

# The Role of the Employee's Magazine in the Internal Communication of an Organization

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*This paper aims at underlining the importance of the employee's magazine in structuring and managing the communication process within an organization as well as laying out the differences between the employee's magazine and other communication tools used by PR or Human Resources departments within the organization. It also attempts to get a grasp on the different functions and tasks of an employee's magazine and to uncover the different strengths and weaknesses of using this PR tool. Lastly, the paper focuses on how the employee's magazine can contribute to a successful management of change processes that can occur in an organization.*

## Introduction

Nowadays almost every company and organization feels obliged to publish an employee's magazine as it has become obvious during the past decades that this PR instrument is a must when it comes to the success of a company. The employee's publication also called the *house organ* is designed mainly for the internal audiences and one of its main purposes is leadership. Alongside with the value of the written information it contains, it can also transform the employees into disseminators of a company's positive image due to the fact that broader audiences can be reached through a written instrument. The employee's magazine allows PR or HR specialists to advertise their company and build acceptance and understanding among staff.

The employee's magazine is often called an *Information-shower* or *Information-cascade* due to the role it bears in the top-down communication processes. What the horizontal communication flow is concerned, the employees must and should know what their colleagues from different departments are doing so that a mutual understanding can be created within the company and employees can collaborate better. When it comes to vertical communication employees are entitled to know how the development schemes of the company look like and for the management to find out how the employees feel about its leadership.

The reader of the magazine, which in this case is the employee should get the sense that the magazine is made especially for him and perceive its employer as a person who is handing him a gift. The magazine is no matter where or when at the employees service. Key words such as motivation increase in performance, work climate, leadership policies, mission statement of the organization or social responsibility are connected to how an employee's magazine is supposed to be perceived.

The employee's magazine is considered by managers and PR experts as the central part of a clear communication strategy aimed at a company's employees which not only sets the basis of a goal-oriented information flow, but also completes 2 additional tasks. On the one hand, it will try to make the employees realize the importance of their tasks for the company so that they will be able to get a global perception of the connections between different activities that take place inside the company. On the other hand, the employees should be able to gain a detailed view over the company's role in the economical, social and political mechanisms of the country. The publication should also fit the needs of the company to spread credibility and authenticity among employees. However if it only serves the interests of the board of directors it runs the risk of not accomplishing the goals of the management to acquire the support and understanding of the staff, nor the needs of the employees to be informed and motivated.

It is not at all surprising that the employee's magazine is included by PR experts in the category of controlled media releases in which the editors can say exactly what they want. Due to the fact that the author has total control over the information that is being disseminated as well as over the way in which information is presented, the employee's magazine is without any doubt an adequate tool through which the management of an organization can accomplish the message-retention and message-acceptance objectives. In this situation there are no barriers to the message like in the case of a controlled publication in which everything that reaches the public is scanned beforehand by a gatekeeper.

However it has been shown that in spite of the lack of control exercised by gatekeepers the employee's magazine has similar effects to the ones that controlled print media produces. As surprising as the above statement may seem, one must keep in mind the fact that the staff members are not always strongly motivated to read this newsletter

in which situation their attitudes or behaviors cannot be changed through this printed publication.

## **Hypothesis**

1. The employee's magazine can be a powerful communication tool when it comes to reaching active publics and triggering changes in cognitions, attitudes and behaviours in the direction wanted by the management of the organization.
2. The employee's newsletter holds a series of functions through which it plays a major role in stirring the flow of horizontal and vertical communication processes within the organization.

## **Discussion**

### 1. Contents of an Employee's Magazine

The employee's magazine should offer information independently from any sort of interests connected to certain hierarchical structures of the organization. The main focus of the articles presented in this publication should be the organization itself so that a subject becomes newsworthy when it concerns the organization or the branch of activity itself. Many newsletters however publish articles on subjects that are not so important for the staff or the organization itself.

The staff publication should be compiled of a series of elements that can also be considered themes of writing. First of all it is of major importance that the employee's magazine offers its audience the possibility to make suggestions of improvement as well as to criticize so that the members of staff get the feeling that their opinion is taken into consideration by the management of the organization. This opportunity can nevertheless be seen as a *management of criticism potential* subsequently as the board of director's way to discover the sources of dissatisfaction among staff and to neutralize them. Finally the management's response to criticism and the facilitation of an open dialogue between leadership and staff points out the fact that an employee plays an active role in the development of the organization.

Secondly it is highly significant that in times of change and restructuring of organization structures employees be kept up to date with all transformation that takes place. In addition to preserving transparency, it is also necessary that staff members know all about the strategy and philosophy of the organization through practical examples. This also creates an opportunity for the management to present its leadership competence.

Reports of successful activities within the organization or a description of certain jobs within the organization is also a subject that should be included in an employee's magazine. Depictions of how satisfied some employees are with their job and status are usually used by the management in the publication to arouse motivation among other

staff members. Nevertheless, presenting only examples taken from the management of the organization as opposed to lower structures of the hierarchical latter may lead to rejection and dissatisfaction from the side of the employees.

Articles that concern an employee's dedication to his work, reports about trips, hobbies or other free-time activities of the staff that pull out an employee from anonymity and generate satisfaction due to exposure in the publication can also contribute to improved communication flow among staff. On the other hand, editors must pay attention to the fact that the audience that reads the publication comprises retired members of staff so that the magazine should include articles on topics that could interest this public.

One further thing that can help increase the popularity of the employee's magazine in the eyes of its audience is the possibility to publish personal adverts.

The employee's magazine will be able to gain the interest and attraction of staff members only when the audience gets the feeling that it needs the information included in the pages of the magazine. Interest can be brought out not only through the quality and newsworthiness of the articles, but also through the way the information is presented. Here are some ways through which interest for the employee's magazine can be created among staff:

1. Presenting information about employees can arouse emotional involvement of the staff by using interviews, statements or quotations instead of reports that can seem dry. Texts can only become alive when persons and examples are included so that it is imperative that long blocks of text should contain quotations which personalize them.
2. The words used as well as the style of writing influence the potential of an article to arouse interest. While reading it, the employee should get the impression that the text flows and the sentences shouldn't be very long or contain a large number of nouns. The writer should focus on using as many verbs as possible to induce dynamics to the text.
3. Using pictures and headlines is also vital in keeping the audience interested in reading an article. Studies have shown that the longer an article is the more it should contain charts, pictures, interviews and examples to keep the reader's attention.

## 2. Functions of the Employee's Magazine

The structure as well as the goals of an organization plays a major role in the way that an employee's magazine is conceived and on the functions that it has. Perhaps the first function that can come to mind is the *dissemination of information* to staff. The credibility of the newsletter is directly linked to the credibility and trustworthiness of the management in the eyes of the employees. To be able to build credibility one must first of all attempt to build objectiveness and critique, which means that certain aspects or problems that may affect the image of the organization should not be kept

secret, but presented to the staff. However, these issues should be laid out in a manner that doesn't point out the incompetent nature or inability to solve problems of the management, but in such a way that employees get the feeling that the management is perfectly capable of handling these issues and is taking appropriate measures.

It is not only the omission of certain aspects that can cause damage to the credibility of the management, but also false or only half-true information that may appear in the articles of the newsletter. In the long run, publishing true information can only lead to an increase of the trust factor and acceptance on the side of the staff.

Another goal that the employee's magazine has is to gain the understanding of staff towards the organization's activities and its role in community. A major importance is also placed on correctly applying the decentralization and subsidiarity principles to the structures of the organization, which should be reflected in the articles of the employee's magazine. By offering the staff a transparent view of the activity of management the employee's newsletter can serve to building understanding and trust in the leadership.

A positive role that the employee's magazine can play is spreading the feeling of being well-informed, absorbing insecurity among staff and fighting rumors. Rumors are natural component of the unofficial internal communication and are based mainly on the emotional factor as well as likes or dislikes of a person. Rumors can become problematic when they take up a dominant position in the communication between employees. This is where the employee's magazine comes in: by offering detailed information and denying false information it can contribute to an increase in the efficiency of the workplace.

Rumors can become especially dangerous for an organization during times of radical change, when the management finds it more comfortable to remain silent about any problems that might have triggered these changes. Nevertheless, it is not uncommon that employees make presumptions when they don't hold the necessary information which results in rumors. In this situation the management should be open about those changes so that they can make the employees feel integrated in these change processes and ensure their understanding.

*Motivating employees* is the second function that a newsletter has within an organization. Motivation can be brought about to employees through different ways. One of them is attempting to create satisfaction at the workplace which is directly linked to how well employees are informed through the newsletter of the organization. If employees feel uninformed they are also less motivated which is easily reflected in the efficiency of their work. Being able to acknowledge responsibility and quality at the workplace is a feeling that arises from motivation.

Motivation can also be created through praising the employee for its results at the workplace so that he becomes aware of the fact that his work is appreciated and properly acknowledged by the management. However, just commending on the

employee's activity may not be enough. It is also important that the employee has the feeling his needs are being discussed and taken into consideration through the articles of the newsletter.

Motivation can occur through the identification with the organization's goals which have to be laid out in a transparent manner through the magazine. Corporate culture and culture identity are 2 other concepts that should be transmitted by means of the magazine and play a significant role in motivating the staff by offering them a model of identification and a system of values which they can internalize. Loyalty towards the organization and its goals cannot arise unless the employee internalizes the values of the system which mainly occurs through the help of the employee's magazine.

A third function that the employee's magazine has is that of *managing the image of the organization*, which means that it can be used as Public Relations tool inside the organization as well as in the external environment. When it comes to practicing PR within the organization, the main purpose of the employee's magazine is to transform the employee into a positive image disseminator. Even in their private life outside their working environment employees can still influence people's views of the organization through simple things connected mainly to their behavior. In regard to the external environment, the newsletter is bound to provide information to audiences of secondary importance such as friends or family of the employees, clients or journalists.

The fourth important function of the employee's magazine is *supporting the dialogue and exchange of information* between hierarchical levels within the organization. This function of the newsletter helps to create bonds between employees, exchange experiences and practical knowledge, bring about discussion topics or solve contradictions. This is how the employees' magazine can play a role in conflict management processes. In practice this function becomes obvious through the number of articles written by employees that are published in each newsletter. By offering personnel the possibility to express its own views and opinions, the magazine encourages their interest in exchanging information and establishing social bonds with other employees. In stimulating communication within the organization, the employees' magazine becomes a ground on which critique can be made and constructive discussions can take place. This is how the management can obtain direct feedback on their actions as well as suggestions of improvement. The ultimate benefit that can be drawn from this function of the employee's magazine is building credibility and authenticity for the organization.

### 3. The Role of the Employee's Magazine in Change-Processes

When used correctly, the employee's magazine can facilitate change processes that occur within an organization by offering guidance to employees, present perspectives and motivate personnel to participate actively in these processes. There are mainly 3 ways through which the employee's newsletter can help the management during

times of change:

1. It offers a clear, detailed and continuous coverage of changes taking place in the organization and attempts to include the employee in these processes.
2. The employee's magazine undergoes a process of change itself which triggers a modification of certain elements that make up corporate culture.
3. Through the two actions listed above can the employee's newsletter spread credibility and win over the support of the personnel for the change processes that are taking place.

What makes the employee's magazine particularly useful in spreading information about change is the fact that as opposed to the Intranet, meetings or e-mails it can offer a detailed coverage and offer indications regarding the backgrounds of these changes. Nevertheless, the management should acknowledge the fact that it should be as sincere and as open as possible about certain problems changes may bring.

A continuous, uninterrupted reporting about processes taking place within the organization is also important to maintain the credibility and trustworthiness of the management at high levels. Lack of information on topics to which employees are particularly sensitive only encourages speculations and rumoring, this is why continuity in covering certain subjects is necessary.

When offering information on change-processes, the management of an organization should be careful to send out the same message through all means of communication. If contradictions are found between information presented in different communication mediums, members of personnel may feel that they are subjects of manipulation, that certain pieces of information are being kept secret from them or that the organization is dealing with major issues. This leaves plenty of room for speculation and can have damaging consequences on the credibility and ultimately on the image of the management and the organization itself.

A proper synchronization of information dissemination can also lead to a successful process of change within the organization. Reports on specific changes should reach certain target groups at exact moments so that their effectiveness is enhanced. One should take into consideration the fact that the internal target groups (personnel, management) should be the first to receive important information and only then can this information be made available to external target groups (journalists, family or friends of employees, clients).

All in all, one must point out the fact that the employee's magazine should not only offer information on the development schemes of the organization, but also provide clues through which the employees can distinguish changes in corporate culture and in the strategy of the organization. It is only in this case that the employee's newsletter can facilitate the acceptance of change processes among personnel.

## **SWOT Analysis**

### **Strengths**

1. The employee's magazine is an established medium that can reach all members of staff
2. The fact that it is a printed medium leads to the fact that it can be read anytime and any place
3. It covers a vast spectrum of topics
4. It supports the vertical and horizontal communication flow
5. It helps motivate the employees
6. It contributes to building the staff's credibility and trustworthiness in the management
7. It supports the dialogue between members of personnel creating social bonds
8. It helps management get feedback from staff members

### **Weaknesses**

1. The employee's magazine is losing ground in front of the Intranet because of the fact that it is a printed medium, and therefore considered outdated and slow
2. The continuity of coverage can be negatively affected if the newsletter is published only 2 or 3 times a year
3. The variety of target-groups which the magazine has can lead to the fact that some groups may feel neglected or unimportant as opposed to other groups that get more information

### **Opportunities**

1. It works as a support-tool for the management during times of change
2. It helps building Corporate Culture and spreading the values of the organization
3. It can attract potential clients by presenting developments, projects or new products
4. It can build a positive image of the management and organization itself in the eyes of staff members

### **Threats**

1. In case of presenting incomplete or untrue information it can damage the image of management or of the organization
2. Employees may place little importance on the newsletter which can also mean that they underestimate the management
3. The editors of the employee's magazine don't always possess the professional knowledge that could enable them to design a high-quality newsletter
4. The budget that the management offers for the employee's magazine is often very small which is also reflected in the quality of the medium

## 5. Conclusions

The employee's magazine is the most used communication medium within organizations in spite of the appearance of Intranet and its advantages. The printed newsletter is still being used because of its ability to reach different target groups. The advantages of using the employee's magazine are various, but one can sum them up in: providing orientation, contributing to integration of the employee in formal and informal structures of the organization and disseminating information in different hierarchical levels. However, one cannot disregard the fact that it also imparts values and elements of corporate culture to the personnel, creating loyalty and an emotional bond between the employee and the organization.

The employee's newsletter does not only serve the needs and interests of the staff, but also those of the management so that one can think of it as a strategical medium of leadership. Due to the fact that it is a controlled medium, the management has the opportunity to send out messages that serve their purposes. When used correctly, the newsletter can accomplish the message-retention objectives of the management and produce changes in thinking and behavior on the side of the employees.

Through the information that it helps disseminate at all levels of the hierarchical structure it not only plays a leading role in the process of communication, but it also helps bring about satisfaction and motivation among personnel. An employee which is well informed and who feels that he receives all information that he needs is more satisfied with his workplace and is consequently more loyal to the organization. By providing significant data to the members of staff, the employee's magazine spreads the feeling that each and every employee is important for a proper functioning of the organization and that the management is interested in the opinion of every member of staff. This is how the newsletter can contribute to a better understanding between management and staff and ultimately to an increase in the efficiency and productivity of the organization.

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