

ОБЩЕСТВЕНИ КОМУНИКАЦИИ И ИНФОРМАЦИОННИ НАУКИ PUBLIC COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION SCIENCES

CHANGES IN LEADERSHIP COMMUNICATION

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Abstract: *Leadership and communication are inextricably linked. The current transformation of the world of work needs a new way of managing communication, which can adapt to today's agile and remote forms of collaboration and their subsequent demands. New principles of work require an overall reform of management processes. Digitalization is not only a driver of change, it also creates numerous new opportunities for communication. For example, hybrid teams can be supported by modern digital media. Overall, collaboration tools enable a broad cross-divisional exchange, as well as platforms for interdisciplinary collaboration. Leadership itself is challenged by remote leadership. Overall, managers have to deal with new communicative interventions. For this reason, it is generally assumed that the turbulent processes described above will not work without the corresponding competences of managers. The present study examines the changing aspects of leadership communication. The aim of the article is to illuminate perspectives on leadership communication and to focus on corresponding perspectives for action.*

Keywords: *Leadership communication, digitalization, virtual collaboration, remote management, communication skills*

INTRODUCTION

The world of work is currently undergoing a dynamic change. Trends, demographic developments and digitalization are considered to be the drivers for this. It is assumed that company structures are adapting to change (cf. Suling & Wildner 2024, p. 4). Based on this, it can be argued that leadership processes will transform accordingly (cf. Suling & Wildner 2024, p. 5). It is fundamentally true that leadership is only possible through communication. It can also be argued that any form of collaboration is fundamentally dependent on communication (cf. Karczmarzyk 2021, p. 7). Leadership communication is considered an essential tool in implementing innovations and developments, which are the result of change (cf. Weibler 2012, p. 398). With this in mind, we can argue that successful leadership communication depends on employees having sufficient information and guidance available, which in turn requires that managers themselves are well informed (cf. Staffbase GmbH 2024, p. 1). Overall, communication is a major success factor for leadership processes. Managers therefore need sufficient skills to be able to act accordingly (cf. Olfert 2015, p. 281). The new world of work is currently characterized by digital interaction. The dynamics of change-related progress therefore require the use of digital media more than ever. This is due on the one hand to the mobility of work, and on the other hand, to the necessary speed of communication (cf. Bechstein 2024, p. 1). The 'Great Place to Work' study from 2021 shows that above all employees want their managers to have professional expertise, empathy and a willingness to communicate (cf. Great Place to Work 2021, p. 1). The study by Deloitte Consulting Ltd 'Work in Transition' from 2022 shows that working remotely involves some challenges. According to the study, mobile working often results in a decreased sense of belonging in employees (cf. Deloitte Consulting GmbH 2022, p. 5). In this context, it is noted that informal dialogue and interdisciplinary communication are suffering. It is also noted that purely technical solutions or virtual methods cannot replace personal dialogue (cf. Deloitte Consulting GmbH 2022, p. 15). Leichsenring (2023) describes that the modern world of work poses challenges for managers. Drawing on a study by Staufen, Leichsenring (2023) shows that more than 70% of respondents rate communication skills as the most important leadership competence. More than 40% of respondents stated that managers need development in this area in particular (cf. Leichsenring 2023, p. 1). The 'Business and Law School' (2021) focuses on recommendations for action for managers in a new world of work.

The communication dimension in particular proves to be essential. Transparent communication and equal access to information for all stakeholders also appear to be of great importance. These serve as the basis for successful cooperation. Similarly, personal and supportive dialogue should be initiated and maintained by managers at all times (cf. BSP 2021, p. 17).

The aim of this academic article is to highlight aspects of the changes in leadership communication in relation to the change in the world of work. It is intended to shed light on current perspectives and possible courses for action. Overall, this article is intended to provide recommendations, as well as impetus for further scientific discourses.

METHODOLOGY

This scientific article refers to current aspects of leadership communication. It focuses on the following research question: How is successful leadership communication modified in the currently changing world of work? A systematic literature review is conducted to answer this question. To this end, the literature on the topic of 'Leadership communication in the current changing world of work' will be researched and then evaluated, compared and critically interpreted. The focus here is on the examination of existing findings and a reflected contextualisation in order to answer the present research question.

RESULTS

Leadership communication

Leadership communication is the instrument used to convey not only content and relevant guidelines through communication, but also concrete information, requirements and policies. It can be assumed that success depends on whether leadership communication works (cf. Weibler 2012, p. 398). Scholz (2022) argues that managers have the ability to use various communicative leadership tools (cf. Scholz 2022, p. 80). It is important to note that leadership communication plays a central role in the work process (cf. Scholz 2022, p. 81). Karczmarzyk (2021) makes it clear that leadership can be interpreted in many ways and is therefore difficult to define explicitly. What is obvious, however, is that it is initiated by people who have command of the communicative tools necessary for a successful leadership process (cf. Karczmarzyk 2021, p. 11). According to Stehle et al. (2018) there is significantly more communication in employee-oriented leadership than in task-oriented leadership. Employee-orientation seems to be more appropriate when it comes to change in particular (cf. Stehle et al. 2018, p. 20). On the one hand, leadership communication in the event of change depends on the dynamics of the change processes; on the other hand, it can influence the subjective attitude of the management in times of change. As a whole, change-related leadership communication seems to benefit from dialogue-oriented communication (cf. Marso-Walbeck 2018, p. 61).

In her remarks Müller (2020) refers to the "[...] *Study of the Institute for Leadership Culture in the Digital Age* [...]" (Müller 2020, p. 1) from 2019. The results show that leadership communication, shortly followed by adaptability are the most important competencies of leaders. According to Müller, transparency in communication is another requirement. Clarity of expression also plays a central role in communicative interaction, since otherwise there is a risk of misunderstandings (cf. Müller 2020, p. 1).

Leadership is impossible without personal communication (cf. Laufer 2021, p. 8). In times of change, intensive communication is particularly important. Those affected or involved in change processes should be fully involved by way of transparent communication (cf. Laufer 2021, p. 27). Essentially, changes must be explained by managers in terms of purpose and goals. It is also advisable to provide information not only about advantages, but also about any disadvantages. A dialogue in this regard should take place for as long as it is needed (cf. Laufer 2021, p. 28).

Digital developments are constantly driving change, so that leadership reaches the limits of its information processing. Employees are dependent on an efficient internal communication flow. Based on this, management communication should be multidimensional to promote agility. Digital communication can maintain agility. However, there is also a certain risk of creating misunderstandings in the process (cf. Laufer 2021, p.7).

In the new world of work, work increasingly takes place remotely, which poses a particular challenge for management communication. Mühsig (2024) notes that management communication only works if

managers “[...] *are themselves in the flow of communication [...]*” (Mühsig 2024, p. 1). In this context, managers are seen as the “[...] *most important multipliers [...]*” (Mühsig 2024, p. 1) for implementing corporate communication. Nevertheless, not only an uninterrupted information chain seems to be crucial, but also the corresponding competences of managers.

The basic principle is that leadership is successful only when communication has achieved an understanding of goals. Essentially, three fundamental aspects are identified for successful leadership communication. Firstly, as already pointed out in the previous sections, it is necessary to take a look at the managers themselves. Secondly, an appropriate communication strategy focussing on the necessary impact is recommended. Thirdly, it seems important that leadership communication uses the right channels and media (cf. Mühsig 2024, p. 1).

Digital communication in leadership

Digital communication is understood as the communication between at least two people using different technical means of communication (cf. Olfert 2015, p. 284). Ciesielski and Schutz (2016) assume that digital communication can only take place to a limited extent, as communication fundamentally also creates room for interpretation. Personal communication, on the other hand, supports clarity through facial expressions and gestures. By comparison, the possibility of recording is limited in personal communication. In contrast, in digital communication, technical storage options and the associated repetitions are available (cf. Ciesielski & Schutz 2016, p. 19).

The rapid development of digital communication is creating wider connection options. The key factors in digital communication are stable connection, uninterrupted transmission quality and appropriate data protection. The advantages lie in the speed, reliability and quality of information transmission. The quantity of available information and its quality are seen as challenges. Digital leadership is understood as a virtual process in which employees, who work in various forms on a mobile and virtual basis, are instructed or guided by managers using the available digital communication media. In this context, the New Work trend is particularly evident in terms of new and flexible working models (cf. Forum Verlag Herkert 2024, p. 1). In virtual leadership, managers are sometimes restricted in their scope of action. Therefore, it is advisable that management should take place largely by way of target agreements and that virtual teams are given more responsibility. The so-called “*virtual distance*” (Blaszczyk 2019, p. 52), which is based on the key factors of relationships, interaction and networking, is considered a threat to virtual teams. Should the above factors be missing, or only present to a limited extent, this would result in “*virtual distance*” (Blaszczyk 2019, p. 52). Blaszczyk (2019) assumes that the promotion of these factors is crucial for team success (cf. Blaszczyk 2019, p. 52). Thus, it makes sense for leaders to initiate, promote and implement communication, relationships and activities (cf. Blaszczyk, 2019, p. 53). Collaboration in teams is subject to individual communication and interaction requirements. In this context, teamwork offers the opportunity to combine different potentials in order to achieve room for maneuver and the autonomy that results from it (cf. Mütze-Niewöhner et al. 2021, p. 2). However, when teams work together virtually, challenges and burdens are placed before or at least alongside potential opportunities (cf. Mütze-Niewöhner et al. 2021, p. 3). Managers are called upon here to support assignments for teams through appropriate attitudes and conditions (cf. Mütze-Niewöhner et al. 2021, p. 4).

Perspectives on management communication

The current transformation of the world of work clearly shows new forms of cooperation as well as related trends in communication. Both are largely due to the ongoing progress of digitalisation. Virtual leadership is therefore faced with changing conditions and principles. Managers are required to adapt to this (cf. Pohlabein et al. 2020, p. 53). The principles are “[...] *more collaboration and transparency as the basis for more personal responsibility and autonomous working [...]*” (Pohlabein et al. 2020, p. 53). Digitalization and the related technical conditions create opportunities to manage the multitude of information resulting from change. The methods and tools that are available appear to be important. It can be expected that similarly adapted forms of communication will also be required (cf. Pohlabein et al. 2020, p. 63). All in all, managers need a range of new skills to lead employees through change. The new forms of

collaboration resulting from the change can be seen to create greater room for maneuver. Self-organization and self-management are becoming the focus of work activities. Digitalisation and the associated technical conditions create opportunities to deal with the multitude of information resulting from change. The methods and tools that are available appear to be important. It can be expected that correspondingly adapted forms of communication will also be required (cf. Pohlabein et al. 2020, p. 63).

All of the factors listed above depend on a form of communication that is necessary in the modern world of work (cf. Kauffeld & Albrecht 2021, p. 4). Seibold and Mugler (2022) argue that a new work organisation brings with it various new methods. that a new labor organization will bring with it several new methods. In particular, they point out that the modern world of work makes use of digital communication and collaboration tools (cf. Seibold & Mugler 2022, p. 5). Collaboration is understood as working together in the common interest. Here, employees from different areas of work collaborate, despite having conflicting interests (cf. DWDS 2024, p. 1). Seibold and Mugler cite Office 365 as an example of a digital communication and collaboration tool (cf. Seibold & Mugler 2022, p. 5). A collaboration tool is software that makes it possible for several parties to act simultaneously. The purpose behind this is to enable transparent and efficient collaboration (cf. Sturm 2024, p. 1). The use of such tools safeguards data protection, behavior, communication and organization. However, internet connection problems or irregularly frequent updates, could hinder the efficient operation of such tools (cf. Seibold & Mugler 2022, p. 32). Technical developments control the way in which leadership takes place. According to Suling and Wildner (2024), large amounts of data, comprehensive platforms and the use of artificial intelligence also influence the management process. One of the challenges posed by these aspects is that managers could lose control and overview (cf. Suling & Wildner 2024, p. 5).

The growth in remote work situations leads to increased virtual leadership. In the circumstance of hybrid working conditions, leadership is faced with certain challenges. Hybrid collaboration is when employees work together both on site and from home at the same time (cf. Breyer-Mayländer & Zerres 2022, p. 2). Studies show that the process of management communication is particularly important here (cf. Breyer-Mayländer & Zerres 2022, p. 3). In hybrid collaboration, it is assumed that there is a lack of information between present and virtual employees. It is also assumed that virtual employees are less committed to the company and that there is less trust in the management relationship. Asynchronous management communication seems possible in principle, but it is assumed that it lacks in quality (cf. Breyer-Mayländer & Zerres 2022, p. 4). Overall, it can be concluded that managers need appropriate professional skills when implementing virtual communication tools (cf. Breyer-Mayländer & Zerres 2022, p. 5).

CONCLUSION

The results of the current study indicate an evolution in the forms in management communication. It is clear that management communication is not only undergoing a transformation as a result of the changing world of work but is also becoming of central importance. It can be assumed that how we work together will change significantly. As a result, communication should be designed accordingly and should be agile enough to adapt to the necessary speed of change. Due to the mobility of work, remote leadership presents a challenge to managers. Specifically, it can be argued that communication in mobile and hybrid collaboration requires integral support. In this regard, regular dialogue and feedback could be an effective tool for successful leadership communication. It is recommended that communication achieve a higher level of understanding, particularly through changes in personal dialogue. The above feedback could help managers take a new course of action. It is commonly believed that sufficient and transparent information has always been a priority for employees. The use of different digital media in communication seems unavoidable. New forms of work therefore require new virtual instruments for collaboration. Digital communication and collaboration tools are seen as a necessary innovation. On the one hand, agile communication is considered an advantage. On the other hand, digital cooperation could give rise to criticism. It is recommended that employees participate in the use of such tools. Communication with a remote-working staff requires needs- and demand-orientated virtual tools. Overall, change-related management communication seems to benefit from dialogue-oriented communication.

The current world of work requires communicative leaders with strong knowledge in the application

of various digital communication tools. Communicative competence is fundamentally required, as well as knowledge of demand-oriented digital tools as well. Management communicative competence could be assessed as a prerequisite in accordance with the necessary adaptation and transformation abilities.

The following recommendations for action can be derived from this: Companies should pursue a communication strategy in the new changing world of work. It is important that all stakeholders are involved in a communicatively transparent manner. Overall, management contact should take place via appropriate means of communication. According to the overall context, interaction requires security and data protection, especially with regard to digital communication, as well as network and line stability. In the case of virtual teams, management processes based on goal-oriented agreements are recommended. Managers are the key to success. To do this, they need opportunities to adapt and expand their communicative skills. There is some evidence that leaders themselves need to expand and adapt their competencies.

To sum up, the needs of employees are worth further analysis. Involving employees in the integration of new communication processes through participation and co-design can be beneficial from several perspectives. As a suggestion for further in-depth research on leadership communication, it is recommended to analyze the dimension of digitalization in more detail, in particular the aspects of artificial intelligence.

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ПРОМЕНИ В УПРАВЛЕНСКАТА КОМУНИКАЦИЯ

Резюме: Лидерството и комуникацията са неразривно свързани. Настоящата трансформация на света на труда се нуждае от нов начин на комуникация на ръководството, който може да се адаптира към днешните гъвкави и отдалечени форми на сътрудничество и произтичащите от тях изисквания. Новите принципи на работа изискват цялостна реформа на управленските процеси. Цифровизацията е не само двигател на промените, но и създава множество нови възможности за комуникация. Например хибридните екипи могат да бъдат подпомагани от съвременните цифрови медии. Като цяло инструментите за сътрудничество позволяват широк междуетраслов обмен, както и платформи за интердисциплинарно сътрудничество. Самото ръководство е изправено пред предизвикателството на дистанционното ръководство. Като цяло мениджърите трябва да се справят с нови комуникационни интервенции. Поради тази причина обикновено се приема, че описаните бурни процеси няма да проработят без съответните компетенции на мениджърите. Настоящото изследване разглежда променящите се аспекти на управленската комуникация. Целта на статията е да се осветлят перспективите за лидерската комуникация и да се акцентира върху съответните перспективи за действие.

Ключови думи: лидерска комуникация, дигитализация, виртуално сътрудничество, дистанционно управление, комуникационни умения

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