



Factors Affecting an Effective Internal Communication System: A Study on a Textile and Apparel Manufacturer in Sri Lanka

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ABSTRACT

Ineffective internal communication systems are highly attributable to some failures in implementing firms' operational strategies. Literature reveals some factors, such as data accuracy, data timeliness, data completeness, technology, interaction frequency, communication flow, and the knowledge have impacted on maintaining an effective internal communication system for a firm in global context. The objective of the present study is to apply such factors in Sri Lankan textile and apparel manufacturing context as the industrial sector is frequently adopting operational strategies to serve the global market competitively. The data were collected through a structured questionnaire and face-to-face interviews from the production floor employees of a purposely selected textile and apparel manufacturing plant. The question items were developed to measure the variables in 5-point Likert scales and the pilot test results revealed a high internal consistency among the question items that were deployed to test the selected variables. The random sampling technique was used to select participants for the survey (125) and the interview (25). After excluding incomplete and illogical answers, 75 no. of responses were selected for the final analysis. The findings reveal that the factors of data timeliness, data completeness, technology, communication flow, and knowledge are applicable to assess the effectiveness of the existing internal communication system of the production floor. As the managerial implications, the study recommends promoting workers' council method and improving real-time text based internal communication system to maintain an effective communication system and to avoid failures in implementing the firm's operational strategies.

KEYWORDS: Effectiveness, Internal Communication, Production Floor, Textile and Apparel Manufacturer

1 INTRODUCTION

The textile and apparel industry is highlighted as the main exporter of the economy of Sri Lanka (Annual Report, 2015). Therefore, maintaining an effective and efficient production function is required for the players of that industry to strengthen their supply chains for delivering superior value to the global customers. Moreover, the high competitive rivalry among them leads to frequent changes in the production floor management. Hence, the production floor employees are required to adopt themselves for such changes within a shorter period of time.

The internal communication is an important infrastructure for a workplace as the successful implementation and maintenance of

operational changes depend on how a workplace could maintain an effective communication system internally (Evangelos, 2010). However, the literature on how to execute or maintain an internal communication system effectively in achieving the corporate objectives by textile and apparel manufacturing firms is minimal in Sri Lankan context.

Accordingly, the study objective is set as to explore the factors that affect an effective internal communication system in the production floor of a textile and apparel manufacturer. Thereby, the findings of this research are expected to be a contribution in filling the aforementioned literature gap.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Communication is a fundamental need for everybody to maintain a smooth

livelihood. According to the communication theory, at least two parties are needed to be involved in the communication process. According to Marshall Scott Poole (2005), the communication depends on the understanding of the information being transferred between the two parties called, the sender and the receiver.

There are two types of communication within a firm; internal and external. According to Evangelos (2010), there are two forms under the said types and those are known as formal and informal. The literature reveals that many studies have carried out in global context to measure the effectiveness of communication process within workplaces. Yates (2006) has found that, if an organization could invest on improving the effectiveness of their existing communication process, then they would be able to get better return on that investment in future. Therefore, an effective communication system has a direct impact on the profitability of an organization.

Shorman (2008) has found that the effectiveness of communication systems depends on the “message type” and it can be improved with the “message timeliness”. Yates (2006) have considered some dimensions of communication such as, “communication flow”, “coordination/ knowledge sharing”, “communication barriers”, “accuracy”, “reliability”, “timeliness”, “media effectiveness”, and “interaction frequency” in measuring the effectiveness of communication systems in organizations. The results of that study show that the said dimensions have impacted on the communication effectiveness and thereby, the organization can enhance their profitability. Root (2015) has found that for any type of a communication to be effective, the message should be “complete” and “understandable” to the receiver who may listen or read it. According to Qing Xia (2009), the “background knowledge” has impacted on the effectiveness of communication system. Reiskin (2012) has found that the “technology” can play a significant role in the communication

process and it impacts on effective maintenance of a communication system.

There are some barriers to communication which can create difficulties in communicating especially between unknown parties. Those barriers or difficulties may arise due to some reasons which may directly influence on disturbing the communication process. According to Keynes (2005), if one department of a firm has produced incorrect or incomplete information, then the other interconnected department(s) of it would interpret or use the same incorrect or incomplete information for their work. As a result, some disputes may arise within the departments and the overall results of the organization might be completely incorrect. Further to the said author, there are some reasons for the problems of communication in the textile and apparel industry and they are;

- Overlap in the expertise of the employees.
- Different mental representations and thinking styles.
- Issues in the organization and physical arrangement.

Based on the reviewed literature, a conceptual framework has been identified by the study to establish the hypotheses for future empirical testing and validation. Fig. 1 shows the conceptual framework of the present study.

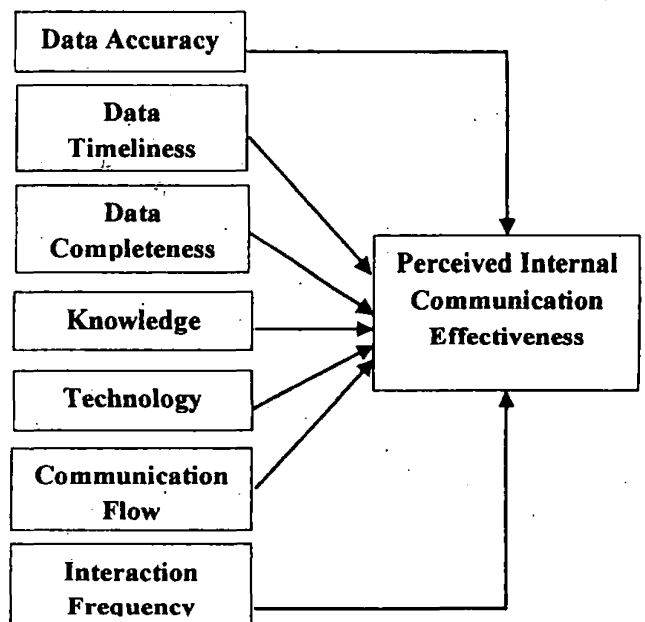


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

3 METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study is to explore the factors that affect an effective internal communication system in Sri Lankan manufacturing context. The study is deductive in nature because the findings of the communication literature have been used to establish the hypotheses to test and validate them to the relevant context. Since, the study was expected to establish a correlation between the dependent and independent variables as a representation of the relation between theory and reality, the quantitative approach was used to handle the research problem in a broader spectrum and to improve the generalizability of findings in different contexts.

The study setting was the purposively selected manufacturing plant of a leading textile and apparel manufacturing firm in Sri Lanka. The production floor employees of that plant were identified as the population of this study. Both primary and secondary data were used for the analysis. The primary data were collected by using questionnaires and the face-to-face interview method. The reports and instruction manuals that were been published by the production floor managers were used as the secondary data.

The question items were developed to measure the dependent variable of “perceived internal communication effectiveness” and the independent variables of “data accuracy”, “data completeness”, “data timeliness”, “knowledge”, “technology”, “communication flow”, and “interaction frequency” in 5-point Likert scales. A pilot survey was carried out among purposively selected 10 no. of employees and the findings revealed that there is a high internal consistency among the question items that were selected to measure each variable of the study (Cronbach’s α value > 0.7).

The final survey was carried out among a sample 125 no. employees who were selected randomly from the production floor. Moreover, to gain an in-depth understanding about the study problem, another randomly selected 25 no. of employees were

interviewed by using the questionnaire that was used for the final survey. The SPSS 20.0 version was used to test the study hypotheses that were established based on the Fig. 1. Accordingly, it was hypothesized as “there is a relationship between perceived internal communication effectiveness and data accuracy (H1), data timeliness (H2), data completeness (H3), knowledge of the employee (H4), technology used (H5), communication flow (H6), and Interaction frequency (H7)”.

4 DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

After excluding the incomplete and illogical responses that were found from the questionnaires and the interview, only 75 no. of responses were selected for the final analysis. Fig. 2 shows the details about the internal communication methods that were used by the production floor employees.

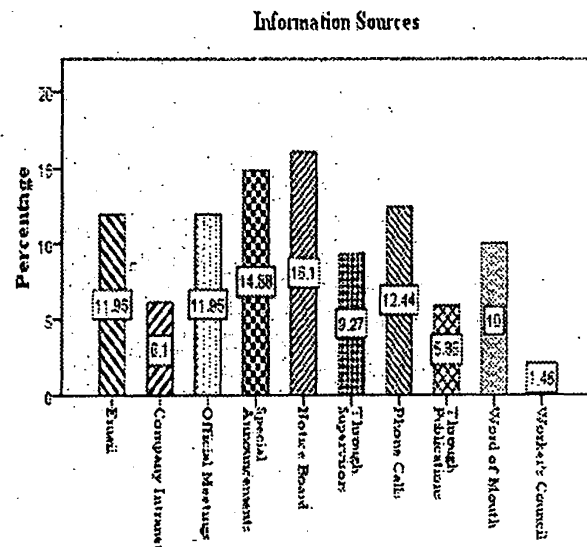


Figure 2: Usages of Internal Communication Methods

According to Fig. 2, there were several methods such as email, intranet, formal meetings, special announcements, notice boards, communication via supervisors, phone calls, publications, word-of-mouth, and the worker council to communicate between the superiors and subordinates of the production floor. Among those methods, 16.1 percent of employees used notice boards and 1.46 percent of employees used the worker’s council method.

The communication barriers for the successful implementation of any operational strategy in the production floor have been shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Reasons for Resistance to Change

No.	Reason	Mean	Rank
1	Lack of interest to the message	2.15	4
2	Lack of knowledge in understanding the message	2.32	3
3	Weaknesses in the communication method (medium)	2.35	2
4	Other behavioral issues	3.16	1

According to Table 1, the lack of interest to read, understand or respond to the message, lack of knowledge in understanding the sender's message, and the weaknesses in the communication method (medium) have been identified as some reasons for making resistance to change from the ineffective internal communication perspective.

The Table 2 shows the results of the correlation analysis. Accordingly, the variables of data accuracy and interaction frequency were not statistically different in the relationship with the perceived internal communication effectiveness by the production floor employees.

5 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Among the seven hypotheses that were established to test the relationship between the dependent variable of perceived internal communication effectiveness and each of the seven independent variables as shown in Fig. 1, only five hypotheses were accepted. Accordingly, the independent variables of data timeliness, data completeness, knowledge of the employee, communication flow, and the technology have found as significant for perceiving the existing internal communication system as effective by the production floor employees of that manufacturing plant. The hypotheses with respect to data accuracy and interaction frequency were not proved under this study setting.

Moreover, the internal communication methods of notice boards and the announcements made by the managers have been found as popular methods among the production floor employees due to the easiness of using them to get awareness about changes. Although the worker council method (similar to open door policy) has been identified as the best method to clarify the problems of changes, it is less forceful to use by the production floor employees to solve their work related problems.

Table 2: Results of the Correlational Analysis

	Communication Effectiveness	Data Accuracy	Data Timeliness	Data Completeness	Knowledge	Communication Flow	Technology	Interaction Frequency
Pearson Correlation	1	0.231	-0.232*	-0.330**	0.397**	-0.243*	0.280*	-0.196
Sig. (2-tailed)		0.05	0.04	0.00	0.00	0.04	0.01	0.09

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed). ** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Then, among the reasons for the resistance to change which may arise due to the problems of internal communication system, some inherent weaknesses in the communication method (medium) which is used by the management (sender) to send a particular message to the production floor employees (receiver) have been highlighted as the main reason by the majority of the production floor employees.

6 CONCLUSION

The objective of this study was to explore the factors that are affecting an effective internal communication system in Sri Lankan textile and apparel manufacturing context. Accordingly one of the leading manufacturers who served for the foreign customers was selected purposively. The results showed that data timeliness, data completeness, knowledge, communication flow, and technology are the factors that can be used to assess the effectiveness of the internal communication system of the selected manufacturing plant. However, this finding can be generalized only to the similar type of textile and apparel manufacturing plants in Sri Lankan context.

As the theoretical implication, the study findings were able to prove the general applicability of the factors in Sri Lankan textile and apparel manufacturing context which have already been explored in global organizational context. Moreover, the present study can be treated as a contribution to the existing literature under the communication theory study domain. Then, as managerial implications, the present study recommends to the manufacturing plant to promote the worker council method among the production floor employees to avoid misunderstandings and conflicts between the employer and employees about the routine work as well as their interactive communication. Furthermore, the real-time text based communication system should be further popularized among the production floor employees as it is an ideal communication method to avoid delays in sending messages using the modern telecommunication technologies.

As future research directions, the study suggests to re-test the same hypotheses using another set of cross-sectional data in the same study setting as the variables of data accuracy and interaction frequency were not found as significant from the analysis of the present study. Further, some other statistical analysis methods can be performed to find out the degree of impact made by each of the independent variables to enrich the validity of the study. Finally, there is an opportunity to do the same study in a manufacturing plant of a different product manufacturer to generalize the study finding in a broader spectrum.

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