

THE INTERNAL COMMUNICATION CRISIS AND ITS IMPACT ON AN ORGANIZATION'S PERFORMANCE

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Abstract

The aim of this research is to study how internal communication inefficiency can, if at all, lead to an organizational crisis. An answer to this question was found by studying theory and previous empirical research on internal communication and organizational crises. For the purpose of this paper, a case study of one particular organizational crisis was carried out by applying a combined research methodology – in-depth interviews and a survey. As a result of a detailed analysis of theory and a study of a real-life case, a new concept – the “internal communication crisis” – was identified in the study. Also, it was established that an internal communication crisis is a result of asymmetrical formal internal communication, a lack of leadership, weak organizational culture, a lack of values, and active grapevine communication. This research study found that an internal communication crisis is directly related to an organizational crisis because there is a big possibility that in the alternative decision-making process, established as a result of an internal communication crisis, employees will try to solve organizational problems by involving external stakeholders. Such attempts to involve external stakeholders lead to a very high risk of negative publicity and damage to reputation, which gives national policy decision-makers an opportunity to expose an organization to threats of liquidation or resource reduction.

Keywords: Formal internal communication, leadership, organizational culture, informal internal communication, organizational crisis, internal communication crisis.

Paper type: Case study

INTRODUCTION

The 21st century has come with essential changes in communication between organisations and communities important thereto. In a communication context, open-space communication, which is becoming more open and uncontrollable, is increasingly being discussed. Organisations are working hard to realise their communication programmes so that they correspond to the desires of external stakeholders and the latest communication channels.

An equally important role in communication programmes should be taken by the division of internal communication, which, to a great extent, is based on the engagement of employees in defining organisational targets, tasks and values and building an internal culture. Although communication scientists and researchers are having major discussions about the role and importance of internal communication in the overall organizational programme of public relations, there is still a large number of organisations which do not have a clear understanding of the meaning of internal communication and its importance as a component in the creation of mutual understanding between management and employees. Also, when examining crisis situations, managers do not relate them to internal factors.

The aim of this research was to establish the role of internal communication in the context of organisational crisis, namely, in what way inefficient internal communication can bring an organisation to a crisis situation. In examining the historical development of internal communication theory and modern research schools, it may be concluded that internal communication has hardly been viewed as a factor that causes a crisis. Therefore, the author, on the basis of a case study of a particular organisation, explains the impact of internal communication on the origin of a crisis in an organisation. The tasks of the research were (1) to study the conclusions made in the platform of internal communication to date, (2) to develop an innovative concept of an internal communication crisis, and (3) to carry out research in order to verify the theoretical model that has been formed. During the research, the author looked for answers to the following questions: What causes an internal communication crisis? How does an internal communication crisis influence an organisation's activity?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Both researchers and practitioners in the field of communication have already indicated that in the 20th century, an organisation's internal communication determines how efficient, successful and performance-orientated it is. Yet this position on internal communication quite often is related to such notions as "employee information", "raising the efficiency of employees" and "one-way communication". These notions, which are factually directed towards the unilateral benefit of an organisation, indicate the application of the notion "internal communication" in practice. Accordingly, internal communication is considered to be a tool that affects employees rather than a tool for employee involvement in a dialogue in order to achieve mutual understanding between management and employees.

Two communication researchers, Lyn Smith and Pamela Mounter, believe that the role has been described as still immature... Top managers continue to have different views on the role of internal communication, some seeing it as little more than 'a message service' with no particular place in the wider scheme of things, while others regard it as an essential change agent (Smith, Mounter, 2008).

Researcher Pamela Mounter defines internal communication as follows: Effective communication means telling people where they are going (horizontal message) by welding different organisational divisions into one team and gaining information on how well the communication has been delivered (feedback from bottom to top) (Gregory, 2007).

Pamela Mounter calls internal communication corporate glue that helps build teams, reinforces pride in working for a company and encourages people to work that much harder to beat the competition (Gregory, 2004).

Professor Sandra Oliver of Thames Valley University in London speaks of internal communication by emphasizing its complex nature. Internal communication as a core function of corporate strategy is no longer a simple question of efficient bottom-up or top-down communication via line management (Olivera, 2009).

Symmetrical systems of internal communication

Most systems of internal communication are asymmetrical, however, and they do not increase morale or organisational effectiveness. A symmetrical communication system is one in which employees are provided mechanisms for dialogue with each other and with supervisors. Interpersonal communication is crucial in a symmetrical system, although employee media can complement it (Grunig, 1992).

The cultural perspective in internal communication

Organisational values determine how employees and management implement objectives and which principles are clear and understandable and help employees in the fulfilment of their tasks. According to organisational value researchers Randolph A. Pohlman and Gareth S. Gardiner, the organisation itself cannot be a value. Values are brought by specific people working for these organisations. A major challenge for managers is to balance organisational values, vision, targets and tasks with individual values represented by employees of organisations (Pohlman, Gardiner, Heffes, 2000).

The role of leadership in internal communication

Researchers of organisational management have discovered and analysed various styles of leadership and indicated characteristics of the leader. Yet, according to Daniel Goleman, Richard E. Boyatzis and Annie McKee, the leader is the one whom others follow and continuously view as an example. This group of others also indicates that the leader acts as the group's emotional guide. In the modern organization, this primordial emotional task – though by now largely invisible – remains foremost among the many jobs of leadership: driving collective emotions in a positive direction. The leader is also the one to whom others look for assurance and clarity regarding their job (Boyatzis, McKee, Goleman, 2002).

Christine M. Pearson and Judith A. Clair, in the publication "Reframing Crisis Management", reveal various crisis aspects by indicating that in all cases a crisis is related to losing faith in leadership and confidence in organisational culture. Organizational members are likely to question the organization's cultural beliefs and to feel a need for a transformation of the culture. Finally, the social-political perspective suggests that crisis management is unlikely to be successful without a reformation

of organizational leadership and culture (Pearson, Clair, 1998).

Informal communication as a crisis agent

A group of American communication theoreticians, Scott Cutlip, Allen Center and Glen Broom, in speaking about internal communication and its role in the organisation, have paid special attention to the notion of a “grapevine”. A grapevine is neither a formal, nor a controllable means of communication, but a word expressed in direct contact quite often is the fastest means for obtaining and receiving information. A “grapevine” is a powerful channel of information. Sometimes it is very dangerous or may become dangerous (Cutlip, Center, Broom, 2002). Fearn-Banks says that rumours can be positive or negative. They can be absolutely false or partly false. They can also be undeniably true or premature facts. There is an expression, “There’s a ring of truth in every rumour” (Fearn-Banks, 1996), because people tend to believe rumours. Kimmel says that if a rumour adequately explains unanswered questions or sufficiently fills in gaps in people’s understanding about what is going on, this may serve to reduce their anxieties and eliminate their fears (Kimmel, 2004).

Organisational crisis

When communication theoreticians discuss the cause of organisational crisis, basically they relate it to the external setting of the organisation, which, under specific conditions, may paralyse the company’s or the organisation’s activity. Nonetheless, it is important to indicate that the external setting is closely linked to the internal setting – the structure, management, communication and people working in the organisation.

Yet, theoreticians Elizabeth L. Toth, Kathleen Fearn-Banks, Matthew Wayne Seeger, Timothy Lester Sellnow, Robert R. Ulmer, Robert L. Heath and Timothy Coombs, who have studied crisis communication, have had little insight into the influence of imperfection of internal communication on organisational crisis. This means that research of crisis communication has a wide innovation potential, which is directly related not to an organisation’s external setting but to processes inside the organisation.

Elizabeth L. Toth defines organizational crisis as an unpleasant condition, a critical state, an accident, a huge disaster, a calamity or a catastrophe (Toth, 2007).

Crisis management expert Kathleen Fearn-Banks explains that a “crisis is a major occurrence with a potentially negative outcome effecting an organization, company, or industry as well as its publics, products, services, or good name. It interrupts normal business transactions and can sometimes threaten the existence of the organization” (Fearn-Banks, 1996).

Seeger defines an organizational crisis as “a specific, unexpected and non-routine organizationally based event or series of events which creates high levels of uncertainty and threats or perceived threat to an organization’s high priority goals” (Seeger, Sellnow, Ulmer, 2003).

After gathering and analysing several research works and published theoretical discoveries conducted by professionals and researchers in the field of communications (Joseph W. Weiss, 1996; Anne H. Reilly, 2008; Joanne E. Hale, Ronald E. Dulek, David P. Hale, 2005; Rusaw A. Carol, Rusaw F. Michael, 2008; W. Tomothy Coombs, Sherry J. Holladay, 2005; Jim Suchan, 2006; Heiner Minssen, 2006; Claudia Simoes, Sally Dibb, and Raymond P. Fisk, 2005; Joseph Eric Massey, Ph.D., 2001; J. Suzanne Horsley, Randolph T. Barker, 2002; Mary E. Vielhaber, 2008; Denis Smith, 1990; Dwane Hal Dean, 2004, Sandra L. Christensen and John Kohls, 2003), it should be concluded that researchers in most cases have focused on crises as situations prescribed by the external setting. When referring to causes of crises, they relate them to accidents, low-quality goods or services or a bad name deliberately created in the public. In studying the literature, special attention was paid to crisis definitions and the causes of a crisis in an organisation’s internal setting, which facilitated the conclusion that crisis communication experts present only some crisis situations related to the internal setting: deliberate breach of an organisation’s rules and regulations, employee strikes or different types of violence in an organisation. This finding suggests that crisis communication researchers should look for new research perspectives directed specifically towards research of the internal setting as the cause of a crisis.

In crisis conditions, an organisation’s problems will always come to light. Yet, organisations and communication researchers should be aware of a set of crisis agents which traditionally are not considered as the causes of a crisis, such as:

- a) non-existence of organisational values or disagreement in the organisation;
- b) asymmetrical communication in the organisation;

- c) lack of leadership, vision and tasks, which prevents employees from understanding the organisation's direction;
- d) predominance of informal internal communication over formal communication in the organisation.

INTERNAL COMMUNICATION CRISIS

On the basis of the aforementioned theory, the author has created a concept in internal communication theory, the "internal communication crisis" (see Fig. 1), and verified this concept by applying a case study method. An internal communication crisis should be understood as the situation in an organization when there is a lack of active exchange of information, attitudes and opinions via formal information channels among organizational groups and instead a stable role is played by informal communication (the grapevine), where various gossip is circulating, making such a big communicative buzz that, in effect, official information cannot be heard and quality internal discussions are disturbed. If, in fact, there is no formal internal communication at all, this allows informal communication to develop an alternative setting for decision-making and the direction of decisions to be implemented outside the circle of influence of organizational control. An alternative setting for decision-making of this kind specifically threatens the existence of an organization most because in such a situation it is characteristic to have autonomous leaders, an internal decision-making process, a communication setting, a creation of a strategy and its implementation for the sake of attaining a definite aim. An internal communication crisis also establishes that employees no longer trust their formal (actual) manager. The manager is no longer capable of controlling communication with employees; therefore, the manager loses authority and the opportunity to attain the organizational objectives.

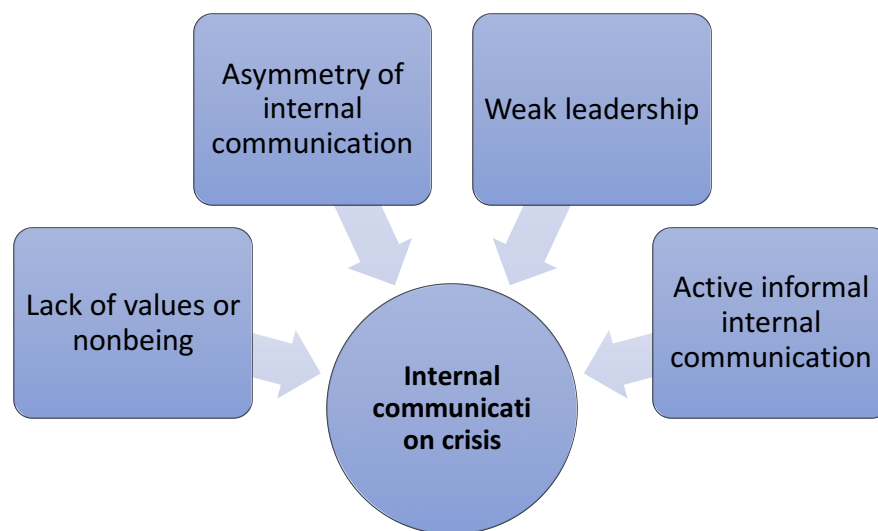


Figure 1. Internal communication crisis

Research methodology

The organisation which was chosen as the object of a case study is a public authority founded after 2002. This institution is state-funded and its objectives and tasks have been prescribed by law. At the point when the case study research was conducted, the organisation employed approximately 50 people. The mission of the organisation according to the principles of Western democracy is to ensure efficient cooperation between the government and the population.

The organisation started its operations on the basis of objectives and tasks set forth by law; however, in the long run multiple problems crystallized which were identified by employees of the organisation – poor management, managers' lack of understanding of the field of operations, and insufficient communication with employees.

At the time when the management of the institution had to implement governmental decisions regarding public authority budget cuts, the organisation suffered a serious internal communication crisis. The trade union of the organisation prepared and published an open letter, signed by employees of the

organisation, describing negative situations and examples preventing the organisation from being efficient and working according to its mission.

This letter was addressed to the state's high-ranking officials. The letter reached the media and initiated a public discussion on the organisation's efficiency and importance which lasted for several months.

Negative publicity and negotiations in the *Saeima* and the Cabinet of Ministers were significant obstacles to providing quality support to the already decreased budget of the organisation and prevented even greater budget cuts for the next year. The discussion resulted in opponents of this little-known institution appearing in society and pointing out that if there are conflicts inside the institution, such an institution in general is not necessary. One of Latvia's leading media outlets described the necessity for liquidation of the organisation. A high-ranking state official with decision-making powers with regard to the existence of the organisation indicated that the institution should be closed in order to save a significant amount of resources for the state budget.

In the end, the institution was not closed; however, as a result of the negative publicity, the organisation's budget was reduced by half.

For gathering the research data, a case study, based on a combined research methodology, was carried out. As emphasized by Christine Daymon and Immy Holloway, a case study differs from other methodological approaches through intensive examination of a single entity which is bounded by time and place. The purpose of case study research is to increase knowledge of real, contemporary communications events in their context (Daymon, Holloway, 2002). Daymon and Holloway add that a case study is suitable for constructing theories or verifying them.

During the case study, qualitative (in-depth interviews) and quantitative (survey) methods were applied.

Surveying was used to establish co-orientation. Jack MacLeod and Steven Chaffee offer a model of co-orientation. Under the concept, the authors present models of a spiral of reciprocal perspectives: a direct perspective is "what I think"; a metaperspective is "what I think you think" (Botan, Hazleton, 1989). Accordingly, co-orientation allows one to discover the viewpoint of two groups on one and the same issue and also the viewpoints of representatives of one group on the viewpoints of the other group concerning the same matter.

Within the framework of qualitative research methodology, structured interviews with eight employees at different levels of the organisation were conducted. The selection of research participants was guided by purposeful sampling, described by Thomas Lindlof and Brian Taylor (Lindlof, Taylor, 2002).

Within the study, three groups have been identified which would allow for an in-depth analysis of issues discussed in this paper: management (dominant coalition and supporters of a manager), employees who are opponents of the government and employees in neutral positions. Since the head of the organization refused to participate in an interview, the study defined and discussed the overall role of the dominant coalition of the organisation, comprising a manager, his/her advisors and the administrative manager. Larissa Grunig (Larissa A. Grunig), referring to power-control theory, argues that organisations do what they do because people with the most power in the organisation – the dominant coalition – decide to do it that way (Grunig, 1992).

RESULTS

Both information gained in interviews and factors verified in quantitative research indicate that an internal communication crisis of an organisation, as a new concept put forward by the author, is caused by four factors: (1) deficiencies in formal internal communication; (2) undefined and disembodied cultural aspects of the organisation; (3) lack of leadership; and (4) very active and purposeful informal communication which dominates over formal communication and has a definite aim – changes in the organisation's operations.

Both interviews and surveys revealed that the majority of participants consider **internal communication** to be an important precondition for successful activity of the organisation. Yet these data also disclose a significant gap between the views of employees and the dominant coalition regarding the role of efficient internal communication in providing successful organisational performance. If employees considered that efficient internal communication is a precondition for successful organisational performance, then representatives of the dominant coalition more likely disagree than

agree with this statement. The very same considerations were brought forward by representatives of both groups in interviews.

Considering **organisational culture** with regard to values, the qualitative research showed that employees (with one exception) were convinced that the organisation has no defined values, yet everyone named unwritten rules, based on their inner feeling of what they as employees are allowed or not allowed to do. The interviews disclosed that employees consider expressing one's opinion, activity and initiative to be a taboo inside the organisation. Meanwhile the dominant coalition mentioned loyalty towards the manager as an unwritten rule. Results of the quantitative survey supplemented the answers of interviews concerning organisational values.

In the section about the role of **leadership** in the context of organisational performance, the data of both studies show that the manager of the organisation has not been a leader with a personal vision regarding organisational activity, objectives and tasks. Also, the manager has not been an inspirer who enables employees to work better or stimulates them to carry out certain actions. Instead employees spoke of passivity, disinterest and conformism. Also, in the quantitative survey, with the participation of half of current and former employees, it was expressed that the manager was not a leader and employees tended to disagree with the viewpoint that the manager had a vision guiding organisational activity, objectives and priorities. When evaluating co-orientation among the viewpoints of employees and the dominant coalition and the views of both groups about opinions of the other group, it should be noted that this question was one of the rare occasions when the opinions of both parties coincided, not only regarding the lack of leadership but also regarding the opinions of the other group.

Both groups agreed with the statement that **informal communication** plays a significant role in information exchange and in the formation of the mood among employees. This opinion was reflected both in interviews and questionnaires. Yet the opinions of the research participants differed in questions regarding reasons for and consequences of informal communication. If employees, both in interviews and the questionnaire, unanimously agreed that the reason for informal communication was inefficient communication between the management and employees, then the dominant coalition tended to point to a historical splitting of the colleagues into "the old" and "the new" ones, and that this has nothing to do with the desire to improve organisational activity. More likely, it is the desire to maintain the same operational routine as before when a new manager enters the office.

Having analysed what the employee group, activated in an informal communication setting, wanted to achieve, the overall opinions of the employees coincide with the opinions stated in interviews and information obtained in the questionnaire – the desire to improve organisational activity and the decision-making model and to be listened to. The quantitative questionnaire shows that with regard to co-orientation, the statement of employees' desire to improve organisational activity is valued differently – employees agree that this was the aim, but the dominant coalition disagrees. Employees' views regarding the opinion held by the dominant coalition are comparable, but the management, nonetheless, considered that employees do not think that actions were guided by a desire to improve organisational activity.

The second question of the study discussed the impact of the internal communication crisis on organisational activity. In this regard, it should be noted that in the presence of conditions where communication symmetry in the internal environment of the organisation is not implemented, employees are not led by a leader, and there is a lack of a definite value system and of the preconditions for informal communication to dominate over formal communication, there is a distinct risk that employees who create an alternative decision-making model through informal communication channels may also use resources available in an external setting in order to influence the course of the organisation. In this respect, organisational activity may be threatened by the risk of unfriendliness of the external setting, of active circulation of negative information in the mass media, allowing decision-makers and society to express a negative stand, which, in turn, could threaten the organisation's reputation, existence or the amount of available financial resources.

Data from both the qualitative and the quantitative research indicate that an internal communication crisis is directly related to threats to organisational activity. In interviews, employees reveal that, specifically, asymmetrical informal communication and lack of leadership and a defined value system facilitated the impact of informal communication in the organisation. Active and symmetrical communication-driven employees teamed up in this informal communication setting and decided that external stakeholders like media and politicians should be involved in the struggle for better

organisational activity. This step, labelled by employees as “a cry for help”, was the one that threatened the existence of the organisation and was also a determinant in the sharp decrease in funding for the organisation’s operations.

DISCUSSION

The results of the research permit discussions about the set of components of an internal communication crisis discovered and envisioned by the author at the beginning of the paper – asymmetry of communication, lack of leadership and of values, and active informal communication. Further on in the text, the author will briefly touch on each of these concepts in order to discuss whether the four factors may cause an internal communication crisis in an organisation and how this affects an organisation’s operations.

The great importance of symmetry has been noted by Gruning and Hunt, who describe symmetric communication as a source and a recipient which cannot be separated but are equal participants of a communication process seeking (striving for) mutual understanding and a proportional two-way effect (Grunig, Grunig A. Larissa, 1989). The research work carried out under the auspices of the paper points to the lack of a symmetric approach in internal communication, which is noted by the research participants (not representing the dominant coalition) as an important cause of the problem and of the crisis in the organization. The employees have indicated that the dialogue between the organisation’s management and the employees was minimal and insufficient. Communication between the dominant coalition and the employees has left more unanswered questions than clear answers. During the research it was established that employees have felt uninvolved, uninformed and unheard. These answers led to the conclusion that lack of symmetry is one of the factors causing an internal communication crisis. Employees who are not satisfied with communication and who are uninformed are not perceived as equal team players and thus not granted the opportunity to express their opinion, give feedback and participate in the decision-making process on important issues of the organisation, and this eventually forms the grounds for an internal crisis situation which cannot be resolved in any other way but by means of a strategic approach to planning and managing internal communication. However, the devastating power of **asymmetrical communication** could be discussed with regard to the particular case.

Another aspect which has been brought forward as crucial is **organisational culture**. In the research, this aspect has been narrowed down by analysing only the values in the organisation as a possible cause of an internal communication crisis.

Randolph Pohlman and Gareth Gardiner (Pohlman, Gardiner with Ellen M. Heffes, 2000) noted that organisational values determine how employees and management implement objectives and what principles are clear, understood by everyone and helpful to employees in their daily tasks. Research conducted within the framework of the paper suggested that the organisation in question failed to have defined values. Firstly, a rhetorical question could be asked: Should there be any? Regardless, the answer can be found in narratives by the research participants on the organisation’s unwritten rules which would not flatter any organisation. In in-depth interviews participants pointed out that in the organisation there have indeed been unwritten rules: every initiative and activity is condemnable, an opinion which is contrary to the management’s opinion must not be expressed, and there is a double standard with regard to what is allowed for one person and not allowed for another. Such a series of unwritten rules points to such values as non-transparency, passivity and inequality. A value system of this kind is destructive for any organisation. The internal risk factor for the organisation in question was hidden by the fact that, although there were undeclared values in the organisation which did not promote activity and initiative, there were still employees in whose consciousness this organisation had to work according to completely different values: openness, transparency, dialogue, and open decision-making.

The third factor of an internal communication crisis is leadership or lack thereof. Researchers Pearson and Clair (Pearson, Clair, 1998), in discussing various aspects of a crisis, indicate that in all cases a crisis is related to the loss of faith in the leader and conviction in the organisation’s culture. The research work carried out within the framework of this paper to a certain degree affirms what Pearson and Clair have said because it relates to very deep problems specifically in the managerial style of the organisation. The first conclusion repeated by every single participant in the interviews was that the manager was not a leader. Yet the problem that the manager is not a leader cannot be regarded as the characteristic parameter of the organisation. The main problem within the organisation in question is

still, as employees put it, that “the managerial style has no shape”. Such a managerial style is characteristic of passivity, disinterest, avoidance of problem solving, use of mediated communication channels and lack of vision and objectives.

The research work reveals that the lack of leadership, unclear managerial style and incomprehension of employees’ need for information created a fundamental problem in the organisation’s internal communication. If the manager does not understand that communication is a significant element in the management of employees and that communication determines if employees will be efficient, a programme on efficient internal communication cannot be implemented. Grunig (Grunig 1992) indicates that public relations must be a management function if they are to make organizations more effective. The example of the research also reflects the managerial responsibility for implementation / lack of implementation of efficient internal communication. Examples of internal communication and management from the organisation in question reveal that the manager and his dominant coalition, most likely, unknowingly activated informal communication in the organisation, thus encouraging the development of horizontal communication between employees and vertical communication between employees and heads of their structural units, which constitutes a success in a formal environment. It remains unclear whether the organisation’s management implemented asymmetrical communication on purpose or whether this resulted from incomprehension of the significant role of communication. Regardless of the reasons, informal communication among employees was facilitated.

The role of **informal communication** and the “grapevine” in an organisation’s communication is viewed as one of the crucial factors influencing an organisation’s operations and may become a threat to an organisation. This idea is discussed by Cutlip, Center and Broom (Cutlip, Center, Broom, 2002). To sum up the discussion on the role of communication symmetry, organisational culture and leadership in an organisation in implementing efficient internal communication, it should be concluded that in a situation where all three factors are not being implemented there is a high risk of activation of informal communication. Frank Laurich indicated that the aim of internal communication is to provide missing information, soothe nervous emotions and help people to orientate themselves (Berziņš, Klauss, 2006). If management is not able to provide its employees with facts regarding the necessity of a decision to be made, rumours are created. Participants of the research work also indicated that informal communication was activated because there was inefficient communication between the manager and employees. The dominant coalition, however, disagrees with this viewpoint. Yet this aspect once again proves that there is a huge gap between the opinions of employees and the dominant coalition on various matters concerning efficient communication.

The **Influence of an internal communication crisis** on the organisation’s operation is related to the fact that employees who are active and represent different values than those offered by the management and the internal communication environment are ready to activate not only the internal setting but also involve the external setting – decision-makers and society – with the aim of receiving help. However, as the example shows, the hope for help in an external setting may work against the organisation by threatening its funding and existence.

The results obtained within the framework of the given case study indicate that an organisational crisis may be caused not only by external conditions which are difficult for an organisation to control, but also by internal factors which are closely linked to communication problems in the organisation. Although the case study analysis is based on a single case, information disseminated in the public domain during the course of the research on other similar cases indicates the topicality of the problem in organisational operations; it should be considered as a problem present in other organisations.

The results obtained allow us to speak of new developments in the research of internal communication and organisational crises. If, until now, researchers of crisis communication have only partially confirmed that an organisation’s internal factors may be a crucial condition for a crisis to arise in the organisation, this research fully confirms this assumption, providing definite proof of internal factors which determine whether an organisation experiences or does not experience a crisis. In the same manner, the concept of internal communication has been expanded; so far it has been described only from the point of view of employees’ efficiency (Pamela Mounter, Lyn Smith, Bill Kirk, Sandra Oliver) and satisfaction (Pincus, Reifield, Knips, Grunig), and it is impossible to find scientific examples dealing with an internal communication crisis as a concept which the organisation must consider if it implements specific internal communication programmes or simply ignores the communication needs of its

employees by using an asymmetrical approach to communication. The results fully answer the questions put forward at the beginning of the paper. There is an indication of a gap in the literature discussing the influence of communication on a crisis. Therefore, the author offers to supplement communication literature with the new concept of an “internal communication crisis”. Also, the results obtained add to theoretical concepts containing suggestions for communication practitioners on how to identify possible problems in an organisation’s internal setting and respond to them in a timely manner.

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