Customer Relationship Management through Communication Strategy: Fibres Industry Case Study

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ABSTRACT

Changes in today’s organisations are often necessary for survival due to the world becoming smaller and the threat from foreign imports becoming more apparent to businesses. Often the most damaging element of this foreign threat is the low costs at which they can operate. Many factors, including inexpensive labour, exchange rates and economies, make production more efficient and reduce the overall costs significantly to enable a significant competitive edge. For example, Fibres is a polyester manufacturer who faces this threat and has realised the need for change towards more speciality products with differentials other than price. However, this will involve major changes in production, including the production methods and the adoption of TQM to ensure that the differential of quality is utilized. This paper examines communication as an enabler for change and studies the current communication methods within the company against the desired improvement processes from groups within those companies, culminating in a targeted internal marketing strategy to aid future business changes.

Keywords: Change, Communication, CRM, Knowledge Transfer, SME, TQM

INTRODUCTION

Significant organisational changes often begin slowly, are incrementally implemented and are subject to change as information is gathered concerning the effectiveness of the process. Indeed that is the approach normally espoused by those who have extensive experience in planned organisational change. Such change processes may be non-inclusive at the start in that only a small fraction of the workforce is involved. Many organisational participants are only vaguely aware that changes are taking place and the ambiguity surrounding these changes provides a fertile ground for rumours, anxiety and ultimately resistance (Jick, 1993). This is true even though management has communicated its intent through specifically designed messages or even a carefully crafted communication strategy. Nonetheless by the

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time the change is dispersed throughout the organisation, many organisational participants have developed attitudes different from those which management intended. When the attitudes are negative the success of the change may be affected adversely.

There are several empirically founded communications principles that taken together can constitute a communications strategy (Klein, 1996). These are as follows:

- Message redundancy is related to message retention.
- The use of several media is more effective than the use of just one.
- Face-to-face communication is a preferred medium.
- The line hierarchy is the most effective organizationally sanctioned communication channel.
- Direct supervision is the expected and most effective source of organizationally sanctioned information.
- Opinion leaders are effective changers of attitudes and opinions.
- Personally relevant information is better retained than abstract, unfamiliar or general information.

### Redundancy of Message and Medium

The data are clear on the related points that repetition of the message through more than one medium increases people’s memory of the message (Bachrach & Aiken, 1977; Daft & Lengel, 1984; Dansereau & Markham, 1987). Still we have seen management delivering their message once or perhaps twice, usually via some written medium and letting it go at that. Then when employees complain about not getting the information, they are told “but we did send the message in the plant bulletin” or whatever. The fact that the message was neither received nor understood is blamed on the intended receiver for not “getting it” and not on the sender. Yet who was it that desired to communicate?

### Face-to-Face Communication is Most Effective

Taken by it, face-to-face communication has a greater impact than any other single medium (D’Aprix, 1982; Jablin, 1979, 1982). The impact of a face-to-face medium may be due to its immediacy but the interactive potential of it, if realized, is what works (Gioia & Sims, 1986). The two-way give and take encourages involvement in the process. It also clarifies ambiguities, and increases the probability that the sender and the receiver are connecting appropriately. It is the best way that feedback can be used to correct deficiencies immediately in the communication process (O’Connor, 1990).

One of the chief advantages of face-to-face communication is the ability of the participants to pick up non-verbal cues as the interaction unfolds. This adds richness to the interpretation of the message as well as communicating the emotional aspects which otherwise might be hidden (Gioia & Simms, 1986).

Of particular relevance to the argument that we will make regarding a communication strategy is that face-to-face communication in a group context can be a powerful force in the service of a successful change. It provides the communicator with an opportunity to capitalize on the different perspectives and interpretations that are likely to result from a complex message in terms of providing explanations and clarifications relevant to likely variations of understanding (Weick, 1989).

### Line Authority is an Effective Communications Channel

In this time of employee empowerment and decisions by consensus, the importance of the authority hierarchy is often overlooked. Yet there are few large organizations that do not rely on formal authority as the ultimate
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