



Barriers to Effective Interpersonal Communication in Retail

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Abstract: *Communication is an inseparable part of our daily lives. Interpersonal communication appears between two and more people and consists not only of verbal communication by using words and consciously talking to others but also consciously or unconsciously by using non-verbal communication such as gestures, body movement and posture, facial expressions, haptics (touch), eye contact, proxemics (physical distance), paralanguage, etc. In verbal and non-verbal communication enter some issues that can cause misunderstandings in the communication process. People communicate everywhere and anytime, therefore it is natural that some difficulties and problems occur in interpersonal communication and are encountered in the workplace. There are different types of communication in the workplace, but this paper focuses mainly on interpersonal communication between managers and their team members. The way how they communicate influences the output of the entire communication process and has direct or side effects on performance, work environment, company goals and similar. The main goal of this paper is the identification of barriers to effective interpersonal communication in a selected branch of an international retail organization in Germany. Based on the research, it is possible to identify the barriers to the effective communication process between managers and their team members. Of a total of 187 employees working at this branch, 48 employees participated in this survey. This paper provides results from conducted research where some positive aspects and barriers were explored as well. Among positive results are that the employees do not afraid to address the company's management directly, employees are not interrupted while speaking, do not get the information they do not understand, the managers do not use the terms their employees do not understand, employees are not often overwhelmed with the information, not facing a misunderstanding from manager's side. On the other hand, the organization may support more communication between departments and provide more information to employees to feel well informed. This paper correlates with other research conducted in this field by different researchers in different countries and adds the missing barriers or confirmed already often occurring barriers to effective interpersonal communication.*



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1. INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, we often come across various publications in conjunction with communication. Communication is an essential element of society that we meet every day. We constantly communicate, whether verbal or nonverbal. It is not possible not to communicate. Whether to talk about common problems, joys, work, or talk to friends, colleagues or family, people are constantly communicating. It means transmitting and receiving signals. Individuals are also affected by the environment in which they communicate. Not only in the workplace, but also in every situation, they should try to create suitable conditions so that communicators in the communication

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process feel relaxed and comfortable because this can affect the course of the entire communication. The basis for achieving the company's goals is a functioning communication and communication network. In general, it can be considered a critical area of management skills. The manager is responsible for effective communication in the organization. Communication is a complex process, so it needs to be understood in context. It is a unique process that reflects the life of the individual, the group and the entire organization. To complete the communication process, communication partners need to understand the importance of feedback and keep on delivering the completed message (Zahid, Qinghe and Sohail, 2021). Managers are people whose job success depends on their communication abilities. They need to learn how to maximize the effectiveness of their communication skills and how to achieve a meaningful work effect. In communication, people often encounter certain problems, and barriers. In order to be able to prevent them, they should know them. These can be barriers on the part of the sender, recipient, or environmental factors. Deficiencies and ineffective communication lead to problems in interpersonal relationships, lower work efficiency and demotivation. For the failure of a communication process, there can be a lot of reasons, therefore, communication partners need to communicate clearly, take the feedback from another person, and make sure that the message is communicated in proper way. Every activity of a communication partner involves direct or indirect interaction (Zahid, Qinghe and Sohail, 2021). Managers communicate daily with their team, whether about routine matters (work, private), tasks, goals, problems, problem-solving. Through communication, managers lead their team, evaluate employees, motivate them, guide them, communicate between departments, with the company board, personnel department and customers, clients. In every company can occur different barriers in communication which can cause immediate negative effects on the communication process and communication partners (Yusof and Rahmat, 2020). Lately, there were conducted only a few studies focusing on barriers to effective communication therefore it is needed to bring up this topic and go deeper to research what the main barriers are and how to avoid them.

The structure of this paper is the following: (1) Literature review – introduces the main topic of this paper and the latest results of research in this area. (2) Methodology – describes the data used in research and the whole methodology. (3) Discussion – presents the results of the survey. (4) Conclusion – shows concluding remarks about employee development and the limits of the research.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Communication is an active process that is occurring all around us. About 70 % of our time, we spend communicating, by sharing and receiving information through various meanings (Ansari, 2021). The best way to transfer information, attitude and emotions is through face-to-face communication. This form of communication provides immediate feedback between communication partners and non-verbal communication supports the message. It is also a good way to develop positive relations between people. Both verbal and non-verbal communication is important for meaningful interaction (Venter, 2019). If there is a conflict between verbal and non-verbal communication, verbal expression is often overlooked in favor of the non-verbal understanding of the message. Non-verbal communication builds comfort by avoiding ambiguity and creating a common foundation for understanding (Lamichhane, 2016). There can occur a lack of meaningful conversation between communication partners due to limited non-verbal cues, where they seek to understand the more emotional content of a conversation (Venter, 2019). Showing empathy and understanding the perspective of team members does not cause changes in goals or professional expectations. If managers have high emotional intelligence, they can still keep team members

responsible for results and positively address inefficiencies. The perception of the manager influences the work environment, team togetherness and cohesiveness. Observing individuals and listening to what others say can reveal more about their personalities, how they are and how they want to be treated (Nguyen et al., 2019). An inaccurate understanding of the meaning of the message can cause a communication barrier between communication partners (Demchenko, Khoroshevskaya and Krukov, 2021). Among communication barriers can be found the loss of the original meaning of the message, distorted information, increase in the level of topics to be communicated, attitudes and behaviors in the communication process, giving and receiving feedback, managers expressing their superiority, missing effective listening skills, lack of interest, information overload, low level of trust between manager and employee, lack of understanding and concern and similar. These barriers were also confirmed in the research conducted by Vasilev and Stefanova (2021). A better look can help to overcome these and similar barriers and improve effective communication (Vasilev and Stefanova, 2021). The positive value is seen when the managers invest in improving their interpersonal skills and as a result improve the relationship between manager and team members which also impacts organizational economic growth (Saadi, 2018). There is evidence of the positive influence of effective communication in daily work. Interpersonal communication is seen as effective when there is a reaction or response from the communication partner. The meaning of the message has to be transferred in the communication process; the process is successful if the other side understands the basic idea of a message (Naumovski et al., 2016). Face-to-face conversations use communication strategies using verbal and non-verbal communication to express feelings and attitudes. Quality interpersonal communication requires listening and empathy, the ability to express emotions, lead the meaningful conversation for both communication partners as well as give and receive feedback (Venter, 2019). According to Rana (2013) one of the top reasons the organization fails is poor communication in the workplace which causes employees to tend to be cynical, lose their trust and respect for the leaders and the whole organization. Rani (2016) confirmed that when we communicate, we have a tendency to raise barriers that hinder our ability to communicate. Among the potential communication barriers belong the selection of words (e.g., too technical), grammar, sentence structure, punctuation and spelling can also hinder the understanding of the message, physical form of the message (appearance can affect its readability), personal appearance of the communicator (e.g., the credibility of the oral message, distraction), environmental factors (e.g., noise), the ability of communication partner (e.g., any disabilities), ineffective listening skills or other communication barriers (e.g., lack of interest, lack of knowledge, different cultural perceptions, linguistic differences, biases and similar). The communication partners should try to avoid any possible barriers of ineffective communication, related to communication barriers (Naumovski et al., 2016). Interpersonal communication skills make a person more charismatic which can help to sustain stability in the workplace, moreover, managers can maintain the work environment as positive and productive helping to build trust with their teams and retain them (Ansari, 2021). Also, the function of interpersonal communication is to reduce uncertainty, avoid and overcome conflicts, share knowledge and experience (Lusiawati, 2019).

3. METHODOLOGY

The subject of the survey is the identification of barriers to effective interpersonal communication in the organization. Two research questions were set: 1. What are the main barriers to effective interpersonal communication? 2. How is the communication flow in the organization? This second research question is answered by these questions from the questionnaire: “The organization supports communication between departments.” and “The company’s management

provides all necessary information in relation to employees.” Based on these questions and the characteristics of the way of communication in the organization and the identification of barriers occurring in the communication process, may be determined the deficiencies as well as the positives of communication in the workplace. This paper shows how employees and managers communicate and their mutual satisfaction. The survey was conducted before Covid-19 crisis has started in a selected international company in Germany.

The research is based on the quantitative-qualitative method, where the questionnaire consisted of 10 closed questions and 5 open questions focusing on describing what communication problems the employees can encounter in the organization, what they suggest to prevent the problem or how to fix it, how the way of communication in the organization can be improved, whether the organization provides training to increase communication skills, and the last question provides an answer to the overall satisfaction of employees with the way of communication in the organization. The questionnaire was co-created with HR professionals that consisted of questions where respondents answered whether they agree with the statement, disagree, or partially agree/disagree in the first part of the questionnaire, followed by five open-ended questions where respondents had the opportunity to present their views. Similar ways of working with this topic were chosen by other researchers and studies are presented in this paper.

48 employees (32 women and 16 men) participated in the questionnaire survey of a total of 187 employees, which means the return rate of the questionnaire is 25.67%.

4. RESULTS

The results of the research are summed up in the following Table 1, where are shown the respondents’ responses (in percentage) on barriers to effective communication:

Table 1. Barriers to effective communication in the organization

Barriers to effective communication in the organization	Agree with the statement	Disagree with the statement	Partially agree / partially disagree with the statement
1. I am not afraid to address the company’s management directly.	78,7 %	12,6 %	12,5 %
2. The organization supports communication between departments.	37,6 %	31,3 %	31,3 %
3. The company’s management provides all necessary information in relation to employees.	20,9 %	37,6 %	41,7 %
4. I often encounter a misunderstanding of my manager in the communication process.	10,5 %	54,3 %	35,5 %
5. I am often overwhelmed with a lot of information.	16,7 %	75,1 %	8,4 %
6. I don’t understand the terms my manager uses.	4,2 %	89,7 %	6,3 %
7. I often encounter my manager’s lack of interest in my problem.	6,3 %	73 %	20,9 %
8. I’m getting information I don’t understand.	6,3 %	85,5 %	8,4 %
9. When I talk, my manager often interrupts me.	8,4 %	75,1 %	16,7 %
10. When I talk to my co-workers, they often interrupt me.	12,6 %	68,8 %	18,8 %

Source: Own research

The results of the survey differ on whether the organization supports communication between departments. Employees tended to believe that the company's management did not provide all the necessary information to them, according to 36.7% of respondents and 41.7% partially agreed and partially disagreed that the company's management provide enough information to employees. On other issues, employees did not see significant problems. For example, when it comes to using terms that employees do not understand, as many as 89.7% of respondents said they understood the technical terms used by their manager. It was similar in terms of receiving information from managers that employees do not understand, where only 6.3% of employees do not understand them and 85.5% of employees do. According to Yusof and Rahmat (2020), if the communication partners are not able to understand each other, the communication barrier can occur and they cannot achieve an agreement. Moreover, some employees can have communication issues because of sending unclear messages for them, which can cause a lack of clarity (Adu-Oppong and Agyin-Birikorang, 2014). Different data have to be summarized or simplified to make a message clearer (Demchenko, Khoroshevskaya and Krukov, 2021). As we can see in Table 1, 73% of respondents do not agree that they would not be interested in their problem with their manager. It is expected of managers to create an environment with easy and effective communication flow (Oladiran and Burghate, 2016). According to one research, most organizations and managers have difficulties with communication strategies that influence employees' productivity and the success of the entire organization (Nelly and Mosley, 2018). The quality of communication exchange depends also on the status differences of employees (employees do not always inform their managers and managers also separate some information for their employees consciously or by using different communication channels) (Demchenko, Khoroshevskaya and Krukov, 2021).

The next part of the questionnaire consisted of three open questions. The first question is: Describe what communication problems you encounter in the organization? Responses to this question are divided into several areas: a) Information flow, hierarchy and feedback (little or no feedback, little direct communication between levels, especially manager vs. co-workers in the organization, the organization is led through managers, it is difficult to provide open criticism, the problem of finding the right person to communicate with, poorer flow of information, lengthy information flow through the organization, departments, team leaders, assistants and employees divide information or a gap in understanding, a large amount of information to pass to all employees are different, e.g. if they are also not at work every day, so it is difficult to find the person you are looking for), b) Time and workload (failure to provide information in advance, what is planned, open deadlines, no precise determination e.g. annual talk, increased time pressure, too many tasks divided among few people, often interrupt the phone during conversations – this one may be also include in area "openness and empathy), c) Openness and empathy (disregard for ideas, worries, fears, problems, dealing with only one's own interests, low ability to empathize, lack of interest), d) Ways of communication (barriers due to poor language skills, sometimes problems communicating with people for whom German is a foreign language, the responsibility of other areas, there are many ways of communication and it is often not clear which is the easiest for employees, insufficient information about the current problem, use of technical terms). Quantitative research conducted by Yusof and Rahmat (2020) for working adults coming from different types of companies found similar results to the presented survey above, people need some time to understand foreign colleagues when communicating and have some problems understanding the foreign accent. Among other results, there can be seen a correlation between the survey presented in this paper and research by Yusof and Rahmat in responses connected to time - not enough time to do work or other personal barriers such as

“not allowed to voice out the opinion unless someone asks, cannot question the seniors at the workplace, awareness of the emotional states of colleagues, ability to put into another’s shoes”. Studies present the importance of effective interpersonal communication in the workplace and the role of managerial communication in managing employees, conflict resolution, job responsibilities and organization’s productivity (Oladiran and Burghate, 2019). The information distortions may increase in organizations with multiple hierarchical levels (Demchenko, Khoroshevskaya and Krukov, 2021). Another study supports the face-to-face conversation between managers and their employees as an effective way of communication due to paying attention to the body language and more accurately interpreting the message (Jonsdottir and Fridriksdottir, 2019). Moreover, the pressure of work often blocks effective communication, time pressure and heavy workload can cause passing out insufficient or incomplete information to employees (Oladiran and Burghate, 2019). These examples clearly describe the problems that employees face in the organization.

In the second question, employees were asked what they suggest to prevent the problem or how to fix it. The most common suggestions include sharing information on what is planned for tomorrow / next week, providing feedback (even negative), talking about the problem with all stakeholders (either not to promise), meeting deadlines (talks, interviews), and collecting other opinions from the department. Other responses of respondents include increasing soft as well as professional skills such as increasing empathy, seeing each colleague as part of a team working with the same goal, raising team spirit, increasing motivation, adhering to, creating a central position or delegating an employee who is always located in a certain place, providing information from managers to employees, entrusting a company employee to whom employees can turn when their line manager is not available, follow the agreed goals more together, managers should be less committed and have more time spontaneously for employees, the structure of meetings at the level of managers should be understandable for employees, learning technical terms, more employees (staff planning), division of priorities, improve management structure, create training for each manager on various topics, e-mail access for all employees, regular mutual interviews, language course, etc. To communicate effectively, managers need to know how to handle formal as well as informal communication within the organization (Oladiran and Burghate, 2019). Employees suggested several options to solve various problems. Their implementation could prevent misunderstandings that currently arise in the workplace. Openness, active listening, body language, conflict resolution, assertiveness, negotiation skills, positive attitude, decision making and problem-solving, assertiveness, empathy and teamwork are the competencies needed for effective interpersonal communication (Beqiri, 2018).

The third question follows from the previous one, how the way of communication in the organization can be improved. The answers can be used to formulate useful recommendations such as talking at eye level and conducting open conversations more often (multiple meetings), improving time management (managers should devote more time to employees), leading conversations/meetings also between departments, but also to cooperate and explain the context for better understanding, to ask, request information and connect questions so that everyone can as quickly as possible come to more relevant, more transparent communication between departments, to be open and friendly to each other. The responses to this question are very similar to the previous one, they provide solutions to problems without suggestions for a specific implementation. According to a study conducted by Jonsdottir and Fridriksdottir (2019), in the communication process is important the understand both communication partners, use open questions to obtain certain information and lead the conversation, seek further clarification by asking. Another

survey added - what employees expect from their manager: openness, active listening, problem-solving and teamwork (Ansari, 2021). Having strong communication skills is a base for managers to communicate effectively and be able to make a decision and resolve problems; furthermore, it supports a smooth workflow and establishes a positive influence on the entire organization (Oladiran and Burghate, 2016).

Two questions were asked in the last part of the questionnaire survey. To the first question of whether the organization provides training to increase communication skills, 27.1% of employees say yes, 33.3% of employees say no and 39.6% of employees do not know. Organizing training to increase communication skills is important, at least at the level of managers, so that they can have effective talks, conversations, and interviews with their employees. Disilva and Arun (2017), who conducted a study in the hospitality industry, revealed that the programs created for communication skills development have a positive effect on employee development. What is more, 65,2% of respondents lack the training and development programs and see it among the biggest communication barriers. Therefore, they (89,1%) request an appropriate training program to overcome the communication barriers. In another survey conducted by Ansari (2021), 88,9 % of respondents stated that their organization lacks practical training such as body language. The second question provides an answer to the overall satisfaction of employees with the way of communication in the organization. Overall, exactly 50% of employees are satisfied.

5. CONCLUSION

The paper analyses the barriers to effective communication in a selected organization with the goal to identify them. The results of the research show that half of the employees are satisfied with the communication process in the organization. Open questions discovered many issues, even little ones in effective communication but the employees were able to seek solutions and suggested some. As positive results are seen that the employees do not afraid to address the company's management directly, employees are not interrupted while speaking, do not get the information they do not understand, the managers do not use the terms their employees do not understand, employees are not often overwhelmed with the information, not facing a misunderstanding from manager's side. On the other hand, the organization may support more communication between departments and provide more information to employees to feel well informed.

The current research has several implications for theory and practice. At the theoretical level, it extends the research from the fields of interpersonal and managerial communication about specific barriers occurring in the organization and summarized the similarities in other research conducted in this field. It also offers practical information for organizations, managers and human resources professionals to learn more about barriers and try to avoid them in daily work life. For scholars, it provides the base about barriers to effective communication and gives the opportunity to continue exploring this area.

This research required addressing several limitations. Firstly, the sample size is too small, only 25,67 % of employees participated. Secondly, the survey was conducted before the COVID-19 pandemic crisis has started, therefore there can be some differences between that time and nowadays. Thirdly, the questionnaire could go deeper and seek more details on barriers to effective communication. If the research will be conducted repeatedly with a higher number of respondents, after COVID-19 pandemic crisis and with detailed questions in the questionnaire, it can offer an even better overview of barriers occurring in the organizations.

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