

Chapter 58

Listening and Leadership

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ABSTRACT

This era is both characterized by continually evolving and changing market conditions and the relevance of knowledge to adapt to the new environment.

In this chapter, the authors will focus on three ideas: the connection between the company results and the leader's listening skills; people as the firm's most valuable resource; and therefore, internal communication as the key for success and full potential of the company. However, the survey concludes that internal communication is scarce and not always effective since one way communication seems to be the most common form of interaction, even though leaders know the importance and value of their human resources.

INTRODUCTION

In the era that we live in, where the market conditions are continually evolving and changing, and organizations are struggling to adapt to the new conditions, leaders must understand that what they really manage in an organization is people. House (2004) defines leadership as “the ability of an individual to influence, motivate and enable others to contribute toward the effectiveness and

success of the organizations of which they are members”, The DePree's (1992) idea of leadership, a position of servant hood, compliments with Drunker (1992) observation that the Japanese leader recognizes that rank does not confer privileges but rank entails responsibility. For Nelda Spinks and Barron Wells (1995) to make people feel as though they are accomplishing something and not just “putting time”, a leader must work with people and not against them. Leaders must understand that people are the most important components in an organization and that having

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an effective communication with them is key to enhance performance. But reality seems to be different since leaders do not put in practice, during their daily interactions, the elements that make good communication possible. Trusting and open environments are the exception in an overall organization's atmosphere characterized by judgment, interruptions, and misunderstanding of people's needs.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Key Leadership Skill

Communication is the most important skill a leader must possess; since it occupies 70 to 90 per cent of his/her time (Mintzberg 1973, Ecles & Nohria, 1991). If that same study were done today including e-mail, cell phones, and text messaging, the percentages yielded would be even higher. The total amount of time managers dedicate to communicate emphasizes the importance of having strong communication skills to advance to leadership positions. Mastering leadership communication should be a priority for managers wanting their organizations to consider them as leaders (Deborah J. Barrett, 2006). Without ef-

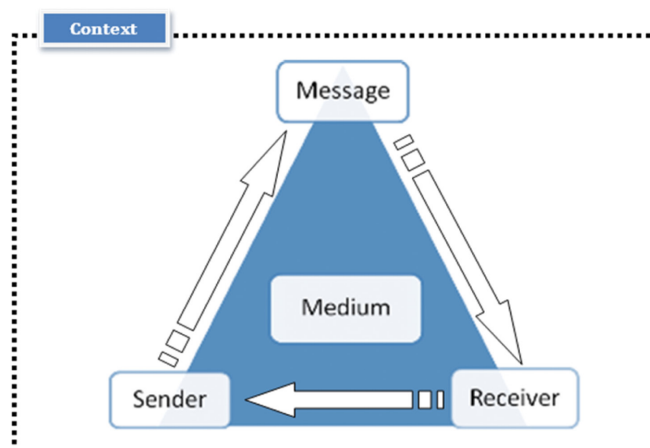
fective communication, a manager accomplishes little. Without effective communication a manager is not an effective leader, and through effective communication, a leader leads.

Communication is the transmission of meaning from one person to another or to a group of people, whether verbally or non verbally. Leaders must pay attention to four elements to become effective communicators: the sender, the medium or channel, the receiver and the context (Figure 1).

This triangle shows what would be an ideal and simple communication process without miscommunications or misunderstandings. The person, who sends the message, understands the audience (receiver) and the context, selects the most appropriate medium and sends a clear message. On the other hand, the person who receives it understands the message as the sender intended. But in reality, communication resembles some variations, as in Figure 2 (Barret, 2006).

The complication in communication comes from the interruptions or interferences in that transmission, whether the sender causes them or the receiver. Leadership communication necessitates anticipating all interruptions and interferences through audience analysis and then developing a communication strategy that controls the

Figure 1. Ideal and simple communication process (Source: Own elaboration)



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