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Communication Effectiveness and Implications for Job Satisfaction in a Retail Merchandising Corporation

Elisa S. Wierenga
Western Michigan University

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COMMUNICATION EFFECTIVENESS
AND IMPLICATIONS FOR JOB SATISFACTION IN A
RETAIL MERCHANDISING CORPORATION

by

Elisa S. Wierenga

A Thesis
Submitted to the
Faculty of The Graduate College
in partial fulfillment
of the
Degree of Master of Arts

Western Michigan University
Kalamazoo, Michigan
April, 1979

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In writing this thesis, I would like to acknowledge the help of a few people who have made the project intellectually stimulating and a valuable professional experience. I would like to thank professors Jack Asher, Richard Schmidt, David Lyon, and John Nangle for their advice, encouragement, and constructive criticism. I am also grateful to the management of the company for their cooperation in allowing me to study their organization. Without their support and encouragement, the project would not have been possible.

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Elisa Sheri Wierenga

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  WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY, M.A., 1979

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INDEX OF TABLES

The purpose of the present study was to investigate communication effectiveness in a retail corporation and its implications for job satisfaction. This was achieved by means of a questionnaire developed solely for this purpose and fitted to suit the needs and areas of the organization. It was believed that an attitudinal measure would yield the most descriptive data concerning communication effectiveness.

The latest phase of human-management theory is said, by Elton Mayo, to be a result of the Hawthorne experiments. Since the Hawthorne studies at the Western Electric Company during the 1920's and early 1930's, organization and management research has increasingly focused on research and findings in sociology, psychology and cultural anthropology. This human-relations approach is uniquely American in that it exemplifies an American goal, that of the dignity of the common man. The extent to which a person fulfills his "dignity" or potential is dependent on motivation, which in turn is dependent on a worker's primary and secondary needs and a work environment in which to fulfill those needs.

Slater and Bennis (1964) see the democratization of management as essential to the work environment in order to insure survival. Democracy is not a permissive system but a "system of values including full and free communication, reliance on consensus, influence based on technical competence, emotional expression, and a basic human bias accepting conflict between the organization and the individual, but coping with and mediating this conflict rationally". Thus, full and

1

free communication may tend to have an effect on motivation and job satisfaction.

Many factors in the working environment such as direction of communication, level of employment, the psychological costs of communication, style of management and the type of communication used, may impede communication which may in turn affect job satisfaction.

Previous research suggests that there are basic connections between the choice of the communication style of management and the characteristics of the problems incurred within the organization (Holland, Bushman, and Ketlow, 1975, as quoted by Powell, 1976).

It also has been found that employees develop, over a period of time, feelings regarding the psychological costs of exchanging information in an organization. The more positive a climate the management can foster, the more sharing of information takes place (Dewhurst, 1975). This theme was also stated by Paul Slee-Smith in 1973 when he wrote, "No matter how efficient the actual mechanics of communication may be, if there is not existing a favorable employee attitude, then good communication cannot exist."

Good communication flows not only downward, but also horizontally and upward. In most organizations, it has been found there is a predominance of downward and horizontal communication flow, rather than upward (Rudolph, 1973). Bi-level channels suggested by research to reverse this trend include suggestions systems, surveys, workshops and interdepartmental meetings (Hickson, Greenbaum, Goldhaber, 1975).

Employee attitudes are molded by their level of employment in the organizational hierarchy and the range of dispersion in location from

the corporate offices. The effects of these variables are not constant. Management needs to take into consideration the effect that the level of dispersion has on employee morale. In 1976, Powell found that encouraging more employee feedback and taking measures to insure that branches and/or far-flung departments feel they are an integral part of the organization, will tend to increase communication and employee satisfaction.

The implications for the relating of satisfaction to communication has been explored by previous research, which suggested that satisfaction can be influenced by level of employment. It was found that those employees located in a peripheral position are less satisfied than those employees in centralized postions (Shaw, 1954; Lawson, 1965). Satisfaction studies have also investigated the relation between satisfaction and superior influence (Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, Snock and Rosenthal, 1964; Herald, 1974).

Research has also indicated that high levels of employee satisfaction decrease absenteeism (Newman, 1974), and increase the probability of the employee remaining with the company (Brayfield and Crockett, 1944; Porter and Steers, 1973).

The impetus for the present study were areas of apparent unhappiness and low employee morale in a retail merchandising corporation. It was believed by management that the unhappiness stemmed from a lack or breakdown of communication, and therefore was affecting employees' attitudes.

An attitude survey was decided upon as the best and the most efficient method of gathering data in the endeavor to study communica-

tion effectiveness and make inferences to job satisfaction. Strenski, in 1970, was highly enthusiastic regarding the implementation of an attitudinal survey. He wrote, "one of the techniques that should be considered and used by all with management responsibility in communication is the attitudinal survey. By a well-developed, scientifically prepared attitudinal survey, you can take the pulse of your employees and determine your communications and policy strong points as well as weak points. You are able to single out with some degree of assurance what areas of your management policies and company operations should be emphasized and which problem areas that should be changed."

Satisfaction can be inferred by studying the questionnaire responses as a whole. Herzberg et al. (1959) found that scaled inventories of job attitudes reflect morale (also known as job satisfaction), and the summation of several specific responses can give clues to overall trends.

This study was initiated by a concern on the part of the management of a retail organization that their communication system within the organization was ineffective. A questionnaire was developed to not only explore the communication problems, but also the company's style of management and their approach to training. Thus, the overall study was not only concerned with communication problems, but also the general attitude of the employees toward the organization.

Previous studies have shown that employees' perceptions and willingness to change is contingent on a clear indication from management that they are interested and back such an investigation. And management, by such a backing, implies a willingness to change its

approach (Beatty and Springhorn, 1977).

METHOD

Sample

The study group consisted of 240 employees of a retail merchan-
dising corporation located in the Mid-West United States. The survey
was administered to the sample group during the afternoon shift (12:00
P.M. to 5:30 P.M.) so as to include the greatest number of male and
female, full-time and part-time employees. The afternoon shift over-
laps both day workers (9:00 A.M. to 6:00 P.M.) and afternoon/evening
workers (12:00 P.M. to 9:00 P.M.). Employees surveyed ranged from the
company president to janitors, and included employees who had worked
for the company from one month to fifty years. Due to the nature of
retail work, there were more female employees than male employees sur-
veyed. Ages for employees ran from 16 years to 45 years and over.
It was decided to retain very new and/or young employees in the survey
data to evaluate their initial impressions of the organization, es-
pecially concerning training procedures. It was decided to examine
the survey data in three groups because of the large number of em-
ployee categories: Selling Employees, including salesclerks and de-
partment heads, and Non-selling Employees, that of buyers, office per-
sonnel, stock workers, data processing, and service building employees.
The third group consisted of Management - upper level, store managers,
and area supervisors (see Table I.)

6

TABLE I

Employee Profile

(Numbers of Employees in each Group)

	Group I[a]	Group II[b]	Group III[c]
Age:			
16–18	10	4	0
19–25	43	25	7
26–35	18	17	1
36–45	14	4	4
45–over	69	14	8
Sex:			
Male	6	10	4
Female	107	35	13
Full-time	94	51	21
Part-time	41	12	0
Years Employed:			
0–1	49	24	3
2–5	51	23	7
6–10	30	7	0
11–20	14	6	5
21–over	4	3	4

[a] Selling Personnel - Department Heads and Salespersons

[b] Non-selling Personnel - Buyers, Stock, Office, Data Processing, and Service Building

[c] Management - Upper-level Management, Store Managers, and Area Supervisors

Questionnaire

A 40-item survey was administered on company time to all available employees during the afternoon working hours within a three week period.

A general information section was included for employee profile and categorization only. Questions were presented in four response styles, that of Yes/No, Free Response (fill in the blank), a Likert type scale ranging from very positive to very negative responses, and time questions ranged from very few hours to many hours. (See Appendix.)

The topics covered and number of questions devoted to each area were as follows: training (6), meetings (4), memos (6), suggestions (4), work evaluation and feedback (3), in-house publications (6), superior/subordinate relations (4), and employee benefits, policies and procedures (3). The last question of the survey asked for any additional comments and/or suggestions, and was intended to be answered in terms of complaints, compliments, perceptions concerning the organization, job satisfaction and methods of communication.

The questions were designed to facilitate the search for problem areas in communication, and indicate employee participation in the organization to thereby infer relative job satisfaction. The questionnaire was an attitude survey which was designed to reflect the perceptions of the respondents.

Data Collection

The items in developing the questionnaire were drawn from management's and workers' suggestions and from information available in previous research on communication, job satisfaction, and industrial psychology (Borgman et al., 1969; Anastasi, 1967; Dooher, 1956; Slee-Smith, 1973; Litwin and Stringer, 1968). It was believed that this company's major communication problem areas, as gathered from informal interview data, were training, memos and meetings, in-house publications, superior/subordinate relations, policies and procedures, and benefits. These areas were therefore developed and explored as the major thrusts of the survey.

The researcher introduced herself and personally explained the purpose and confidentiality of the questionnaire to promote a comfortable atmosphere for the administration of the survey. This information was restated in a cover letter to the survey explaining its purpose relating to interstore communication, the confidentiality of answers, and the wish for candid and unbiased participation. It was signed by the researcher and by the company president. It was also noted that final tabulations would be made available to interested employees upon receipt of a separate sheet of paper listing name, department and store number.

The questionnaire was then left with the employees to be completed at their leisure within two or three days of being handed out. Only one employee refused to fill out the questionnaire.

Each respondent was categorized by using their general position held within the organization to insure the greatest amount of privacy

possible, and in the case of selling personnel, categorization was by store number. No other identification was placed on the survey. Each subject was personally assured that questionnaire data would only be seen by the researcher after the survey was completed. Questionnaires were either collected by the researcher or deposited in a special envelope to be returned immediately. There was no means possible to trace the information in the questionnaire to any single person as a result of this procedure.

RESULTS

The data were divided according to areas of communications co-
vered by the survey and reported by employee groups of Selling (Group
I), Non-selling (Group II), and Management (Group III). The collec-
ted data, as a whole, indicated that the company's intentions are
toward a good communication system. However, it is in the transition
from intentions to practice where breakdowns in communication become
evident.

Training: The survey responses about training are found in
Table 2. These data show that in Group I (selling), 73% agreed that
they did have a formal training session, while on the other hand, 66%
of Group II (non-selling) and 63% or Group III (management) indicated
they did not. Seventy-two percent of Group I, 58% of Group II and
64% of Group III agreed that they had been well-informed of their du-
ties. All groups - 84% of Group I, 71% of Group II, and 50% of Group
III - stated that they had had zero to four hours of being informed
of their duties; however, 88% of Group I, 56% of Group II, and 64% of
Group III indicated that they had also spent only zero to four hours
in being shown how to perform their job tasks. In evaluating the per-
ceived effectiveness of the training, 55% of Group I signified that
it was not effective, as did 51% of Group II and 53% of Group III.
Ninety-one percent of Group I declared that they knew their jobs well
after one month, as did 89% of Group II, and 89% of Group III.

Meetings and Memos: The survey responses for the incidence of
meetings and memos are found in Table 3. Group I indicated by 99%

11

TABLE 2

Responses to Items on Training
by Employee Groups
(Percent Responding)

Questions	Group I- Sales Agree	Group I- Sales Disagree	Group II- Non-selling Agree	Group II- Non-selling Disagree	Group III- Management Agree	Group III- Management Disagree
1. Given a formal training session?	72.5	27.5	34.4	65.6	36.8	63.2
2. Well-informed of duties?	71.7	28.3	58.3	41.7	63.6	36.4
3. Amount of time spent in informing?						
0-4 hours	84.5		70.7		50.0	
8-10+ hours	15.5		29.3		50.0	
4. Time spent in teaching was effective?	44.9	55.1	49.2	50.8	47.1	52.9
5. Time spent showing how to perform duties?						
0-4 hours	88.0		56.0		64.3	
8-10+ hours	12.0		44.0		35.7	
6. Knew job well after one month?	90.6	9.4	89.1	11.9	88.9	11.1

TABLE 3

Responses to Items on Meetings and Memos
by Employee Groups
(Percent Responding)

Questions	Group I- Sales Agree	Disagree	Group II- Non-selling Agree	Disagree	Group III- Management Agree	Disagree
7. Number of meetings per month?						
0-2	99.1		92.9		75.0	
4-5+	.9		7.1		25.0	
8. Meetings are effective?	37.2	62.8	36.8	63.2	66.7	33.3
9. Purpose clearly stated?	83.9	16.1	90.0	10.0	100.0	0.0
10. Do meetings improve communication?	54.7	45.3	66.7	33.3	100.0	0.0
11. Memos are received often?	69.5	30.5	58.3	39.6	95.7	4.3
12. Received by those for whom memo is intended?	91.5	8.5	87.8	12.2	100.0	0.0
13. Purpose of memo stated?	93.0	7.0	80.5	19.5	100.0	0.0
14. Information reliable?	95.5	4.5	85.7	14.3	100.0	0.0
15. Message clear and concise?	93.0	7.0	85.0	15.0	93.3	6.7
16. Rate memos as form of communication?	95.5	4.5	73.3	26.7	100.0	0.0

TABLE 3 (continued)

Responses to Items on Meetings and Memos
by Employee Groups
(Percent Responding)

Questions	Group I- Sales Agree	Disagree	Group II- Non-selling Agree	Disagree	Group III - Management Agree	Disagree
28. Feel sufficiently notified of ads in department?	84.3	15.7	51.9	48.1	85.7	14.3

14

that meetings were held zero to two times per month. In Group II, 93%, and in Group III, 75%, also attended zero to two meetings per month. Sixty-three percent of Group I felt the meetings were not effective, as did 63% of Group II. However, Group III indicated by 67% that meetings were effective. All groups - 84% for Group I, 90% for Group II, and 100% for Group III - responded that the purpose of the meetings was clearly stated, and all groups concurred that the meetings did improve communication: Group I with 55%, Group II with 67%, and Group III with 100%.

In responses to questions about memos, 70% of Group I, 58% of Group II, and 96% of Group III indicated they received them often. All groups felt that memos did reach the person for whom they were intended: 92% in Group I, 88% in Group II, and 100% in Group III. Apparently, the purpose of most memos was clearly stated because all groups indicated that they had no problems with them. The majority in all groups said that the information was reliable by 95% in Group I, 86% in Group II and 100% in Group III. In addition, they stated that the message was clear and concise as indicated by 93% of Group I, 85% of Group II, and 94% of Group III. All groups agreed that memos were a good form of communication.

Also, 84% of Group I, 52% of Group II and 86% of Group III stated that they felt sufficiently informed of activities within their departments.

In-House Publications: The survey responses concerning In-house Publications are found in Table 4. Seventy-seven percent of Group I, 73% of Group II and 91% of Group III indicated they read the company

TABLE 4

Responses to Items on In-house Publications
by Employee Groups
(Percent Responding)

Questions	Group I- Sales Agree	Disagree	Group II- Non-selling Agree	Disagree	Group III- Management Agree	Disagree
24. Read company newspaper?	76.9	23.1	72.5	27.5	90.9	9.1
26. Like to have more general information included in paper?	64.6	35.4	53.8	46.2	53.3	46.7
36. Find employee handbook helpful?	64.7	35.3	42.1	57.9	42.1	57.9

newspaper. Sixty-five percent of Group I would like to have more general information included in the paper, as does 54% of Group II and 53% of Group III. The responses to the open-ended questions regarding the favorite types of articles in the paper were as follows: 62 people stated that they liked to read about personnel actions including promotions, 61 people liked explanations of company policies and procedures, 50 people liked reports on social activities, and 44 enjoyed reading about group sport activities. "Personals" were requested by 41 persons, and gossip was listed by 30 people. Thirty people weren't too particular, declaring they liked all the topics covered in the paper. Concerning the question of what they would like to see in the paper, an overwhelming majority of 79 employees expressed a desire to read fashion forecasts. Thirteen people each wanted to read about health care, more sports, and home decorating and improvement ideas. Recreation and child care ideas were listed by nine people and eight people, respectively. Because these responses were to open-ended questions, the results are reported by number rather than percent.

Sixty-five percent of Group I felt the Employee Handbook was helpful. However, 58% of both Group II and Group III answered that it was not helpful. In an attempt to analyze the areas of the handbook that are most useful, responses to open-ended questions were used. Twenty-two employees referred to it for answers on general procedure, 17 people used it for vacation and holiday information, and 11 people used it for reviewing company policy. Ten employees stated they used it for employee benefit information, eight employees for answers concerning holiday pay, and seven for sick pay. Six employees relied on

it for definition of the dress code and six for seldom-used procedures. Five respondents referred to the handbook for insurance answers, five stated they didn't have a handbook, and nine employees thought it should be updated.

Superior/Subordinate Relations: The survey responses for Superior/Subordinate Relations may be found in Table 5. The data in this section indicated that 58% of Group I and 77% of Group II believed they did not receive adequate feedback on their work performance. However, 85% of Group III indicated they felt they did receive adequate feedback. Sixty-nine percent of Group I felt the discussion of their work evaluation had been adequate, as did 69% of Group II and 92% of Group III. All groups believed that the rater was fair and unbiased: 81% for Group I, 78% of Group II and 100% of Group III. Seventy-nine percent of Group I, 84% of Group II, and 93% of Group III felt that buyers' decisions were determined by what was selling. Seventy-six percent of respondents stated the buyer spent zero to four hours in various departments, as did 92% of Group II and 100% of Group III. All groups signified that the amount of time was satisfactory: 57% of Group I, 77% of Group II, and 60% of Group III.

When questioned on how often the employees spent time with their superiors in the department, 91% of Group I stated they saw their area manager often, 58% saw their buyer seldom, 54% related with the store manager seldom, and 87% talked with the company president seldom.

Eighty-five percent of Group II talked with their area supervisor often, 72% saw the store manager seldom, and 98% saw the company president seldom. (The section on buyers was eliminated from this item,

TABLE 5

Responses to Items on Superior/Subordinate Relations
by Employee Groups
(Percent Responding)

Questions	Group I- Sales Agree	Disagree	Group II- Non-selling Agree	Disagree	Group III- Management Agree	Disagree
21. Receive feedback on work performance?	42.4	57.6	24.3	76.7	84.6	15.4
22. Discussion of evaluations adequate?	69.3	30.7	68.6	31.4	92.3	7.7
23. Rater was fair and un-biased?	81.1	18.9	77.8	22.2	100.0	0.0
29. Buyer's decisions are influenced by sales?	78.8	20.2	84.0	16.0	93.3	6.7
30. Hours/month buyer spends in department?						
0-4 hours	76.1		92.3		100.0	
8-10+ hours	23.9		7.7		0.0	
31. Amount of time is satisfactory?	57.1	42.9	76.7	23.3	60.0	40.0
38. Supervisor talks to, or gets to know employee?	Often	Seldom	Often	Seldom	Often	Seldom
Buyer?	41.3	58.2	----	----	----	----
Area Supervisor?	91.1	8.9	84.6	15.4	----	----
Store Manager?	46.3	57.3	27.0	73.0	100.0	0.0
Co. President?	12.7	87.3	2.4	97.6	30.0	70.0

due to the fact that most non-selling personnel are not affiliated with a buyer, and because buyers make up a large part of this category.) Group III responded by saying that 100% saw their store managers often, but 70% saw the company president seldom.

Policies, Procedures & Employee Benefits: The survey responses for Policies, Procedures & Employee Benefits may be found in Table 6. Seventy-six percent of Group I, 78% of Group II, and 74% of Group III indicated that their store had a suggestion box. However, 97% of Group I did not contribute suggestions, nor did 73% of Group II. On the other hand, 98% of Group III did contribute suggestions. Fifty-four percent of Group I believe the company reads the suggestions, but 65% felt the company does not respond to them. Of Group II, 72% said the company does not read the suggestions, and 86% declared the company does not respond to them. Group III felt the opposite was true; 86% stated that the company read the suggestions, and 80% felt the company responded to them.

Concerning the question of seminars being held for salespersons, 56% of Group I said there were no seminars; however, 52% of Group II said there were, as did 94% of Group III. Seventy-eight percent of Group I felt well-informed, as did 53% of Group II and 93% of Group III. Fifty-four percent of Group I wanted salary scales published for available positions, 60% of Group II agreed, but 69% of Group III did not.

The method of finding out about new position openings came through the grapevine for 70% of Group I. Five percent were informed by their supervisor, less than one percent received a written notice, and 23%

TABLE 6

Responses to Items on Policies, Procedures, and Benefits
by Employee Groups
(Percent Responding)

Questions	Group I- Sales Agree	Disagree	Group II- Non-selling Agree	Disagree	Group III- Management Agree	Disagree
17. Store has suggestion box?	76.0	24.0	78.0	11.9	73.7	26.3
18. Employee contributes suggestions?	3.1	96.9	26.7	73.3	98.1	1.9
19. Co. reads suggestions?	53.8	46.3	27.6	72.4	85.7	14.3
20. Company responds to suggestions?	34.2	65.8	13.8	86.2	80.0	20.0
32. Seminars held for all sales personnel?	44.1	55.9	51.9	48.1	93.8	6.3
33. Employee feels well-informed?	77.6	22.4	53.1	46.9	93.3	6.7
34. Would like salary scales of available positions made public?	53.5	46.5	60.5	39.5	31.3	68.8
35. Finds out about job openings by: Grapevine	70.3		73.7		62.5	
Supervisor	5.1		7.0		12.5	
Written Notice	.7		.0		.0	
Other	23.2		19.3		25.0	

TABLE 6 (continued)

Responses to Items on Policies, Procedures, and Benefits
by Employee Groups
(Percent Responding)

Questions	Group I- Sales		Group II- Non-selling		Group III- Management	
	Good	Poor	Good	Poor	Good	Poor
39. Rate quality of information on:						
a. Insurance	52.6	47.7	46.2	53.8	50.0	50.0
b. Payroll	64.9	35.1	68.6	31.4	80.0	20.0
c. Mailing Information	76.9	23.1	67.6	32.4	90.0	10.0
d. Merchandise in stock	71.3	28.7	62.1	37.9	100.0	0.0
e. Special orders	70.6	29.4	65.4	34.1	91.7	8.3
f. Bldg. maintenance	52.7	47.3	30.3	69.7	69.2	30.8
g. Holiday/vacation time	68.9	31.1	55.3	44.7	85.7	14.3
h. Credit authorization	88.8	11.2	66.7	33.3	100.0	0.0
i. Shoplifting/theft	54.8	45.2	30.8	69.2	69.2	30.8
j. Retirement benefits	17.0	83.0	6.1	93.9	47.1	52.9
k. Management training programs	29.1	70.9	11.5	88.5	58.3	41.7
l. Personnel problem	55.3	44.7	50.0	50.0	91.7	8.3

TABLE 6 (continued)

Responses to Items on Policies, Procedures, and Benefits
by Employee Groups
(Percent Responding)

Questions	Group I- Sales		Group II- Non-selling		Group III- Management	
	Good	Poor	Good	Poor	Good	Poor
m. Schedule conflict	88.3	11.7	71.9	28.1	100.0	0.0
n. Calling in sick	77.4	22.6	71.9	28.1	100.0	0.0
o. Personal problem	64.3	35.7	80.0	20.0	92.3	7.7

resorted to other means. Seventy-four percent of Group II heard about a position through the grapevine, 7% by their supervisor, and 19% by other means. Group III indicated that 63% of their employees obtained information by the grapevine, 13% from their supervisors, and 25% by other means. (No one in either Group II or Group III indicated that they had received a written notice regarding job openings.)

Item #39 asked the respondent to rate the quality of information that would be pertinent to the employees at some time during their stay with the company. On the perceived quality of information regarding insurance, 53% of Group I said it was good, as did 50% of Group III; however Group II, by 54%, rated the information as poor. Sixty-five percent of Group I, 69% of Group II, and 80% of Group III rated payroll information as good. Also rated as good was mailing information by 77% of Group I, 67% of Group II, and 100% of Group III. Information on merchandise in stock was rated as good by 71% of Group I, 62% of Group II, and 100% of Group III. The quality of information was rated good by 71% of Group I, 65% of Group II, and 92% of Group III in regards to special orders. Information on building maintenance was rated as good by 53% of Group I, but as poor by 70% of Group II and 69% of Group III. Holiday and vacation time information was rated as good by 69% of Group I, 55% of Group II, and 86% of Group III, as was credit authorization by 89% of Group I, 67% of Group II, and 100% of Group III. Concerning answers to shoplifting and theft information, 55% of Group I rated it as good, as did 70% of Group III. Group II disagreed by rating it as poor by 70%. All groups rated the information on retirement benefits as poor, by 83% of Group I, 94% of Group

II and 53% of Group III. Management training program information was rated as poor by 71% of Group I, 88% of Group II, but as good by 58% of Group III. Mediation of personnel problems (between employees) was rated as good by 55% of Group I, 50% of Group II, and 92% of Group III. The quality of information regarding scheduling conflicts or other related problems was rated as good by 88% of Group I, 72% of Group II, and 100% of Group III. The notification of the department or employee's supervisor when calling in sick was rated as good by 77% of Group I, 72% of Group II, and 100% of Group III. Information relative to personal problems was rated as good by 64% of Group I, 80% of Group II and 92% of Group III.

Item #40 was another open-ended question asking for comments and suggestions regarding the survey, their job, etc. Twenty-six people protested the poor salaries and no bonus. Poor morale was commented on by sixteen employees, and lack of training was another source of frustration to fifteen people. The lack of communication upset fourteen respondents, and evaluations, predisposed by almost exclusively negative feedback, prompted eleven people to reply. Eight people said suggestions didn't matter to the company, and seven didn't like the contradictory policies and procedures. Ten people protested about working conditions, including six that didn't like working Sundays and holidays. On the other hand, six other employees felt the company was a good place to work. Five people indicated the buyers were out of touch with the salesperson and consumer, and four respondents wanted their benefits explained more clearly.

DISCUSSION

The purpose of the present study was to investigate communication effectiveness and implied job satisfaction. Although these data seem to indicate that pertinent information is available to the employees, the responses to the open-ended questions contradicts this.

Training was a major area of perceived communication breakdown. All groups agreed that after one month they were well-informed of their duties; however, the time spent being trained was always described as fours hours or less, and the time spent in showing individuals how to do their jobs was also less than four hours. Even though the majority felt they knew their jobs well after one month, the answers to the question of the effectiveness of time spent in teaching, suggests that training is not the primary source of job knowledge. It would seem that although the training session may have been well designed, and the information accurate, employees did not see the relation between hearing of duties and performing them. This might seem to place the employee in an insecure and frustrating position in his/her job, thus fostering feelings of resentment toward the company.

The topic of memos and meetings indicated another area of differences in group perceptions. Most employees had few meetings per month, and Groups I and II did not feel the meetings were effective, however, Group III (Management) did. The mechanics of running a meeting seemed to be in order, and all groups felt that when meetings

26

were held, they did tend to improve communication. The difference in perception between Groups I and II, and Group III indicates that more meetings might indeed open up more communication and therefore increase the effectiveness of the communication, which at the time was considered to be lacking.

All groups felt very positive about memos, stating they were reliable, clear, and received often by the people for whom they were intended.

All groups felt positive (over 72%) in their reactions to the company newspaper. Group I indicated a preference to have more general information printed, while Groups II and III were more evenly distributed between wanting general information and selective company or departmental information. It could be surmissed that as an employee progresses up the corporate ladder, general information becomes less relevant to them, and company information would be more useful to their individual career goals.

The employee handbooks were thought to be useful only by Group I. In reviewing the handbook, it might be found that it was written to answer the needs of incoming personnel, particularly at the sales level. This would obviously mean that it does not contain the type and amount of valid information essential for managers and non-selling groups. A revision of the handbook giving information that is relevant to every group, such as company history, employee benefits, company goals, holiday and vacation time, and various other procedures unique to the running of the company would seem worth further study. This could be followed by appendices to supplement the individual and

group needs by work area (selling, non-selling, and management).

The personnel evaluations and performance feedback in superior/ subordinate relations indicated that all groups thought the discussion after the evaluation was adequate and the rater was fair and unbiased. However, Groups I and II said they seldom received feedback on their work performance. A few employees commented in the open-ended question that when they did receive feedback, it was usually negative in nature. Employees also said that evaluations should be given more often than once per year, and dollar amounts of sales should not be weighed so heavily in determining the quality of the employee. Respondents seemed to be eager for additional feedback, both of the informal and formal (evaluations) variety, and that total employee performance and contributions be evaluated.

All three groups felt the buyers spent enough time in the departments and that their decisions were greatly influenced by sales. Question 38, however, indicated that Group I (sales) believed that buyers did not try to get to know them. Consequently, it might be inferred that buyers were not overtly friendly, but accomplished their tasks within the department with a minimal amount of social interaction.

Groups II and III were well-acquainted with their supervisors, which suggested the supervisors had made successful efforts to get to know their workers. Store managers were seldom seen by Groups I and II. However, all of Group III agreed they interacted with the store managers often. This would suggest that most store managers are availing themselves to management but not to their own employees. All three groups indicated that they saw the company president seldom,

even in the upper-level management category. If visibility is a factor in morale and communication, then communication effectiveness and job satisfaction could jointly improve if management were more highly visible and available for interaction.

A suggestion box is a primary source of upward communication in most organizations, provided employees receive feedback from their suggestions. In this organization, all stores do not have a suggestion box. For those responding to this question, Groups I and II indicated that they seldom contribute suggestions, and further indicated that the company did not read their suggestions or respond to them. On the other hand, the management group did contribute suggestions and felt they were responded to. This would suggest little upward communication flow, with more critical/suggestive information exchange at the top of the organizational hierarchy.

Groups II and III stated that seminars were organized for sales personnel. Fifty-six percent of Group I, however, stated that management had not arranged any seminars for them. A probable explanation for this response is that part-time salespersons miss out on many seminars, or that the seminars are timed such that less than half the employees can participate. The majority of employees felt they were well-informed on product knowledge with or without the seminars.

A slight majority (54%) of Group I would like salary scales of available positions within the company made public, and 60% of Group II agreed that this information should be available. Many of Group I are employees who have never been promoted and may never be interested in moving up to new positions, or even staying with the company.

Salary scales to these people would be irrelevant. To Group II, who probably have been promoted to their positions, and to those people in Group I who are interested in moving up in the company, salary scales would be pertinent to their personal ambitions. Group III was not interested in salary scales, which might indicate that as an employee reaches the upper echelons of the company, he/she would prefer that the subordinates not know how much he/she was being paid (or not paid).

The grapevine was the most common medium for finding out about available positions for all groups. Very few people received the news from a supervisor or were given a written notice of the open positions. Employees with ambitions could feel frustrated in their attempts to advance if most information is transmitted by rumor and speculation, so common to grapevines.

All three groups rated payroll, mailing information, merchandise in stock, special orders, holiday and vacation time, credit authorization, personnel problems and schedule conflicts, calling in sick, and personal problems as good. Building maintenance was rated as good by Groups I and III, but as poor by Group II. (Many of this non-selling group were situated in the old Service Building, and have been moved to a newer facility.) Retirement benefits were rated as poor by all three groups; management training programs were rated as poor by Groups I and II, and as good by Group III, needless to say.

The interpretation of questions 40 must be considered in light of that out of 240 respondents, a total of 89 people chose to respond to the question, and no more than 26 replied to any one topic. Those that

did respond were articulate and adamant in their opinions. This vocal minority may or may not be representative of their fellow employees. However, it has been found that open-ended questions are a source of information that has "face validity" in determining corporate climate (Patchen, 1965).

Patchen found that in assessing the reliability of the indices and the evidence of validity, there are no good criterian measures against which to compare. One can, however, "expect a moderate agreement between outside indicators of behavior and questionnaire indices," but correlations with validating evidence are low enough to caution one into thinking the measures are precise.

Therefore, it can be said on the whole, the company seems to have an adequate communication system for special types of information. However, there are a few problem areas. These are problems in developing good, formal training sessions, setting up and running employee seminars, managerial visibility, and job posting, among others.

Some complications were encountered in assessing the data. Analysis by store was both difficult and inappropriate due to the small size of the study group. Also, the stores closer to the home office were more cooperative in taking part in the study than those branches further away, therefore response rates were uneven. However, even this might be interpreted to mean that the attitude of employees becomes poorer in a direct correlation with the distance to the home office, as related to feelings of participation within the organizational structure, compounded by the visibility and availability of upper-level management with the typical employee.

Employee morale would tend to suffer because of this as feelings of alienation increase; on the job, from the employees' co-workers in other branches, and from an umbilical tie with management. Employees become distrustful of management in a "them versus us" syndrome.

Therefore, when communication breaks down at its implementation, employees begin to feel that management says one policy, yet affects another, which facilitates psychological dissonance (Festinger, 1957). Employees may react to reduce this tension in forms of either anger or apathy, hence the company has a morale problem. The point is, simply, that if the employees feel that management is sending out a survey to "get them" or as lip service to a problem, they may either react by turning in blatantly hostile or incorrect answers, or conveniently overlooking filling out the questionnaire, misplacing it, or not filling in the entire survey.

There are alternatives, other than communications for the date obtained. One alternative is that the company does not have a communications problem, but a problem of management style and/or philosophy. The company, being a family-owned business, is guided by strong family control. The family makes up the majority of top level management and other family members are working in the two other employee groups. Along the continuum of McGregors X-Y Theory of Management Style, family owned businesses tend toward the X style of management, which is not condusive to a growing, vital company or high employee morale. The X Style Manager responds to employees as not wanting to work, but motivated solely by the monetary aspects of the job. Short spans of control are characteristic of this philosophy, as is an

authoritarian/parental style of leading the "flock". Relinquishing control for this type of management is difficult. Unless employees need a very secure and rigid job environment, many workers find this style of leadership stifling, uncreative and frustrating. The logical result of this phenomena is that personal communication is stifled and job satisfaction decreases.

Another reason may be that a great number of sales (Group I) employees are part-time and/or temporary and are really not involved with the company on a daily basis. The liklihood of their participation in communication is lessoned by their fewer hours and/or temporary on-call status.

A third possiblity may be related to the fact that women far out-number men in lower level positions. Many of these women are housewives and students, and they are not used to being an integral part of a company, but merely see themselves as getting a paycheck (which to some employees may be enough). These people are not apathetic or angry; they simply are not allowed or choose not to participate other than putting in their time. However, in the future, as women may grow to feel more assertive in accordance with today's changing social standards, the company may find them to be an increasingly vocal majority.

Another possible view of this same employee group is that the company prefers to hire what they assume is a particular type of worker: one who works hard, does not complain of low pay, likes the store discount, minds their own business, and lets the "people who know better" run the store. This non-vocal employee looks upon their

vocal peers as rabble-rousers, and by peer/corporate environmental pressure, the chaffe is sorted from the wheat and they eventually quit.

In summary, as previous studies have shown, communication does effect job satisfaction. Full and free communication may tend to have an effect on motivation and job satisfaction. Dewhirst (1975) and Slee-Smith (1973) found that positive climates promote free expression and favorable employee attitude. It has also been found that encouraging employee feedback and taking time to insure all areas of the organization feel they are an integral part of the company, will increase communication and employee satisfaction. Towards this end, the company's major problem areas are training, managerial visibility, promoting good, vertical communication flow and effective evaluation programs. In addition, it is apparent that training for employees in new positions needs improving. The greatest discrepancy in the perception of training is in the relationship of hearing about their duties and then performing them.

There were several questions in the survey that exemplify this employer's lack of concern for employees' feelings and security. Question 35, which asked how employees learn of new positions may be typical of the company's attitude. No one in either Groups II or III, and less than one percent of Group I, had ever received a written notice of available positions. Question 17 indicates that employees don't know whether or not they have a suggestion box in their store. Question 20 indicates further that the employees do not believe the company responds to their suggestions. Question 32 asks whether

seminars are held for all sales personnel. The majority of sales-persons say they have not been to any seminars to update their training and product knowledge (and this group is the company's vital link to the buying public).

A philosophy of management, as previously indicated, in addition to the alienation of employees, combine to suggest at the very least, relatively low job satisfaction exists in this organization. However, areas such as wages and employee benefits have not been investigated as major contributing factors in job satisfaction.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following suggestions seem appropriate for this organization as a result of the present study:

An objective review of the management style of the company should be completed and analyzed in terms of whether that style will effectively utilize human resources in the future.

Training:

    a. develop formal training sessions for all employees in new positions, to be followed by session feedback and evaluations.

    b. set up a "continuing education program" for both full-time and part-time employees using seminars, videotapes, and "learning by doing" for new techniques, information on product knowledge, and new trends and developments in the market and in the public's buying needs.

    c. implement a mentor system between the new employee and a more experienced employee. This would allow the new employee to ask questions and feel that someone is close by to help, if needed.

Evaluations:

    a. have evaluations every six months to promote more superior-to subordinate feedback, especially of the positive nature.

    b. evaluate the "total" employee as far as critical contributions to the company (i.e. creative suggestions), conscienceness (keeping their work area and/or department clean, tardiness within reason, number of sick days, offers to work overtime), selling in dollar amounts, product and/or job knowledge, etc. Then reward accordingly, by recognition, salary increases, etc.

For Improved Communications:

    a. urge more managerial visibility and availability.

    b. enlarge the employee newspaper to include such areas as job postings, company developments, personnel columns ex-

36

plaining various programs such as employee benefits or
management training programs; devote one page to each
branch's news, include Employee-of-the-Month type items,
and general information to appeal to employees during
their off hours (i.e. household hints, all about tools,
sports, childcare, etc.), and finally, put two copies in
every department and lounge.

c. recognize the change in social attitudes that are having
   an effect on the working woman and her ambitions.

d. try to organize at least one departmental meeting per
   month to not only impart company policy or new informa-
   tion, but also to let the employees vent their concerns.

e. buyers should send newsletters to their respective de-
   partments, including such information as market trends,
   what image they are promoting in their buying for the
   following season, upcoming sales, explanation of new
   lines and products, product knowledge, and requests for
   buying and/or customer suggestions, plus customer feed-
   back on the merchandise purchased.

APPENDIX

Dear ██████ Employee:

The purpose of this brief questionnaire is two-fold. Firstly, it will, hopefully, gather important information concerning the type and quality of communication existing in ████████ as a growing organization and, secondly, it will assist me in a Master's thesis at Western Michigan University.

This survey is being run with the full cooperation of Mr. ████████ ████████ and the Industrial Psychology department at WMU. It is important to note here that all questionnaires and answers will be held strictly confidential from all ████████ management and personnel at WMU. Only the final total group tabulations will be made public.

The openness and honesty you contribute to this questionnaire form the crucial basis for any possible positive changes in the communication process here at ████████. Again, thank you for your cooperation and candor.

Lisa Wierenga

Should you like a copy of the final group tabulations, hand in a separate sheet of paper with your name, department, and store number.

P.S.   I would like to add a few comments to Lisa Wierenga's remarks. Your cooperation in answering the questionnaire would be greatly appreciated and I would be hopeful that they would be completely candid

38

and unbiased. Our goal is to make ████████ the best possible place

to work.

GENERAL INFORMATION:

Number of years working for ████████? _____   Sex: M   F

Position Held: _____   Age: 16-18 _____
                                                   19-25 _____
Store #:   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   SB   26-35 _____
                                                   36-45 _____
Full Time: _____   Part Time: _____   45-Over _____

PLEASE CIRCLE OR CHECK THE MOST APPROPRIATE ANSWER:

1. Were you given a formal training session? Yes _____   No _____

2. How well were you informed of your duties?

   Very well / Well / Adequate / Little / Not informed

3. How much time was spent informing you of those duties?

   0-1 hr. / 2-4 hrs. / 5-7 hrs. / 8-10 hrs. / 10 or more

4. Please rate the effectiveness of the time spent in teaching you.

   Very effective / Effective / Adequate / Inadequate

5. How much time was spent in showing you how to perform those duties?

   0-1 hr. / 2-4 hrs. / 5-7 hrs. / 8-10 hrs. / 10 or more

6. How well do you feel you knew your job after the first month?

   Very well / Well / Adequate / Little / Didn't know

7. How often are meetings held per month? 1   2   3   4   5   more

8. How effective are these meetings?

   Very effective / Effective / Adequate / Ineffective

9. Is the purpose of the meeting clearly stated?

   Consistently / Fairly often / Occasionally / Seldom / Never

10. Do they tend to improve or open up communication?

   Consistently / Fairly often / Occasionally / Seldom / Never

11. How often are memos received?

   Consistently / Fairly often / Occasionally / Seldom / Never

12. Is the message received by those for whom it was intended?

   Consistently / Fairly often / Occasionally / Seldom / Never

13. Does the memo express the purpose of the communication?

   Consistently / Fairly often / Occasionally / Seldom / Never

14. Is the information reliable?

   Consistently / Fairly often / Occasionally / Seldom / Never

15. Is the message clear and concise?

   Consistently / Fairly often / Occasionally / Seldom / Never

16. Please rate memos as a form of communication.

   Excellent / Good / O.K. / Poor / Very poor

17. Does your store have a suggestion box?   Yes _____   No _____

18. How often do you contribute suggestions?

   Very often / Often / Occasionally / Seldom / Never

19. Do you feel the company reads the suggestions?

   Consistently / Fairly often / Occasionally / Seldom / Never

20. Do you feel the company responds to the suggestions?

   Consistently / Fairly often / Occasionally / Seldom / Never

21. Do you receive feedback on your work performance?

   Consistently / Fairly often / Occasionally / Seldom / Never

22. Do you feel your discussion of the evaluation was adequate?

   Always / Fairly often / Occasionally / Seldom / Never

23. To what extent do you feel the rater was fair and unbiased?

   Always / Fairly often / Occasionally / Seldom / Never

24. How often do you read the company newspaper ▉▉▉▉▉▉▉?

    Very often / Often / Occasionally / Seldom / Never

25. Please list the topics that you enjoy (i.e. personals-gossip, personnel actions and changes, company policy and procedures, group activities--sport and social, etc.).

    _____

    _____

26. Would you be interested in having more general information included? (i.e. nutrition, recreation, fashion forecasts, home, child, and health care, sports, and mechanics?)

    Yes _____   No _____

27. If so, which types? _____

    _____

28. To what extent do you feel sufficiently notified of all ads running in your department?

    Consistently / Fairly often / Occasionally / Seldom / Never

29. To what extent do you feel the buyer's decisions are influenced by what's happening in sales?

    Always / Fairly often / Occasionally / Seldom / Never

30. How many hours/month does the buyer spend in your department?

    0-1 hr. / 2-4 hrs. / 5-7 hrs. / 8-10 hrs. / 10 or more

31. Is that amount of time satisfactory?   Yes _____   No _____

32. Are seminars held to better acquaint all sales personnel in the department with the merchandise?

                        Yes _____   No _____

33. To what extent do you feel well-informed and up-to-date on sales, personnel changes, new merchandise, meetings, etc., in your area?

    Always / Fairly often / Occasionally / Seldom / Never

34. Would you like salary scales of all positions available in the company made public?

                Yes _____   No _____   Don't know _____

35. How do you usually find out about job openings?

   Grapevine _____ Supervisor _____ Written Notice _____ Other _____

36. Do you find the Employee Handbook to be helpful in answering your questions?

   Yes _____ No _____

37. In what areas specifically? _____

   _____

38. How often does your immediate supervisor come into your work area to talk, offer ideas, find opinions, and/or get to know you?

	V. Often	Often	Occ.	Seldom	Never
..the Area Supervisor?	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
..the Buyer?	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
..the Store manager?	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
..the Co. President?	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

39. Please rate the information concerning the following.

	V. Good	Good	Ave.	Poor	V. Poor
a. Insurance questions	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
b. Payroll questions	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
c. Mailing information	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
d. Merchandise in stock	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
e. Special orders	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
f. Building maintenance	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
g. Holiday and vacation time	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
h. Credit authorization	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
i. A case of shoplifting or theft	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
j. Retirement benefits	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
k. Management training programs	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
l. A personnel problem	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
m. A schedule conflict or problem	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
n. Calling in sick	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
o. A personal problem	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

40. Any further comments and/or suggestions: (use reverse side if necessary)

   _____

   _____

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