

How to Minimize Communication Gaps in the Workplace

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The Macmillan Dictionary defines *communication* as ‘the process of giving information or making emotions or ideas known to someone’. In the workplace, this process can be complicated by differences in employee backgrounds, attitudes, experience, culture, age, gender, and more. When information or ideas are miscommunicated or misunderstood, a communication gap occurs. Such gaps are especially challenging for managers who “spend 75 to 95 percent of their time communicating”, Pettit D. (1994, P. 4).

Sources of communication gaps

Once source of communication gaps in the workplace is the “grapevine”. This informal communication among employees involves sharing information that may or may not be true. Topics of communication can be sensitive, such as personal details about an employee or corporate rumors about pay or employment status. Mamoria, Gankar and Pareek (2004, p.672) states ‘bad news is often left to rumors and the grapevine’. When management and employees do not communicate openly about workplace issues and come to a common understanding, communication gaps can occur.

Bergin J. (1981, P.80) states that 'anyone who has worked in a large organization has experienced the aggressions, tensions, and anxieties that infiltrate every office and workshop.' This has been true for me, as described in the two scenarios that follow. When I was working as a general manager for intercity bus services, a labor union leader misinformed employees that there were insufficient funds to pay monthly salaries. The misinformation created a communication gap that resulted in an employee uprising. In another situation, as deputy manager for Leather Articles Marketing Enterprise, I approved the sale of a dead stock of leather cutting knives. Two days later, leaders of a labor union disseminated rumors that the client who bought the knives resold them for a huge profit. This rumor created a communication gap that was problematic for the organization.

Impact of communication gaps

According to Mamoria, Gankar and Pareek (2004), 'A manager depends on communication to achieve organizational objectives.' Thus, it follows that communication gaps in the workplace can interfere with the achievement of organizational objectives. When objectives are not met, organizations experience turmoil which can contribute to in-fighting. Bergin J. (1981) states 'the organization is a battlefield where individuals and cliques emerge and fight each other for status and power ... fighting erupts in every nook and cranny.' Jones.R et al. (2010a) further notes that 'poor communication can sometimes be downright dangerous and lead to tragic and unnecessary loss of human life'. This is evidenced by the instances of workplace violence that we so often see published in the media. From this we can surmise that communication gaps in the workplace should be carefully managed to maintain a civil workplace.

Remedy for communication gaps

Communication gaps can be minimized by smoothing flows of communication between layers of an organization. This can be accomplished through transparency—by keeping all employees informed, honesty—by sharing the existing reality of organizational issues, and fairness—by providing a culture where all employees are treated fairly.

In the two scenarios of communication gaps cited previously, both were remedied by providing evidence that negated the misinformation. Transparency enabled the misinformation to be openly addressed and honesty allowed information to be presented that proved the communication by labor leaders was false. Mamoria, Gankar and Pareek (2004) states, 'The information function serves to provide knowledge to individuals needed to guide their actions. It also fulfills workers' desires for the awareness of things that affect them.'

In summary, to minimize communication gaps in the workplace, there should exist a smooth flow of communication among employees that serves to minimize uncertainty. Jones. R et al, (2010b) states, 'Uncertainty is a threat to individuals, groups, and the organization as a whole that can interfere with effective performance and goal attainment.' Therefore, managers should be as transparent as possible, while communicating honestly and fairly to all employees, According to Heller. R (1998), 'Good communication is the lifeblood of

organizations.'

About the Author



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Ayele attained his Bachelor's of Business Administration BBA degree in Management from Addis Ababa University and his MBA from the Institute of Management Science Delft the Netherlands. He has had over 30 years of professional work and currently holds the title of general manager at Project Service Enterprise.

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