BRIDGES OVER WALLS: CONSTRUCTING EMPLOYEE CONNECTIONS IN CONSTRUCTION CORPORATIONS UNDER THE FIELD OF CIVIL ENGINEERING THROUGH EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative study is to discuss the communication dynamics within a construction corporation operating in San Miguel, Bulacan, Philippines. The main objective of the research is to investigate their communication practices, how they identify challenges concerning communication in their workplace, and how they provide the necessary solutions to these difficulties. Grounded theory methodology is used to employ face-to-face interviews with three engineers from the corporation, who are in charge of the ongoing construction project within the said research locale. The oral type of questionnaires guided the interviews in obtaining information needed for the construction corporation's communication dynamics.

The findings of the study demonstrated the corporation's communication culture, which is characterized by language usage, transparency and open communication, effective leadership communication, active listening and feedback, meeting flow, and employee engagement initiatives. The conducted research also elaborated the communication challenges identified by the participants of the study which were technological issues and miscommunication among the members of the organization. In addition to this, the researchers identified the flow of communication within the corporation as downward communication, horizontal communication, and diagonal communication.

Overall, this research aims to offer the important details of how communication in construction corporations in the field of civil engineering works and how it affects the general dynamics in their workplace.

Keywords: Civil Engineering, Construction Corporations, Communication, Communication In The Workplace, Flow Of Communication.

1. INTRODUCTION

The construction company from which the research was conducted is a leading AA-certified contractor providing quality solutions in the field of engineering, civil works and services, buildings and utilities ("Recruitday.com," n.d.). As a leading AA-certified contractor, the construction corporation plays an important role in the engineering industry, providing guaranteed

quality civil engineering works and services in the real estate and utility industries. The said organization plays a key role in providing excellent solutions in the construction industry by ensuring the integrity and reliability of projects. The corporation has the absolute ability to provide reliable and efficient services while maintaining its commitment to be the most preferred construction company in the Philippines.

An essential component of knowledge management is communication. Workers are the brains of the company, and communication is the nerve system that connects key organizational components by delivering common meaning and information. Knowledge is brought into the organization and distributed to staff members who need it through effective communication. When there is effective communication, the issue of "silos of knowledge" is reduced, which enhances an organization's potential and empowers people to make better decisions regarding business initiatives (Guo & Sanchez, 2005). If an organization has the means to develop into a better business, it can stand and endure. A company's ability to handle its human resources (HR) from the point of recruiting through the stages of selection, placement, and growth to the end of a career determines its level of success. People actively participate in every organization's planning and execution which can increase revenue for the business. Every organization looks for workers who are ready to put in a lot of effort and produce the best results possible, in addition to those who are capable, knowledgeable, and skilled in their field (Ramadanty & Martinus, 2016).

The main objective of this study is to investigate a construction corporation's communication dynamics. The purpose of this study is to determine the communication behaviors of the members of an organization in the workplace, the communication obstacles they face, and the solutions they have devised to resolve these communication-related problems. This study was conducted in San Miguel, Bulacan, Philippines, and it is a grounded theory qualitative research. The researchers interviewed three (3) engineers from a construction corporation who were assigned to the research locale. Face-to-face interviews were conducted, with the researchers providing structured questionnaires.

2. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE
Definition Of Communication

The word "communication" is descended from the Latin word *communicatio*, which means sharing or transmitting (Peters, 2008). Communication, therefore, is the sharing of related ideas to one another by human beings to achieve a common ground of understanding.

According to Leagans (1961), communication can be described as the interchanging of information and messages regarding facts, ideas, and opinions between two or more people. Rogers and Shoemaker (1971) also defined communication as "the process by which messages are transferred from a source to the receiver."

Organizational Communication

Communication is known to be one of the most powerful and important processes in an organization (Harris and Nelson, 2008). It serves as an essential part of building and sustaining connections in the workplace (Axner, 1993). A study from Rajhans in 2009 stated that communication fosters relationships, and the functioning and survival of organizations rely on successful and effective relationships among individuals within the organization.

It is important to note that these interactions not only bridge the gap between the members of an institution but also, it creates a certain culture amongst themselves. Pineda (2023) said that

"each organization has its cultural patterns." Cameron and McCollum (1993) found in their study of the relationship between organizational culture and communication that the key to successful communication among management and employees is communication through a commonly agreed scheme. The 'culture of communication' within organizations is helping their performance by boosting employees' understanding, developing trust, stimulating engagement, and improving productivity in constantly changing circumstances (Rajhans, 2009).

Channels Of Communication

The channels of communication are the ways that information and messages travel around in an institution such as verbal communication, non-verbal communication, and technology-aided communication.

Verbal communication refers to the spoken and written techniques of disseminating information (Ergen, 2010). However, non-verbal communication refers to communication that goes beyond the written or spoken word (Gabbott and Hogg 2001).

Meanwhile, technology-aided communication that features instant messaging, e-mailing, phone calls, virtual meeting software, other social computing tools, etc., is said to have revolutionized the communication process by offering flexibility, more well-informed employees, more precise decision-making, and, lastly, improving the company's structure of operations (Ergen, 2010).

Styles Of Communication In Organizations

Organizations use different communication channels and styles to establish an efficient and productive working environment for the management and its employees. There are two styles of communication in an organization: Formal and Informal Communication.

Gomez and Dailey (2017) in their study gave the various characteristics of formal communication. First, it is believed to be rational, with a set of rules and routines that promote efficiency and decrease personal biases (p. 2). Second, it is structured (p. 3). Organizations require formal, and organized communication so that employees know what to do, whose directives to follow, how to make judgments in the face of ambiguity, and whom to notify about their work. Third, it is goal-oriented. Formal communication is purposive and in a way that focuses on the accomplishment of a specific task (p. 4). Formal communication often includes directives, information, or feedback intended for the betterment of organizational processes or practices (Tompkins, 1967). Job descriptions, work orders, sales and inventory information, memorandums, meeting reports, and presentations are a few examples of formal communication.

Maarschalk (1988) stated that the communication that occurs in outside contexts of the organization is termed "informal communication". Marsick and Volpe (1999) emphasized that informal communication is "communication that is unstructured based on experience and it is non-institutionalized." Since informal communication is deemed to be unstructured, it has the characteristic of flexibility. No formality obstructs or limits communication between members of the institution.

Flow Of Communication In Organizations

In a lecture by CSJMU Kanpur (formerly known as Kanpur University), the four different types of communication flow in an organization were enumerated as the following: downward

flow of communication, upward flow of communication, horizontal/lateral flow of communication, and diagonal flow of communication (p. 1).

In the same lecture, it is stated that a downward flow of communication conveys information from a higher level to a lower level inside an organization. This is a formal procedure of transmitting information to employees via a chain of command, i.e. executives give orders to employees. Examples of this are meetings, emails, and memorandums (p. 2).

Furthermore, upward communication is deemed to occur when information moves from lower levels to higher levels in an organization. Here, the subordinates transmit information to superiors. It includes demands, reports, concerns, recommendations, etc (p. 3).

Additionally, lateral communication, also known as horizontal communication, happens when persons at the equivalent level communicate inside an organization. This is a sort of communication that is frequently utilized in teams or while working with colleagues (p. 3).

Lastly, in diagonal or grapevine communication, information is transferred throughout different levels and divisions of a company. This type of communication is frequently used in cross-functional teams or multifaceted professions. It is said to be useful for conducting any form of digital communication (p. 4).

Common Challenges Regarding Communication In Organizations

Ergen (2010) defines barriers to communication as anything that filters, hinders, or modifies the message or information during the "encoding-sending-decoding" process.

In the words of Anand and Shachar (2007), miscommunication is a key aspect of communication. Vijaya and Tiwari (2010) said that a lack of cross-cultural adaptability as well as comprehension is a common communication barrier. According to Kim (2012), cross-cultural adaptation is the process of internal change in individuals that allows them to thrive in an unfamiliar culture. Furthermore, it is defined as when newcomers learn to adapt to their native cultural patterns and achieve a degree of efficacy in the new environment. Without cross-cultural adaptation and understanding, the rate of the occurrence of misinterpretations in organizations will rise. These misinterpretations will then lead to miscommunications that can hinder organizational operations and affect the efficiency of the institution.

3. METHODOLOGY
Research Design

This study utilized a Qualitative Research design to gain a better understanding of the specific experiences of the participants. Qualitative research approaches are useful for interpreting multiple points of view while providing in-depth explanations of complex phenomena. It gives opportunities to participants to discuss their experiences and to explore more theories that can result in hypotheses and explanations (Sofaer, 1999). The study also utilized the ground theory research design which aims to develop theory based on the data gathered and analyzed information. It involves developing theories directly from the data in a systematic manner (Noble & Mitchell, 2016).

Research Setting

The research local is at San Miguel, Bulacan, Philippines where the engineers are assigned. It is an expansion of the planned Plaridel Bypass Road; the San Rafael-San Ildefonso-San Miguel Bypass Road is now under development. The said research locale offers more opportunities to gain

a deeper understanding of their day-to-day communication and the challenges faced within their working site.

Research Instrument

This study utilized oral type of questionnaires to gather data. The questionnaire is made by the researchers before the interview. The questionnaire consists of 12 structured questions to obtain information needed for this study. The researchers conducted a face-to-face interview to inquire the participants regarding the questionnaires. This serves as a valuable instrument to gain further insights into their communication dynamics. The questions are designed to explore the culture, challenges, and flow of communication within the institution. It is used to identify the common problems of miscommunication, the unique way of communicating with peers inside the company, and the effective way of communication.

Research Participants

The participants of this study are three (3) project engineers from an engineering company who are based in San Miguel, Bulacan, Philippines for the ongoing San Rafael-San Ildefonso-San Miguel Bypass Road project. The said participants provided clear and honest responses in the interview that significantly contributed to the depth and reliability of this study's findings.

Data Collection Procedure

Data was collected by conducting face-to-face interviews with questionnaires. This methodology allows the researchers to directly engage with the participants in order to gain in-depth responses and insights. The researchers provided the participants with a structured questionnaire that consisted of 12 questions. Face-to-face interviews provide more reliable data as the researchers have direct contact with the participants, so follow-up inquiries can be made in order for the researchers to get more valid and accurate responses.

4. RESULTS

Based on the responses of the participants in the interview, the researchers came up with several key themes regarding communication culture. In formal settings, formal language was used by the workers under the corporation. But by means of communicating with each other in their day-to-day living, they mostly use casual language. The corporation also advocates transparency to their employees by giving them awareness about the problems and system of the company. The corporation is also open to communication about the employees' concerns at times. Leadership communication also takes a vital role in their corporation, senior employees let their apprentice coordinate with their clients to improve their communication skills and adapt to their environment, but with their guidance and give them advice. Open feedback and active listening were also emphasized by the participants. Every two weeks the corporation held a meeting to discuss their site accomplishments, problems, and solutions. Corporation leaders talk to the employees if they have personal concerns that must be discussed privately and vice versa. The organization also asserts employee engagement by having team building and a trip abroad to strengthen the bond between the employees.

Various communication challenges occur within the corporation and some of them were identified by the participants. First of the challenges identified are technology issues; Engineers may be assigned to a remote area where they face poor internet connection. Lack of engagement was also identified; misunderstanding what someone is saying and deciding without consulting with their coworkers.

The researchers observed different communication flows within the corporation. Downward communication flow when a memo from the corporation was sent to the email of all the employees of the corporation. Horizontal communication is observed with the participants, the way they talk comfortably and casually with each other. It is also observed when they are doing their monthly meeting to discuss their site accomplishments, problems, and solutions. Diagonal communication was also observed in the corporation. Lower-level employees can talk to senior-level employees to raise their concerns and vice versa.

5. DISCUSSION

Based on the findings, the researchers concluded that the workers under the construction corporation balanced the standard English in formal settings and casual manner between their peers as aligned with the research made by Gomez and Dailey (2017) for formal and Maarschalk (1988) for informal communication. The corporation advocates transparency, they have an open line of communication to ensure that the employees are aware of the problems and the company's system. According to the study made by Rajhans (2009), effective leadership communication plays a vital role in the company, senior employees supervise their apprentices in communicating with their clients to develop their communication skills and to adjust to their environment. Active listening and open feedback in the company were highlighted in line with Tompkins (1967). They are doing it along with the discussion of the company's achievements, problems, and solutions and if there are personal concerns, employees could speak with their corporation leaders privately. In addition, the company promotes the relationships of the employees through team building and international trips.

Several communication challenges within the organization were identified by the respondents such as technological issues and lack of engagement. When the engineer was placed in a remote location without internet access, technological difficulties became a problem. These results correspond to the studies that highlight the unofficial networks of communication within an organization (Engen, 2010). Conversely, a lack of participation resulted from miscommunication and making decisions without seeking input from others. These various challenges can greatly impact the effectiveness of communication in the workplace. This aligns with research that tackles misinterpretations that lead to miscommunications (Kim, 2012).

The different communication flows that were observed by the researchers include downward communication, horizontal communication, and diagonal communication; these affect how information is shared among staff members. A memo that the company sent to its employees through the use of email was a form of downward communication since information was shared from higher levels to lower ones. The comfortable interaction between employees was observed as horizontal communication by the participants because it is characterized by informal interactions and comfortable conversations. Open lines of communication between employees and higher levels were observed as diagonal communication because they promote good information sharing, transparency, and mutual respect between different levels in the corporation. This corresponds to the lecture made by CSJMU. In conclusion, maintaining a cohesive and cooperative

workplace is crucial to achieving the organization's goal through efficient communication flow management.

6. CONCLUSION

Based on the responses gathered from the participants during the interview, the researchers can conclude the following regarding the communication culture within construction corporation:

1. **Use of Language:** In official settings within the corporation, employees employ formal language in a professional-to-professional conversation, while in their daily interactions on sites, they tend to use more informal, casual language, as that is what the employees are used to.
2. **Transparent with their Employers:** By ensuring that its staff are informed about company matters and operational systems, the construction corporation aims to promote transparency. Staff are invited to raise their concerns, and the management is prepared to discuss these issues behind closed doors.
3. **Communication Guidance:** In the construction corporation, it is the responsibility of experienced senior staff to guide and support junior staff and to motivate them to improve their communication skills. The seniors help the juniors initiate interaction with their clients and provide them with useful guidance and advice for them to gain more experience in the workplace.
4. **Feedback and Active Listening:** To promote effective communication and understanding between staff, the participants placed a strong emphasis on open feedback and continuous listening at the corporate level to assess issues that may arise.
5. **Regular Conduction of Meetings:** The company holds weekly meetings to assess the success of the projects, deal with any problems that arise on the site, and come up with a solution. These meetings are intended to promote communication and cooperation between staff to get a clear view of what's happening in each site's assignments.
6. **Camaraderie:** To enhance and promote comradeship and strengthen relationships between employees, the organization consistently promotes employee engagement through organizing Team Building Events and Overseas Visits such as in Japan, Singapore, etc.,

Participants have indicated the following as regards communication challenges at the corporation:

1. **Technology Issues:** When engineers are assigned to remote areas, they usually encounter difficulties with inadequate internet connectivity that cause problems in their workplace.
2. **Miscommunication:** Some employees may not understand each other or make decisions without consulting their colleagues, which can lead to miscommunication.

Regarding the communication flows, the following were observed within the company:
1. **Downward Communication:** A top-down approach to communication is demonstrated by the fact that all staff have received messages from the company in an email form.
2. **Horizontal Communication:** During the month's meeting to discuss site issues, participants participate in a comfortable and casual conversation.

3. **Diagonal Communication:** Lower-level employees can communicate with senior-level employees to raise concerns without hesitation, fostering an environment of open communication and collaboration.

7. LIMITATIONS
The study has potential limitations. Initially, the questionnaire was limited to only 12 questions due to lack of time encountered by engineers. Thus, the researchers did not get a more comprehensive observation regarding the communication culture within the corporation. Moreover, the lack of specific resources constrained access to more literature. Financial constraints also prevented the researchers from visiting different libraries or institutions for additional sources such as journal articles, case studies, and dissertations. Moreover, the lack of access to the company's human resources department could also limit this study because interviews with only the three engineers may introduce potential biases in their opinions that cannot be considered representative of an entire firm. Lastly, questions that are outside the scope of the investigations referred to may not be addressed in this study.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS
Based on the findings of this study, it is hereby recommended to:
1. Future researchers may allocate more time to conduct the study to make it more in-depth and comprehensive.
2. Increase the number of participants to achieve a larger data variance and enhance reliability, thereby obtaining more accurate data.
3. Increase the financial budget allocated for the study so that future researchers may utilize it for conducting the study.
4. Having the human resources department as the participant in the study can help obtain reliable and unbiased results.
5. Prepare at least 15 and above questions should future researchers conduct this study for them to gain more in-depth understanding and insights.

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