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Internal Strategies for Assessing Communication Channel Effectiveness

Melvin Murphy, DBA

Abstract
This qualitative multiple case study was designed to explore communication assessment strategies used in three law firms to improve message dissemination and channel efficiency. The findings revealed informal assessment strategies can sustain operations, indirect assessment strategies have a role, and efficient versus timely assessments could improve employee performance and morale.

Problem
The general business problem is that some managers of law firms do not assess the effectiveness of internal communication channels, which results in costly inefficiencies and lost business opportunities. The specific business problem is that some midsized law firm managers lack internal strategies to assess the effectiveness of internal communication channels.

Purpose
The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore what internal strategies that medium-sized law firm managers use to assess the effectiveness of their organizations' internal communication channels.

Research Questions
What internal strategies do managers of medium-sized law firms use, if any, to assess the effectiveness of their internal communication channels?

Relevant Literature
Conceptual Framework
The conceptual basis for this study was the Channel Expansion Theory (Carlson & Zmud, 1999), which centers on how individuals select, use, and perceive communication channels. • User perceptions of communication channel effectiveness lead to change of how channels are used, which under certain conditions leads to expanding the use of the communications channel to achieve effective communications (Carlson & Zmud, 1999). • Appropriate to explore organizational communications effectiveness, Figure 1 illustration of the CET conceptual framework as a graphical representation.

The literature review showed that corporate leaders believed assessing organizational communication channel effectiveness was unnecessary, researchers believed that study of communication channel effectiveness was needed to support channel choice and use decisions. Nyan (2015) found that communication of certainty has a perlocutionary effect. Accordingly, the literature reviewed in this study suggested communication managers need to conduct more exploration on internal strategies to assess the effectiveness of organizational communication channels.

Procedures
Adhering to the scope of the study:
• Multiple case study using purposeful sampling. • 3 midsized law firms, each having 50 employees and a communications department. • 90 min interviews leaders and managers; 1 week member checking with follow up until data saturation. • Data triangulation using recordings from interviews, documentation and member checking.

Data Analysis
Data analysis process included compilation, coding, and analysis of data originating from interviews to display the findings.
I used cross-case analysis to compare case-specific factors, determine patterns of associations, and generate coding tables and matrices.

Findings
Three themes emerged from the findings:
• Informal Assessment Strategies • Indirect Assessment Strategies • Efficient vs. Timely Assessment Strategies

After reviewing the organizations’ documents, policies, records, and the interview data, it was clear the leaders of the case firms had only informal, indirect and unwritten strategies to assess the effectiveness of the organizational communication channels.
Neither of the organizations had any written formal communication plan or separate formal plan to assess the effectiveness of internal communication channels.

Limitations
This study had two limitations. • Participants might respond to questions in accordance with what they believe a researcher wants to hear. • CET suggested participants’ perceptions about communication channel effectiveness depended on their experiences with communication channels in their organizational context, which represented limitations on the extent to which the results of the study are valid for other organizations.

Conclusions
Evolving communication technology, increased volume of information needed by businesses, and the intensified competitive environment has made internal company communication more critical to a business’s financial success.

Social Change Implications
Positive social change may be fostered by influencing the attitudes and behavior of law firm leaders and managers who are leading teams.

The findings can potentially affect positive change by improving how assessment of communication channels are administered and providing synergy for a more positive employee workplace experience, thus improving the quality of life for employees.

Committee Members: Drs. Doug Campbell, Chair, Denise Land, Second Member, and Diane Dusick, URR.