planning. Engaging stakeholders in a transparent manner helps organizations gain valuable insights, build consensus, and make more informed decisions that align with stakeholders' expectations.

- Organizational Performance: Transparency contributes to improved organizational performance. By openly sharing information, organizations can identify areas for improvement, address inefficiencies, and leverage stakeholders' knowledge and expertise. Transparent organizations are more likely to be accountable for achieving their goals and objectives and are better equipped to adapt to changing circumstances.

- Reputation and Credibility: Transparency enhances an organization's reputation and credibility. When an organization demonstrates a commitment to transparency, it is perceived as trustworthy, responsible, and reliable. This positive reputation can attract stakeholders, including customers, investors, employees, and partners, who value transparency and are more likely to engage with and support the organization. Transparency is a foundational principle for fostering trust, accountability, and effective stakeholder relationships. By embracing transparency, organizations can create a more inclusive, ethical, and sustainable operating environment.

4.3 Governance:

is a set of laws, rules, and procedures aimed at achieving quality and excellence in performance by selecting the right and effective methods to manage organizations and achieve their goals. It aims to follow a specific system to control relationships between key parties.

Factors affecting organizational performance, which help in organizing work and defining responsibilities to achieve long-term goals. (https://bakkah.net.sa/ar/consulting-insights, n.d.)

Internal stakeholders (human resources) have the right to access and continuously benefit from information that serves their presence and sustainability in the organization. This forces managers to adopt a positive and wise communication policy that enhances an excellent work environment based on equal opportunities, integrity, and fairness, away from favoritism and bias, to ensure a secure and comfortable professional future. The organization must adopt governance in the communication process to preserve its human resources and make them active partners in achieving its goals and implementing its plans. This can be achieved by strategically thinking about the information flow system in a way that ensures an open communication culture with internal stakeholders, considering them as part of the organization, in order to strengthen relationships and achieve their satisfaction.

4.4 Empowerment:

Empowering human resources in the organization stems from the importance of

sharing ideas and visions to serve as a barrier during times of crisis. A positive communication culture supports collective positive thinking and makes stability a permanent advantage.

Establishing a positive communication culture in the organization enhances the loyalty of human resources, who play a fundamental role in decision-making and crisis management, as they believe that they are contributors and essential partners in achieving the organization's goals. This satisfies them with the values and knowledge that make them important members, contributing to the stability of the organization and adjusting their behaviors to align with the organization's goals.

A positive communication culture enhances the behavioral empowerment aspect of human resources, who deal cooperatively with the information they receive from the communication process to solve work-related problems. They have prior awareness of the organization's goals, vision, and strategic direction, which enhances their ability to act autonomously in crisis management without waiting for orders and directives, saturating them with the communication culture.

5. Communication Culture as a Proactive Strategy for Crisis Management:

Organizations are no longer immune to various types of crises, whether internal or external, which makes imbalances manifest clearly in their internal environment. Communication is the key to good crisis control and management, as it indicates the organization's preparedness to face a crisis. (Libaert, 2015, pp. 7-10) Strategic thinking is responsible for formulating the vision and goals of the organization's communication system. It determines its clarity and the methodology of utilizing it to achieve an effective communication environment, through which the robustness of the work environment and the quality of its relationships are achieved. This thinking, with its dimensions and determinants, forms an important framework that can make communication culture a defensive barrier for the organization's achievements.

Crises serve as a harsh test for the vertical and horizontal cohesion of the organization, (Perry, 2008, p.138) and securing those relationships improves performance during times of crisis. However, this cannot be achieved unless leaders maintain simplicity by requesting human resources to perform tasks, they have been trained on rather than unfamiliar ones. (Abu Qahf, 1999, p.133) Confronting crises in the work environment requires qualified human resources and a strong and effective communication system that helps provide information and alerts in a timely manner. (Gad Allah, 2010, pp. 29-37) It also requires a degree of proactivity in addressing issues rather than quick fixes. The cultural and behavioral capital possessed by human resources within the organization, gained through saturation with values and the organizational culture supported by the communication culture, make them a safety valve against various crises. Building a strong, empowering, and collaborative communication culture enables future resilience in the face of anything that could harm the organization. Continuous interaction among organizational members creates a protective barrier for values, beliefs, and organizational culture, which becomes

evident during crises and problems.

The organization should not wait for crises with their accompanying tensions and endless rumors. Instead, it can create a sense of information saturation among internal stakeholders by nurturing the necessary information through the communication culture, incorporating positive values and constructive behaviors to proactively protect the stability of the organization from such crises.

6. Results and discussion:

"If you haven't communicated, promulgated, and inculcated your culture before you're in crisis, then it's probably too late to do so during one." (Cook R. , 2023). The abbreviated statement highlights the inevitable consequence of not sharing a positive culture through the promotion of effective communication. It cannot be remedied during times of crisis, and it is impossible to have a significant impact on individuals' culture that has not been consistently saturated with the values and behaviors of the organization. The negative outcomes of disregarding the communication process can significantly affect individuals' performance during crises, leading to divergent orientations and goals due to a lack of trust, making it difficult to adapt to challenges and face crises. The study reached a number of results, which are as follows:

- Communication culture is an integral part of organizational culture.
- The involvement of human resources in the organizational culture framework and their access to information and data in a timely and optimal communication manner makes them constant partners in decision-making and initiators of crisis resolution and management.
- Establishing a positive communication culture relies on selecting the appropriate management style and adopting transparency, governance, and empowerment in managing the communication process.
- Dealing with crises in the work environment requires a proactive approach to addressing them, rather than relying on quick fixes, by providing a strong and effective communication system that facilitates the availability of information and early warnings.
- The cultural and behavioral capital possessed by human resources within the organization, acquired through saturation with values and the organizational culture supported by the communication culture, makes them a safety valve against various crises.

7. CONCLUSION

Organizations are no longer immune to various types of crises, whether internal or external, which makes imbalances evident in their internal environment. Positive communication culture is the key to effective crisis control and management as it reflects the resilience of the work environment and the quality of relationships within it. This culture, with its dimensions and determinants, forms an important system that can serve as a defensive barrier for the organization's assets if it is characterized by transparency, governance, and empowerment within an administrative model that emphasizes nurturing the human resources culture and focuses on their interaction through aligning behavior. Based on the above, we can recommend the following:

- It is necessary to saturate the communication culture with the fundamentals of organizational culture, considering it an integral part of it.
- Emphasize the importance of adopting effective communication tools that ensure the flow of a communication culture saturated with values and operational systems that instill principles and behaviors in the human resources, promoting their responsiveness to plans and practices that serve the organization.
- The management style that nourishes the communication culture should prevail in the organization.
- It is essential to share information through upward, downward, and horizontal communication within the organization with transparency, which increases trust and encourages collaboration in problem-solving.
- The importance of establishing an information flow system that ensures a communication culture characterized by governance and openness to internal stakeholders as part of the organization.
- Enhancing behavioral empowerment in human resources that feeds on the communication culture and deepens the prior awareness of the organization's goals, vision, and strategic direction, thereby enhancing the ability to act autonomously in crisis management.
- The importance of dealing with crises proactively by adopting a positive communication culture that ensures that human resources are saturated with sufficient information in a timely manner, creating a defense system that protects the stability of the organization.

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