ORGANISATIONAL COMMUNICATION PATTERNS UNDERLYING THE CONCEPT OF ORGANISATIONAL BEHAVIOUR

Aura CODREANU

Regional Department of Defense Resources Management Studies, Brasov, Romania

Abstract: In order to understand what patterns of communication underlie organisational behaviour and thus better grasp the latter concept a two-fold approach is necessary. First, a broad outline of what communication is from the perspective of communication theories is necessary since it may provide an insight into the basics of the concept of communication proper. Thus, once general terminological delineations are made and a model of communication theory identified as the incipit for a communication paradigm, a breakdown of the concept of communication into its main variables from the perspective of organisational theory is required in order to set out the basic paradigm of analysis for the concept of organisational behaviour.
Hence, the aim of this article is to provide an overview of theoretical delineations of the concept of communication with a view to future research in the field of organisational behaviour. Moreover, starting from the theoretical outlook, a depiction of the independent variables underlying prospective research in the field will also be carried out.

Keywords: communication, organisational behaviour, research variables.

1. INTRODUCTION

Work experience with various organisations contributes not only to increased expertise in the field of work. Beyond this surface there is a plethora of empirical observations about people's character, motivations, expectations, assumptions concerning the drivers behind individual and/or group behaviour towards formal groups or formal leaders, new comers, informal groups, top-down changes, or hypotheses about how organisational design (i.e. number of departments, span of control) or communication channels contribute to overall organisational efficiency.

Consequently, the problem that appears is if all these observations point out to a reality that can be perceived, experienced only from within an organisation or any objective researcher can frame it from the outside. Hence, the basic assumption underlying this article is that regardless of the background of an empirical observer with various organisations, the latter's observations can only yield partial insights into organisational life which may be biased, inconclusive or narrowed to personal or group perceptions and likely to turn into mere clichés.

As a result, the task of objectively studying and building up an overall picture out of the insights into organisational life through employment of an overarching concept and of a paradigm through which the latter to be better accounted for starting from a an investigation into the already existing literature in the field of investigation lies with the researcher.

Thus, the focus of this article is to provide the theoretical tools necessary for the investigation of organisational life which is also known as organisational behaviour. The paradigm by which the latter is to be tackled is that of organisational communication patterns underlying the concept proper and the method considered as best for investigating both the paradigm and the concept is the comparison and contrast one.

2. COMMUNICATION FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF COMMUNICATION THEORIES

According to Bougnoux [1], *'the primary role of communication is to organize social relationships, to structure daily life and to maintain community cohesion'*. Thus, what communication is about in the end, as the above opinion upholds, is the way the human being connects with another human being and thus influences the latter through signs. Moreover, as part of this pragmatic viewpoint, failure of communication or, in other words, miscommunication needs to be also taken into account when approaching the topic of communication. Another issue that needs to be remembered when talking about the concept already defined is that quantifying or objectively describing communication results is a vain attempt since, as Bougnoux highlights [1], no science or technique can encompass communication due to the latter's presence in so many fields that it becomes difficult to grasp all the dimensions of the concept under a unifying perspective.

However, such an attempt with inherent shades of grey is made by Muchielli [2] who claims that from the point of view of communication theories, the concept is viewed as 'all the "expressions" (and by this term the author refers to communication instances cut out of longer, more complex communication sequences) yielded by social actors and carrying an analysable intentionality' within a context defining for the actors involved.

In addition to the above aspects, both Bougnoux and Muchielli [2], draw attention to the fact that communication is not only information since the latter represents only the last stage within the communication process. Moreover, communication has to be viewed beyond the words uttered or put down on paper, beyond the exchanges taking place at an interpersonal level and, inherently, as covering non-communication as well (namely what could have been said, done or written but was not simply because this, in its turn, was meant to convey a message).

Consequently, in order to understand the 'expressions' of communication, to use Muchielli's term, their context or framework within which they take place needs to be analysed. In this respect, Watlawick and alii [3] view communication as a whole whose parts are the content of the communication and the relationship established between interlocutors. Thus, in order to understand a message or behaviour, the type of relationship to which they are subsumed needs to be understood.

As a result, such knowledge informs on the framework to which a specific instance of communication belongs and leads to the conclusion that within communication as a whole, it is the relationship that includes the content and becomes metacommunication.

In conclusion, communication also involves metacommunication as long as the interlocutor needs to know how a certain message is to be classified in terms of the addressee; the latter's status, the category the message falls in. Nonetheless, such metaframeworks, even though underlying communication, need not to be made explicit as long as the interlocutors agree on the issues they communicate about. Only when disagreement appears, metacommunication is resorted to in order to account for the framework to which the exchange belongs.

Thus, starting form Bateson's idea [1] according to which 'to communicate is to join the orchestra', Bougnoux underlines the fact that the relationship developed while communicating needs to be aligned with the already existing means, channels, networks of communication. In this way, one of the basic constraints with a say in the communication process is the need to work within the available network, rather than create a new one.

In support of the above idea Auroux [1] claims that statements do not exist outside the context in which they were uttered. Hence, the latter informs on who made the statement, the place where it was made, and its witnesses and how it was made. Based on this, Muchielli distinguishes several contexts:

• The spatial context, namely the place where the statement was made and the inherent constraints of the place on uttering the statement

• The physical and sensorial context as expressed through sight, hearing, smell, touch, senses which convey meaning to a statement.

• The time context when what is said at a certain moment becomes meaningful in comparison with what was said before

• The social relationship context, namely how the quality of the relationship among the interlocutors give meaning to a statement

• The cultural or sub cultural context built on collectively shared norms and rules when statements acquire meaning in accordance with the norms acknowledged or established during communicative exchanges.

• The actors' identities context when statements acquire meaning in accordance with what is known or displayed about the intentions and stakes of those involved in communication.

Thus, starting from the contexts listed and briefly described above, the conclusion drawn by Muchielli is that meaning emerges only by contextualizing the communication process and is shared by all actors only through and during exchanges that often become metacommunication.

As a consequence, out of the models (e.g. the sender-receiver model, the two-level communication model, the transactional communication model, etc.) employed along the history of communication sciences, the contexts listed above point out as a model of communication analysis the situational one. Hence, from the perspective of this model, communication is a collective construct through contexts and, in this respect, the stakes of communication are how meaning is shared and to what extent communication is possible.

However, considering the topic of the current research, very few of the contexts previously mentioned can be analysed in order to assess how the situational model of communication informs on organisational behaviour. Consequently, the model is not very helpful in constructing the paradigm needed to carry out the analysis and interpretation of the data unveiled by prospective research in the field. However, it may be useful when drawing the final conclusions of such research.

3. TOWARDS A MODEL OF COMMUNICATION FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF COMMUNICATION THEORIES

In order to set out the basic framework of analysis and interpretation for future studies in the field of organisational behaviour another model needs to be employed. As a result, by resorting to the list of models of communication presented by Muchielli, the best model that fits the purposes of this article is the interactionist and systemic one. According to the explanations provided by the aforementioned author, from the perspective of this model communication is defined as 'participation to a system of interactions' and is built upon a system of exchanges necessary to meet the requirements of all the actors involved in terms of cohesion, advantages, collective participation to name just a few.

Relating this model to the constituents of communication, namely content and relationship described by Bougnoux, Muchielli emphasizes the fact that there is a tight connection between the systems of relationships social actors (i.e. groups, collectivities, organisations, institutions) are part of and their identities, since the latter are based on these systems. Consequently, communication sciences are concerned not only with systems of communication, but also with the identities of the social actors generating or joining these systems since the claim they make is that one of the fundamental contexts for the analysis of communication is the context within which an individual acts [3].

4. COMMUNICATION FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF ORGANISATIONAL THEORY

With a view to the above theoretical background and more specifically to the interactionist and systemic model through which we believe that the analysis and interpretation of the data of prospective in the field of organisational behaviour can be carried out, as well as taking into account the dimensions of the concept of organisational behaviour as accounted for in previous articles

[4], this sub-chapter aims at grounding the research into a feasible paradigm through which the findings to gain relevance for the reader. Consequently, in what follows, a presentation of how communication is defined and viewed from the perspective of organisational theory will be carried out. Communication in an organisational context is an evolutionary and cultural process which consists of sharing information and enhancing relationships in formal organisations.

Building up on this definition, Martin [5] emphasizes an idea already highlighted by Bougnoux and Muchielli. Thus, according to him, communication is not only the exchange of information between two persons. In this respect, it needs to be a two-way process involving not only transmission of data, but also proper interactions on those data. Consequently, without mentioning the name of the model proposed by this research as a possible paradigm of interpretation of the information to be made available by future research, the aforementioned author reinforces the usage of the interactionist paradigm as a means of investigation into the concept of communication as a landmark for organisational behaviour.

In terms of the interacting systems identified by Martin from the perspective of organisational framework, the latter are built around the key concept of the communicator. The main roles of this "system" are as follows: to give instructions, to organize, to clarify, direct and influence when getting into contact with the system of subordinates, to establish parameters, identify options and influence when in contact with the system of external peers, to report, to seek approval, to clarify and to influence when in touch with the system of superiors and last, but not least to persuade, integrate and influence when interacting with internal peers. In conclusion, starting from the interactionist and systemic model the author proposes, the investigation of organisations involves a complex process since, as he puts it *'Complexity in communication is an exponential function of the number of people involved'.*

Barnard [6], in his turn, emphasizes the fact that communication holds primacy when approaching the topic of organisational theory, since communication techniques determine the structure and the scope of an organisation. Consequently, Steers, R. M and J. Stewart Black [7] point out the fact that in organisational settings there are several types of organisational communication that can be identified in accordance with the direction a message can flow. Thus, the dimensions of organisational communication they identify are as follows: upward, downward and horizontal.

As far as downward communication is concerned, this type of communication is employed by managers in order to direct and control the activities of those in the chain of command. The purposes identified by Daft, R. and R. Steers as underpinning it are as follows: provision of clear goals, strategies, objectives for the whole organisation, as well as for the departments within it in order to ensure employees have a sense of direction and purpose; job instructions and the rationale behind them; organisation design; policies and procedures through which people are informed on organisation design; performance assessment and correction of performance; indoctrination and socialization since employees are told what the organisation holds important and what not.

Concerning the other type of communication identified by Steers and Black, namely upward communication, the latter flows towards the top of the hierarchical ladder and it involves the following aspects: problems and exceptions that are presented to the manager; performance reports; grievances, disputes; accounting and financial reports.

However, noteworthy in this respect is that, as F. Luthans and J. Larsen observe [8], *'when upward communication does occur, it is likely to be influenced to a considerable degree by what the subordinate thinks his or her superior wants to hear'.* Consequently, when promotion is a personal goal, for example, then positive message get exaggerated, while negative ones are downplayed or omitted.

As for the third type of communication, namely horizontal communication, the latter refers to inter-departmental and intradepartmental activities carried out in order

to ensure completion of projects and tasks assigned to departments or work groups.

Besides these types of communication Zlate [9], drawing upon specialized literature in the field of organisational theory, identifies two major types of communication: formal and informal. The formal one subsumes the three dimensions of communication already identified and described in the paragraphs above. As for the informal one, the latter emerges from the complexity of networks established among people as a result of their psychological needs, the frequency of the interactions among them, age, gender similarities. In the case of this type of communication, information flows in all directions regardless of hierarchy. Among some of its characteristics, the following are worth mentioning: rapid information flow; focus on both organisational and personal life; partial accuracy of information; positive, as well as negative output due to informal socialization, increase of group cohesion.

As we may notice, the above dimensions of communication describe accurately the interactionist and systemic model outlined by Martin. However, one important interaction fails to be observed by Steers, Black and Zlate, namely the one with external environment. In this respect, it is organisation theories that make the omission.

Concerning the relationship between an organisation and its external environment, the issue is of great importance because any organisation needs to be viewed as an *'open system'* [7]. Consequently, not only does any organisation receive input from the external environment (e.g. employees, raw materials, investment), but it also gives back output to the environment (e.g. goods, services, etc.). Consequently, for an organisation to have good communication with its environment and thus ensure its growth and survival it is necessary to be able to respond to the opportunities, challenges, risks and limitations posed by the external environment [10]. As a result, factors such as the political, economic, socio-cultural, technological, legal ones must all the time be taken into consideration in the relationship of continuous exchange established between an organisation and its external environment.

Thus, as Mullins points out *'Organisations make contributions to the quality of life and to the well-being of the community'* through the plethora of stakeholders who have an interest or are affected by the goals, activities and organisational behaviour.

Even though organisation theory does not state it explicitly, we believe that in the relationship organisations establish with external environment, the output they contribute to the latter consists not only of the materials or services they provide, but also of the way their image is communicated through all three dimensions of the concept of organisational behaviour, but especially through individual and organisational behaviour. Consequently, depending on how successful this communication with external environment is, the input these organisations get in terms of the resources they need to employ in their current activities is determined and plays a major role in their positioning within a competing environment.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Based on the theoretical investigation provided by this article, further research into organisational behaviour that resorts to patterns of communication as a paradigm of study and interpretation of data needs to view this framework as the one yielding the independent variables. Consequently, we suggest two broad interrelated categories, namely inter-organisational communication and organisational outward communication as umbrella terms for the independent variables. Thus, in our opinion, inter-organisational communication is defined through the traditionally acknowledged variables of formal communication (V1), informal communication (V2), vertical communication (V3), horizontal communication (V4).

In their turn, these variables can be measured through the variables and categories described by the concept of organisational behaviour.

Thus, any prospective questionnaires and data interpretation are bound to take into

account the following concept-defining variables:

V1: Formal communication described through the following independent variables: communication in terms of organisation processes; organisation design; job policies and procedures; career; leadership; work environment; conflict (measured through the categories of 'conflict sources' and 'conflict approach').

V2: Informal communication measured through communication at informal group level and power relationships

V3: Vertical communication (i.e. upward communication) described through the inward projection of organisational relationships in terms of linguistic means of showing respect to superiors

V4: Horizontal communication depicted through communication at formal group level; conflict (measured through the category of 'conflict sources'); power and politics

As for the category of organisational outward communication, the focus is a two-fold one. Thus, even if when tackling this issue specialized literature speaks only of organisational behaviour in relationship with environmental factors (see for example Steers and Black, 1994: 358-394), the current article upholds the assumption that if the concept of organisational behaviour is to be discussed from the perspective of the patterns of communication underlying it, then it is individual behaviour that needs to be held under scrutiny. As a result, individual attitudes towards the organisation in terms of job satisfaction, organisation commitment and organisation trust can inform both on the current and future status of the organisations under scrutiny. Thus, for a better understanding of the variables measuring the category of organisational outward communication, the former are listed below:

V5: Organisational outward communication viewed as organisation's behaviour within its environment; outward linguistic projection of organisational relationships and individual attitudes towards job satisfaction, organisation commitment, organisation trust.

In conclusion, we believe that based on the insights into the categories and variables of organisational communication patterns an accurate and through investigation into the concept of organisational behaviour can be further undertaken.

REFERENCES

1. Bougnoux, D., *Introducere in ştiinţele comunicării,* Bucureşti, Polirom, 1998;
2. Muchielli, A., Corbalan J.A., Ferrandez, V., *Teoria proceselor de comunicare,* Iasi, Institutul European, 2006;
3. Watlawick, P. et alii, *Une logique de la communication,* 1972, p. 37;
4. Codreanu, A., *Managementul integrat al apărării din perspectiva conceptului de comportament organizaţional*, Revista militară de management şi educaţie, No. 3/2007; pp. 11-14; 14-17;
5. Martin, J., *Organizational Behaviour*, Thomson Learning, 2001;
6. Barnard, C., *The Functions of the Executive,* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1938;
7. Steers, R.M., Black, J.S., *Organizational Behaviour*, Harper Collins Publishers, 1994;
8. Luthans, F., Larsen, J., *Observe How Managers Really Communicate*, Human relations, 1986, pp. 167-168;
9. Zlate, M., *Tratat de psihosociologie organizational-managerială*, Iasi, Polirom, 2004, pp. 501-505;
10. Mullins, L., *Management and Organisational Behaviour*, Prentice Hall, 2006.