

Communication of a leader

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Abstract

Effective communication is the most important skill a leader can have. It is thanks to her that he achieves his goals and is effective in action and influencing the environment. The article deals with the topic of skilful communication of a leader. The authors of the publication characterized the process of social communication aimed at causing the recipient of information to change the consciousness intended by the sender. Communication skills are presented as a trait of a leader, as well as trust in him as one of the most important conditions for its effectiveness. The personality trait of charisma was also discussed, thanks to which the person possessing it owes unquestionable authority in people and influence on them. It is often the most succinct way of describing the trait that distinguishes effective leaders from subordinates.

In order to analyse the quality of communication in the managed team, the study contains sets of questions that should be answered by the leader. They contain questions to be asked when analysing the process of giving direction, analysing your level of empathy for feedback in the communication process and building team morale, and analysing the process of your leadership activity towards your team members.

The publication also characterizes the performance of a leader in a multicultural environment and describes models of the leadership process.

Keywords: communication, leader, leadership process models.

1. INTRODUCTION

The ability to communicate effectively is recognized as an essential leader trait. According to research conducted in the 1970s, communication is the actual 70 to 90 percent of a leader's working time. Contemporary realities, richer in technical possibilities of information transfer, do not diminish the participation of communication in the process of the leader's activity.

It is estimated that a person who has the entire set of qualities of a good leader, but at the same time cannot communicate effectively - cannot be a leader¹. Skilful communication combines the full potential of the features that make up a good leader with the realities in which they have to act. He/she is an effector that allows him/her to implement his/her plans and a receptor that allows him/her to control the results of the activities of his teams. To become a great leader, you need to have outstanding communication skills².

If we overlay all of this with unstable political systems, changes in human behaviour, dynamically developing and equally rapidly declining enterprises, ubiquitous competition and often a ruthless race for profit, we have real conditions for the functioning of modern organizations and leaders³.

2. COMMUNICATION

The encyclopaedic definition of communication for management, i.e. leading leadership activity, describes it as a process aimed at causing the recipient of information to change the consciousness intended by the sender. In this process, the following stages of operation can be distinguished⁴:

- thought encoding by the sender,
- sending the carrier (physical delivery to the recipient through a formal or informal channel),

¹ Luthra A., Dahija R., *Effective Leadership is all about Communicating Effectively: Connecting Leadership and Communication*, "International journal of management and business studies", 5 (2015) 3, pp. 43-45.

² Loc. cit.

³ Ścibiorek Z., *Uwarunkowania procesu decyzyjnego w niemilitarnych zdarzeniach nadzwyczajnych*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warszawa 2018, p. 116.

⁴ Encyklopedia Zarządzania, <https://mfiles.pl/pl/index.php/Komunikacja> [access on: 04.10.2021].

- receipt of the carrier by the recipient of the message,
- reconstruction of the information content (decoding),
- feedback.

The sender of the message, and thus the initiator of the communication process, is in this case the leader. He begins the transfer of information by coding an idea of his choice. Thought encoded in this way becomes a message. It may take the form of an expression or writing, formal or informal, it may be just a single gesture, an impulse of light or sound, or a set of various signs.

A news feed is the means through which a message is broadcast over a given medium. It is received by the addressee of the message, in this case a member of managed teams. It is them who begin the process of decoding, that is, understanding the thought sent by the sender. Before they can receive the message, however, it must be translated into a form that they understand.

Feedback is information that goes from the recipient to the sender of a message, which may convey knowledge about whether the given thought has been understood or whether and how it will be implemented.

The communication process can be multidirectional. Its flow pattern is often determined along the horizontal and vertical axis.

Top-down flow is when information moves from a leader, that is, from the higher level, to the members of the managed team, group or organization, that is, to the lower level. Organizational level leaders communicate in this way with members of managed teams. The main purpose of this communication is to advise, inform, direct, educate and evaluate members of managed teams and to provide information about the goals and tasks of the organization.

Bottom-up Direction: This is the process of flow from the lower levels of the command hierarchy towards the higher levels of the hierarchy. It is used to provide feedback to senior positions, keep them informed of progress towards goals, and alert them to current issues.

Horizontal flow is used for communication between members of teams, groups or organizations, in equal positions. It saves time and facilitates the coordination of activities. An additional benefit of horizontal communication is the ability to

establish relationships with other team members, which is an important factor in maintaining an appropriate level of their well-being⁵.

The direct transmission of information takes place through verbal and non-verbal communication. The first type of communication involves formal and informal conversations and discussions. There is also an activity known colloquially as gossiping, or spreading and listening to rumours. The advantages of verbal communication are its speed and almost immediate feedback, which can also be observed in a non-verbal form, such as the interlocutor's facial expressions, postures or the whole body language. The main disadvantage of such communication is revealed in organizations or wherever the message has to pass through a larger number of their members. The more there are, the greater the possibility of distortion.

Information can also be communicated in a non-verbal manner. These include: body movements, the intonation or accentuation of words, facial expressions, and the physical distance between the sender and receiver. Very often, these messages are expressed unconsciously, regardless of the will of the sender⁶.

Traditionally, the communication process of a leader, especially a political leader, can be divided into⁷:

- elite communication, meaning a situation in which rulers communicate with each other,
- hegemonic communication, occurring when people in leadership send messages to their followers,
- petition communication from supporters to leaders
- associative communication as a type of communication between followers.

3. THE ABILITY TO COMMUNICATE AS A TRAIT OF A LEADER

Systematic research, conducted for several decades, consisting in the analysis of individual psychological characteristics of leaders, indicate that some of them, e.g. intelligence, assertiveness, resistance to stress, emotional stability, empathy,

⁵ Loc. cit.

⁶ Loc. cit.

⁷ Żukiewicz P., *O komunikacji w procesie przywództwa politycznego*, "Lingua ac Communitas", 22 (2012), pp. 15-17.

creativity, independence, the need to act and achieve goals, distinguish leaders from those who are not⁸.

A leader is a person who, by acting, is able to take control, guide, encourage or otherwise stimulate the activity of others. Since decision-making means the process of choosing an action as a way to resolve a specific problem⁹, then he must think logically, skilfully convince people to be right and feel responsible for his decisions and actions. He should be able to create and manage a value system as well as support and motivate members of his teams. A leader is able to achieve all of this through smart planning and effective monitoring and communication. It is precisely the precise, even perfect communication skills that are assessed as the most important and indispensable quality of a leader. Without communication skills, all the other qualities that characterize a leader remain useless¹⁰.

4. TRUST

Efficient operation of information flow channels seems to be a necessary but not a sufficient condition for effective communication. One of the most important conditions for its effectiveness is trust in the leader. As research shows, it is precisely the trust in the goal-setter and task-setter that every member of the leadership team wants to feel before following them. Regardless of whether it is a battlefield or a conference room¹¹.

Trust cannot be effectively claimed or demanded. You have to create it. An effective leader can build self-confidence by communicating having a clear set of values and belief in principles instilled in others. A good leader must give the impression of a sincere, honest person. This is one of the pillars of a good reputation, i.e. the opinion of a trustworthy person. Without trust, effective collaboration is difficult, and the evidence supporting this thesis is also provided by research in the fields of evolution, biology, and socio-biology. The roots of the human need for trust go

⁸ Babiak J., *Cechy przywódcze jako determinanty sukcesu organizacyjnego: odradzający się kierunek w badaniach przywództwa w organizacji*, "Przegląd Psychologiczny: organ Polskiego Towarzystwa Psychologicznego", 51 (2008), p. 4.

⁹ Ścibiorek Z., *Decydowanie podstawową funkcją zarządzania*, Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek, Toruń 2021, p. 4.

¹⁰ Luthra A., Dahija R., op. cit., p. 43.

¹¹ Luthra A., Dahija R., op. cit., p. 46.

back so far. Its framework is observed in all species, the survival of which is based on conscious cooperation.

Building the image of a trustworthy person should take place not only at the level of formal communication, but also in informal and personal interactions. In such situations, non-verbal communication and body language become more important. It is worth remembering that non-verbal communication is easier to absorb than the words we use¹².

Informal situations are also a good opportunity to collect messages from team members, i.e. to implement the feedback process. Personal contact allows you to receive real knowledge about the effects of activities, less suited to the image of the leader's expectations, built by team members, which may allow for solving problems at an early stage of their occurrence.

The simplicity and brevity of the message also inspire confidence. Aristotle had already advised "Think like a sage, speak like a simple man." It is important that the choice of vocabulary is adjusted to the situation and cultural patterns as well as the possibilities of analysing the interlocutors. Usually, people who communicate clearly and unambiguously are perceived as more honest.

Concise communication also saves time, which can be useful in receiving sincere feedback from the recipient of the message. He has less time to adapt to the leader's imagined expectations.

The leader cannot be afraid of confronting people with a different opinion, but at the same time cannot limit himself to merely criticizing their position. Such an attitude may lead to a situation where the leader is surrounded by people communicating to him only the information he wants to receive, which will lead to a misjudgement of the reality and, ultimately, errors in the leader's activity.

The willingness to discuss and dialogue, limited by the organizational culture in which a given team operates and situational requirements, builds a good reputation as a leader. When conducting a dialogue, it should be remembered that a lot of useful information is not directly formulated and articulated. The skill popularly

¹² Stangierska I., Horst-Sikorska W., *Ogólne zasady komunikacji między pacjentem a lekarzem*, "Forum Medycyny Rodzinnej", 1 (2007)/1, pp. 59-62.

known as "reading between the lines" will allow for the effective completion of information necessary for effective leadership activity.

Regardless of whether the message reaches the recipient in a formal or informal way, it is important that it is personalized. A good leader communicates with individuals, individual team members, not with the group. A message whose recipient has the impression that it is addressed directly to them has a better chance of being understood and implemented¹³.

5. CHARISMA

Charisma (Greek: *charisma*: a special gift, God's grace) is often the most succinct way of describing the trait that distinguishes effective leaders from subordinates. A charismatic leader is characterized by self-confidence, steadfast motivation to take over, and is convinced that his own judgments are right. The concept of charismatic leadership is popular today and occupies an important place in research in the field of psychology and management.

A leader endowed with such a special gift as the gift of charisma, not only gains trust, but also impresses the members of the managed teams, to such an extent that his instructions and instructions are carried out primarily because they come from him. This type of leadership is implemented effectively, especially in problematic, crisis circumstances that are new to team members. It is in such situations that the feeling of discomfort or even danger prompts you to seek a quick way to get rid of these feelings. A charismatic leader may seem to be a guarantee of getting rid of the problem quickly and overcoming the crisis. Charismatic leadership is characterized by a strong influence on the attitudes of team members and a strong emotional bond between the leader and the people who are influenced by it. There is also no doubt that the direction that determines the effectiveness of this type of leadership is one: the leader is adored by members of managed teams. However, he must also be ready to face strong emotions, including negative ones, on the part of those subordinates who have a different opinion than the leader.

Researchers of the above-described type of leadership emphasize that the ability to overcome crises, to present a convincing vision of the directions of knitting and their motives, to stimulate the maximum involvement of members of managed

¹³ Luthra A., Dahija R., op. cit., p. 46.

teams, caused by the feeling of being based on common values, has an impact on the effectiveness of their operations and achieving above-average successes¹⁴.

6. MODELS OF THE LEADERSHIP PROCESS

Communication plays a key role in the leadership process. The way in which information flows and the nature of its use in this process allowed researchers to build various types of models describing it. We can mention here the following model: decision-making, situational, "path leading to the goal", network, as well as transformational and transactional.

Decision Model

It links the effectiveness of leadership with the procedures by which decisions are made. The decision-making process of a leader takes place when he asks himself questions and answers them. In such a model, the role of communication is to collect information that enables the collection of accurate answers to a set of questions that will enable effective decisions to be made.

Situational Model

It is characterized by adapting the skills of team members to the task assigned to them. It is one of the most widely used in Western culture. It is based on the thesis that the leader should adapt his behaviour to the situation in which a member of the team he manages is active. Each of them may have different competences, degree of commitment and readiness to perform the task, different relationship with the leader and other difficulties in performing the assigned task resulting from these factors. Depending on these factors, a leader should change his/her way of leadership activity¹⁵.

The effectiveness of the leadership process is to be ensured by appropriate action strategies that the leader can apply depending on the conditions in which he or she is to act:

- an information strategy applied to a team member who knows how to act and does not want to act at the same time,

¹⁴ Babiak J., op. cit., p. 6.

¹⁵ Świtek S., *Charakterystyka modeli przywództwa stosowanych w organizacjach lean i six sigma*, "Organizacja i Zarządzanie: kwartalnik naukowy", 36 (2016)/4, pp. 139-155.

- a cheering strategy, used when a person wants to act but lacks the necessary competences to perform a given task,
- a delegation strategy, effective when someone reluctant to be active, but endowed with the ability to perform the task,
- a participatory strategy, useful when a team member is both willing to act and has the competence to perform the assigned tasks.

The Model of Servant Leadership

In this model, the organizational hierarchy appears to be inverted. Here, leaders must prove their worth by demonstrating the ability to support the teams managed in this way. In the first place, a leader must be motivated by the willingness to be helpful, i.e. the willingness to serve the members of managed teams, and only from this willingness a conscious choice of the role of a leader should result. The author of this concept, Robert Greanleaf, distinguished the most important features of such a leader: the desire to serve, listening and understanding, acceptance and empathy, farsightedness, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, self-regeneration and community rebuilding¹⁶. Note that servant leadership is not soft - a leader can make hard decisions to benefit others, not to affirm power as such.

The "Path Leading to the Goal" Model

It consists in the leader providing support to members of his teams during the implementation of the tasks entrusted to him. Due to the type of this support, several types of leaders can be distinguished:

- directive - they support informing team members about what tasks need to be completed and how to do it,
- self-sacrificing - these are leaders who establish a close relationship with their teams,
- participating - these are the leaders involved in the day-to-day activities of the team, co-deciding at every stage of the task execution,
- demanding - activating his support only when the effects of his teams' activities are satisfactory.

Network Model

Its essence is to reject the traditional, hierarchical role of a real leader. The leader plays a rather symbolic role here. The network model enables each participant of

¹⁶ Servant leadership – przywództwo przyszłości?, <https://bigcall.pl/strefa-wiedzy/servant-leadership-przywodztwo-przyszlosci> [dostęp: 26.10.2021].

the organization operating according to such a scheme to influence the decisions made¹⁷.

Transformational and Transactional Model

Charisma is seen as one of the main components of the type of transformational leadership. A transformational leader has been described as a person who shares with subordinates his vision of goals and ways to achieve them, thus stimulating them intellectually, showing himself as a leader personally interested in each team member. A transactional leader manages by making a certain exchange, transactions. For achieving goals and certain behaviours, he awards various kinds of rewards¹⁸.

A transformational leader uses in action the human need for meaning through activity, at the same time being motivated by goals, and guided by values and ethics. He plans his activities in the long term, taking into account the values and principles of the managed team, and patiently supports the activity of team members. Acts fairly recognizing and rewarding merits, notices and develops the talents of members of managed teams, adjusts structures to strengthen the values and backbone of the managed organization¹⁹.

A transactional leader uses the human need to work and earn money, in action he focuses on power and his own position, acts on an ad hoc basis, plans short-term, focusing on the current situation. He assesses the causes and effects, supports structures and systems that strengthen the day-to-day operations of the managed organization, which makes him more of a tactician than a strategist²⁰.

7. PRACTICE

The multitude of models based on the conducted scientific research and the differences resulting from the cultural properties in which a given managed organization is embedded resulted in the search for "shortcuts". A path that is easy to analyse and apply by a leader who is looking for practical solutions, not wanting to wade through specialized articles in the field of sociology, psychology and management.

¹⁷ Loc. cit.

¹⁸ Babiak J., op. cit., p. 6.

¹⁹ Świtek S., op. cit., p. 145.

²⁰ Loc. cit.

Such guidance is widely available on the Internet. They usually take the form of a multi-point instruction, the use of which is to enable success in the leadership process.

Many researchers notice such a need and respond to it by developing proprietary system tools that are to combine practice with the results of scientific research, enabling the analysis of their own activities and improvement of leadership activity. One of them will be quoted for the purposes of this study²¹. Its creators recommend that leaders answer a set of questions to analyse the quality of communication in the managed team, as it seems useful.

Questions that may be asked by a leader when analysing the process of giving direction to action:

1. Do I provide members of managed teams with positive feedback when they are doing a good job of carrying out important tasks in the organization?
2. Do I give them feedback on improving performance when they are not working to the required level?
3. Do I understand clearly what is expected of them and what are their duties?
4. Do I provide members of managed teams with appropriate organizational information necessary to perform their tasks?
5. Do I tailor feedback to performance to maximize understanding for each employee?
6. Do I use the communication media that is most effective in providing performance guidance and feedback?
7. Is the communication of results most appropriate for the task?

Questions that can be asked by a leader when analysing his level of empathy, which is useful in receiving feedback in the communication process and in building team morale:

1. Do I speak to members of informally managed teams?
2. Do I provide feedback in an understandable way and respect the recipient's feelings?
3. Do I advise my team members in informal discussions?
4. Do I show a willingness to receive feedback on the negative emotions of my team members?
5. Do I use the most appropriate ways to express my ideas and reflections?

²¹ Mayfield J., Mayfield M., *Leader Communication Strategies Critical Paths to Improving Employee Commitment*, "American Business Review", (2002)/6, pp. 92-93.

Questions that a leader may ask himself when analysing the process of his leadership activity towards his team members:

1. Do I inform them about the organizational possibilities at their disposal?
2. Do I provide examples of people who have been successful in your organization and of those who have failed?
3. Do I provide new team members with information about the culture of a given organization?
4. Do I communicate to team members what to do to fit in with the organisation's operating culture?
5. Do I present ways to be successful in the culture of your organization?

8. A LEADER IN AN INTERCULTURAL ENVIRONMENT

The growing importance of international cooperation, along with its consequence, which is to operate in a multicultural environment, poses new requirements for leaders, which they must meet if they want to perform their functions effectively.

Already at the stage of selecting candidates to perform specific tasks, including leadership tasks, more and more attention is paid to their predispositions to work in a culturally heterogeneous environment. Intercultural management skills come to the fore here, ahead of specialist knowledge and professional qualifications. They are obviously important, but those who make the selections assume that professional qualifications without the ability to communicate with people with a different cultural code will be insufficient for an effective leader.

A good leader in an intercultural environment must be flexible in his actions, appreciate the diversity of the environment in which he works, and avoid actions motivated by cultural stereotypes. Such a leader will then notice that often the heterogeneity of human teams brings new ways of assessing the situation, suggests previously unknown ways to solve problems, which in turn increases the effectiveness of such a team that is diversified in the cultural structure²².

Multiculturalism is an inevitable feature in modern society, in the current demographic conditions, even for organizations that do not cooperate on an inter-state

²² Jabłońska U., *Nowe wyzwania: Zespoły międzykulturowe*, "GFMP Management Focus", 14 (2013), p. 17.

scale. It will keep increasing, not decreasing. Therefore, a good leader will see it as an opportunity for development and potential, rather than an obstacle to action.

Nowadays, the most important direction in the study of intercultural interactions in organizations is the attempt to find ways that integrate their diversity, resulting in the so-called cultural synergy and searching for those cultural factors that play an important role in management.

Currently, the most popular trend in research on intercultural interactions in an organization is the search for mechanisms that integrate diversity, causing the so-called cultural synergy. Going further, an attempt is made to define when and which cultural factors are an important determinant of the management and behaviour of people in the organization²³.

Creativity develops on diversity²⁴. This point of view prevails today in terms of assessing the advantages of multicultural teams. In addition to creativity, skilful management of such teams reduces the loss of their staff and absenteeism, and thus increases the effectiveness of the entire organization. If, on the other hand, the organization grows, efficiently managed multicultural teams find new members belonging to different cultures easier, and they more easily cooperate in different than the original conditions, to which they adapt faster than homogeneous groups.

A good leader of a multicultural team makes its members aware of the heterogeneity of their group and its consequences, emphasizing its benefits²⁵

9. SUMMARY

Taking into account the above schemes and principles of the leader's operation, it can be concluded that effective communication, i.e. allowing the leader to implement his/her intentions, means efficient, multi-directional flow of information in the form and time adjusted to the prevailing conditions and the characteristics of the members of the managed teams.

²³ Burkiewicz Ł., Knap-Stefaniuk A., *Zarządzanie międzykulturowe jako wyzwanie dla współczesnych menedżerów - rozwijanie potencjału wielokulturowych zespołów*, "Zeszyty Naukowe Politechniki Śląskiej. Organizacja i Zarządzanie", 130 (2018), p. 65.

²⁴ Morgan G., *Endangered Species: New Ideas*, "Business Month", 133 (1989)/4, pp. 75-77.

²⁵ Burkiewicz Ł., Knap-Stefaniuk A., op. cit., p. 65.

In order to achieve this effectiveness, it is recommended to strengthen communication channels that the leader uses in managing his teams. Such activities are aimed at adapting members of managed teams to the rules prevailing in a given organization, to its operating culture. They also allow employees to match the tasks and strategic goals of the organization presented to them. They build trust in the leader and in the structures and principles of the institution. They help to keep the group engaged at an effective level. They make it easier for teams and their members to collaborate, and to communicate changes and other important information affecting the performance of a task. They also prevent misunderstandings.

A leader must pay special attention to the quality of his communication skills, as they allow him/her to clearly and comprehensibly present goals and tasks to members of the managed teams and to recognize problems and the real situation in which these teams operate. He/She must be aware of the consequences of choosing the method of communication he will choose and know that the quality of the messages he/she sends and the information he/she receives largely define his/her activity as a leader.

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