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Organizational Decision Making: The Luhmannian Decision Communication Perspective

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Abstract

Studies of organizational communication around decision-making and decision communication have largely concerned how decisions should be made and promoted. Less efforts have focused on how decisions should be communicated inside organizations and how they influence organizational effectiveness and performance. This study examined decision communication in an engineer-based organization 2008–2009. Key findings demonstrate that effective decision communication can be considered as the backbone of organizational communication, which can benefit the whole organization from the top management to lower levels. This paper also discusses the concept of decision communication generally and from theoretical point of view. Decision communication can be seen as a very special part of organizational communication. Additionally, it can also be seen as the guiding force of organizational effectiveness. Organizations need to make decision-making processes visible. From the organizational communication perspective this means holding decisions' meetings, certain rites and documents. Organizations as systems need a rational type of order to follow the decision-making process. The public relations or communication management workers' (specifically internal relations management) role in organizations has traditionally been to communicate the goals and objectives of current decisions at hand.

Keywords: Decision making; Organizational communication; Decision communication; Niklas Luhmann

Introduction

Changes in the communication technology and communication environments has led companies and communities to focus on increasing the information retrieval about the surrounding environment. Increased scanning of environments has challenged organizational decision-making and communication (Eisenberg & Goodall, 2001). When more and more employees are considered “knowledge workers”, and even more have access to information, the decision-making related communication faces a lot of challenges. Relying only on traditional forms of communication in post-decisional communication is not effective any more because organizations have to reflect on their environment and suit the communication according the environment (Eisenberg et al., 2001).

Decision communication's role in organizations can be considered much more important and significant than just communicating the outcomes of every decision. Based on Niklas Luhmann's organization theory (2003), decision communication can be seen as the force around which organizations are formed. Decisions are confirmed through decision communication and transformed for new premises for organizational decisions.

Studies of organizational decision making during the last decades have very much focused on how decisions should be made. Theories often discuss decision-making as intentional, consequential action where the most suitable solution is chosen and implemented. Less studies have focused on how to discuss decision-making from its communicative point of view. Organizations as goal-oriented systems (Simon, 1958) have largely based their decision-making on finding effective patterns of activity directed towards the goals. Recently more scientific literature (Ashcraft et al., 2009; Putnam & Nicotera, 2008; Wehmeier & Winkler, 2013) in organization studies, have drawn on the idea that not just decisions, but also communication constitutes organization, often abbreviated to CCO (Schoeneborn, 2011).

What constitutes organizational performance are decisions and communication. No matter how great the strategy is, it will not succeed without these two elements. Organizational decision-making is based on communication (Cheney, Christensen, Zorn and Ganesh, 2004). Many organizations struggle with decision-making and even more organizations have difficulties with effective communication. Organizations' challenge is not just making good decisions. They need to execute and implement them successfully as well. The dynamics of communication are hidden in between communicative events, as organizations as social systems produce both their problems and functional solutions using their own resources (Nassehi, 2005).

2. Literature Review

The emergence of modern society has meant a number of changes in the whole society and in the forms of communication. The increased complexity of communication has challenged the organizational decision-making and strategic internal communication as well. Increased complexity has also meant that organizations and communication management have to put more effort into organizing life within organizations.

This paper introduces theories and literature related to decision communication. Several scholars of decision communication (Luhmann, 2003; Andersen, 2003a; 2003b; Nassehi, 2005; Seidl & Becker, 2006; Williams & Clampitt, 2007; Knudsen, 2005; Schoeneborn, 2011) have theorized the significance of how decision communication guides organizations, and especially internal communication. Organizations as systems have a need for communicative action and organizations live in communicative rationality. Decision-making is a social action and needs communication. Decision-making inside organizations is strategic action and oriented towards successful problem solving (Habermas, 1998). Communication facilitates coordinated social action. As Leeper (1996) argues, communication is needed in decision-making and as an organizational process. This eventually leads to an understanding among organization's publics. Organizations are certain places or "decision machines" where different forms of decisions get concentrated and where the history of decision-making and routines arises (Nassehi, 2005). According to Jönhill (2003), the membership of an organization, the formulated program and defined goals and the appointed staff are all established through decisions. The existence and the form of the organization are based on decisions. Organizations cannot stop making decisions, because they would cease to exist as an organization. From Luhmannian point of view, the decisions are a special medium of communication and organizations requires decision communication.

3. Theoretical Background of Decision Communication

Decision communication's foundation lies within the theory about social systems of communication by Niklas Luhmann. Luhmann's fundamental idea was that social systems as organizations are meaning-creating systems that consist of communication (Andersen, 2003b), and social systems observe them independently through communication. The fundamental social event in organizations is defined as communication. Communication is used to observe the organizational environment and decisions can be observed as a form of communication. The sociality of organizations consists only of communication and the fundamental social event is defined as communication and not as action (Andersen, 2003b). Luhmann described system of communication as autopoietic, which means that systems consists only self-producing elements. Originally elaborated by Maturana (1981), autopoietic systems have permanent structure and they are capable of completing the decisions that make them up through the decisions that make them up. Communication is used by social systems to create themselves and it take place within the social system. Social system constructs its own perception of itself and its environment through communication.

Luhmann (2005) emphasizes that decision communications are not produced by human beings but by the social system, the organization. Luhmann sees decisions as the elements of organization and "compact communications", which communicate their own contingency. Luhmann also theorizes (2005) that decision communication is the only form of communication that contributes to the autopoiesis of organisation.

Luhmann (2005) says that inside organizations decision communication is always integrated into a process of connecting decisions – the actual autopoiesis. According to him, decision communication can be seen as uncertainty absorption, originally introduced by Simon & March (1958). In their concept no decision can rely on complete information and some uncertainty always remain. Uncertainty absorption takes place between the connection of decisions. All information is transformed into the selection of one alternative over the other ones. Now decision absorbs the uncertainty and decision communication informs about the selected and rejected alternatives (Seidl, 2005).

Seidl (2005) theorizes that decisions are "complete" when subsequent decision is connected to it. Analogies from different communication actions can be found: communication is completed once another communication connects to it by defining its meaning retrospectively.

Decision communication in organizations is to observe decisions through the perspective of communication (Andersen, 2003b). He argues that organizations are formed around decision communication and decisions are confirmed through decision communication and are transformed for new premises for decisions. Knudsen (2005) argues that in Luhmannian systems theory, social systems are seen consisting of communication. Decisions are but one type of communication (Knudsen, 2005).

Communication in social systems is improbable. Organizations consist of recursively connected elements. Not as actors or individuals. Communication is only really communication if communicative events are understood and "used as the basis for connecting with further behaviours." Communication is communication only when communicative events consecutively connect each other (Knudsen, 2005).

Decisions are basic elements of organization and organization is thus defined as a network of recursively connected decisions. Organizations simply consist of decisions referring to other decisions. Without this connection there is no organization (Knudsen, 2005). Andersen (2003b) proposes that decisions should be seen as a communication processes that creates social expectations and divides them and the world to fixed and open contingency.

Communication, which addresses these social expectations, can be considered as decision communication as Andersen (2003b) argues. According to him, decisions fulfil the present

expectations among the members of organization, but the same they create new ones what to expect from the future. Our fundamental proposal is that that the effectiveness of decision communication can and should be measured by how well these social expectations are addressed. Organizations' basic need is to make the decision making process visible to its' members. This is the main problem of every organization as social systems as Nassehi (2005) presents. Inside organizations the communication usually gains a life of its own. Luhmann (1996) reminds that when this happens, it cannot be reduced by the participants part-takers of communication.

3.1 The Concept of Decision Communication

Decision communication consists usually messages from made decisions. This messages or selections, as Luhmann calls them, are the unity of three selections: information, form of communication and understanding. As Andersen (2003b) interprets Luhmann's theory, communication is as flow of selected messages, which are linked retrospectively to prior communication. A modern concept of organizational goals is to improve organizational efficiency and effectiveness. It is necessary to develop democratic decision-making and communication. Hatch (2008) speaks about the communicative rationality of organizations. Decision communication can be seen as a part of this rationality.

Decision communication, as well all communication, shares the same features as it is always facing backwards. Decision communication is much about implementing decisions, following up and getting feedback how decisions are accepted and what kind of effect they have made. Harrison & March (1988) say that the post-decisional information has been used to clarify the outcomes and values of the selected alternative. Decision communication is traditionally meant to communicate how decisions' criteria are met or satisfied. But in Luhmannian perspective (2003) it can be also considered to use in decision making related communication, where it have significant role. For instance, scanning issues from the environment, gathering information and introducing alternatives. It can be also considered the process of selecting the best alternative. If decision communication is considered as decision-related communication, the whole decision making process could be considered as decision communication.

Luhmann's (2005) fundamental idea was that organizations decide by themselves, which is considered as a decision. This applies to decision communication as well. Organization themselves define how much communication every decision needs. As a matter of fact, they also decide what is decision communication in their organization. As combined organization itself decide how much effort they give for decision communication for every decision making process. Nassehi (2005) states that only communication can understand what has been communicated. When decisions are seen as a process of communication, decision communication is needed to understand what has been communicated earlier. Organizations continue themselves by connecting decisions to previous decisions. Decision communication combines the chain of decisions.

Luhmann (2005) also states that the nature of decision communication changes when the time to make a decision occurs. If decision communication is seen as communication, which leads to a decision, then the post-decisional information of decision communication differs from pre-decisional communication. Decision communication uses information about the world and environment of organization. But the information is different what is used in subsequent decision communication.

Based on these views, the nature of decision communication can be seen as very fragile. According to Seidl & Becker (2006), it is even more fragile than the ordinary communication, because it not just communicates selected alternative but indirectly the rejected options as well. To be successful, decision communication needs to have particular communicative provisions,

which are referred to as deparadoxifications (Seidl & Becker, 2006). This means that the paradoxical form of decision communications is hidden after the decision in ensuing communications.

3.2 The Strategic Role of Decision Communication

Organizations' decision-making is based on processing information (Cheney et. Al, 2004). But does decision communication have strategic value for organizations? Organizations have need for specific information and feedback. But this means that organizations have to be willing and able to communicate efficiently internally. As White, Vane & Stafford (2010) view that strategic internal communication brings benefits not only to the employee satisfaction and productivity, but it also benefits company's external efforts.

Decision communication's role can be seen from the strategic point of view as well. Moorcroft (2003) sees that employees want to know where organization is heading and what are its goals. Decision communication can be considered as the force, which creates a buy-in for organization's goals and strategies.

Traditionally managers and other members of dominant coalition have had a significant impact how decisions have been communicated inside organizations. As White et al. (2010) argue, dominant coalition consists of different class of employees who have more power and influence in to decision-making process. By using this power they also can influence the communication and acceptance of organizational goals.

White et al. (2010) find that the most important source of communication for the publics of organization is the top of the organization. This applies to decision communication as well. Hearing the outcomes from top management empowers the employees and gives the sense that they are receiving full information about decisions. March (1988) emphasizes that decisions can be more decentralized and of better quality when everyone understands where the company is headed. Effective decision communication could offer more coherence, so every individual and each part of the company will be better able to drive purposefully toward a common goal that is clear, communicated and understood by everyone.

Communication in organizations is needed to measure the effectiveness of decisions (Hitt et al., 2006) as well. Especially upward communication from subordinates to supervisors is needed to receive feedback about how previously made decisions are working. Tampere (2010) continues that decisions also determine how organizations behave and act. Together with organizational identity, decisions and their outcomes modify organizational reputation. This is very much linked to how organizations see their importance and responsibility as decision makers. Holmström (2006) points out that through decisions, organizations also question their identity, responsibility and their role in society.

3.3 Decision is a Medium and Form of Communication

Decision itself is a message and can be considered as a form of communication. Andersen (2003b) proposes that decision is a form of communication takes into account the social expectations of members of organization on three different levels. Temporal expectations are directed to the future, factual expectations directed at the organization, and social expectations directed at the partakers in the communication. In this sense decisions can be seen telling what to expect form individual tasks and from future decisions. Decisions create social expectations for subsequent decisions as well.

Because decisions themselves are communication, they can be considered also a medium. Inside organizations, employees tend to evaluate different communication channels (White et al., 2010). Decisions always exist in organisational life, but the problem is that employees do not

recognize decisions often as such, and they do not think about decisions as decisions. Employees do not always see or understand the connection between decision and communication. It means that some situations in the organizational life, which are connected to decisions, need strategic and planned communication, because through communications we construct connotations and meanings. And in this touch point, the role of strategic internal (organizational) communication arises, and the role of public relations clears as an initiator of decision communication. Or other words, decision communication is one of the most important internal public relations (communication management) functions in the organizational life.

As White et al. (2010) find, managers often neglect information flow because they assume that everybody knows already. They may not recognize the need to convey some pieces of information. That is why organized decision communication has its place in organizations - to ensure that employees receive the information needed through the communication channels, which reach the employees best. Timely, efficiently communicated information prevents rumors, speculations and uncertainty inside organizations and makes organizational internal environment more stable and balanced. And this is the assumption for organizational effectiveness.

Andersen (2003a) emphasizes that a decision's "before" and "after" leaves a mark in a medium that affects the decision, since a decision and organizational communication are codified in accordance with the medium. Decision communication is designed by the organizational culture and the forms of organizational communication. Organizational communication, as well as decision communication, can form several mediums. These mediums can be for instance money or power. When the generalized medium is money, decision communication communicates about the decision "best value for the money". Andersen (2003a) states that decisions cannot be communicated except in the imprinting in a symbolically generalized medium.

3.4 Problems and Benefits of Decision Communication

Traditionally the benefits of internal communication have been better employee satisfaction and productivity. Decision communication can be seen to benefit internal communication as well. But decision communication can focus some special areas of its own. As Moorcroft (2003) finds, effective decision communication can create buy-in for an organization's strategies, goals and identity. This can be used to show how employees contribute to achieving the vision of organization.

To be effective decision communication should focus on communicating the "right amount" of information. Receiving large amount of information is not equal to receiving wanted information. Relationship between wanted and received information in internal communication is strived from information adequacy (Rosenfeld, Richman & May, 2004).

Williams & Clampitt (2007) point out that decision communication has problems as well. They argue that two common reasons for inefficient decision communication exist: failure to clarify responsibilities and the desire to inform quickly after the decision has been made. In the first case, decision-makers often think that their job is simply to make decisions, not to communicate or participate in communication. They assume that someone else will carry out the communication. Williams & Clampitt (2007) remind that many decision-making models give scant attention to communication of decisions.

In some cases, communication takes place only as restricted messages of the highlights of a decision. Often only the final pieces of information in the form of results are given out without context. The relevant facts, weighted options, and uncertainties surrounding the conclusions and the manner by which the decision was made, are left out of the communication process.

Based on the Luhmannian thinking (Andersen, 2003b), the basic nature of decision communication is considered paradoxical: the more the chosen alternative is communicated as a justified right selection, the less the other options will appear as real alternatives and the decision is considered less as a real decision. The same applies the other way around: the more there is communication about other options, the less the chosen one seems as a justified decision and the less the decision will appear as decided (Seidl & Becker, 2006).

Badly governed communication about decisions can be observed through Tampere's (2008) chaotic asymmetrical communication model (CAC). According to this model, dialogue, as well as feedback to the public, in this case to employees of an organization, is not understood, and therefore the processes of communication are chaotic, asymmetrical, and ungoverned. According to this model, an organization sends its message to a so-called abstract and anonymous public, but it is not received because it is often delivered in technocratic wording and lacks a clearly defined message. This means that decisions are communicated, but the communication does not create any desired understanding about the outcomes of decisions. The flow of information in the CAC model is independent, chaotic, and lives a life of its own. Even when organizations do nothing in the communication and relations fields, messages nevertheless exist. But like White et al. (2010) remind, information is not the same as communication. Information about decisions outcomes is not sufficient when employees get information merely through informal routes.

As Hitt et al. (2006) emphasize, effective communication is crucial for organizations in implementing strategies and decisions need to be interpreted in certain communication before they can be transformed into action (Huebner, Varey, & Wood, 2008). When an organization is communicates effectively about decisions, rumours and gossips are managed better.

4. Methodology

Present article is based on the study of decision communication in an organization. A mixed method research was conducted in October 2008 and February 2009. The research was conducted in an engineer-based organization, a local department of technology and services supplier Metso Paper. During the research, the company employs over 12 000 employees all over the world, and locally 1 900 employees in Finland. The participants of the study worked as automation engineers. In their daily work the employees and managers make e.g. cost accounting for projects and participate in the starting of new paper machinery. They participate in projects on a large scale, from the earliest offers to the final phase of starting a new paper machine. All employees are responsible for the internal communications related processes in their own work. Areas of responsibility and key issues in this work process exist in terms of getting the work done. A significant share of the daily communication occurs at the individual level through meetings with people, so it is important that work-related knowledge and information is shared with others and made decisions are actively acknowledged by every employee. Supervisors provide information on work procedures, offer directions in specific tasks, and communicate issues related to the work environment.

4.1 Research Questions and Data Collection

The research and data sections of this paper discuss the decision communication in an engineer based work organization. The data collection contains two different parts: the results from interviews and a survey. The original data was collected in the fall 2008 and spring 2009. The original aim of the research was to find out and explore how decision-making and –

communication processes are planned and realized in an every day work environment among managers and employees in this specific organization. The research question was:

How decision is communicated in the Metso Paper's automation engineering department?

The purpose was to find out how decisions and their outcomes are communicated in researched organization. The intention is to find out what the main communication channels are and what information is communicated, as well as how the information of decisions flows in the organization.

The first part of the research consisted of in-depth interviews. Four team leaders and the head of the department, overall five managers participated. The interview question form comprised of 14 questions and interviews lasted for one hour. For this paper, only the data from questions regarding communication of decisions and use of information, is used. The interviews were transcribed and answers were grouped and combined together according to the questions. Following this, the questions were grouped according to the research questions and the answers were combined together. When the questions were analyzed together, different theme groups within a question were formed.

The second part of the research was quantitative. A survey, which was conducted online by using Mr. Interview software, was targeted at all employees of the researched organization. Overall 36 out of 74 employees participated. The purpose of the second part of the research was to gather information on how the employees perceive decision-making and decision communication in the department. The questionnaire was a mixture of open questions and structured questions. The questionnaire also included a few questions, which used Wiio's Organizational Communication Development (OCD) method. According to Hargie and Tourish (2009), the OCD method helps to translate the goals of an organization to end-results and it addresses several issues, which are not covered by other survey instruments. For this paper only the data from the questions regarding communication of decisions is used.

The quantitative data was analyzed with SPSS statistical analysis software. The quantitative data was analyzed by using means, ranges, numbers of respondents and deviations.

5. Results

The first finding was that the interviewed managers considered the decisions to be usually changes in consensual policies. They consider decisions to be "something bigger" that always include a change. So the decision is usually seen as a change. They found that normal daily routines, existing policies or decisions that have been made earlier, are not decisions.

"Decision is a change in policy and forces us to change the daily routine. Decision tells that we have to take a new direction." (Manager 1)

"Decision is a bargain of policy and a collective treaty of something. It is always something big, but do I have to communicate it forward is also something to decide." (Manager 2)

Managers also found that the decision can be collective information that leads to a decision. Those who were not sure how to define a decision said that the decisions are normal work and something that is a part of a supervisor's job. On some level, the decisions are "playing by the rules and guidelines". One leader found that acting according to norms and regulations is

also a decision. Another leader had no words to describe what a decision is, but said that he feels and knows it when a decision is made.

“The decision can be just something that comes to my mind.” (Manager 4)

5.1 The Communication of Decisions to Employees

Interviewed managers found that the best ways to communicate decisions to employees in their organization were scheduled meetings, face-to-face communication and email. The made decisions are revised once in a month in a group meeting, which are also to used to introduce the decisions of company’s board. The whole department gathers together every two months in a department’s meeting. After meetings, the made decisions are communicated with memos by using email. In addition to these meetings, there is also a technical core meeting and a managers own meeting with the department’s leader every week.

Findings suggest that communication is often driven by the urgency of the message. Messages that are in hurry are delivered by using fast communication channels as email or by face-to-face. Messages with lower priority are communicated in meetings.

“Telling something personally is often quicker and easier than sending email. Emailing usually takes more time than walking to a person and talking face-to-face.”
(Manager 1)

Managers found that a major part of communication is done by technical databases and computer-based memos. The instructions for daily work also exist in different databases. If instructions are to change, the new instructions are accepted and commented by a appropriate superior before they get sent out. The memos are sent via email along with comments. Messages concerning all employees of the department are sent via email. An information conference for employees is held only when, for instance, some big organizational reform is planned to go ahead. Almost every manager found that one of the best ways to inform employees about ongoing decision making process is to use non-official communication channels by participating in coffee table conversations during breaks. These conversations are thought of as a little bit problematic. Managers felt that not every subject or decision detail is appropriate for discussion during breaks. Also during these conversations employees are eager to get some information that has not yet been made public.

Managers found that the communication capabilities vary very much among employees and each employee’s attitude towards decisions affects how the decisions are accepted. Superiors said that they wanted to keep their mind open to negative feedback and want to discuss openly if someone has something negative to say about the decision making process.

5.2 Communicating Decisions to Managers

Managers found that they receive very well the information of decisions made by employees. Notable from their behalf was that project designers and project leaders often come to talk and share decision information face-to-face. Email is also often used and the email messages are often commentated. If managers want some information via a normally unused channel, this is agreed beforehand in meetings.

“I find it good that decisions are brought to me face-to-face. Matters that have no hurry are handled in group meetings. There we also handle those things people want to complain about.” (Manager 3)

Interviews revealed that managers do not want to monitor excessively the work of project leaders and employees. They have no need to know every decision that is made by team members. For decent knowledge of the situation of projects and its decision, the managers rely on the project databases.

“Project databases include the decision and memos and they can be read from there. The superior doesn’t need the information of decision as much as the project leaders do.” (Manager 4)

Managers acknowledged that it is very common that employees come to talk and give feedback when walking among employees or around the coffee point. They also stated that they keep their doors open every time, so that they are available for discussion.

5.3 Managers as Decision Makers and Communicators

Interviewed managers saw their roles as decision makers to be more as information gatherers and processors, than authoritative leaders. They felt that they draw the lines and weld together the alternatives. The superior is the last person to formulate the decision.

“In an organization where everyone has a certain expertise, the information and knowledge are in the group as a whole. I have to try to act so that I could get out all the needed tacit knowledge for the support of a decision.” (Manager 1)

Managers use consideration when making decisions and they expressed that if needed, the arguments for a certain decision can be found. Interviews suggest that managers would not begin to explain their decisions, because all decision-making in this organization is based on facts. If they do not have enough information to make the decision, they will search for it. On the other hand, they felt that the managerial work would be easier if the strategies from the upper level would be communicated better. Managers expressed that superiors are playing the key part in their organization and are the ones who “live” the strategies to lower level and employees. Managers felt their role as a decision maker and a communicator is to take decision making to a direction that eases and helps the further decision making of employees. The interviews suggest that the employees are more willing to speak out about decisions and discuss when they feel that they are heard. This also helps commit to previously made decisions.

5.4 Wanted and Received Information about Decisions

One of the most important questions of the questionnaire was the question about wanted and received information. In these questions, the respondents estimated how much they want information about certain decision themes and how much they receive it. This is called the information gap.

The gap was measured by asking the following questions: how often do you get information about the following things and how often would you like to have information about the following things? On the scale 1 to 5: one was ‘never’, and five stood for ‘very often’.

Decision information	N	Needed information	Received information	Gap
Changes in work	36	4.08	3.22	0.86
Technical things	36	4.14	3.31	0.83
Education possibilities	36	3.81	3.11	0.70
Personnel of department	36	3.53	3.19	0.41
Running projects	36	3.83	3.42	0.39
Traveling	36	3.28	2.97	0.31
Metso as a company	36	3.39	3.14	0.25
Timetables	36	3.72	3.53	0.19
Working hours	36	3.28	3.17	0.11
Department's finance	36	3.28	3.36	-0.08

Table 1. Differences between wanted and received information about decisions.

The differences between these two questions were analyzed by subtracting the received information from the wanted information. As table 1 shows, the gap was the biggest in information about decisions, which are related to changes in daily work. The gap was 0.86 and it is remarkable. The mean for wanted information was 4.08. The gap in information about a decisions which are related to technical things and education possibilities was also significant.

The gap in the first was 0.83 and in the latter 0.70. The mean of information related to technical things is high, 4.14. The gap of the information about decisions of personnel was 0.41. Travelling is one part of the work in research organization. The gap in this question was 0.31. The gap between wanted and received information about running projects was 0.39.

Less significant gaps were the gaps for information about decisions which are related to Metso as a company, timetables and working hours. The gaps in order were 0.25, 0.19 and 0.11. It is significant to notice that there exists one theme where the gap is negative, in other words the employees receive more information than they need. The gap for the department's financial things is -0.08.

This question viewed how much information about decisions flows to employees. The results show that more information about decisions is needed. Especially the themes where the gaps are big should be addressed. In nine fields out of ten, the amount of information about decisions does not cover the need. In terms of communication, the situation is serious where the gap is more than 0.50. Two respondents commented the question by open comment. One felt that

the true information of the goals of management should always be given. Now the information is more or less non-specific. Another respondent found that the possibilities to influence the decisions are too low. Now the information comes when the decision is already made.

5.5 Information of Decisions in Different Communication Channels

The questionnaire also inquired about the gap between wanted and received information about decisions in different communication channels. This gap is called the channel gap. The exact questions were:

- (1) Through which communication channels do you get the information about your work best?
- (2) Through which communication channels would you like to have more information about decisions concerning your work?

These questions were used to resolve the best channels to communicate about decisions within research organization. In scale 1 to 5 the 1 was never and 5 was very often.

Communication channel	N	Wanted information	Received information	Channel gap
Core meeting	36	2.69	2.00	0.69
Personnel magazines	36	2.42	2.00	0.42
Superior's bulletin	36	3.03	2.81	0.22
Department meeting	36	3.36	3.17	0.19
Group meetings	36	3.81	3.67	0.14
Intranet	36	2.81	2.72	0.09
Memos	36	3.25	3.22	0.03
Phone	36	2.89	2.86	0.03
Email	36	3.94	3.92	0.02
Co-worker	36	3.72	3.81	-0.09
Databases	36	3.25	3.36	-0.11
Internet	36	2.64	2.86	-0.22

Table 2. Differences between wanted and received information in different channels.

The gap (table 2) was the biggest in the core meeting, 0.69. After this, the second biggest gap was in personnel magazines. The gap is 0.42. These two communication channels had the biggest gap, but the means for wanted information and received information in both are under

average. From this point of view they cannot be considered as very significant communication channels.

The gaps in superior announcements, department meetings, group meetings, intranet, memos, phone, and email, are not significant. In each case, a bit more information through these channels is needed. It is notable that email and group meetings have relatively high means for both wanted and received information. The gap is negative in three cases: co-workers, databases and the internet. Two respondents commented the questions. They emphasized that the best channels are superior and the face-to-face conversation.

The results of this question showed that the information sent through different channels are mainly in balance. In the light of means, the three most used communication channels where the information is wanted are in order email, group meetings and co-workers. In 9 cases out of 12, a bit more information through different channels were wanted. Only in one case the gap is significant, in others not. In three cases more information through the channels is received than wanted.

6. Discussion

Findings from the present research show that the daily work is full of decisions and the boundaries of decisions disappear in the everyday action. This means that usually only big and important decisions are truly acknowledged as decisions. As the managers of the researched organization mentioned, the decisions in those cases are usually changes in consensual policies. Interviews revealed that decisions for them are something that always includes a change and which always seems to include a process of information.

The findings show that in an engineer-based organization, the decision-making process is very strongly based on the information and facts. The flow of information and messages build the most important decision premise. In this premise, managers see their role more as information gatherers, rather than decision makers. They feel that they feed alternatives to decision-making and try to ease and guide the employees' decision making. Findings from the organization show that the responsibility of decision communication is widely given to employees. While their work is based on instructions and guidelines, the decision communication is not. Employees' responsibility is to decide what they communicate vertically and horizontally inside their organization, and usually the channel is chosen by the urgency of the message. Greenberg & Baron (2008) presented that employees who have the power to make decisions usually know what is best for their job and effectiveness. This also increases the commitment to decisions.

When viewing the results of this study in the light of Luhmann's theory (2003) about autopoietic organization, we notice that decisions are truly a special form of communication. Decisions, for instance, can communicate what employees could expect from the future. Decisions are also social events and consist of coordinated actions as Habermas (1998) presented. The work at the research organization is oriented towards successful problem solving. Decisions and decision making are the part of every employee's daily work. Decisions made during daily work create organizational processes inside the organization. As the results and theoretical background in this paper show, processing information and disseminating decisions inside organization can form the backbone of organizational effectiveness.

Theories do not often seem to consider decision communication as a special form of communication management, even some scholars like Andersen (2003b) and Seidl & Becker (2006) have written about it during the last years, although this special form of communication is not much covered in the literature. Decision communication is often seen as a part of normal organizational communication and its fragile nature (Seidl & Becker 2006) is not recognized. In

theories, the basic models of decision-making are process-oriented and do not recognize the role of communication enough as a part of decision making. Organization's managers have their informational roles as important nerve centres and have the possibility to develop the decision communication at their workplaces strategically and planned ways.

In the research organization, information and facts form a solid base for decision-making. Moreover, the flow of information and messages build the most important decision premise in this organization. Theories also recognize that in decision-making there are other meaningful factors as well, especially on the individual level.

As theory presented in this paper and collected data shows, decisions are indeed a matter of communication and communication management (Public Relations). Decisions can be seen as the guiding force of organizations and the feed for organizational communication. Effective decision communication can be considered the backbone of organizational communication, which can benefit the whole organization from the top management to lower levels. Organizations may only learn from their experience and practice, and in this process, decision-making and decision communication play a key role.

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