

A PRELIMINARY EXAMINATION OF COMMUNICATION CONTENT, LEADERSHIP STYLES, AND JOB SATISFACTION

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the relationships between communication content, leadership styles, and job satisfaction for a sample of 354 people working in multiple organizations. Results suggest a relationship between all five communication content types and the two leadership styles. No relationship was found between communication content and job satisfaction, and no relationship was found between leadership styles and job satisfaction.

INTRODUCTION

This paper is a preliminary examination of the relationship between basic communication content, leadership styles, and job satisfaction. Over the past several decades, public interest and a stream of management literature focused on quality of work life programs and on team work and team building along with high commitment human resource management practices. In general, society's perception is that "people friendly" leadership emphasizing communication maximizes not only organizational performance but also attitudes such as job satisfaction [6] [8] [3] [9]. Researchers question whether society's perception is accurate. The research question is whether the leadership styles and communication content make a difference in job satisfaction. In this study, the relationships between leadership styles-- initiating structure leadership and consideration leadership, five categories of communication content, and job satisfaction are examined. Does a "people friendly" leadership style result in subordinates who are more satisfied with their jobs? Does communication content relate to job satisfaction?

BACKGROUND

Leadership can be defined as the exercise of influence by one member over other members to accomplish group or organizational goals. Leader communication is often presumed to be an important element of exercising influence [4]. There is a commonly held belief that leaders "make a difference" and that they can have an effect on individuals, groups, or entire organizations. As a result, the leader gets credit when things go right and blame when things go wrong.

Researchers question why some leaders are more effective than others. The leader behavior approach focuses on what leaders actually do; that is, the specific behaviors performed by effective leaders as opposed to ineffective leaders. The behavior approach sought to identify the leader behaviors that aid individuals, groups, or organizations in the achievement of their goals. From multiple research studies, two categories of the leader behaviors were identified-- consideration and initiating structure. Consideration behaviors show that the leader trusts, respects, and values good relationships with the subordinates. Examples of a leader's consideration behavior include being friendly, treating subordinates as equals, and providing an explanation for his or her actions. Initiating structure behaviors are those behaviors done to make sure the work gets performed and that subordinates do their jobs adequately. Setting goals, determining a strategy to reach those goals, delegating tasks to subordinates, and urging subordinates to do those tasks would be initiating structure behavior. Consideration behaviors and initiating structure behaviors are not mutually exclusive but rather are complementary. Consideration

behaviors would be the “people friendly” style of leadership; whereas initiating structure leadership would be more concerned with getting the job done.

Management scholars have assumed that communication is an important, if not necessarily well understood, indicator of success for managers [10] [3]. This assumption is entirely natural. Even the most casual consideration of the manager's job is likely to lead one to conclude that a fundamental relationship exists between communication and the potential of managers to perform the most basic functions associated with the job. Since the link between communication and managerial performance is believed to be basic in nature, there have been few efforts to identify or to understand the relationship between the content of a leader's communication and potentially important outcomes.

On the one hand, the lack of research into communication content may reflect reluctance by organization scholars to "study the obvious." On the other hand, some believe that variance in basic communication is too small to explain variance in performance between managers. This latter view is held by Jablin, Cude, Wayson, House, Lee and Roth [5] who suggest that research efforts be focused on how skills are used to achieve organization goals rather than on the identification of skills. Both of these perspectives seem too limiting for a number of reasons. First, while the link between communications and performance may seem obvious, there is no consensus on which aspects of basic communication content are more or less important indicators of managerial effectiveness. Second, the assumption that basic communication abilities also referred to as "threshold skills" are of little importance has not been empirically verified. Third, organizations spend large amounts of money and time attempting to improve the "communication skills" of their current and future managers. Understanding the basic communications abilities most critical to managerial success could provide a basis for making such efforts more meaningful.

METHOD

The sample for this study consisted of employees working in a large southern city. Subjects for this study consisted of a sample of first line supervisors, middle and executive level managers and their immediate subordinates. Respondents included the following groups: employees of the headquarters staff of a division of a multinational company, employees of regional production plants from two national consumer products corporations, employees of a multinational chemical firm, and employees of a regional financial services company. Questionnaires along with cover letters and addressed, postage-paid return envelopes were distributed through company mail to 640 potential study participants. Completed questionnaires were mailed directly to the researchers. Usable responses were received from 354 individuals for a response rate of 55 percent.

Leadership style was measured using a short form of the Leader Behavior Description Questionnaire XII (LBDQ XII) Stogdill, 1963 [2]. Two subscales were selected for measurement: Initiating Structure (10 items), and Consideration (10 items). Communication content was measured using the Communications Content Questionnaire (CCQ) [7]. The CCQ measures five types of leader/manager communication content: Performance Communication, Task Communication, Career Communication, Personal Communication, and Responsive Communication. Job satisfaction was measured using the Brayfield and Roth job satisfaction scale [1].

RESULTS

This study was concerned with determining the basic relationship that might exist between a manager's leadership style, the content of his or her communication with subordinates, and employee job satisfaction. Pearson correlation results are reported in Table 1. The results of this preliminary study are rather surprising in that they are not consistent with “conventional wisdom.” For this sample, there were no significant relationships between any of the five communication content dimensions and job

satisfaction. Furthermore, the relationships between leadership styles and job satisfaction were not significant. However, there were significant relationships found between both leadership styles and all five communication content dimensions.

Note: Table 1 will be furnished upon request.

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