

FIRST INTERNATIONAL MEETING OF ISSOW

Work, Social Change and Economic Dynamics: Challenges for Contemporary Societies

27-28 November 2014 :: Escola Superior de Educação - Instituto Politécnico de Lisboa

Theme 6) Human Resources Management

What is the role of 360° evaluation in organizational communication?

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Abstract

The performance evaluation and organizational communication have a central role in organizations, because promote organizational effectiveness (Proctor and Doukakis, 2003).

Some limitations of top-down performance appraisal (e.g. subjectivity) and new technologies (*i.e.*, intranet) have been urging other evaluations, like 360° evaluation (Kondrasuk, 2012). This is a specific evaluation that considers more than one appraiser (Brutus and Gorriti, 2005).

We intend to realize what type of communication that leaders adopt (*i.e.*, support communication or defensive communication) after applying the 360° evaluation. We intend to realize, too, which might be the consequences of this type of communication for some attitudes and behaviors of employees (e.g. commitment, satisfaction, trust and cynicism). To construct a research question, firstly it becomes pertinent to conducting an exploratory qualitative study, through interviews with experts.

In theoretical terms, we will present some categories and sub-categories constructed with data from the exploratory interviews (e.g. “360° evaluation as advantageous for organizational communication”). In general, we conclude that 360° evaluation may increase an active voice of employees and promotes a bi-directional and a symmetrical communication among them.

In practical terms, the aim is a promotion of the application of 360° evaluation and organizational communication, exceeding any limitations of existing communicative and evaluative processes.

Keywords: 360° evaluation; performance appraisal; organizational communication

Introdução

In recent years some factors began promoting other type of performance appraisal that may include more than one evaluator (e.g. colleagues, clients and supervisors) and this particular type of performance evaluation is called 360° evaluation. The 360° evaluation can promote a more effective organizational communication (Carson, 2006). This is because organizations with a power-sharing culture could be responsible to have a horizontal organizational communication that tends to be promoted by 360° evaluation (Heijden and Nijhof, 2004; Mamatoglu, 2008).

In this study we pretend to understand how experts define organizational communication and 360° evaluation and we pretend to understand how experts perceive the practice of organizational communication, upon application of 360° evaluation. Some authors (Heijden and Nijhof, 2004)

argue that, there are specific forms of communication, depending on the type of appraisal used and the sharing of power in organizations.

360° Evaluation

The main objective of 360° evaluation is the development of organizational actors (Nowack, 2009), allowing them an identification of their learning needs and therefore an understanding of its performance, and an increase in communication and trust between them (Slenttenhaar, 2008). This type of performance appraisal is different from other methods because it includes several evaluators (Brutus and Gorriti, 2005; Caetano, 2008). These evaluators are: the employee himself (through its self-evaluation); colleagues; direct supervisors (Bracken, Timmreck, Fleenor, and Summers, 2001; Craig and Hannum, 2006; Nowack, 2009).

The 360° evaluation is a confidential and anonymous process, unlike other evaluation methods (e.g. traditional performance evaluation) (Carson, 2006; Craig and Hannum, 2006; Gillespie and Parry, 2006; Kline and Sulsky, 2009). This confidentiality and anonymity mean that there is greater acceptance of this evaluation by the individuals who are evaluated (Heijden and Nijhof, 2004). Thus, the 360° evaluation has been seen as more valid (has confidential information) and more reliable (includes more than one appraiser) (Maurer, Mitchell and Barbeite, 2002). This is because the average number of evaluations can control idiosyncrasies (Kondrasuk, 2012; Smither, London and Reilly, 2005). In this context that the 360° evaluation has more clear and objective appraisals, because it encourages dialogue between all organizational actors, enabling the exposure of their point of views (e.g. Gomes, Cunha Rego, Cunha, Cardoso and Marques, 2008).

In general, it is considered that the 360-° evaluation involves a more effective organizational communication (Gomes et al., 2008), enabling the dissolution of hierarchical barriers (e.g. Brutus and Brassard, 2005). In this sense, it is considered that this type of feedback enables a greater interest in the different views of each organizational actor, enabling greater sharing of opinions between them and a more dynamic communication environment (e.g. Atwater and Brett, 2005; Carson, 2006). This type of communicative environment may become responsible for the perception of a larger organizational membership (e.g. shared values and goals with the organization), by organizational actors and consequently for better individual and group

performances (Carson, 2006; Mamatoglu, 2008). Thus, the feedback 360° may become as facilitator of organizational communication, it allows a greater closeness and trust among employees, because the perceptions of power tend to be modified (*i.e.*, power sharing among the organizational actors), changing climate perceptions and organizational culture (Mamatoglu, 2008). In addition, the 360° evaluation may become useful for obtaining relevant information for either organizational actors, or for organizations (Carson, 2006). Such information is related with direct supervisors, because organizational actors evaluate them (Carson, 2006; Letchfield and Bourn, 2011) and it is possible to know how direct supervisors react when are evaluated (Atwater and Brett, 2005).

Considering the aspects mentioned above, it is important to have studies about organizational communication under 360° evaluation, because this type of evaluation is usually applied in organizational contexts where there is a greater power sharing (Caetano, 2008) and, consequently, fewer failures communication (Felts, 1992).

Communication between the organizational actors

The organizational communication can be defined as the communication that organizational actors establish among themselves (Vercic, Vercic and Sriramesh, 2012). In this sense, one of the main objectives of organizational communication is related to an effective human resource management (Ruão, 1999) and, consequently, with better individual performance and greater organizational effectiveness (Proctor and Doukakis, 2003). The internet has modified the interactions established between organizational actors. In this way, this type of communication allows a more constant communication between them (Almeida, 2003). Furthermore, the emergence of the internet has enabled communication in many ways, namely upward, downward and lateral. In this case, the sender and the receiver of the messages have the same relevance (Almeida, 2003). The organizational communication has become the same to all organizational actors (e.g. employees send information to customers, the managers give instructions to supervisors) (Conrad and Poole, 2012). Therefore, in addition to a vertical communication (between supervisors and subordinates) organizations also have an horizontal communication (*i.e.*, communication between all different organizational people within organizations). However,

this horizontal communication tends to be more applied in democratic organizational contexts (Mamatoglu, 2008).

A concept related to organizational communication is called the communication climate. This communication climate may depend on the type current leadership, making it relevant to the interactions that take place between the organizational actors. In this context, organizations that have collaborative cultures and where there is a power sharing, adopt a specific communication-called support communication (Czech and Forward, 2010). This support communication tends to be clear, precise, open and shared. In these cases, the evaluations are easily accepted by the other, making it effective for interpersonal relationships established between organizational actors.

In turn, in organizational contexts where do not exist power sharing, tends to develop a specific type of communication is known as defensive communication. In these cases, organizational actors feel intimidated when they communicate with their supervisors. Thus, defensive communication contributes, in most cases, to more destructive interpersonal relations, within the organization. Moreover, the supervisors who adopt support communication are perceived as more competent than supervisors who use a defensive communication, and such is reflected in an improvement of relationship with their subordinates (Czech and Forward, 2010).

Finally, it should be noted that, in addition to higher satisfaction with support communication, organizational actors also manifest a better organizational commitment and a better performance when it is applied. This is because support communication is part of a collaborative organizational culture. In other words, organizational actors have a clear idea about their performance (Czech and Forward, 2010).

It could be conclude that organizational communication makes influence in performance, because it allows the alignment of work objectives of organizational actors and provides feedback about their performance (e.g. Simões and Miranda, 2011). On the other hand, 360° evaluation may also become advantageous for organizational communication as it allows an increase of information exchange between the different organizational actors. This exchange of information is not possible in other type of performance appraisal like top-down performance appraisal (Heijden and Nijhof , 2004).

The main objective of this study was to understand how experts define organizational communication and 360° evaluation. Specifically, we need to know how some university professors (*i.e.*, professors who teach themes like organizational behavior) perceive the practice of organizational communication and the practice of 360° evaluation.

Method: Interviews with some experts

In this study, we used an exploratory qualitative methodology. In this way, according to the information obtained in the literature review, we have created a semi-structured interview guide with open questions. This script was previously tested and applied to a Ph.D. student in psychology.

After this pre-test, we proceed to the interviews. In this sense, whereas this study was an exploratory study, we interviewed only nine people. People interviewed had specific features considering initial objectives of this study. We interviewed 2 university professors; 3 organizational communication trainers and 4 department's communication employees. In total, we interviewed 5 women and 4 men. His professional experience ranged from 5 to 20 years and all of them have postgraduate studies. At the beginning of each interview was given an informed consent document, to ensure anonymity and confidentiality of the process.

All of the interviews were recorded and were transcribed, to have a more reliable analysis. To analyze them we have created different categories and sub-categories, highlighting key ideas. These key ideas will be presented below.

Some Results

The answers helped us to define three main categories, namely: 1. "The organizational communication"; 2. "The 360° evaluation" and 3. "The 360° evaluation as advantageous to organizational communication".

In the first case, respondents help to define organizational communication, referring also to its relevance and explain the interest of leaders and employees about this practice. In category 2, participants define the 360° evaluation and explain what is its application context. Finally, in category 3 respondents explain why the 360° evaluation may be advantageous for organizational

communication. In this case, the participants say that the feedback of 360° evaluation is more reliable and that this type of performance appraisal promotes a bi-directional and symmetrical communication

Within these categories mentioned is important to highlight some sub-categories, such as: 1.1. “Definition of organizational communication”; 1.2. “Relevance of organizational communication”; 1.3. “Little interest of leaders”; 1.4. “Little interest of employees”; 2.1. “The organizational context for the application of 360° evaluation”; 3.1. “Relevance of 360° feedback”; 3.2. “Symmetric communication”; 3.3. “Two-way communication”

Each of the categories and sub-categories is mentioned in the tables below (Table 1; Table 2; Table 3) as well as the corresponding illustrative sentence given by participants.

Table 1: “Organizational Communication”

Sub-categories	“Definition of organizational communication”	“Relevance of organizational communication”	“Little interest of leaders”	“Little interest of employees”
Speech	<i>“The organizational communication may be understood as all forms of interaction that can promote making decisions, within the organization and its relationship with the external environment.” (E3)</i>	<i>“Today, if there is no communication in organizations is the same as these do not exist, isn't it? People do not know them ... and this fact is the same that organizations do not exist.” (E6)</i>	<i>“The leaders feel that communication would be a poor part of the organization ... In other words, it was not important to create communication flows, nor engage employees, or inform them about the decision making in the organization.” (E4)</i>	<i>“I do not like to say that the problem is the people, because they are not, people are the challenge. But the truth is that people also sometimes do not want to receive the information or do not want to know the information.” (E2)</i>

Table 2: “The 360° evaluation”

Sub-categories	“The organizational context for the application of 360° evaluation”
Speech	<i>“I think it's ... it's more focused on their internal talent organization ... is a more flexible organization, is an organization ... younger! It's not as bureaucratic, not so hierarchically closed and usually also a ... a company or an entity with ... with few hierarchical levels.” (E7)</i>

Table 3: “The 360° evaluation as advantageous to organizational communication”

Sub-categories	“Relevance of 360° feedback”	“Symmetric communication”	“Two-way communication”
Speech	<i>“In this moment of evaluation [feedback] there is opportunity to transmit this feedback and this is useful to improve some procedures.” (E4)</i>	<i>“Another ... Another aspect is the issue of symmetry. That is, is the more important the communication will flow from leadership to operation, but also the communication that flow from the operation to the leadership” (E5)</i>	<i>“The proposals and resolutions arising from the evaluation are always related to this bidirectionality of communication circuits. That is, we do things to get better understand what is happening here with you, let's make things to solve better and to involve you better ...” (E5)</i>

Conclusion

It is important to note that these interview results are only preliminary, since they were not analyzed in its totally. The preliminary findings of this study are about the initially proposed objectives. In this sense, these findings become useful for further theoretical understanding of the issues and hence to more effective practical implementation.

In a generic way, participants reported that organizational communication may be advantageous for communication that organizational actors have with each other. This is because, respondents argue that the 360° evaluation allows a more symmetrical communication and bi-directional between all organizational actors.

In a specific way, participants argue that despite the organizational communication is relevant to organizations, their application will depend on the interest of leaders and the interests of employees. In addition, the subjects reported that the application of the 360° evaluation will also depend on the organizational context, and it is not possible to apply it in any context.

This study is advantageous to enrich the little knowledge that literature has on these two themes (*i.e.*, organizational communication and evaluation 360). The information of the interviews allowed the identification of potential facilitators and potential barriers to the implementation of organizational communication within the 360° evaluation. These barriers and facilitators will help to build a more effective evaluation systems, which offer a more constant communication between different organizational actors and, consequently, better professional performance. In this way, we could conclude that the knowledge obtained through this study may be relevant to the promotion of the application of these practices, contributing to better organizational effectiveness.

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