

Recent Trends In Strategic Communication For Remote Workforce

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Abstract

Purpose: This study aims to define the post-pandemic remote workforce and understand their needs so that organizations can better communicate with this growing population. While the pandemic impact on workplace and resultant crisis form the backdrop for this study, it is not the central focus of this effort. The primary objective of this research is to theoretically find connecting thread between strategic communication and the post-pandemic remote worker in the IT industry to strengthen communication effectiveness during the employee lifecycle.

Design/Methodology/Approach –This paper reviews literature related to strategic communication, remote working, best practices for hybrid working and importance of communication in remote working. A systematic review was conducted for the present study and various databases were explored. 25 relevant papers were chosen for the final study and were critically analyzed.

Findings: The selected studies and their findings were discussed in detail the study.

Key Words: Strategic Communication, Remote Workforce, IT Industry.

Introduction

According to studies on workplace communication, 86% of workers and executives point to poor teamwork and communication for company failures (Pumble, 2022). There is strong evidence that employees as significant stakeholders, have

influence over firm reputation, and serve as brand ambassadors. According to various studies (Welch & Jackson, 2007; White et al., 2010), good communication with staff members can increase organizational commitment, produce superior business results, affect corporate reputation, help share expertise, develop trust, foster a sense of belonging, raise awareness, and engage staff members.

According to Yates (2006), there are 8 key areas which flourish due to effective communication - presenting financial insights and goals, clarifying and advocating new programmes and policies, integrating new hires into the organization, communicating the importance of the total rewards programme, helping connect employees to the business, assisting in aligning employees' actions with customer needs, training employees about the organizational culture and values, and exhibiting leadership during change. Sharing information and engaging in communication are strategies that can contribute to increased shareholder returns, higher market premiums, improved employee engagement, and decreased attrition. It is said that good internal communication is an organization's "secret weapon" for advancing financially and organizationally. Better market share, greater shareholder value, greater engagement, and lower employee turnover are all benefits of investing in and excelling at internal communication (Yates, 2006).

Face-to-face contact, video conferencing, email, and business collaboration software are some of the essential forms of efficient communication that the communication department oversees. Allowing for both upward and downward communication is necessary. The goal of downward communication is to convey values and priorities, such as the mission and policies. Employees must be able to speak up and share their opinions, describe how they feel about their workplace, and offer feedback on managers' strategies for boosting productivity and performance (Cornelissen, 2011).

According to Maria (2019), "strategic communication refers to the manner communication is used in different situations and how the activities get organized, planned, and performed to gain expected results and to promote the image of the organization." Through its ability to increase public awareness and

understanding of organisational goals and operating procedures and, as a result, to foster support among various audiences for particular activities carried out by the organisation, strategic communication positively and directly contributes to the successful completion of all operations, tasks, and activities of an organisation. Strategic communication strives to and is successful in enhancing the strategic positioning and competitiveness of the organisation among its competitors. It also aligns with the organization's mission, vision, and values.

Need of the Current Study

Worldwide, millions of white-collar professionals (WCE) began working from home as a result of COVID-19. Work from home (WFH) became operational in the vast majority of organisations in India towards the end of March 2020 (Jayadevan, 2020).

The meeting time increased as working from home became more prevalent (Reclaim, 2021). Meetings accounted for more over half of the typical professional's 40-hour workday, according to a report from Reclaim (2021).

In order to allow at least some workers to work remotely even after the pandemic, many technology companies, including Twitter, Facebook, Square, Box, Slack, and Quora, have announced longer-term and, in some cases, permanent remote work policies (McLean, 2020).

The COVID-19 pandemic has been studied by George et al. (2020) in relation to the research agenda for technology and innovation management, and it has been determined that the pandemic has altered how we live and work. Since collaboration and communication are necessary for creativity, their work covered the impact of the pandemic on innovation when in-person interactions are replaced by online communication as well as the difficulties associated with visualizing collaboration and innovation.

Objectives

Hence, the key objectives of this study are:

- To define the post-pandemic remote workforce and understand their needs

- To theoretically connect strategic communication and the post-pandemic remote worker in the IT industry.

Methodology

A systematic review was carried out on the basis of existing literature. The literature published on strategic communication from 2005 to 2023 was covered with a special emphasis on publications from 2019-2023. A total of 25 studies out of 100 were included in the final review focusing on changes in strategic communication for the remote workforce as well as the need of strategic communication.

Results & Discussion

1. Changing Trends in Communication

1.1 Meetings- During and after COVID-19

Numerous studies indicate that in 2020, employees attended more meetings.

Meetings were typically shorter and mostly concentrated on preserving team engagement and one-on-one check-ins.

DeFilippis et al. (2020) examined how COVID-19 affected collaboration and discovered that, for the majority of information workers, the nature of work has altered, particularly with regard to meetings, business communication, and workday hours.

Specifically, there were 13.5% more attendees each meeting and 12.9% more meetings held per individual (DeFilippis et al., 2020).

The average meeting time decreased by 20.1%, people spent 11.5% less time in meetings after the lockdown, and workdays have now become 8.2% (or 48.5 minutes) longer on average.

According to Doodle (2021), socialization-focused meetings increased in number in 2020, with one-on-one meetings rising by 18% and check-ins and team socialisation meetings rising by 10%.

1.2 Shorter meetings prevailed throughout 2020

The number of meetings increased as a result of an abrupt transition to remote work. In order to recreate the in-person contact that employees were accustomed to in the workplace, organisations began scheduling more meetings.

Despite attending more meetings, participants had slightly more downtime because they had more casual check-ins that lasted less time than they had a year earlier. Microsoft's Workplace Insights

(Layne & Cozzi, 2020) indicated that in 2020, the average meeting time grew by 10%. Short meetings, or those lasting 30 minutes or less, saw a 22% increase, nonetheless.

Additionally, Doodle (2021) discovered that in 2020, the number of 15-minute meetings grew by 10.8%.

One of the most unusual effects of the pandemic on business meetings has been the move to a virtual setting. But according to the same estimate, virtual meetings continued to make up 42% of all meetings in 2020.

2. The rise of one-on-one meetings

Internal collaboration meetings were the most common kind of office meetings prior to the pandemic. According to Reclaim's meeting survey from 2021, one-on-one meetings predominated in offices in 2020 and beyond. In particular, the study indicated a startling 500% rise in one-on-one meetings in 2020. In comparison to the 5.6 1:1 meeting per week in October 2021, there were fewer 1:1 meeting before February 2020 (Reclaim, 2021). Doodle (2021), using data from 2020, found that the number of one-on-one meets increased from January to December by more than 1,230%. Even though they increased the most, these meetings made up about 42% of all those that were scheduled.

3. Impact of Virtual Meetings on Productivity

The transition to a work-from-home (and work-from-anywhere) model lengthened general meetings but also increased involvement and output.

While on-site work and in-person meetings have historically been associated with peak productivity among employers, the data indicate that this is not the consensus among the workforce (Owl Labs, 2022). In a poll conducted in 2022 by Owl Labs, 67% of participants claimed that working from home increases their productivity. They can better manage their time and prevent meetings from interfering with their workflow thanks to this flexibility.

Better training provided by employers is another factor in increased productivity. According to Owl Labs (2022), 50% of the studied organisations have given their leadership training in running virtual meetings. Additionally, 54% of companies have

concentrated on training staff to make hybrid meetings inclusive and productive.

Virtual meetings are also preferred by respondents in Buffer's State of Remote Work study for 2023, especially when the camera is on. The camera on, according to about 62% of the interviewed remote workers, allowed them to observe participants' nonverbal signs. Another 16% of those surveyed say that these meetings make them feel less alone.

3. Communication & Job Performance

Although communication is important for organizational success, researchers have found that there is no unifying theoretical framework that explains how communication supports organizational functioning, particularly through individual performance. In particular, because it concentrates on performance in a virtual environment, which is comparable to remote situations, and because it addresses individual-level performance, Dulebohn & Hoch's (2017) input-output-process model of virtual teams is pertinent. Simply put, the model contends that critical facets of the organization, leadership, and team make a difference in the cognitive, affective, motivational, and behavioral processes of the team, which in turn affect team performance as well as individual performance and attitudes.

4. Videoconferencing

Participant involvement and multitasking behaviour during videoconference meetings have also been studied in research. For instance, (Kuzminykh & Rintel, 2020) discovered that when attending a conference remotely as opposed to in person, participants reported feeling less motivated to engage both behaviorally and cognitively. Participants also mentioned that turning on or off their video was an important indicator of involvement, with a camera on denoting high engagement and a camera off denoting low interest. According to Cao et al. (2021), multitasking frequently occurs during videoconference sessions, with email multitasking accounting for roughly 30% of meetings. 32 percent of participants reported that while the video camera and microphone were off, they were more inclined to multitask. Additionally, they found that multitasking was more likely to

happen in meetings that were big, prolonged, scheduled in the morning, frequent, and thought to be of less importance. In terms of outcomes, while a small percentage of participants (15%) claimed that multitasking in meetings increased their productivity, a larger percentage (36%) mentioned adverse effects, such as forgetting meeting details (where the details were crucial), experiencing increased mental fatigue, and having other people perceive you as rude, impolite, or disrespectful. (Waizenegger et al., 2020) examined interview data to determine the favourable and unfavourable effects of technology on team collaboration using Gibson's (1977) affordance theory approach. Their findings imply that videoconferencing offered a social affordance, or the chance to interact with people and exchange ideas. However, whilst people living alone who missed social interaction generally welcomed virtual meetings, working parents often complained about meeting fatigue, having too many meetings, or finding meetings intrusive. Some also noted an increase in role conflict as a result of the blurring of work-life boundaries.

5. Townhalls

They can be utilised to strengthen connections with top leaders and colleagues in a post-pandemic society because some of these connections may have eroded or vanished over the past few years (Lobell, 2022).

Town hall meetings allow the leadership team to interact with every team member, share inspiration and essential information, and learn about their concerns. All participants are drawn together by a town hall. Townhalls are also held to give information on how the various company verticals are doing and what they have planned. While it's critical for business executives to discuss recent changes, they also need to be receptive to inquiries that will foster a pleasant working culture (Lobell, 2022). Town hall meetings may increase output, foster community, and promote openness, but it's crucial to know how to do them effectively. Try, for example, to hold them in your hands. Since employees are taking time away from their workday to participate, another suggestion is to have a specific and worthwhile aim for the town hall (Lobell, 2022). An agenda, for

instance, demonstrates that a company values the time of its employees. The easiest approach to do this is to make your intentions clear and explain them from the beginning of the Townhall. Additionally, community building activities should be done during a town hall meeting. Start the meeting with a topic unrelated to business or an icebreaker to break the ice and increase team morale (Lobell, 2022).

6. Practices Adopted by Various Companies to Conduct Townhalls

At SmileDirectClub, huge group meetings are filmed and occasionally condensed into a shorter version so that every staff member, irrespective of time zone or team, can watch the key details. According to the Liberty House Buying Group, after the epidemic, there was a profound sense of alienation among the staff, which had a negative effect on morale. The Townhall was then switched to an in-person mode to solve the issue, enabling two-way conversation to promote connectivity and a sense of belonging.

Townhalls are utilised at Qumu Corp., an enterprise video platform with headquarters in Minneapolis, to honour and recognise staff members outside of official recognition programmes, which may include shout-outs for significant achievements, milestones, and finished projects. Each meeting is made available as an on-demand video, and they encourage staff to attend live. Regardless of the location, the key is intentionality and making attendance at the meeting appealing so that staff members don't feel it is a waste of time or unauthentic.

7. Daily Stand-Up Calls

Stand-up meetings have their roots in the Agile community, more specifically in the Scrum project management paradigm for software development. They have, however, been used for a very long time in other business disciplines to track daily progress and coordinate teams. They are meant to be done standing up, but working with a remote team makes that difficult. A standup meeting is a regular procedure that gives your team time to agree on current problems. Stand-ups provide the teams a strong foundation and a sense of security that comes from knowing the

team's common conditions and objectives. These meetings have now become a norm to bridge the geographic barrier between the remote workforce teams.

Conclusion

The digital revolution caused by the pandemic has led to multiple disruptions- especially hampering the workplace productivity. However, with the changing situations, the rise of strategic communication has come to light. The study focused on connecting threads between strategic communication and the post-pandemic remote worker in the IT industry to strengthen communication effectiveness during the employee lifecycle. For the same, a systematic review was conducted and various findings representing a chain of changing events have emerged - changing trends in communication, the rise of one-on-one meetings, impact of virtual meetings, townhalls, daily stand-up calls, videoconferencing, communication and job performance. To highlight practices, certain new practices adopted by companies in the West have also been studied.

Delimitations

This study has covered various industries globally along with changing trends and the rising importance of communication.

Practical Implications

The study clearly shows the need of more strategic communication and collaboration to raise the bar of employee engagement in case of remote workforce since the meeting time has increased. This study will help organizations recognize loopholes and build on them to reduce attrition and build a strong company workforce in the rapidly changing times.

Scope for Future Research

However, most of these studies focus on different industries specifically in the Western context. More qualitative and quantitative research needs to be done on Indian companies with a special focus on industry wise and zone wise segregation of results to develop policies and practices suitable to the Indian context. A study can also be done to understand some of the

recent developments in strategic communication tools such as Townhall & Cadence to achieve better connection with remote workforce.

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