

ORGANISATIONAL COMMUNICATION: A CASE STUDY

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Introduction

The organization chosen for this case study on organizational communication is a small political activists' organization for which the writer of this paper once volunteered. The organizational communication problem encountered was that the volunteer supervisor did not have projects ready during the scheduled volunteer time slots, and despite a thorough interview process to determine skill-need matches and prior verbal scheduling of volunteer times, this problem persisted for months. With the lack of a communication plan, the consequence was a diminished enthusiasm for the cause and growing level of frustration causing this writer to cease volunteering for the organization despite having a true belief in its mission.

Knowledge

The major problem in this case study was that the volunteer supervisor was engaged in so many projects that she did not invest the time to communicate projects to delegate to the volunteer. Most volunteers for this organization worked on updating databases, solicitations, and mailings. This writer's volunteer emphasis was on writing and doing special projects. Therefore, it was only through horizontal top down communication from this particular supervisor that these special projects could be delegated. Because the

volunteer work was so different than the other volunteers, there was no real value to vertical communication. In Organizational Communication, Kathryn Baker, contends many communication theories are not so relevant in today's service world as well as today's technologically globalized world. (Baker, 2002) While many organizational communication principals would apply, this organization operates locally and nationally, and falls into Baker's description of 'the service' organization.

What the supervisor could have done was implement time saving communication systems, such as writing memos, e-mails, and other written communication methods to delegate tasks to be done within that specific time frame. If this was done, the task(s) often were so simple that they did not take all the volunteer time, and she was left scrambling to find another volunteer project.

Sensitivity

The person that appears to be most responsible for the problem was the volunteer supervisor. However, she was being asked to do more than supervise volunteers; she was an assistant to the Marketing/Communication Director and was involved in a very extensive public awareness campaign which required a lot of hands on work on her part. Additionally, the communications department seemed at odds with other parts of the organization, and other

departmental managers often were putting demands on this supervisor as well. Her lack of time resulted in her being a poor communicator, and even though this volunteer's skills could have helped ease her work load, she couldn't slow down enough to implement a concrete communications strategy.

Skills

The writer of this case study looks to Carter McNamara's Basics in Internal Organizational Communications

(McNamara, 2007) who suggests a communication plan. This plan can involve verbal or written communications that would cover how to effectively manage a nontraditional volunteer. As cited earlier, this supervisor dealt mostly with people with specific tasks, not project skills, and therefore did not need a one-on-one short session with them during their volunteer time. They also had the value of communication with one another to help them out when they ran into a specific problem.

Values

The value of the frustrated volunteer was the desire to create some quality work and be included within a network of volunteers for this cause. The value of the supervisor was to impress her managers. The values of the volunteer and supervisor were not mutual. If the goals had been mutual, it might have created an environment that would have made it more conducive for the supervisor to take the time to communicate special volunteer projects of value. It's rather ironic that during the initial volunteer meeting, how the writer of this paper could assist the cause was a major point of discussion.

This paper does acknowledge that as with many political activists' organizations, things happen on the spot, and there is a great deal of crisis management, and not a lot of pre-planning. Additionally the communication focus for this organization was external, not internal. This organizational culture spilled over into the communication methods of this writer's volunteer work, and was a cause of a great deal of frustration.

Alternative Solutions

The volunteer supervisor should delegate another volunteer to hand out the written instructions for the volunteer time block, and because of the nature of the work, keep the volunteer time appointment in her appointment book, not just on the general volunteer log. This would have eased the frustration and allowed the writer of this paper to feel like a valuable contribution was being made to this particular cause.

Proposed Solutions

McNamara's communication plan could be written. The written communication vehicles could include hand written memos, or emails. This former volunteer believes that the supervisor did not see the benefit of investing the necessary time to guide, mentor, or retain the volunteer. A communication vehicle needed to be defined, tasks assigned, and then executed with a communication vehicle defined for feedback.

References

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