

Organization's value communication strategies from a human resource management perspective

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ABSTRACT

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The purpose of this study is to investigate the methods organizations use to communicate their values to employees, and to determine the extent of their effectiveness, thereby revealing how values are incorporated in the roles of employees from a human resource management perspective. The study was conducted with managers and executives in four organizations, of different sizes and economic sectors, throughout the United States and Finland. The research consisted of interviews that aimed to reveal the specific strategies of how values are communicated to employees at different organizations, and to discover what strategies were most effective and why.

The findings of the study revealed many different value communication strategies that organizations possess, the most effective being creating a call-out culture and leadership. Further, there were significant factors that determined how effectively values were communicated, such as the size of the organization, nature of the mission, and the extent of value congruence between employees and the organization. The findings suggested that while all organizations attempt to communicate their values, the extent to which they are communicated effectively, varies between organizations. The research project concluded that while values have the potential to provide a valuable reference for HRM, the implementation and consistency needed for value communication, is difficult to achieve for certain organizations.

Keywords: Organizational values, internal communication, human resource management

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1 INTRODUCTION

Organizational values contribute significantly to the achievement of organizational goals. The values of the organization provide the framework that guide employees toward achieving the mission and vision (Argandoña, 2003). Many studies have been conducted that reveal findings about the positive influences of values within organizations (Malbasic, 2015). For example, value congruence between organization and employee has been shown to help employees attain fulfillment in their work, build a stronger, more committed relationship with the organization, and minimize turnover costs (Edwards, Cable, 2009). However, the subject has not been studied extensively from a human resource management (HRM) perspective. The following questions, from a HRM perspective, present interesting considerations. How are organizational values understood and incorporated into the development of employees' skills and competencies? How do values aid the learning and development of employees within an organization?

Organizational values are largely represented in organizations through the behavior of its employees (Schein, 2010). Therefore, the extent to which employees develop an understanding, regarding how to behave and make decisions in accordance with the values, provides an idea of how genuinely organizations live by their professed values. While every organization has values, the extent to which the professed values are truly representative of the organization, and its employees, varies. In other words, some organizations simply advertise values, yet do not promote behavior, make decisions, and construct a work environment in accordance with them.

The communication of values to employees can be understood as a learning and development opportunity for employees, i.e. an opportunity for adults to continue to learn in the workplace. When moving to a new organization, employees undergo a learning process where they build an understanding for how to behave and act in accordance with the values. In order for employees to understand and incorporate the values into their roles within the organizations, the

values need to be adequately communicated to them. Without proper value communication, employees cannot be expected to build an understanding values, therefore depriving the employees, and the organization, of the significant benefits values can provide. Through proper value communication, employees will have more learning opportunities for development and growth in regards to their competencies and responsibilities within an organization.

The purpose of this study is to examine the different ways organizations communicate their values and how effective those strategies are. Through investigating communication strategies and evaluating their effectiveness, the researcher hopes to reveal insights into how organizations can improve their communication strategies, thereby aiding the learning and development of employees. Through interviewing and assessing various organizations, as well as employees, certain similarities and patterns of effective value communication strategies could be revealed. Through effective value communication, organizations can better harness the potential of their employees growth and development, thereby improving the implementation their strategies and furthering achievement of their goals.

In the following chapters, the researcher will explain the theoretical background of organizational values, and their communication, from a HRM perspective. After the review of prior literature and studies, the methodological framework will be presented, followed by the findings, discussion, and conclusion.

2 VALUES

The study of values can be quite abstract. Questions such as what values are, and how they influence behavior and decision making, are significant philosophical concepts. Given the aim of this thesis, it is simply not possible to consider the nuances and ontological essence of what values are in detail. However, it is important to briefly introduce the theoretical background and attempt to compile a basic understanding of what values are. In order to progress into researching the nature of values and their roles within organizations, there is a need to have a concise, working definition of values. The following section will provide a brief description of the study of values and the relationship individuals have to values.

2.1 Study of Values

The modern academic understanding of values can be traced back to Milton Rokeach (1973). His definition and investigation of values are constantly referenced in research related to the subject of values and human behavior. Rokeach (1973, p. 5) defines values as “an enduring belief that a specific mode of conduct or end-state of existence is personally or socially preferable to an opposite or converse mode of conduct or end-state of existence.” To make sense of the complex definition, Rokeach divides values into two types, terminal and instrumental. Terminal values are values in which they are desirable in and of themselves (Rokeach, 1973). In other words, terminal values *are* desirable states of existence or end goals, from which to pursue. Instrumental values on the other hand, work *toward* achieving end states and goals (Rokeach, 1973). Instrumental values are established in order to make progress and work towards desired end states or goals.

Rokeach proposes that instrumental values are used to achieve terminal values. For example, if a person has the desire to be educated (terminal value), their behavior and decisions will result in spending more time reading than watching television. Even if watching television is more satisfying in the short

term, their value of being educated is more important to them. In order to achieve the end goal of being “educated,” the person might employ self-discipline (instrumental value). Through a combination of terminal and instrumental values, a person is believed to possess a hierarchical ordering of preferences that determines their behavior and decision making (Rokeach, 1973). However, the distinction between how terminal and instrumental work together to influence behavior and decisions, i.e. means to an end and vice versa, is not clear (Dewey, 1957; Schwartz, 1990). The important point to acknowledge is that values are understood to be at the core of decision making and behaviour, in the pursuit of end goals.

2.2 Definition of Values

Since Rokeach’s (1973) work, a significant amount of literature concerning the nature of values has revolved around how values provide a basis for guiding behavior, decision making, and achieving end states or goals (Argandoña, 2003; Cable, Edwards, 2009; Schwartz, 1990). Schwarz (1990, p. 878) has defined that “values (a) are concepts or beliefs, (b) pertain to desirable end states or behaviors, (c) transcend specific situations, (d) guide selection or evaluation of behavior and events, and (e) are ordered by relative importance.” The main features of values listed by Schwarz (1990) can be identified in other theories regarding values and human behavior. First, individuals have desired end states (Cable, Edwards, 2009). Second, individuals pursue these end states through certain behavior (Ravlin, 1998). Third, there is a hierarchical ordering of the end states, depending on the beliefs of the individual, about what end states are more important than others (Feather, 1994). These three main features are integral and comprise many definitions of other researchers who have studied values. Based on these features, the researcher has chosen the following definition for values considering the scope of this research.

Definition: Values are a hierarchical ordering of central beliefs of which an individual relies upon to make decisions and guide their behavior.

The aim of the research is to explore how organizations communicate values to employees, and the extent to which they are communicated effectively. Since values are understood to be at the center of human behavior and decision making, it is vital for organizations to establish and communicate values. Establishing values conveys a message to employees about organizational priorities, including end goals, of which can be achieved through promoting desired behavior and decision-making. Through values, employees are provided a foundation from which to learn and develop competencies regarding behavior and decision making, desired by the organization. Therefore, from a HRM perspective, the communication of values offers a way for managers and leadership to assist the continued learning and development of their employees within the organization.

3 ORGANIZATIONAL VALUES

After the brief explanation about how values can be understood to be at the center of human behavior and decision-making, it is important to understand values in the organizational context. The following section will describe mission and vision statements, distinguish internal and external values, and explain how the functions of values are significant to organizational strategy and success. Understanding why organizational values are important provides evidence for why their communication to employees, from a HRM perspective, deserves attention.

3.1 Mission and Vision Statements

Having an understanding of mission and vision statements is important, because they provide a foundation from which values are developed and chosen within organizations. Each organization has a mission and vision, usually constructed by the founder and/or top management (Edwards, Cable, 2009; Argandoña, 2003). The mission is a clear and compelling goal that succinctly describes the service an organization is providing, i.e. its purpose (Edwards, Cable, 2009; Argandoña, 2003; Scott, et. al., 1993). For example, the mission of a newspaper organization, could resemble seeking the truth and helping people understand the world.

The mission statement is subject to change, depending on the service the organization is providing to its clients (Argandoña, 2003). For example, mission statements, made by organizations in the healthcare industry, would be aimed at improving and maintaining personal health. On the other hand, mission statements in the sports entertainment industry, tend to focus on providing high quality entertainment for sports fans. The mission constitutes the foundation from

which values are chosen (Edwards, Cable, 2009), therefore it is important to consider what sector of the economy an organization occupies when studying values.

Argandoña (2003) makes an important distinction between mission statements, i.e. the external and internal mission. Most missions generally resemble external missions, which are aimed at appealing to the needs of customers (Edwards, Cable, 2009). For example, external missions of organizations will commonly contain performance related values, such as excellence, quality, and reliability (Foreman, Whetten, 2002). However, an organization's internal mission, is designed for employees (Argandona, 2003). Internal missions typically represent the well-being and needs of employees, e.g. mutual respect, employee development, and empowerment (Chatman, Jehn, 1994; O'reilly, et al., 1991). Through a combination of the external and internal mission, organizations are taking both customers and employees into consideration.

Similar to the nature of mission statements, values also depend on the sector of the economy the organization occupies (Schein, 2010). However, while mission and vision statements between organizations in the same sector may be similar, the values that represent how the mission and vision will be realized, are of greater variance (Edwards, Cable, 2009). For example, two restaurants may share the same mission of creating a memorable dining experience. However, the values that inform how they are going to provide the dining experience, are more likely to have a higher degree of variance.

Organizations also establish a vision that communicates to the customer base and employees, what they are aspiring to upon achievement of the mission (Cornelissen, 2009). A vision serves as a way of communicating the direction and strategic intent of the organization (Cornelissen, 2009). Like mission statements, visions are developed by senior management. Vision statements resemble the pursuit of a desired future end state that depend on the commitment and energies of the employees (Cornelissen, 2009). In order for the vision to be a strong guiding force, the values need to be clear and authentic (Collins, Porras, 1991).

While the mission and vision are more related to the pursued end state of the organization, values provide the essence and basis for how the mission and vision will be achieved (Edwards, Cable, 2009; Argandoña, 2003; Collins, Porras, 1991; Gorenak, 2015; Schein, 2010). The mission and vision of organizations help provide the foundation from which organizational values are chosen and established (Argandoña, 2003).

3.2 Definition of Organizational Values

On the basis of previous literature, organizational values are defined in this thesis as a small set of principles that inform and guide members within an organization in their selection of behavior and decision making (Collins, Porras, 1996; Argandoña, 2003; Edwards, Cable, 2009). Examples of organizational values include: performance, diversity, respect, innovation, teamwork, integrity. Even if values are represented in the same words, their meaning and significance changes from organization to organization. Two organizations in the technology sector may share the value of innovation, yet how innovation is defined, conceptualized, and communicated throughout each organization differs (Argandoña, 2003; Schein, 2010). Understanding what organizational values are by themselves is quite complicated. A more comprehensive understanding of organizational values will be achieved, through explaining the functions and roles they fulfill.

3.3 Functions of Organizational Values

References for Behavior and Decision-Making

Organizational values function as guidelines for behavior and decision-making that are in accordance with the goals of the organization (Collins, Porras, 1996; Edwards, Cable, 2009; Gorenak, 2015; Scott, et. al, 1993; Schein, 1992). The guidelines for behavior and decision-making help organization's internal members understand *how* the organization is working towards achieving the mission, in accordance with the values. The majority of the literature the researcher covered

describes values as a reference point for guiding employee behaviour, in reflection of the organization's mission and vision. Quenneville, Beintin, and Simard (2010) refer to values as promoting "mobilization of behaviors." The mobilization of behaviors describes how organizations use values to underpin desirable employee behaviour in accordance with their mission. Organizational values describe and give insight into the expectations, modes of conduct, and communication styles within an organization, all of which fall under the concept of behavior and decision-making (Gorenak, 2015).

The way that values guide behavior and decision-making and give insight into expectation, modes of conduct, and communication styles, directly relate to the field of HRM. The field of HRM is premised on how to optimally manage and guide employees, within an organization, to improve their well-being, leading to increased productivity and overall better organizational performance (Bowen, 2004; Bednall, et al., 2014). The explanation of the general principles of the HRM field, in relation to organizational values, will be addressed later in the thesis.

Value Congruence

Value congruence between organization and employee is increasingly important for organizations (Edwards, Cable, 2009). Value congruence essentially means that the employee and organization share the same values, i.e. the values of the employee represent a good fit for the organization. There are significant implications depending upon the value congruence of employees and organizations (Collins, Porras, 1991; Dolan, 2011). Value congruence has been linked to higher job satisfaction, minimized turnover, stronger employee-organizational relationship, and organizational commitment (Kouzes, 2003; Collins, Porras, 1991; Edwards, Cable, 2009). Employees who are more committed to the organization inevitably work harder and boost firm performance, as well as exhibit higher job satisfaction (Disiene, Gostautas, 2013).

Edwards and Cable (2009) claim value congruence contributes to the increase of communication and establishing trust with other members in the organization. Improved communication and trust occurs because there are shared

standards regarding what is important within the organization and its employees. Shared standards of values and priorities work to achieve a common framework for interpreting, explaining, and classifying events. Through sharing a similar framework from which to interpret events, there is a reduction in misunderstandings, leading to less potential conflicts among organizational members (Meglino, Ravlin, 1998). Agreeing upon what is important produces enhanced cooperation, and increases the likelihood of shared goals and procedures to achieve those goals. Further, trust is established between members when employees believe the organization is adhering consistently to acceptable principles of behavior, and basic assumptions of what is right and wrong, are shared (Edwards, Cable, 2009).

Given the numerous implications of value congruence between employees and organizations, organizations that have a clear purpose, attract people whose personal purpose fits the organization's purpose (Collins, Porras, 1991). In the current knowledge economy, recruiting and maintaining top talent has become increasingly competitive (Nyhan, 2004). Having a shared mission and values is a competitive edge certain organizations have, when attracting prospective employees (Edwards, Cable, 2009). The extent to which a prospective employee has value congruence with that of the organization is vital. Hiring and training new employees requires a large investment from organizations. If the prospective employee does not share the same values, and appreciate the mission of the organization, the organization may be making a poor investment. Further, value congruence influences employees' decisions about their intent to stay or leave the organization. The primary determining factor of an employee, deciding whether they should stay or leave, has been linked to job satisfaction (Edwards, Cable, 2009).

In conclusion, determining if employees and organizations have value congruence depends on communication. If the mission, vision, and values are not adequately communicated to prospective, or current members, the benefits of value congruence mentioned above may reverse, becoming disadvantages for organizations.

Branding

It is common knowledge that creating a brand identity for organizations is important. Creating and living up to a brand identity entails establishing trust and integrity within the client base and employees (Burmman, Hegner, Riley, 2009). (Burmman, et al. (2009, p. 115) claims “‘brand identity’ is therefore considered as a form of group identity, which is expressed by a set of commonly shared values, competences, origin, vision, communication style and behavior.” In other words, the brand represents how internal members and clientele perceive the mission, vision, and values of an organization. Just as a person’s values communicate a certain perception of a person, the values of an organization signal brand identity and reputation.

Argandoña’s (2003) differentiation between espoused and attributed values illustrates how honesty and integrity are intertwining concepts regarding brand identity. Espoused values refer to the values that are used by top management in formal and written communication. Attributed values are the values that members within the organization regard as truly pertaining and being representative of the organization. While an organization may espouse certain values, the extent to which those values accurately represent the overall culture can be questionable. An organization may espouse diversity and inclusion, yet from testimonies of the employees, contrary evidence may be found. Policies, management decisions, communication style, and behavior may indicate that in fact, the organization does not truly value diversity and create an inclusive environment from employees of different backgrounds.

Brand identity penetrates the issue of integrity and honesty of an organization. Does the organization live up to its values, or are the values simply created to bolster up an image to present to stakeholders and customers? There are many “toothless” values merely conjured to appeal to certain groups, i.e. customers, investors, and stakeholders (Collins, Porras, 1991). Establishing trust and being perceived as fair has implications for organizations. The behavioral economist Daniel Kahneman (2011) provided evidence for how people respond negatively

to firms that they perceive as partaking in unfair behavior. Therefore, it is within the best interest of organizations, not only to create a brand identity, but to make decisions and promote behaviors, that are truly representative of those values.

From an HRM perspective, the behavior and decision-making of employees reflects on the values, and therefore brand identity, of the organization. When individuals interact with an employee representing an organization, their behavior is attributed to the brand (Wentzel, 2009). Organizations want employees to represent the organization's service and values (Lohndorf, Diamantopoulos, 2014). Just as a country's ambassadors represent the interests and culture of a country, the employees' personal behavior and decisions reflect the organization as a whole. The association of shared values, between employees and organizations, further demonstrates the importance of value congruence. The association created between employees and the organization emphasizes the need for communicating clear expectations, regarding the standard of behavior embodied by the values.

4 PRINCIPLES OF HRM AND THE ROLE OF VALUES IN LEARNING IN THE WORKPLACE

4.1 HRM in Organizational Strategy Implementation

The underlying purpose of HRM is to essentially implement the organization's strategic needs through the employees (Schuler, 1992; Talal, 2013; Bowen, 2004; Huselid, 1995). Schuler (1992, p. 18) describes the purpose as "getting everybody from the top of the human organization to the bottom doing things that make the business successful." Every organization has goals and strategies it pursues, in order to succeed and remain competitive in the market. There is an increasing amount of research and evidence, linking the strength of HR departments of organizations, to how well they perform financially (Armstrong, Taylor, 2014; Bednall, et al., 2014; Huselid, 1995). HRM practices aim to promote development, and increase efficiency of employees, that foster and boost firm performance (Schuler, 1995). Organizations, with strong HR departments, offer extensive training and development opportunities to improve skills and increase productivity of employees (Bednall, et al., 2014).

While developing an HRM strategy may seem straightforward and guided, implementing the strategy in the management of all employees throughout the entire organization is a considerable task (Armstrong, Taylor, 2014). Every department, and every individual within a department, is fulfilling a different role within the organization. It is the responsibility of the HR department to coordinate, organize, and ensure that all of these separate actions, are working towards the goals and strategies of the organization (Schuler, 1992). Bowen and Ostroff (2004, p. 203-204) claim that HR practices "must develop employees' skills, knowledge, and motivation such that employees behave in ways that are instrumental to the implementation of a particular strategy."

The implementation of organizational strategies that HRM fulfills leads to understanding the foundational principle of the HRM perspective. The employees working within the firm are the most important asset for an organization

(Armstrong, Taylor, 2014; Huselid, 1995; Schuler, 1992). If an organization takes proper care to invest in its employees, the theory is that the employees will return the favor by being more productive and dedicated to the organization, increasing overall performance of the organization (Armstrong, Taylor, 2014) (Bednall, 2014). If the employees represent the most important asset for an organization's success, then it should be a priority to continuously find ways to advance employee interests (Armstrong, Taylor, 2014). Through advancing the well-being of its employees, organizations are able to better maintain a competitive advantage and benefit financially.

HRM practices could be compared to the conducting of an orchestra. While different sections of instruments may have individual talent and potential, without proper guidance and coordination, beautiful music will fail to be produced. It takes a gifted conductor to manage all of the different moving pieces into a coherent performance. The challenge is similar in organizations to coordinate the different departments in the implementation of strategy that reflects the mission. In this sense, the efforts of the talented conductor represent the HRM strategies of an organization. The values can be viewed as the pieces of music that constitute the reference point of behavior and decision making, guiding the musicians in their individual performances. Understood in this way, the functions values provide for HR departments and managers throughout the organization are of significant importance in light of achieving the mission. Bowen (2004, p. 206) has stated that "HRM system refers to the set of practices adopted and, ideally, should be largely driven by the strategic goals and values of the organization."

4.2 Values and Learning in the Workplace

A central tenet of HRM includes learning and development opportunities for employees. Creating an environment with abundant opportunities to learn new skills and develop their abilities is mutually beneficial for employees and the organization (Armstrong, Taylor, 2014). Organizations benefit from teaching and

training their employees, resulting in improved performance. Further, employees who recognize the opportunities available to learn more and develop their professional skills will be more inclined to remain at an organization, reducing turnover (Argandoña, 2003). Employees benefit from learning and development opportunities as they are able to accrue more skills and knowledge that help them achieve their tasks and responsibilities. Additionally, the more skills and knowledge they acquire, the more they can pursue a career of their interest. Concerning the aim of this thesis, it is important to consider how the communication of values provides learning and development opportunities. In other words, how does the communication of values contribute to adult education and learning in the workplace?

Organizational Transition and Adaptability

The 21st century workplace increasingly demands workers to be able to adapt to new organizations and solve new challenges that arise (Laitinen, et. al., 2017). The communication of values assists new members in adapting to a new community of practice within an organization. Lave and Wenger (1991, p. 98) describe a community of practice as “a set of relations among persons, activity, and world, over time and in relation to other tangential and overlapping communities of practice.” Essentially, the process of entering a new organization and transitioning from the periphery to the mainstream in the community of practice improves employees’ adaptability. The ability to adapt to new working situations efficiently and sufficiently is a valuable skill. Most workers will change organizations several times in life, necessitating the development and skill of transitioning to new communities of practice.

Through the communication of values, the transition to a new community of practice can be made easier. Given how informative values are in regards to the mission and vision, behavior and decision making expectations, and the culture of an organization, their communication is significant for new employees on the periphery. The faster new employees on the periphery can transition to the

mainstream in the community of practices, the more beneficial it is for the organization. Values and their communication provide the perfect stimulus for the transition to a new organization.

Developing Competencies and Expertise

In regards to developing professional competencies and expertise, organizational values are also beneficial. Once employees adapt to the organization and develop routines, they acquire specialized skills and expertise. They encounter different tasks and situations that build up knowledge about how to approach and achieve these tasks (Fuller, Unwin, 2004). The knowledge acquired for how to best respond to certain tasks amounts to specialization, i.e. they are able to fulfill their role with a certain level of expertise depending on the amount of prior experience.

However, there is a danger with developing routines and repeatedly performing the same practices. The danger exists through becoming insensitive to unexpected or abnormal occurrences in the tasks they have to perform (Schön, 1983). In other words, an employee has approached a certain task in a specific manner to such an extent that when a new situation requiring a change of approach arises, the employee is unable to make an adjustment. Their reliance on previous experiences and expertise restricts their ability to change (Schön, 1983). Reflecting upon the organization's values can help employees refocus and refresh their understanding of how they could approach an unfamiliar problem. Since values can prompt thinking about the organization as a whole, employees can benefit from widening their perspective and reconsider challenging problems in new ways.

Reflecting on Professional Identity

Organizational values can further support the education and development of adults in the workplace through providing the impetus for reflection about professional identity. Values can prompt employees to reflect on their role within

the organization and critically think about how their role works towards achieving the mission. Wenger (1998) claims through reflection, individuals can explore potential for agency and personal growth and comprehend their experiences in relation to the construction of a personal narrative. For example, as organizations communicate their values, employees are able to reflect on what values are important for them. In regards to future employment and career aspirations, employees are able to build a better understanding for the kind of organization that would be in congruence with their values. In other words, the communication of values provides employees opportunities for personal reflection about their role and professional identity within an organization.

5 ORGANIZATIONAL HRM COMMUNICATION THEORY

5.1 Organizational Communication

Each organization has different strategies to communicate their values to employees. The strategies chosen by the organization depend on different variables: number of employees, mission and vision, and hierarchical structure (Bednall, et al., 2014). While there are numerous considerations to take into account for choosing how to communicate values, there are certain foundational principles that describe the goal and nature of HRM communication. Bowen and Ostroff (2004) outline certain key features of HRM practices, that communicate to employees, what behavior and standard of conduct is desired and expected by organizations. Bowen and Ostroff (2004, p. 207) claim, “HRM practices can be viewed as communications from employer to employee.”

Through these key foundational principles of HRM communication, organizations guide employees to elicit behavior that aligns with achieving their strategic goals. While Bowen and Ostroff’s (2004) theoretical framework encompasses other HRM practices, besides the communication of values, there is a common goal of guiding and eliciting desired behavior in employees. Organizational values provide a basis for how employees are supposed to behave and make decisions, and they are arguably at the center of HRM practices. Therefore, HRM practices and organizational values, will be understood as synonymous within this theoretical framework. Regarding the data analysis of this thesis, the fundamental principles of HRM communication outlined by Bowen and Ostroff (2004), will constitute certain themes and categories. Therefore, a comprehensive and complete explanation of Bowen and Ostroff’s (2004) theoretical framework is needed.

5.2 Theoretical Framework of Value Communication

Three foundational principles make up a strong HRM system: distinctiveness, consistency, and consensus (Bowen, Ostroff, 2004). Distinctiveness refers to HRM practices being visible, legitimate, and comprehensible. Consistency regards the extent to which HRM practices are presented consistently, and in the same way over time. Finally, consensus refers to general agreement among employees about how they perceive HRM practices within the organization. These principles also include various subset features, and when combined together, provide a theoretical understanding of HRM communication. The following section will consist of the subset features of HRM communication in more detail, according to Bowen and Ostroff's (2004) study.

Distinctiveness

Distinctiveness refers to how HRM practices are ostentatious in the organizational environment and capture the interest of employees (Bowen, Ostroff, 2004). This distinctiveness of HRM practices is made up of four components: visibility, understandability, legitimacy, and relevance. Distinctiveness is the most relevant foundational principle of Bowen and Ostroff's (2004) model to the communication of values within organizations. The four subset components of distinctiveness describe the strategies and methods where organizations provide opportunities for employees to interpret and make sense of values. Further, the subset features of distinctiveness provide evidence for investigating the extent to which value communication strategies are effective. The four following sections will provide an in depth understanding of the foundational principle of distinctiveness based on Bowen and Ostroff's (2004) theoretical model.

Visibility

The principle of visibility refers to how HRM practices are observable and salient within the organization (Bowen, Ostroff, 2004). Visibility is a basic prerequisite for giving employees the opportunity recognize and make sense of what is ex-

pected from them. The more visible and salient the practices are throughout employee's tasks and work routines, the greater the visibility. For example, if an organization makes their values visible through the hiring, training, and throughout time spent working, visibility will increase. Contrarily, if all employees are not exposed to HRM practices, certain employees would not have the opportunity to interpret and make sense of values. A challenge for organizations is communicating their values to all employees. Depending on the size of the organization, the hierarchical structure, and HR department, the extent to which values will reach every single employee will vary. The visibility of value communication indicates the extent to which an organization is making an effort to communicate values. For this research, the participant's ability to talk about and explain the different communication strategies will provide an idea of how salient and recognizable, i.e. visible, the values are.

Understandability

The next subset feature of distinctiveness is understandability. This refers to the extent of how well various HRM practices are understood and not taken to be ambiguous (Bowen, Ostroff, 2004). The understandability feature is relatively straightforward. If employees have a difficult time comprehending HRM practices (i.e. values), there will be a higher variance of interpretations, hindering consensus among organizational members. Throughout the different methods of value communication, whether written, spoken, or conveyed in another manner, the message should be easy to interpret and make sense of.

Understandability is central to the aim of this research. The ability for organizations to develop strategies and communicate values that are easily understood by employees is vital regarding their effectiveness. If employees have difficulty understanding the values, it would indicate that the organization's value communication strategies are not effective. Employees would be unable to make sense of behavior and decision making desired by the organization, therefore hindering their ability to learn and develop competencies.

Legitimacy of Authority

The third feature of distinctiveness is legitimacy. Legitimacy refers to how HR practices are supported and endorsed by figures of authority within the organization (Bowen, Ostroff, 2004). HRM practices, i.e. organizational values, can be far more effective if they are perceived as formally sanctioned behaviors that are endorsed through the authority of leadership. This endorsement of authority could take the form of top management and various authority figures in the organization actively voicing their support and referencing the values throughout their managerial responsibilities. Employees occupying leadership positions in the hierarchical structure of the organization have potential to add credibility and significance to the values from the perspective of other employees. This demonstration of support by leadership signals to other employees that learning and behaving in accordance with the values is important. If leadership in an organization fails to endorse and uphold the values, it signals to other employees that the values may be negligible.

Relevance

The fourth feature of the foundational principle of distinctiveness is relevance. Relevance refers to how members perceive the HRM practices, and this study in particular, how values are practices that contribute to a goal or interest of the organization (Bowen, Ostroff, 2004). Relevance addresses the issue of congruence between individual and organizational values and goals. Not only should employees understand how values are working towards achieving organizational goals, but also see how the values fit into their individual role and responsibilities. In other words, relevance underpins an employee's understanding of how values are incorporated into how the organization functions as a whole. If the values are not perceived as relevant, it demonstrates that employees are failing to connect how values are integral to the success or pursuit of organizational goals. A failure to understand relevance can lead to a lack of motivation because they are not confident about how, e.g. values, contribute to an attainment of a certain goal or task. In the scope of this research, investigating how participants

understand values to be embodied into their personal responsibilities, as well as the organization as a whole, reveals how effectively values are being communicated.

Consistency

Consistency is the second foundational principle of communication that is essential to the creation of a strong situation. While distinctiveness gives legitimacy to HRM practices, makes them visible, and easy to understand, it is not sufficient in creating employee attributions for what behaviors are expected and rewarded. Consistency is needed to provide evidence for employees to clearly perceive the cause and effect of certain behaviors. Bowen and Ostroff (2004, p. 201) state that “a consistent pattern of instrumentalities across HRM practices, time, and employees that link specific events and effects further enhances the likelihood that desired specific behaviors will be displayed.” Members desire consistency within organizations. Cognitive dissonance can occur if practices and inferred messages from HRM practices do not resemble a coherent cause and effect pattern. Further, consistent HRM practices should result in increased firm performance because the practices promote and reward employee behavior that work to achieve strategic goals of the organization. The three following sections provide a detailed understanding of consistency of HRM communication from Bowen and Ostroff’s (2004) model.

Instrumentality

The first subset feature of consistency is instrumentality. It refers to employees achieving an unambiguous understanding of certain behaviors and their consequences within the organization (Bowen, Ostroff, 2004). In other words, employees need to perceive the consequences of behavior and decision making. Combined with relevance, employees comprehend how certain behaviors result in favorable or unfavorable consequences. Instrumentality is important because it entails how employees anticipate how behaviors will be received within the organization, therefore providing an empirical basis for deciding which behavior to

elicit in the future. Instrumentality further demonstrates the clarity and transparency of value communication within organizations. If the values are being communicated clearly and effectively, it is likely employees will perceive the meaning and significance of the values unambiguously. While instrumentality is vital to the communication of values, it is particularly hard to assess with a limited number of research participants.

Validity

Validity represents the second subset feature of consistency. When creating a strong situation and organizational climate, the HRM practices need to follow through with what they purport to do (Bowen, Ostroff, 2004). Put differently, does the organization follow through and act in accordance with its values, or are the values only for show? If an organization espouses a certain value, and employees observe that their practices do not reflect the purported value, validity will be questioned. Validity and legitimacy are comparable features. However, validity refers more to the function of the values, rather than how they are supported by top management and HR department. For example, organizations may value risk taking, however employees may determine that the HRM system rewards “playing it safe” more. In other words, the purported cause and effect relationship of behaviors, deriving from values, needs to be perceived as valid from the perspective of the employees. Therefore, the behavior, decision making, environment, and work culture of organizations, should be in congruence with the espoused values of the organization. If the espoused values do not match the attributed values of the employees, validity will be damaged.

Consistent HRM Messages

The final feature of consistency is consistent HRM messages that express stability and compatibility deriving from HRM practices (Bowen, Ostroff, 2004). There are three types of consistency that are particularly important to communication. First, there needs to be consistency between the goals and values that top management espouses and attributed goals and values of the employees. Consistency

among HRM practices in themselves is the second type of consistency. This refers to the different practices complementing and aligning with each other to work achieving strategic objectives. Lastly, HRM practices need to be consistent over a period of time. The longer values and attributed behaviors have been stable and consistent, the more employees will come to know what is expected of them, and correctly anticipate the appropriate according decision. To conclude, not only do the values need to be consistently communicated over a long period of time, they need to reinforce a similar message. Therefore, changes in leadership and executives can be particularly challenging for employees, as the vision and values may change according to new leadership.

Consensus

The last foundational feature of HRM communication according to Bowen and Ostroff's (2004) theoretical model is consensus. Consensus is an agreement among employees about the cause and effect relationship of HRM practices (Bowen, Ostroff, 2004). Consensus relates to the idea of congruence, i.e. the extent to which values are interpreted and shared among members within an organization. In the scope of this research, consensus helps reveal the extent to which value communication strategies are effective. If the values are agreed upon, similarly understood, and embodied in fair practices, it indicates effective value communication. Contrarily, if values are interpreted and understood differently among employees, it suggests communication strategies are not effective. One of the main goals of value communication is to make sure there is an agreement and congruence among what values mean and represent within the organization.

It is important to note consistency and consensus are different, they are interdependent principles of HRM communication. When there is a lack of consistency, it leads to a lack of consensus. Further, when there is lack of consensus, there is less probability to achieve consistency. Agreement among principal HRM decision makers, i.e. management and HR employees, and fairness constitute the subset features of consensus. The two following sections describe Bowen and Ostroff's (2004) third and final foundational principle of consensus.

Agreement

Agreement represents the first part of consensus. Agreement among principal HRM decision makers signifies the extent to which the chosen goals and according HRM practices are similarly understood (Bowen, Ostroff, 2004). Essentially, if there is an agreement regarding organizational goals and according strategies to achieve those goals, similar messages will be sent throughout the organization, increasing the potential for consensus among employees. Further, agreement among practices and goals adds to the legitimacy of communication. If employees perceive there to be agreement among top management and HR executives, then it is more likely they will infer the organization is truly working towards their strategic goals. A lack of agreement, especially among leadership and management, has the potential to increase ambiguity in organizational values. If values are being communicated and reinforced in different ways, employees will likely reach different conclusions about desired behavior and decision making.

Fairness

Fairness constitutes the other subset feature of consensus. Fairness refers to the employees' perceptions about the extent to which HRM practices are equally distributed and justified. If employees perceive HRM practices as being fair, there is a greater chance they will accept the practices and see them as legitimate. However, in the scope of this research, fairness is difficult to assess, given the study is not longitudinal in nature. Further, only interviewing participants in positions of leadership restricts the ability to ascertain the extent to which values are communicated to every employee of an organization. In other words, depending on the type of position and department an employee works in, the extent of value communication may vary. In a quantitative study, Reliability and Validity are subsections of this section. They focus on such themes as the repeatability of used indicators, internal logic and links to other indicators that measure the same concept. In a qualitative thesis, you do not automatically need to use such subheadings as reliability – equivalence, transferability, verifiability. The reliability of the study is also reflected upon in the Discussion section. In a quantitative study, the

Discussion can address such issues as the study design and how representative the sample is. In a qualitative study, you can reflect on the performed analysis and the participants in the study, just to name a few themes.

6 RESEARCH METHODS

The following chapter will explain the research topic and approach, and justify the methodology used through the process of planning and conducting the research. First, the research design will be discussed, including the strategy and framework for creating a successful research project. Next, a valid rationale for the data collection process will be stated, including descriptions about how research participants were sampled. Then a detailed description of how the interviews were carried out will be addressed. Additionally, the approach used for the data analysis will be explained. Lastly, the validity and credibility of the research approach will be discussed.

6.1 Methodological Approach

This research attempts to investigate the different strategies that organizations have to communicate their values to employees through the perspective of employees. While organizations have their espoused values, i.e. the values they claim to have, understanding how they are communicated within an organization, should provide some insight into the extent to which values are truly representative of the organization and its mission. Through accessing the perspective of employees, who hold different positions throughout different organizational hierarchies, the researcher aims to investigate the effectiveness of value communication methods. The investigation of value communication should also reveal how seriously organizations aim to incorporate values into the improvement and development of their employees.

The researcher believed the most reliable data would be collected through interviewing employees, and gathering data regarding how values are communicated within an organization. Certain insights may only be accessed and revealed through detailed, qualitative methods, where employees take the time to discuss organizational values in depth. Further, the interviews give the opportunity for employees to express personal thoughts and opinions about values in

general within their organization. Through analyzing how employees speak about organizational values, certain conclusions about the effectiveness of communication may be drawn. Analysis of how effective certain value communication strategies have been, in the participating organizations, could potentially provide valuable feedback and act as a formative evaluation (Patton, 2002). The formative evaluation could be used by organizations that may desire to improve their communication strategy in the future from an HRM perspective.

The following questions are the two central research questions this thesis aims to investigate.

1. *How are organizational values communicated within an organization?*
2. *How effective are the communication methods?*

Rationale for Selecting Qualitative Method

The researcher used qualitative methods approach to carry out the research. According to Patton (2002, p. 21), “the task for the qualitative researcher is to provide a framework within which people can respond in a way that represents accurately and thoroughly their points of view about the world, or that part of the world about which they are talking.” In relation to this research, employees within organizations are providing an account of how they have experienced and perceived the communication of values. The data to be collected demanded rich, in depth responses in order to develop an accurate and comprehensive understanding of employees’ perspectives. Qualitative methods permit in depth and detailed research, as they are not restricted by predetermined categories of analysis, therefore enabling participants the opportunity to reveal depth, openness, and discrete details regarding topic of inquiry (Patton, 2002). In other words, qualitative methods are able to achieve the depth required to develop insights and conduct credible data analysis, especially for subjects as complex as organizational values and their communication within organizations.

Research Participants

The first step in the data collection process was finding organizations that would be willing to participate in the research, i.e. following the sampling criteria of finding managers or employees with managerial responsibilities in organizations. Finding organizations willing to sacrifice the working hours of their employees, to participate in the research, was exceedingly difficult. What ensued was the contacting of organizations through snowball sampling. This occurs when participants refer others who could potentially participate in the research (Patton, 2002). After communicating the research plan with a prominent member of the HR department or top management, the member provided contacts of other members within the organization, who fit the sampling criteria, in each organization.

Organiza- tion	A	B	C	D
Industry	Travel/Tou- rism	Healthcare	IT	Healthcare
# of Em- ployees	500+	150	500+	30
Participant Positions	A1. General Manager A2. Front Of- fice Manager	B3. Founder & CEO B4. Medical Procure- ment Manager B5. Manager of Community Rela- tions	C6. Founder & Former CEO	D7. CEO

Four different organizations participated in the research. They will be referred to as organizations A, B, C, and D in order to ensure the anonymity of the research participants. Organization A is large, with over 500 employees. Based in

the Nordic countries, they are in the private sector, specifically in the traveling and tourism industry. The members interviewed from Organization A were a general manager and a front office manager based in Finland. Organization B is medium sized, with around 150 employees. They are a non profit organization, involved in the healthcare industry, based in the United States. The members interviewed included the founder & chief executive officer (CEO), a medical procurement manager, and manager of community relations. Organization C is large, having over 500 employees. They are based in the United States and operate in the private sector, specifically in the IT industry. The member interviewed from Organization C was the founder & former CEO. They still serve as chairperson of the board. Organization D is small, employing around 30 workers. The organization is based in the United States and they operate in the healthcare industry. The participant interviewed was the CEO of the organization for 15 years, although had recently retired 2 years ago.

The amount of experience participants had at their respective organizations varied from three years to thirty years. All participants were employed in positions involving the management and oversight of other employees, therefore adhering to the population sampling preference.

Data Collection

The research was collected through interviews on an individual basis. Interviews were conducted from January through March, 2019. The interviews ranged from thirty minutes to one hour in length. There were no limiting factors regarding the amount of time for each interview besides the need for the participant to resume their normal tasks at their organization. At the beginning of each interview, the researcher briefly introduced the topic and clarified to the participant that they had freedom to ask clarification or repetition of any questions. The researcher asked questions that followed the pattern of the interview guide. Each interview was recorded and transcribed according to sections of the interview the researcher deemed relevant to the study. Transcriptions omitted pauses, sighs, and other insignificant breaks throughout the interviews. All transcriptions were

saved and stored on the basis of data protection laws in accordance with carrying out scientific research. The following section provides more detail into the format of the interview on the basis of the guide.

Interview Guide

An interview guide was provided to participants in order to inform them of certain themes and questions they could expect to speak about. These themes ensured the participants were guided to talk about and explain similar points of interests. Without consistency of similar themes, data analysis would prove difficult. However, the themes and questions required to be asked in an open ended manner. Patton (2002) maintains that open ended questions allow the participants being interviewed to take the conversation in the direction of their choosing and to express themselves using the words they deem fit to convey their perspective. In other words, the interview guide provided consistency to relevant themes in the research, yet the participants had the freedom to pursue and answer these themes in the depth and detail they deemed necessary.

Of the types of interviews available to qualitative research, the interview guide provided the optimal, semi-structured style. Patton (2002) believes that the interview guide highlights certain topics and subject areas with which the interviewer freely explores, probes, and asks questions that illuminate a particular subject. In other words, semi-structured interviews provide the perfect combination of participants responding to several consistent inquiries, yet having the freedom to explain what they think is significant or relevant to the aim of the research.

Not only was the interview guide sent before the interview to participants, but the questions were ordered in such a way as to make the participant feel comfortable in the interview. Establishing a rapport between the participant and interviewer was accomplished through beginning with relatively easy questions before progressing to more complex subjects. The abstract nature of values requires critical thinking and reflection on the part of the participant. Therefore, it was sensible that the interviews began with simple questions, such as describing

the position of the employee and their general responsibilities. Next, questions referred to how the organization communicated values to the participant in the hiring process, training process, and in further experiences. Then questions probed the extent to which the participants communicate values to other members of the organization and specifically how this communication takes place. Further, several general questions about values and the organization as a whole were asked, once the participant had settled into the interview and felt more comfortable expressing thoughts and opinions. Lastly, the researcher asked each participant if they had anything that they would like to add that the researcher may have missed that would be relevant to the research.

It is important to mention that the interviews at times did not follow the research guide in terms of order of the topics and questions listed. Even though the interviews did not follow the order of the guide at times, the variance of through which the subjects were covered suggests the researcher allowed the participant the flexibility to address what was important and relevant from their perspective.

6.2 Data Analysis

Analytic induction was chosen as the method for the analysis of the data. Analytic induction begins with a theory driven approach, i.e. which is in principle a deductive approach, that provides an existing framework from which to organize the data (Patton, 2002). Analytic induction, primarily a deductive approach, was chosen partially due to the study's basis in a plethora of literature regarding communication theory. Instead of focusing on specific value communication strategies, a communication theory in the context of HRM that adequately describes principles, i.e. the general ideas behind, value communication was more ideally suited for this research.

The theoretical framework of HRM communication was provided by Bowen and Ostroff (2004). Therefore, the data was initially reduced and displayed in features of Bowen and Ostroff's theoretical framework, comprising of 3 main principles of HRM communication, totaling 9 categories. The reduction of the data refers to simplifying and focusing on relevant themes within the data (Patton, 2002). The transcriptions were read several times through to become immersed in the data and identify all relevant passages, and to increase reliability (Patton, 2002). First, each of the three organizations were individually fit into the framework, providing a profile based on separate theoretical features. Deriving from the profiles, conclusions were drawn regarding the extent to which each organization exhibited different communication strategies resembling the categories.

After the data had been initially reduced and displayed in accordance with the theoretical framework, the data was analyzed through an inductive approach. While the first part of analytic induction resembles a deductive approach, an inductive approach is needed to identify any emerging themes that come from the data (Patton, 2002; Creswell, 2013). While the theoretical framework provided the initial model from which to analyze the data, inductive analysis was needed to identify any themes and relevant points the theoretical framework may not have encompassed. Therefore, the researcher had the possibility to become aware of categories and themes emerging solely from the data, of which previous research had not brought to attention (Patton, 2002).

7 FINDINGS

The findings are presented organization by organization, for each organization taking part in the study, following the theoretical framework. The framework for analysis is structured in accordance with significant themes found in Bowen and Ostroff's (2004) HRM communication theory. While Bowen and Ostroff's theory incorporated communication through various HRM practices, the following framework was constructed specifically in regards to how organizations communicate their values. It is important to mention that the values adopted by the organizations are not controlled, assessed, or judged as such in this study. The focus of the study aims to investigate the extent to which organizations make an effort to communicate their values and have their employees learn, adopt, and apply them to their work. Due to the specific aim of this research, certain themes in Bowen and Ostroff's theory have been modified in order to incorporate other important findings that the researcher deemed significant.

The framework for each organization consists of three overarching themes: distinctiveness, consistency, and consensus. Following the framework by Bowen and Ostroff (2004), presented thoroughly in the review of literature, each of the overarching themes contain several subcategories, of which represent different aspects of the larger theme.

Distinctiveness referred to the extent to which value communication strategies were evident, understandable, and incorporated into the functions of employees and the organization as a whole. Distinctiveness incorporated the subcategories: visibility, understandability, legitimacy of authority, and relevance. Visibility referred to specific ways that organizations communicated their values, i.e. the different opportunities employees had to make sense of what the values were. Understandability described the extent to which these communication strategies were effective in conveying the values to employees as well as general statements about how values were understood throughout the entire organization. Legitimacy of authority represented how values were communicated and reinforced by executives and management. Lastly, relevance encompassed the different ways values were incorporated into personal responsibilities and how the organization functioned as a whole. In other words, the notion

of relevance included how values affected employees in fulfilling their role within the organization, specifically from the manager's perspective. Additionally, relevance included how the organization as a whole benefited from values, i.e. how values were important to the organization's overall success.

The second overarching theme, consistency, encompassed how the organizational actions and environment were truly representative of the organization as a whole. Consistency was constituted by validity and consistent HRM messages. Validity provided evidence regarding how the organization's espoused values were embodied in actions based on the perceptions of the participants. Consistent HRM messages identified the frequency of implementing the communication of values over time. The last overarching theme, consensus, represented agreement regarding the extent to which the values between the organization and employees were shared and agreed upon. Consensus included agreement among HRM decision makers and value congruence. Agreement among HRM decision makers consisted of findings relating to how values were chosen, established, and incorporated into the functions of the organization. Value congruence represented the extent to which values were shared between employees and the organization and the resulting implications.

7.1 Organization A

Organization A is a large travel and tourism organization with over 500 employees, based in the Nordic countries. The two members interviewed were a general manager and a front office manager located in Finland.

Visibility

Values were visible in several ways within Organization A. When employees are hired, they had a two week training process, in which documents and explanations of the values were given. Additionally, experienced employees within the organization came and talked about how they incorporated the values into their work. Values were also present during monthly meetings, i.e. displayed

on powerpoint slides and incorporated into discussion between employees. Further, one on one meetings were held, where employees were encouraged to speak about their personal development regarding value based behaviors. Prior to the one on one meeting, questionnaires would be given to employees, allowing them to express questions and feedback about value related issues. There was also a door where employees would post sticky notes, praising each other for doing "something we want to celebrate." Both participants from Organization A stated they would communicate the values to employees through leading by example. A1 stressed the importance of leading by example through stating that "I have to make sure I bring the values... that they will know it so they can lead their teams the best way."

Understandability

Both participants reiterated the importance of leadership in the communication of values. In response to asking if leadership is most successfully communication strategy, A2 strongly agreed and replied "yes, yes, definitely." Both participants believed informal conversations and enabling feedback moments were effective ways to communicate the values. This was expressed by A1 explaining how "it's kind of feedback culture that we can always ask." A1 explained how they had previously been managing one hotel, now they were responsible for two, which made the communication of values more difficult.

"The team was smaller so it was easier because I knew everybody personally and I could really easily say that you could try to approach this value from this point." Participant 1

Participant 1 was responsible for overseeing the rebranding of an entire hotel and transitioning to a new company culture. They claimed "there is so much information... it doesn't happen in one moment." Additionally, they mentioned the challenge of "building trust" among the workers for adopting a new process and way of doing things. They acknowledged that they would have to

review the values later due to the amount of information during the transition to the new organization. Lastly, both the participants mentioned their previous organizations communicated their values less clearly than Organization A.

Legitimacy

The participants from Organization A connected leadership and the communication of values multiple times. Whenever referring to a colleague occupying a higher hierarchical position within the organization, both participants stated that they would always incorporate the values into what they talked about. Further, they also mentioned how leadership was important and to lead by example by “truly living the values.”

Relevance

Both participants identified values as being important for achieving the mission. A1 said values are “part of our everyday work.” In relation to achieving the mission, they both explained how it was their responsibility to be a good leader, so they could show employees how they can incorporate the values. The following quotation highlights how the participants identified the importance of incorporating values into their responsibilities as managers.

“It’s good to know those (values) because the staff members will ask questions. They need guidance. They need managing. They need to know all that is required of them. And you also need to inspire them to then to be able to collaborate and cooperate.” Participant 1

Validity

Both participants referred to their specific branch of the organization receiving awards from the media in response to whether they believed Organization A was truly living up to its values. The following quotation explains how A1 believed Organization A lived up to its values by the fact that employees can trust

the organization to take care of them and in return, the employees will reciprocate with wanting to perform well.

“They (the employees) can trust Organization A as that we pay our salaries and everything correct and we obey all the laws, and that we want to take good care of our workers and then also that we can trust our workers that they want to also be good for our company.” Participant 1

To provide incentives for certain behavior, A1 referred to the sticky notes posted on the door as a “win win situation.” Employees would be recognized for performing their job well, such as treating guests exceptionally well or inspiring a friendly competition with a colleague that earns the organization more money. The participants from Organization A described the rewards as “all those things we want to celebrate are based on our values.” In other words, the sticky notes represented certain behavior and decision making that resulted in the employee and organization mutually benefitting.

Consistent HRM Messages

A1 referred to understanding and learning about the values “doesn’t happen in one moment.” They said the meetings, where mission, vision, and values were always talked about, gave the chance to provide feedback moments. Every employee receives a questionnaire, giving the chance to inform management about their feelings regarding the work environment and leadership, based on the mission and values.

7.2 Organization B

Organization B is medium sized organization with approximately 150 employees. Organization B is a non profit organization operating in the healthcare industry in the United States. There were three members interviewed, consisting

of the founder & chief executive officer (CEO), a medical procurement manager, and a manager of community relations.

Visibility

Before prospective employees went through the recruitment and interview process, the HR department would send an email, informing them to review the values. During the actual interview, the hiring manager would ask interviewees to explain the values and provide examples of how values could be embodied in organizational practices. If the organization decided they wanted to hire the employee, they were presented with a document declaring they will uphold these values upon agreeing to work there.

The values were also visible in the onboarding or orientation process. The CEO met with each new employee individually during their first week at the organization specifically regarding the mission, vision, and values. Like the interview, the meeting involved discussing how the values would be demonstrated in specific examples throughout different departments of the organization. Further, there were meetings with the hiring manager and HR manager where the focus was “talking the values through.” The orientation process also involved meeting every department head of the organization and discussing how their role fitted into the overall mission that Organization B works towards fulfilling.

The values were also present after the orientation process. First, there was always a value of the month. Depending on the value of the month, employees were encouraged to recognize and share different examples of that particular value in action. Second, the values were present in all of the meetings. Whether it was specific department meetings, one on one meetings with managers, or whole team meetings, values were always on the agenda. There was a specific time allotted for employees to specifically “call out” an example, describing how they have recently seen a colleague performing an action or task that embodies one of the five values of the organization. Further, there were physical

sticky notes and an internal communication system where employees were encouraged to write about and share how the actions of other employees embody the values. Values were also found on the name badges that employees wear. Further, all three mentioned the importance that the communication of values does not resemble top down communication. All members were actively taking part in identifying and calling out values in action.

Understandability

All three participants in Organization B explained how “talking the values through” and identifying “values in action” was the most effective way for employees to understand the values. Providing opportunities through meetings, sticky notes, and informal discussions where values were grounded in concrete examples, represented the most effective way to convey understanding to employees. B4 referred to how it would generally take some time for employees to grasp the concept of identifying values in practice. B3 believed that while not everyone may remember all of the values, they could certainly remember some and be able to provide examples of what they look like in practice. It was unanimously acknowledged that it was easier to involve and reach all employees in the communication and discussion of values due to the smaller size of the organization.

When referring to how well the values were understood within the organization, all three participants related their level of perceived understanding to previous places they had been working at. B4 remarked upon the difficulty of employees grasping what values meant at their past organization, which advertised 12 different core values. “Who the hell can remember 12 words?” This quote demonstrates how B4 perceived that certain organizations only had values that looked good and were not actually representative of the organization. If the values were adequately communicated and understood by employees, B4 thought there was no possible way there could be as many as 12 different val-

ues. Both B3 and B4 mentioned that some organizations had good looking posters listing the different values, yet this had nothing to do concerning the extent to which employees understood and incorporated values into their work.

Legitimacy of Authority

As stated before, each newly hired employee would personally meet with the CEO and discuss the values during the orientation process. Further, the values were discussed with the HR manager and hiring manager during orientation. Additionally, the performance evaluations employees underwent with their manager would include references and feedback regarding the values. Lastly, signing the contract that the employee would uphold values illustrated the legitimacy of the values.

Relevance

All participants in Organization B referred to the values as being inherent to their work and achieving the mission. Further, values provided an important reference from which to appraise and coach team members regarding their behavior and performance. When evaluating certain behaviors, B4 remarked upon the absence of data, making it more difficult to evaluate and give feedback, as compared to statistical performance related issues. They claimed values provided the reference from which to coach and train employees in their behavior.

"Whenever there's recognition or offering of opportunities, constructive feedback, it's always value based." Participant 4

There was also emphasis on how employees represented the brand and reputation of the organization, and therefore needed to uphold the values. Participant 3 mentioned how a good news story might reach five people, but a bad one could go viral, resulting in serious consequences that could affect the organization's ability to achieve its mission.

Validity

Further, all three participants from Organization B stated that the organization had a strong reputation in the public in that their employees are known to “go above and beyond.” The values were described as “hardwired within the organization” and “so pervasive that it’s like in the drinking water.”

All participants acknowledged that there was an expectation that the values will be upheld by all employees. This was demonstrated through employees having to go through formal evaluations, in which they would write down examples of how they have upheld the values. Further, employees were “spot tested” about the values. At times, they had to explain certain values and what they were understood to mean. Participant 3 mentioned that when the values were last updated, every single employee had the opportunity to contribute to choosing values that were truly representative of the organization.

Consistent HRM Messages

B3 and B4 had been working for the organization for a combined 45 years, and both stated that the values were currently communicated much better. They both said that it has been a long journey to build and establish a system that works in which the values are communicated effectively. All three participants mentioned the importance of keeping the values “alive.” To keep the values “alive,” there were constant efforts to reference and identify concrete examples of values in practice, such as the value of the month concept. Through meetings, performance evaluations, sticky notes, and other strategies to incorporate values, the goal was to “keep values in front of people.” Participants 3 and 4 mentioned the importance of not being “one and done.” They believed it was easy to introduce the values, but to sustain and keep them alive was where the work really lied.

Value Congruence

B4 and B5 both adamantly stressed how important it was for employees to have their values aligned with the organization. They claimed without value alignment, employees would hinder the performance of other employees, negatively impacting the work towards achieving the mission. B5 stated that the values and mission represent the number one reason that the organization attracted and retained employees.

7.3 Organization C

Organization C is large organization with over 500 employees. They are operating in the IT industry and are based in the United States. The single member interviewed from Organization C was the founder & former CEO.

Visibility

While Organization C had listed its mission, vision, and values on the company website, the presence of values, in words and writing, were not mentioned. In response to the ways Organization C showed its values, the participant stated “our values have been evident and expanded upon from day one.” Firstly, they have get togethers, meetings, and parties for their employees. Further, they allowed “flex time” for their employees to have the freedom to attend important family events. Referring to the new office building, the participant said “the facility itself was a statement toward accommodating the interests of our employees.” Additionally, they created a health and well being program designed to benefit their employees. There was also an orientation process for each new employee, where a combination of the HR department and managers would go through a series of formal explanations about “who we were, who we are, and who we are going to be.”

Understandability

The participant stated “actions speaks louder than words” in regards to how the values were understood at the organization. They indicated employees

could infer from all of the different ways the organization had worked to benefit from, in terms of understanding how important the values were.

Legitimacy of Authority

The formal orientation of explanations about “how the company runs and how it feels” came from management and the HR department. However, when speaking about the values, the participant claimed “those words evolved and quite honestly a lot of those words are coming from within the organization, not necessarily from me personally.”

Relevance

The participant linked the success of the organization the values. The following quotation encapsulates how the participant believed that the company would not have succeeded if they did not have any values. In other words, C6 believed the values were a vital contributor to the growth and success that Organization C had experienced.

“They are explained how the company is how the company has arrived to its current status and what’s involved and why we’re where we are at.” Participant 6

Further, they stated the values of the organization helped retain employees, which is especially hard in the IT industry. C6 explained in the following quote how volatile the IT industry in regards to how employees move and change organizations quickly. “There is such movement in this business it’s incredible.” In other words, C6 expressed the novel success of Organization C’s ability to maintain employees in an industry with such high employee turnover. They expressed doubt how other computer businesses had been able to maintain high employee satisfaction and retain talented workers.

Validity

The participant gave evidence of Organization C exhibiting values through how employees are treated as if they were family. They referred to the same level of respect and treatment of how they would treat their family was how they approached treating employees within Organization C. The following quote further demonstrates how other employees shared the same beliefs about the familial values within Organization C.

“When someone joins the organization, they will use words like “joining the family.” Well, maybe they don’t like that, but that’s what it’s like. We are family here.” Participant 6

As further testament of the organization's values, the participant referred to the number of employees who had stayed for so many years, especially in an industry as competitive as the IT industry.

Consistent HRM Messages

Responding to how the values have changed over the years, the participant stated “I don’t think our values have changed from day 1. I mean that. I would notice if they have.”

7.4 Organization D

Organization D is small, employing approximately 30 workers. The organization is based in the United States and they operate in the healthcare industry. The single participant interviewed was the CEO of the organization for 15 years.

Visibility

During the interview and onboarding process, the values were talked through in conversation with the hiring manager and supervisor for the department.

Employees were also given an employee handbook which explained certain expectations and standards of behavior. Organization D also has monthly meetings, including board and department meetings, where values were “reinforced” and specifics for how the mission will be achieved were discussed. Further, posters were displayed “prominently” throughout the office. Additionally, the participant emphasized that values were present in the leadership, i.e. both in “what they do as well as what they say.” In the following quotation, D7 explained how demonstrating commitment to the mission, as a leader, is incredibly important.

“I always came in all three shifts on Christmas for example because I needed to let the employees that weren’t with their families know that I knew that they were there and appreciated in on behalf of. And so there are things that you can do as a leader that reinforce the mission which is to be the best.” Participant 7

D7 believed that not only do leaders have to be vocal about the mission and values, their actions have to be representative of them.

Understandability

The participant at Organization D felt confident that the employees understood the values, as she claimed they were “made quite explicit.” The participant believed the monthly meetings and “noting, watching for, and commenting extemporaneously” were the most effective ways of communicating the values. The benefits of having a small organization in terms of making it easier to communicate values were mentioned several times. The believed communication in smaller organizations benefited through “strong relationships,” “knowing each employee personally,” “management by walking around,” and “family sort of feel about the organization.”

Legitimacy of authority

The participant reiterated several times how the communication of values occurred through leadership in “both what they do as well as what they say.” They claimed value communication “starts from the top.” They mentioned their negative perception of values at their previous organization came from the president and owner.

Relevance

They believed that the business would not succeed if the employees did not understand the values.

“Somebody’s performance demonstrates that they really are living the values and using it in whatever their discretionary framework is.” Participant 7

Further, the participant believed the behavior and interactions of employees with the clients and business partners represented the values of the organization. Further, different circumstances such as: type of industry, size of organization, competition, and status of economy, all factored into deciding how values should have been communicated and incorporated into the organization. For example, they believed values would be more important when the economy was doing well. With more competition for attracting and maintaining employees, the importance of values increases. Further, they expressed if the organization’s purpose was “building widgets,” i.e. a product or service not perceived as being very important, values could potentially be considered to be less important.

Validity

The participant cited evidence of the values within the organization through employees’ actions and “recognizing people for outstanding performance.” The following quotation describes the desired mentality and attitude for employees at Organization D in terms of recognizing and reinforcing the values. In other

words, recognizing the actions of colleagues was important for validating evidence of employee behavior and decisions representative of the mission and values.

"It's that catch somebody doing something right, and say "wow what a good job, you certainly made the right choice there."" Participant 7

Additionally, during the monthly board and management meetings, there were moments of reflection question if "the existing mission, vision, and values truly represent who we are now?" During this reflection, they stated that it was to figure out if the organization "walks the talk." When the participant was relating to a past experience at a previous company, they referred to the actions and behavior of the president as representing the "predominant values."

Consistent HRM Messages

The participant stated that the values have to be made into "living documents." The values need to be communicated with some frequency and claimed "it's not like you can do it once." The participant expressed confusion about values regarding the changing of ownership of a hospital they previously worked in. The following quote describes D7's past experience of working at a hospital where the ownership changed many times. Due to the number of times ownership of the hospital changed, D7 expressed confusion and the doubts that may arise from a lack of consistency in leadership.

"The hospital was bought and sold numerous times by different newly formed companies and so there was never a sense that the ownership and whatever its values were, were going to be stable. Who is going to own us next? What will they want?" Participant 7

Agreement Among HR Decision Makers

Being a small organization, the participant explained how coming to a similar understanding is easier. Further, the participant explained how through being an executive at several organizations, their experience had taught them that there had to be understanding of the values “both at the board level and among the staff.” The following statement describes how the incongruity of values among leadership can be a significant problem, and even prompt an employee to leave an organization.

“A couple of the places I worked for, like this Miami hospital, I mean were greedy bastards behind it and I was a cultural misfit in that organization and I only stayed a year and half in that organization and I was so grateful to get out of there because I couldn’t support the values of the owner and it was just too stressful.” Participant 7

Value Congruence

The participant mentioned the congruence of values and their importance in reference to the success of the organization on multiple occasions. The values were used in order to figure out if the organization and employee was a “good fit.” Through their experience, the people who did not agree with and understand the values “tended not to be successful.” The participant also mentioned the importance of values in regards to accomplishing the mission in various ways. They noted the fortunate reality of the healthcare industry and how each employee can relate to and appreciate the importance of the values. The following quote describes how each member working in the healthcare industry can easily relate to the mission because everyone understands and has experienced a sick friend or family member. In other words, the quote describes the ease of which members working in healthcare organizations experience a more natural connection to the mission and comprehend its importance.

"Each of us are also consumers of healthcare and we have loved ones who need it, so it's really easy to empathize with the concern. And if I don't answer the phone and somebody is in crisis, what is the impact? I think all of us as consumers bring an appreciation of the importance of that into our role." Participant 7

The participant reiterated the importance of sharing similar values between ownership, management, and staff. In response to values not being in congruence, they said "well, I don't want to be part of such an organization." The following statement describes a previous organization where D7 worked and how the executives were self interested people. The organization's executives' beliefs and actions did not show appreciation or understanding for the work of certain employees. Without showing appreciation or understanding, it revealed a deficiency for certain values and beliefs that D7 held as integral, creating an incongruence of values.

"My conflict with that business was that there was such attention paid to broker relations and the sales side, without appreciating that that happened through the employees and where was the dedication to employee welfare and service and all that?" Participant

8 DISCUSSION

The primary aim of this study was to answer the following questions: what strategies do organizations have to communicate their values to their members? To what extent are the communication strategies effective? Despite certain theoretical and methodological limitations, the research yielded findings to both questions. The participating organizations possessed a variety of strategies used to communicate values to members. Of the strategies mentioned by participants, there were two recurring and significant strategies of effective value communication throughout the organizations participating in the research: creating a “call-out” culture and leadership. Other significant considerations affecting value communication within organizations were repeatedly mentioned by the research participants. The size of the organization, nature of the mission, and value congruence were all significant determinants in how value communication occurred and was effective within the organizations.

The following section will explain and discuss the two most effective value communication strategies. While there were other value communication strategies worth considering, the call-out culture and leadership constitute the most important findings regarding value communication in the organizations participating in the research. The researcher believed focusing on the two most effective strategies and discussing why they were effective consists of the most significant findings of this research. After discussing the call-out culture and leadership, the significant considerations affecting value communication within organizations

will be addressed. These considerations were significant because of their ability to influence the way value communication occurred. Lastly, the section will conclude by discussing certain limitations concerning the nature of the research in regards to theory, methodology, and the findings.

8.1 Call-out Culture

The most effective way values were communicated throughout the participating organizations was through building an environment where employees consistently recognize values in practice, resembling a call-out culture. Participant 7 succinctly described this type of environment in terms of “catch somebody doing something right.” The call-out culture was essentially employees being aware and identifying how the values were being practiced and embodied by their colleagues. Physical value cards and sticky notes, where employees recognized their colleague’s behavior as representative of the values, constitute a perfect example of the call-out culture. There were several reasons that explain why the call-out culture proved to be the most effective value communicative strategy.

Visibility and Consistency

Physical value cards, representative of the call-out culture, were able to maintain consistent communication through increased visibility, i.e. “keeping the values in front of people.” While the formal onboarding process initiated the value communication process, value cards kept the values “fresh” and “alive,” reinforcing the notion of consistency (Bowen, Ostroff, 2004). Several participants described the challenge of value communication was not introducing the values, rather making sure they remained visible and “on the surface.” Therefore value cards, through prompting employees to remain aware and cognizant of values in practice, provided the consistency sought by organizations.

Follow-up Meetings and Storytelling

While the call-out culture was an effective communication method, the extent to which it was effective appeared contingent on the ability of the participating organizations to provide opportunities to share and discuss the values in practice. Having meetings and informal discussion opportunities where employees shared how they recognized a particular value in practice with others, was important. Calling out a value in practice involves a sensemaking process between two employees. Visibility and understanding were greatly enhanced this sensemaking process between colleagues was shared with multiple members at meetings and informal discussions. Through having regular meetings and discussions, consistency can be achieved through “talking the values through” and increasing their visibility among a greater number of members. When consistency improves, it helps to achieve consensus. In other words, having meetings where the calling out and a discussion of values took place, helped build a mutual, shared understanding of what values look like in practice.

Caminotti and Gray’s (2012) theory about the effectiveness of storytelling, in regards to adult education, reinforce the educational and learning benefits of having meetings and sharing experiences. Sharing how an employee identified a value through the actions of another colleague represents the concept of storytelling. The learning potential that stories, i.e. examples of values in practice, have in regards to workplace education is significant. When managers or experienced members demonstrate how values have been embodied in practice, newer members have an important opportunity to learn. The sharing of how these value were identified helps create an understanding of others’ behavior and decision making.

These meetings where values were called out also provided an opportunity to learn and reflect on personal performance (Schön, 1983). Given the chance to reflect on how the values are embodied in practice, employees can be prompted to think about how they can achieve personal growth and better contribute to the overall mission of the organization. Through reflection of their growth and de-

velopment in the organization, employees can better plan and prepare for improving their knowledge and competencies within the organization and industry.

Demonstrating Understanding and Evidence of Learning

The call-out culture gave the opportunity for employees to demonstrate their understanding of organizational values through concrete examples. In order to identify how a colleague's actions were reminiscent of a certain value, the employee needed to have a prior understanding of the value itself. Without a prior understanding of the value, how would the employee be able to identify the value in practice? Therefore, if employees had the ability to identify values in practice through identifying colleague's actions as representative of the values, it demonstrated a certain level of understanding. In other words, the ability for employees to call out values in practice proved a degree of success of prior value communication.

Participant 4 explained how at Organization B, it would normally take new employees a few months before they were able to successfully call-out and explain how a certain value was embodied through a colleague's action. Therefore, becoming adept at identifying and calling out the values in practice at a new organizational context, resembled a learning and development process. An employee learning how values are identified within the organization resembles Lave & Wenger's (1991) adaptation to a "community of practices." While a new employee starts on the periphery of an organization, through the learning and participation the organization offers, the employee develops skills and becomes incorporated into the "mainstream" of an organization. Putting Lave and Wenger's (1991) theory in the context of the call-out culture, employees would gradually learn and develop the necessary skills to identify values in practice through activities and opportunities provided by the organization. The ability to call out colleagues' actions as representative of the values signifies the adaptation

to the community of practices in the organization. The transition from the periphery to the mainstream, i.e. the ability to successfully recognize values in a particular organizational context, is evidence of employee learning in the workplace.

Horizontal Communication and Building Consensus

The call-out culture in the participating organizations also showed how communication can shift away from a top-down process. While value communication begins with leadership and management, the call-out culture resembled how communication can occur horizontally in the organizational hierarchy. Instead of the managers being the primary source of communicating and creating an understanding of the values, colleagues at all different levels of the organization contributed to building a shared understanding through their behavior and actions.

The call-out culture encouraged all employees to participate and actively engage with thinking about how the values can be understood in practice. With employees from different departments, fulfilling different specific roles within the organization, how the values were applied in practice varied. Depending on the role they had, how one employee may understand and apply the value of responsibility may differ from another. Through recognizing and calling out the different ways the values can be embodied in practice, the more likely employees will be able to relate how the values could potentially be incorporated into their personal responsibilities. The higher the variance of roles, the further the extent to which values could be understood in practice, deepening understanding.

When employees at all levels of the organization are involved in contributing to building an understanding of the values, a stronger consensus (Bowen, Ostroff, 2004) can be achieved. In other words, members of an organization can develop a shared, unambiguous understanding of what the values truly represent. In Argandoña's (2003) terms, the organization's attributed values will match those espoused by top management. When attributed values match the

espoused values, it signifies validity. In other words, the values that the organization professes match the perceptions of the employees working their.

8.2 Leadership

Leadership was consistently referenced as one of the most important methods of value communication throughout the organizations participating in the research, resonating Schein's (2010) theoretical claims. Participants repeatedly referred to the need of "living the values" and "being a source of reference" for their employees. It was their managerial responsibility to lead by example and demonstrate to other employees how they are expected to behave and fulfill different responsibilities within the organization. In other words, "living the values" was particularly relevant to participants' ability to communicate the values to their subordinate employees.

Establishing the Importance of Values

A key aspect of establishing the importance of values through leadership was emphasizing their legitimacy from the start. Throughout the hiring and orientation process in all participating organizations, new employees would meet with various members of leadership and "talk the values through." The example of every new employee at Organization B having a one on one meeting with the CEO to talk about the mission, vision, and values embodies legitimacy of authority (Bowen, Ostroff, 2004). Talking the values through with the CEO in the orientation process undoubtedly sends an unambiguous message to all new employees that the values are important.

Reinforcing Values Through Consistency

Several research participants stressed it was important for the leadership and demonstration of values to be consistently reinforced, and not a "one and done." All organizations had meetings, led by management. In these meetings, opportunities to discuss the values and "talk them through" helped keep the values

fresh and alive for employees. Essentially, managers were responsible for keeping the values on the meeting's agenda. Time allocated specifically for talking about values provided platforms that gave employees opportunities for further sensemaking and interpretations of how the values can be applied in practice.

Without talking the values through, organizations are in peril of having the values become stagnant. If the values become stagnant, they can lose their meaning and significance in practice, resulting in only being visible as "fancy words on a poster." Participants 3 and 4 had been working at Organization B for over 15 years, and admitted that values had not been communicated very well previously. It took a long time for management to construct a system where values would be communicated effectively throughout the entire organization. In other words, the time it took for the organization to establish an effective value communication strategy was a testament to importance of consistency, especially from management. Constant reflection was needed on part of the leadership in order to develop a system that kept the values "fresh" and "alive" throughout the entire organization.

Relevance Leads to Deepening Understanding

Leadership was an effective method of communication through a combination of legitimacy of authority and relevance, which ultimately lead to understanding. Leadership embodied the notion of legitimacy of authority (Bowen, Ostroff, 2004), where employees perceived the significance of the values through figures of authority in the organization. If employees perceive that management is not behaving in accordance with the values, it sends the message that the values are not of much importance. If the values are not perceived to be important among management, it damages their legitimacy throughout the entire organization. Legitimacy of authority is further demonstrated by how value communication begins at the top of the organizational hierarchy. Echoing Argandoña's (2003) findings, the research participants holding top management positions were responsible for choosing and developing the values. They were also responsible for figuring out how to disseminate them throughout the organization. In other words,

the importance of values and their communication begins with top management, not from members. Therefore, the extent to which values are chosen, established, and adopted by all members depends on the leadership of the organization.

Complimenting legitimacy of authority is the notion of relevance (Bowen, Ostroff, 2004). Through observing and interpreting the behavior of leadership, employees have the opportunity to see values in practice. In other words, values are represented through readily observable behavior and not only in written and spoken language. A direct connection can be made between values and how they can be incorporated into the different roles and functions employees perform at the organization, i.e. perceiving relevance. Observing and adopting behavior in accordance with leadership decreases ambiguity, which creates less confusion and more consensus. For example, witnessing how a manager is respectful when they interact with a client provides concrete evidence for how to emulate that behavior. Learning through observing behavior does not entail a difficult interpretation and sensemaking process for employees, i.e. it is easy to understand. Through managers demonstrating leadership through “living the values,” the goal is other employees will learn and develop the values and demonstrate them through their behavior and decisions.

Apprenticeship

Transmitting knowledge and competencies in regards to how organizational values are embodied in practice can be understood in the context of Fuller and Unwin's (2015) study of apprenticeship. Managers and other experienced members at organizations are likely to have a wealth of knowledge regarding how the values are embodied in practice. The communication of values through leadership demonstrates an opportunity for new employees to learn and develop their own competencies in the context of particular organization. In other words, the managers are essentially training and partially responsible for the growth and development of new employees. Through demonstrating behavior and decision making, as well as supporting the participation in community of practices of the organization, new employees undergo a type of apprenticeship. They are trained

to adapt to how their responsibilities within the organization, through their behavior and decision making, should be in accordance with the values. With regards to apprenticeship, the leadership skills of the manager to train and develop employees' competencies represented a major aspect of HRM within the organizations participating in the research.

Evidence of successful leadership and a consensual understanding of the values can be inferred when behavior is consistent throughout the organization. When an employee, not holding a managerial position, behaves and makes decisions that are reminiscent of a manager within the organization, it demonstrates growth and development.

To conclude, in agreement with prior literature, leadership was a very effective communication method. Through the combination of providing concrete examples of values in practice, reinforced with the notion of authority, leadership signifies the practice and importance of values to employees.

8.3 Considerations in HRM Organizational Communication

Size of the Organization

The size of the organization was a major emerging theme that influenced value communication methods and their effectiveness throughout the participating organizations. The size of the organization directly impacts communication in regards to visibility (Bowen, Ostroff, 2004). The research participants claimed it was simply harder to keep values present when there are a greater number of employees stratified throughout different departments. With less visibility, employees are exposed to and experience less learning opportunities to interpret behavior and actions desired by the organization.

In relation to leadership, participants explained how they were less able to be present and interact with employees in larger organizations. With less interactions, it was more difficult to create opportunities to "talk the values through," through formal or informal conversations. Having fewer opportunities to interact with employees severely inhibited how leaders and managers communicate val-

ues. Further, when relating performance evaluations tied to the values, participants explained that knowing the employees on a more personal level was important. The larger the organization, the more difficult it was to build personal relationships with colleagues, directly affecting their ability to contribute to the growth and development of their employees. The difficulty was further exemplified through participant 1's explanation about the transition process to a new hotel. Being the new general manager, getting to know many new employees on a personal level was a long process. Due to the long transition process of getting to know colleagues personally, they found it difficult to give appraisals and constructive criticism to their subordinate colleagues.

Contrarily, participants consistently noted the advantages regarding value communication in the context of smaller organizations. Participants claimed it was not only easier to communicate values in smaller organizations, but also to communicate them effectively. For example, employees in smaller organizations were more able to understand how different employees and departments contribute to the overall mission. Organization B, being an organization of around 150 employees, had each new employee meet with all of the different department leaders during the onboarding process. Through meeting the departments heads and discussing how the mission was being achieved, new employees would have a better understanding of how their role and actions within the organization fit into the bigger picture. This understanding of how their role raises their level of commitment towards achieving the mission. Such a high level of personal interaction with different employees in different departments would surely be difficult to achieve in a larger organization.

To summarize, the findings strongly suggest that smaller organizations were advantageous in their ability to communicate values compared to larger organizations. Smaller organizations benefited from an environment of increased personal interactions and relationships between employees. Increased personal interactions with colleagues lead to further discussion of values, creating a higher likelihood of consensus and mutual understanding of the values.

Nature of the Mission

The nature of the organization's mission factored into how the participants perceived employees to be committed to the mission and values, echoing Schein's (2010) findings regarding the importance of employee commitment to the mission. Organizations B and D, operating in the healthcare industry, had missions that directly impacted the health and well being of people. The research participants claimed that employees, e.g. at a healthcare organization, understood how their responsibilities have a direct affect on the mission, possibly endangering a person's well being. This presented a very natural mission that was easy to empathize with. The participants from organizations B and D, operating in the healthcare industry claimed the values "come naturally," leading employees to be more committed to the mission. This "natural" connection with the values can be attributed to relevance (Bowen, Ostroff, 2004). It becomes easier to understand and incorporate organizational values when employees recognize the importance of their role in achieving the organization's mission and purpose.

Contrarily, the research participants unanimously believed that in organizations that have missions that are less empathizable, it may be harder for employees to understand the relative importance of achieving the mission. The example used by participant 7 related to employees working at a widget factory. In that scenario, it would be harder to convince employees of the importance of the mission. If an employee fails to perform their role in an organization producing widgets, the impact of not producing widgets would be harder to connect and empathize with, compared to an organization in the healthcare industry. The nature of the mission has an affect on the willingness of employees to be committed to the mission. If an employee does not perceive the mission to be important, that can affect how seriously employees perceive the values to be. As Edwards and Cable (2009) theorized, the values provide the framework from which to achieve the mission. Without seeing the importance of the mission, it is conceivable that employees would not adopt the values either.

Acknowledgement of the Importance of Mission and Values

An understanding for how values worked to achieve the mission also furthered the notion of relevance (Bowen, Ostroff, 2004). All participants acknowledged the importance of effectively communicating the values to employees in relation to organizational success. This acknowledgement displayed an understanding for how the values factored into achieving the mission. In line with Argandoña's (2003) theory about the positive implications of a strong mission and values, effective communication of values benefited organizations through attracting and maintaining talented employees, establishes a reputation, and ultimately builds a framework for how the mission was going to be achieved. Understanding how values were relevant to the success of the organization established the importance of communicating values among the participants.

Value Congruence

Echoing the importance of value congruence in organizations (Edwards, Cable, 2009), the participants stressed the importance of employees and the organization sharing similar values. Participants viewed value congruence as a major determinant in how they perceived the extent to which a new employee would succeed at the organization. Value congruence relates to idea of consensus, i.e. shared beliefs and values between employee, colleagues, and organization. This congruence between employee and organizational values can be described as the "fit." In other words, how well an employee "fits" at an organization describes the extent to which they feel that they belong, due to similarities in values. In line with Collins and Porras (1991) findings about the implications of value congruence, participants 5 and 7 believed the organizational "fit" to be factor significantly in attracting and maintaining employees. The findings of this research reinforce the belief that prospective employees who are thinking about joining the organization, as well as a current employees debating about staying or leaving, are largely influenced by value congruence. Participant 7 constantly referred to being uncomfortable and feeling that they did not belong, while working at a

previous organization, due to a dissonance regarding the values of other employees. This poor “fit” prompted them to leave the organization.

Discovering the congruence of values was especially apparent in the hiring and onboarding process within participating organizations. Participants noted that when prospective employees did not take the values seriously, it was a “red flag.” The interview and hiring process are the moments when employees will be the most enthusiastic and present the best image of themselves. Participant 5 believed that if there is already any doubt that they do not take the values seriously or do not agree with them, it signifies potential trouble in their future at the organization. As a way to emphasize the importance of sharing similar values, participant 5 further claimed the number one mistake they have made in the past as a manager was hiring employees “who had all the skills, but were not exhibiting the values.” They claimed employees that did not exhibit behaviors representative of the values during the interview and hiring process resulted in dragging down the whole performance of the organization.

The recruiting, hiring, and training of employees represent large investments for organizations. The testimonies of the participants serve to reinforce that organizations should prioritize the assessment of the extent to which prospective employees share a similar set of values congruent with other members and the organization as a whole. This assessment of value congruence requires ample communication in the interviewing and hiring process. If the value congruence is not properly assessed, organizations will suffer the consequences of making investments in employees who, based on the participant’s experiences, hinder the overall performance of colleagues around them, and therefore the mission itself.

Reference Point

Participants constantly related and compared their experiences at previous organizations in relation to values and how they were communicated at the organizations participating in the research. Their understanding of values and how well they were communicated at their current organization appeared to depend

partially on their past experiences. Every time a participant referred to their previous organization in a positive manner, they would mention that the mission and values were strong, well established, and communicated. Contrarily, if the participant referred to their previous organization in a negative manner, they would explain how the mission and values were weak, lacking relevance, and not well communicated. The participant's perceptions regarding values at the current organizations they occupy appeared to be influenced based on previous work experiences. Therefore, when drawing conclusions about value communication, it was important to consider the participant's previous work experience affects their opinion about their current place of work.

8.4 Limitations

The limitations were divided into three sections that the researcher believes are important to consider in the scope of this study. The three sections include limitations concerning theory, methodology, and the findings.

Theoretical Limitations

Lack of Relevant Literature from an HRM Perspective

There was not an abundance of prior literature concerning the communication of organizational values from a HRM perspective. A plethora of literature existed concerning how organizational values help businesses succeed. In terms of the improvement and development of employee behavior in accordance with the values, little research was found. Due to the lack of prior research, there were certain doubts about the nature of the research as there were very few studies from which to reference and inform the researcher about different ways to approach the study. However, the lack of prior research can signify the choice of an interesting topic of investigation. The choice of topic was enthusiastically supported by the participants and they were unanimously interested to hear about the results and conclusions drawn from the research. Therefore,

even though there was a lack of prior research, the topic and its importance were understood by the participants.

The communication of organizational values does not initially appear to be an educational topic. However, from a HRM perspective, the topic is completely educational in nature. When transitioning to a new organization, employees go through a considerable learning process. Depending on the values of the organization, different types of behavior and decision making are encouraged. This transition process is full of sense making and developing an understanding for how the organization desires the employee to fulfill their role and develop their competencies. In order to help employees' growth and development through learning and understanding behavior expectations, organizations need to communicate their values. The communication process of values is essentially a form of adult education in the workplace. Employees are learning and developing knowledge about how their behavior can be in congruence with the organization's values. Being able to adapt and adjust to various community of practices and values is a major skill valued in all industries.

Methodological Limitations

Justified Use of Qualitative Methods

Given the complexity and depth of the research aim and questions, the use of qualitative methods was justified. While identifying value communication strategies within organizations was not difficult, ascertaining the extent to which they were effective required in depth and detailed responses from the research participants. Therefore, this particular research required qualitative methods where the participants' perspective could be thoroughly attained and examined. Interviews and the use of an interview guide were the logical choice for obtaining data. Due to the restrictions of time and resources on part of the researcher, the interviews needed to be guided. Through an interview guide, the researcher assured similar topics were covered through consistent questions.

It is important to consider that only 7 interviews were conducted for the research. While a small number of participants may appear to weaken the validity of insights and conclusions, the nature of qualitative research does not depend on the number of participants (Creswell, 2012). Some very important studies have been done with only one or two participants, yet the data provided rich, detailed insights and important findings (Patton, 2002). The small number of participants may have actually proved to work as an advantage, as the researcher was permitted to go into more depth and detail in the analysis of the data.

Data Triangulation and Sampling

Regarding data triangulation, i.e. the different organizations and employees within those organizations, there was a healthy diversity of perspectives from which to collect data. Four different organizations, of different sizes and occupying different areas of the private sector, participated in the research, along with 7 employees holding a variety of positions. Patton (2002) refers to this diversity of data sources as maximal heterogeneity sampling. The following quote describes the wealth of differences in perspectives that maximal heterogeneity sampling entails. “This strategy for purposeful sampling aims at capturing and describing the central themes that cut across a great deal of variation” (Patton, 2002, p. 235). Through conducting research at several organizations with personnel of multiple positions, the sampling of participants in this research achieved a degree of heterogeneity. The degree of heterogeneity increased the transferability (Patton, 2002) of the research, meaning the diversity of perspectives improves the likelihood that the findings could be applied in further studies of the communication of values within organizations.

Analysis of Data

The method of analytic induction was the most sensible way to analyze the data. Due to the lack of prior research of value communication from a HRM perspective, using an existing framework for the primary analysis of the data

was very beneficial. After understanding the data from a deductive approach, the researcher analyzed the data once more through an inductive approach. In other words, the researcher searched for emerging themes that did not apply to the theoretical framework used in the deductive analysis. Through analyzing the data and constructing the findings through both a deductive and inductive approach, the reliability of conclusions drawn from the data can be said to be increased.

Findings Limitations

Difficulty of Assessing Effectiveness

Even though interviewing CEOs, founders, and managers provided findings and answers for the research questions, the perspective of employees in subordinate positions was absent. Through only interviewing employees in management positions, conclusions could only be drawn regarding how they perceived other employees within their organizations to understand values. Without the perspective of how values were communicated to employees not in leadership positions, the extent to which values were understood and incorporated into different roles throughout the entire organization could not be conclusively determined. Therefore, assessing the effectiveness of value communication strategies can be understood to be limited in nature. To ascertain more detailed findings about the effectiveness of value communication strategies throughout an entire organization, the researcher suggests interviewing employees occupying various positions within a single organization. Through conducting multiple interviews with employees scattered throughout the organizational hierarchy, a better understanding of how effective communication strategies are could be garnered.

Promotion and Branding of Organizations

A consideration to take into account regards the research participant's inherent bias towards their organizations. When responding to inquiries about how important the values were at their organizations, participants generally expressed

positive views and opinions. Few responses included criticism and negative opinions about the organizations. In other words, participants appeared reluctant to express negative views regarding values and their communication in their current organizations. Given that participants experienced little reluctance in criticizing values and their communication at their previous organizations, it seems odd that their current organizations would escape criticism. However, it is reasonable, given the research participants all held managerial positions, that they would want to promote positive views about values in their current organizations. A manager expressing negative views about the values at their organization would convey dissonance, as it would indicate a certain indifference to values. To conclude, when considering the findings, the reader should be aware of the favorable bias of participants referring to their current organizations.

9 CONCLUSION

The initial interest of the researcher was to investigate the extent to which employees perceived organizations' advertised values to be important, and if so, how the values were incorporated into their responsibilities within the organization. The assumption was that every organization has values, and would undoubtedly profess they are integral to the organization's success. However, there were doubts regarding their genuine importance and presence within organizations. In other words, some organizations may only use values as a branding and marketing tool for clients and financial gain, rather than utilizing them to guide internal behavior and decision making of employees. Values, when isolated from an organizational context, represent abstract words. In order for these abstract words to represent a consistent and consensual meaning desired by the organization, they need to be communicated and understood by employees. The researcher hoped exploring how certain organizations communicate their values to employees, would reveal the extent to which organizations genuinely cared about their values from the perspective of the employees.

The researcher premised that if organizations genuinely gave importance to their values, they would have constructed a strategy to ensure their values were communicated and understood by their employees. Therefore, exploring

the different methods organizations had to communicate their values to employees would indicate genuine importance. Are employees simply given documents and explained values during their orientation, or is there a more thorough communication process? Additionally, how effective are these strategies? If employees are unable to demonstrate knowledge of the values, and be able to relate them to their responsibilities within the organization, it would seem to indicate that values were not well communicated, i.e. not of much importance. Therefore, employees' ability to demonstrate a degree of understanding of the values and how they apply to fulfilling their role in the organization, indicates effective communication strategies.

The main findings suggest that the most effective value communication strategies were represented in employees identifying and understanding how values are applied in practice. In other words, Bowen and Ostroff's (2004) concept of relevance proved to be the crucial connection to demonstrate an understanding of the values. If employees fail to see how values are incorporated into their daily responsibilities, values will likely remain abstract words, evading comprehension and consensus. Further, the findings also show that consistency, i.e. keeping the values in front of people, is the real challenge facing organizations. Developing strategies to frequently bring values to the attention of employees and keep them alive is the toughest challenge organizations face. Therefore, strategies helping employees frequently make connections, regarding how values can be applied in practice, are very effective in educating employees about behaviors and decision making in accordance with the desires of the organization.

The research reinforces findings and conclusions from prior studies, in that values are important to organizations, especially from the perspective of managers and executives. Given the viral nature news and media, the wrong behavior and choices of a single employee, can damage the reputation and inflict serious harm on the mission of an organization. Therefore, educating new employees, and reiterating to current employees, regarding expected standard of behavior and decision making in accordance with the values, is paramount. Additionally,

value communication is essential concerning the hiring and recruitment of new employees, as well as maintaining current employees. Lastly, the concept of value congruence was emphasized in the research, as possibly being the main determinant to attract and retain employees.

Considering future research on value communication, the researcher suggests interviewing employees throughout different departments in a single organization. While this research covered communication strategies in several organizations, focusing on a specific organization would allow a more critical assessment of the effectiveness of strategies. If an organization wants to learn how they can better communicate their values to employees, it would be necessary to interview employees throughout the entire organization. While the values may be well communicated and understood by leadership and managers, the perspective of other employees is important to consider. For example, exploring how the position of an employee affects their understanding of the values and their relative importance would be worth pursuing.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1 Consent Form for Research Participation

I have been requested to participate in the following study: Communicating organizational values; a case study

I have read the privacy notice (information letter) and have received sufficient information on the study and its implementation. The content of the study has also been explained to me verbally and I have received proper answers to all my questions concerning the study. The clarifications were provided by David Lampert. I have had sufficient time to consider participating in the study.

I understand that it is voluntary to participate in the study. I have the right to interrupt my participation or cancel my consent at any time and without explanation during the study. Interruption of participation or cancellation of consent for the study have no negative consequences for me.

I will not participate in measurements when I have a flu or fever, or when I am recovering from an illness or otherwise do not feel well.

By signing the consent document, I accept that my information is used for the research described in the privacy notice.

☐ Yes

I accept that the data will be archived with identification codes after the study.

☐ Yes

With my signature, I confirm my participation in the study and permit the matters mentioned above.

Signature

Date

Printed name

Date of birth

Address

Consent received

Signature of the consent recipient

Date

Printed name

The original signed document remains in the archive of the scientist-in-charge and a copy is given to the research subject. The consent is stored as long as the data is in a format that includes identifiers. If the material is anonymised or discarded, there is no longer need to store the consent.

Strategies of Communicating Organizational Values and Their Effectiveness

My research focuses on the communication of values within organizations. In other words, I am investigating the visibility and presence of values and how they are incorporated into the strategy and mission of the organization. Through interviewing employees, specifically managers, I will attempt to draw conclusions about the communication and incorporation of values throughout an organization.

Main research questions:

1. In what ways does the organization communicate its values?
2. How effective are these communication strategies?

General information and personal background

Your position within the organization:

- General explanation of your position
- Previous experience in field

How were the organization's values communicated to you? Were they effectively communicated?

- Entering the organization
- Training process
- Further experience at the organization

How do you communicate the values of the organization to employees you are managing?

- What communication methods work best from your experience?
- What ways can employees give feedback about their ability to understand what is expected of them?

General questions about values within organization

- How do organizational values affect how you do your job? (e.g. leadership, staff development)
- Does the climate/culture of the organization reflect the values that the organization promotes?
- Are the promoted values well understood and consistently communicated?