Information Flow to Front-Line Employees: Leader-Member Exchange Theory

Neil Crump, Master of Arts Candidate
Human Dimensions of Organizations, The University of Texas at Austin

Introduction
This research is a case study within a large bureaucracy: the physical plant operations of a Tier-One university in the United States. The organization of study at this university received low scores for internal communication in their all-employee surveys in 2012 and 2014 and was cited for “lack of information flow to front-line employees” in a peer audit conducted in 2011. Root causes for these deficiencies are investigated through activity theory (AT) analysis along with Leader-Member Exchange Theory (LMX) within the organization.

Methods
• Literature review on theories and studies of:
  ➢ Activity Theory
  ➢ Leader-Member Exchange Theory
  ➢ Organizational Citizenship Behavior
• Qualitative research with survey of 726 employees using LMX-7 questionnaire (consensus measure for best measure of LMX).
• Interviews and observations with 15 participants from the survey group.
• Quantitative research tabulating results of research survey and 2014 all-employee survey.
• Linear regressions of all-employee survey responses to identify areas of improvement to improve overall survey score.

Results
• 13% response rate to the LMX-7 survey
• 30.3% of employees have poor relations with boss
• Clear documentation of “in-groups” and “out-groups”
• 87% of employees only see 2nd level manager 2x/year
• Human-computer interface requires substantial time

Conclusions
- LMX-7 survey results indicated dissatisfaction in 30% in the workforce (discontent openly shared during interviews).
- Every participant eager to be interviewed on subject of this research, indicating desire for positive change.
- Every participant displayed pride in their daily tasks, indicating dedication to group’s mission.
- Organization has opportunity to carry out meaningful initiatives to improve overall employee satisfaction.
- Improvements for employee satisfaction will simultaneously enhance organization’s internal communication and increase productivity.

Specific items to address should include:
• Provide a new work-order management software tool.
• Establish better leader-member relations.
• Continue all-employee surveys.
• Publish improvement plans.

Literature Cited


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Further Information
Please contact me via e-mail (neil.crump@austin.utexas.edu) for further information or to discuss the findings of this study.