

FACTORS INFLUENCING EFFECTIVENESS OF INTERDEPARTMENTAL COMMUNICATION IN HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY: A CASE STUDY OF 4-5 STAR HOTEL EMPLOYEES IN PHUKET

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Abstract

This study aims to examine the key factors influencing interdepartmental communication in the hospitality industry in Phuket. It specifically seeks to test and evaluate a theoretical framework which consists of certain HR practices affecting the improvement of interdepartmental communication, which the literature review shows. The target population was full time 4-5 star hotel employees in Phuket. The author distributed 600 questionnaires and received 441 in representing a usability response rate of 73.5%. The results showed that four dimensions of HR practices (team work, training, core values and personal development) exerted positive correlation with the interdepartmental communication. Hotels should focus on and maintain a positive organizational culture, provide more training for skills development of their staff and build-up teamwork atmosphere to ensure that their employees can work together with a higher level of interdepartmental communication.

Key words: Interdepartmental communication, Hospitality, Human Resources

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ปัจจัยที่มีอิทธิพลต่อประสิทธิภาพการสื่อสารระหว่าง แผนกในอุตสาหกรรมบริการ: กรณีศึกษา พนักงานโรงแรม 4-5 ดาวในภูเก็ต

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บทคัดย่อ

การศึกษาครั้งนี้มีเป้าหมายเพื่อประเมินปัจจัยสำคัญที่มีผลต่อการสื่อสารระหว่างแผนกในอุตสาหกรรมบริการในจังหวัดภูเก็ต โดยการทดสอบและประเมินทฤษฎี เกี่ยวกับแนวปฏิบัติทางด้านทรัพยากรมนุษย์ที่มีผลต่อการปรับปรุงการสื่อสารระหว่างแผนกที่พบในงานวิจัยที่ผ่านมา กลุ่มประชากรเป้าหมายคือ พนักงานประจำของโรงแรม 4-5 ดาวในจังหวัดภูเก็ต มีการเก็บข้อมูลโดยใช้แบบสอบถามจำนวนทั้งสิ้น 600 ชุด ได้รับกลับมาและสามารถใช้ได้จำนวน 441 ชุด คิดเป็นร้อยละ 73.5 ผลการศึกษา พบว่าแนวปฏิบัติด้านทรัพยากรมนุษย์ 4 ด้าน คือ การทำงานเป็นทีม การฝึกอบรม คุณค่าหลัก และการพัฒนาส่วนบุคคล มีความสัมพันธ์เชิงบวกกับการสื่อสารระหว่างแผนก โรงแรมควรให้ความสำคัญและริ่ชาว้พัฒนาธรรมองค์กรเชิงบวก ให้การฝึกอบรมเพื่อพัฒนาทักษะและสร้างบรรยากาศในการทำงานเป็นทีม เพื่อให้พนักงานสามารถทำงานร่วมกันและมีการสื่อสารระหว่างแผนกที่ดีขึ้น

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Introduction

Over the last two decades, the hospitality industry has witnessed a significant shift in focus towards customer orientation, though, the majority of the relevant hospitality research literature is focused on the external customer neglecting the importance of the quality of internal service, where one department in the hotel serves another (Paraskevas, 2001). Social skills are needed to interact within organizational and customer situations effectively. Some of the co-workers are a pleasure to work with while others are difficult. Lack of communication between departments causes mistakes, loss of revenue, and wasted work. It also impacts on product and image development. Ineffective communication might lead to negative workplace outcomes such as anxiety, workplace frustration, little conviction, low commitment, job loss intent and absenteeism (Gondal&Shahbaz, 2012). Efficient management of interdepartmental communication can solve many common problems (Thompson, n.d.).

Since research on the relationship between human resource practices and interdepartmental communication improvement is insufficient in the field of hospitality, determining the mechanism through which human resource practices influence interdepartmental communication is needed. In the current research, it will be explored which among the human resource practices focused on this research, have more impact on the effectiveness of interdepartmental communication.

Objectives

1. To examine current HR practices adopted in influencing interdepartmental communication among hotel employees in Phuket.
2. To investigate the key factors leading to effective interdepartmental communication among 4-5 star hotel employees in Phuket.

Literature review

Importance of interdepartmental communication in hospitality industry

Many researchers have underscored the importance of interdepartmental communication (Gondal & Shahbaz, 2012; Katcher, 2015; Seiler, 1963; Siano, Vollero, Confetto & Siglioccolo, 2013) and particularly in hospitality industry (Alleyne, Doherty, & Greenidge, 2006; Agarwal & Garg, 2012; Bardi, 2006; Nebel, Eddystone, Rutherford, Denney, Schaffer & Jeffrey, 1994; Paraskevas, 2001; Zeithaml, Berry, & Parasuraman, 1988). Meanwhile, internal communication has been the subject of significant debate in the literature on organizations, but research studies on how to measure the aspects of organizational communication are limited (Ballard & Seibold, 2006, Gondal&Shahbaz, 2012, Siano, Vollero, Confetto & Siglioccolo, 2013). The difficulties in interdepartmental communication may have an effect on the healthy working climate and overall organizational performance and shift the customers to other brands (Gondal & Shahbaz, 2012). According to Yang (2009, pp. 1723-1724), when “one department needs a product from another, the transfer process takes place. This process will lead to the building up of invisible boundaries among departments,” and as a result, employees among the departments might be hostile rather than collaborative (Yang, 2009). Therefore, improving communication between departments enhances the efficiency of overall operation of the hotel.

Organizational culture

A study by Ashkanasy, Wilderom, and Peterson (as cited in Blomme, Sok & Tromp, 2013) emphasized that an organizational culture be a socially learned and transferred group-level phenomenon, comprising conscious and visible, unconscious and invisible, cognitive, behavioral, and emotional aspects. These attributes configure a

cognitive and effective framework from which organization members perceive and experience the work environment and act accordingly.

Organizational culture plays the most important role of the organization (Blomme, Sok, & Tromp, 2013; Rahimi, 2014; Cumberland & Herd, 2011) and should be compared and improved based on the required cultural characteristics. The evidence on sustained change confirms that internal communication has improved immensely by implementing effective HR functions focused on organizational culture characteristics across the organization (Rahimi, 2014). Human resources must develop a vibrant and trusting corporate culture that fosters effective internal communication between the departments (Gondal & Shahbaz, 2012). Thus, in such organizations, relationships and interactions are based on the values of care and trust (Manohar & Pandit, 2013). There is evidence that employees' attitudes and relations within a hotel with strong organizational culture can be a source of a company's competitive advantage (Cerovic & Tomasevic, 2009; Gondal & Shahbaz, 2012). Awareness of the organization's goals become part of their employees' job objectives, performance evaluation, and feedback, whether they had good or bad performance, and personal development opportunities would influence their job satisfaction, turnover rate, and employee attitudes (Lindholm, 1999-2000).

Organizational climate

Many researchers emphasize the importance of organizational climate in the organization's structure (Blomme, Sok, & Tromp, 2013; Dawson & Abbot, 2011; Lu & Lin, 2014) that employees exhibit the right attitude (Ilies & Gavrea, 2008; Molineux, 2013). Ethical climate can also improve relationships within an organization, employees' attitudes, and behavior (Lu & Lin, 2014). Organizational climate is defined as the employee's belief about working

conditions where employees value an organization that provides opportunities to grow, employs competent and knowledgeable co-workers, and allows employees to be involved in decision making (Dawson & Abbott, 2011). Good communication is dependent on the climate within the organization (Davidson, McPhail, & Barry, 2011).

Employees' relationship

Internal communication is a process which involves labor relations within an organization (Cumberland & Herd, 2011; Davidson, McPhail, & Barry, 2011; Gondal & Shahbaz, 2012). Personality conflicts can result in people delaying or refusing to communicate, that in turn interfere with effective communication (Agarwal & Garg, 2012). In the hospitality industry, interpersonal relationships affect to a large degree the service encounters both externally and internally (Paraskevas, 2001; Siano, Vollero, Confetto, & Siglioccolo, 2013). A safe working environment with established and clear relationship between employees is a fundamental issue (Nestoroska & Petrovska, 2014). When there is a high degree of trust among superiors and subordinates as well as team members, they are all more willing to share valuable and useful information (Hu, Ou, Chiou, & Lin, 2012).

Trainings

Many studies deal with training staff in different business industries including the hospitality sector (Nestoroska & Petrovska, 2014; Tsaur & Lin, 2004). Having training programs to keep staff member's skills and abilities up to the required standard is necessary for the consistency of the organization (Rahimi, 2014). Staff training in the hospitality sector is essential for the continuous training of currently employed staff and new employees as well. Cross-training

of staff is seen as an important issue for improving the communication and knowledge about other departments that will lead to general improvement of hotel service quality (Dawson & Abbott, 2011; Nestoroska & Petrovska, 2014) and assisted employees in communicating within a department and between departments (Bardi, 2006).

Knowledge sharing

Knowledge sharing was found to be important for internal communications by different researchers and scholars (Chen & Cheng, 2012; Davidson, McPhail, & Barry, 2011; Gondal & Shahbaz, 2012; Hu, Ou, Chiou, & Lin, 2012; Manohar & Pandit, 2014; Molineux, 2013; Paraskevas, 2001; Sinclair & Sinclair, 2009; Yang, 2009; Zeglat, Aljaber & Alrawabdeh, 2014). A considerable gap also exists between employees' and managers' perceptions (Cooke & Saini, 2010). When the employees participate in decision making, they will be able to recognize and accept the concept of sharing their knowledge. Interdepartmental interaction refers to the organizations and the managers' encouraging interaction and mutual assistance among employees of different departments. Training and openness refer to the organization's enabling employees to upgrade their skills and knowledge through training and development while cultivating employees' knowledge-sharing attitudes and capabilities. By implementing education and training, scholars believe the organization may inculcate the value of knowledge-sharing and develop the employees' communication skills that are necessary for sharing knowledge (Chen & Cheng, 2012).

Team work

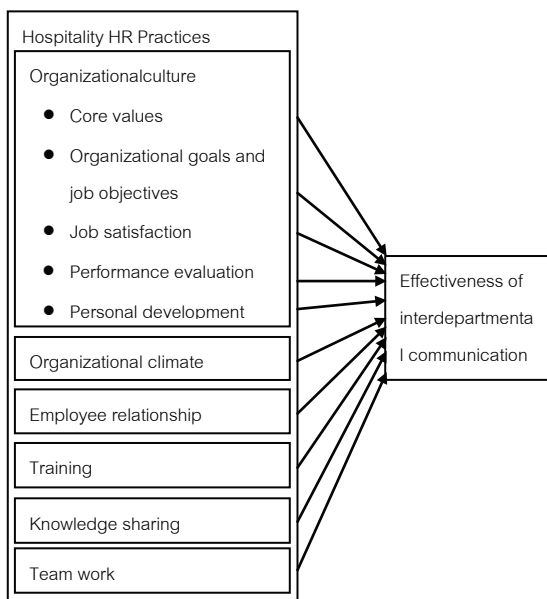
Many researchers and practitioners have stated that teamwork is crucial for the hospitality industry, and it enhances the communication between employees within the organization (Gondal & Shahbaz,

2012; Katcher, 2015; Siano, Vollero, Confetto & Siglioccolo, 2013). Teamwork is of particular importance in the hospitality industry (Alleyne, Doherty, & Greenidge, 2006; Agarwal & Garg, 2012; Nebel, Eddystone, Rutherford, Denney, Schaffer & Jeffrey, 1994; Paraskivas, 2001; Zeithaml, Berry, & Parasuraman, 1988). Teamworking is a multi-dimensional concept which has gained recent popularity and some success in manufacturing, but there is little evidence that large numbers of firms in the service sector have used teamworking methods (Ingram & Desombre, 1999).

The value of teamwork is that employees and managers pull together for a common goal. In high-performing groups, people function as a team and accomplish their goals by allowing group members to participate in decisions and to share in the group's success. When employees are involved in setting standards and improving work procedures, a sense of teamwork is fostered. Employees in various departments cooperate to analyze the work of each department, identify opportunities, and seek improvements (Zeithaml, Berry, & Parasuraman, 1988). Moreover, when a good relationship exists within a team, it can help enhance cohesiveness, thereby resulting in increased willingness of team members to share their experiences at work with other members (Hu, Ou, Chiou & Lin, 2012).

The conceptual research framework was developed upon literature review as shown below:

Research framework



Methodology

This research was a quantitative study which adopted a survey data collection method. The questionnaire was developed both in English and Thai languages, which was used for data collection from full time 4-5 star hotel employees in Phuket, Thailand. A non-probability sampling using convenient sampling method was applied. The target population consisted of employees from different departments, different working levels, and different 4-5 star hotels and resorts in Phuket.

Since the number of 4-5 star hotel employees in Phuket has not been defined, the national newspaper Tanseetakit (2008) was used to identify a ratio of hotel rooms to employees in Thailand at 1:1.5. From a survey in Phuket conducted by the Tourism Authority of Thailand in 2014, the total number of rooms in Phuket was

47,112. According to the information mentioned above, the approximate number of employees was 70,668. The sample size of the study was calculated by the Taro Yamani formula, and 400 samples were determined for this study.

Hotels with 4 and 5-star ratings were selected based on tripadvisor.com, agoda.com, booking.com, and a list of accommodations provided by the Tourism Authority of Thailand from different locations to cover the entire territory of Phuket Island. Thirty-four 4-5 star hotels were contacted, and 31 hotels agreed to support for data collection. The questionnaires were distributed to the participating hotels during November 2015 through April 2016 by email and personal visits to the Human Resource departments. To maximize the response rate and get the required amount of samples, the author distributed 600 questionnaires to hotel employees through HR managers, while 441 were returned usable, representing a response rate of 73.5%.

Research instrument

The questionnaire was developed based on the literature reviews. It consists of eight sections.

Section one includes information about the respondents, such as the type of hotel, department, position level, work experience, gender, age, nationality, the level of education, and marital status.

Section two consists of 18 statements on organizational culture; the first five statements were developed from Manohar and Pandit (2014), and the other statements from six to 18 were derived from Lindholm (1999-2000).

Section three has four selection criteria of organizational climate statements derived from the study by Lu and Lin (2013). Section four consists of five statements about employees' relationship benchmarked from Hu, Ou, Chiou and Lin (2012).

Section five consists of five statements on training benchmarked from Tsaur and Lin (2004).

Section six consists of 10 statements about knowledge sharing; the first nine were benchmarked from Hu, Ou, Chiou and Lin (2012), and the other one was benchmarked from Cooke and Saini (2010).

Section seven consists of 11 statements on teamwork; the first seven were benchmarked from Hu, Ou, Chiou and Lin (2012) and eight to 11 statements were developed from Zeithaml, Berry, and Parasuraman (1988).

Section eight consists of six statements on interdepartmental communication; the first five were developed from Ballard and Seibold (2006), and statement 6 was benchmarked from Katcher (2015).

Measures

Respondents were asked to evaluate the likelihood of their behavior in regards to human resource practices on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from (1) “strongly disagree”, (2) “disagree”, (3) “neither agree nor disagree”, (4) “agree” and (5) “strongly agree.”

SPSS 20.0 software was used for data analysis. The mean value and standard deviation of descriptive statistics were used to analyze the data.

The mean score was defined by interval width as 0.80, following the formula $\frac{5 - 1}{5}$ and ranged the perceptions as below;

4.21 - 5.00	Strongly agree
3.41 - 4.20	Agree
2.61 - 3.40	Neither agree nor disagree
1.81 - 2.60	Disagree
1.00 - 1.80	Strongly disagree

Cronbach's alpha was applied to check the correlation among HR practices having a higher impact on the effectiveness of interdepartmental communication.

Multiple Regression was used to investigate the relationship between each of the various HR practices and effectiveness of interdepartmental communication.

Results

Hotel and job characteristic profile

Among the total respondents of 441, independent hotels represented by 213 (48.3%) respondents, international chain by 210 (47.6%) respondents and national chain only by 18 (4.1%). Of the majority, 92 respondents (20.9%), they were from Food and Beverage departments. The second highest rate was from Front Office with the number of respondents of 81 (18.4%). The third rate was the Human Resource department with respondents of 74 (16.8%). The fourth rate was Housekeeping at 60 (13.6%). The fifth rate was Accounting and Finance at 50 (11.4%), while other departments such as Engineering, Sales and Marketing, other departments and Administration represented rates of 27 (6.1%), 26 (5.9%), 16 (3.6%), 14 (3.2%) respectively. The results showed that the majority of respondents were supervisor and entry level employees with the rates of 143 (32.7%) and 227 (51.9%) respectively.

Regarding the work experience, the results specified that there were 59 (13.4%) who had worked in the hotel industry less than 1 year, 136 (30.8%) for 1-2 years, 90 (20.4%) for 3-4 years, 51 (11.6%) for 5-6 years and 105 (23.8%) more than 6 years in the industry.

Table 1 Hotel and job characteristic profile

Variable	Description	Frequency	Percentage
Type of hotel	Independent	213	48.3
	International chain	210	47.6
	Domestic chain	18	4.1
Department	Front Office	81	18.4
	Food and Beverage	92	20.9
	Housekeeping	60	13.6
	Accounting and Finance	50	11.4
	Human Resource	74	16.8
	Sales and Marketing	26	5.9
	Engineering	27	6.1
	Administrative	14	3.2
	Other	16	3.6
Level of work position	Management	67	15.3
	Supervisor	143	32.7
	Entry	227	51.9
Working in hotel industry	Less than 1 year	59	13.4
	1-2 years	136	30.8
	3-4 years	90	20.4
	5-6 years	51	11.6
	More than 6 years	105	23.8

Respondents' demographic profile

The demographic profile is shown in Table 2. Of those respondents, 165 (37.7%) were male and 273 (62.3%) were female. The majority of the respondents at 197 (45%) were aged 21-30 and 186 (42.5%) were 31-40 years old. Most of the respondents were Thai at 406 (94.4%), while only 24 (5.6%) were foreign respondents.

Regarding educational qualification, the biggest part of the respondents at 287 (66.2%) had Bachelor degrees, 116 (26.9%) had Diplomas, 24 (5.6%) had Master degrees, and just five (1.2%) had only primary school background.

Out of 441 respondents, 239 (56.9%) were single, 161 (38.3%) were married, 14 (3.3%) divorced, and six (1.4%) widowed.

Table 2 Respondents' demographic profile

Variable	Description	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	165	37.7
	Female	273	62.3
Age	Younger than 20	4	0.9
	21-30	197	45
	31-40	186	42.5
	41-50	45	10.3
	More than 51	6	1.4
Nationality	International	24	5.6
	Thai	406	94.4
Education	Primary school	5	1.2
	High school/Certificate/		
	Diploma/Vocational	116	26.9
	Bachelor Degree	287	66.2
	Master Degree or Higher	24	5.6
Marital status	Single	239	56.9
	Married	161	38.3
	Divorced	14	3.3
	Widow	6	1.4

For further analysis, Table 3 shows the grand means, standard deviation, and Cronbach's alpha for each of the factors. There exists significant relationship among HR practices and interdepartmental

communication. The first five dimensions in this table belong to the organizational culture, and Cronbach's alpha value was 86% of reliability for the organizational goals and job objectives, followed by 85% for job satisfaction and 85% for performance evaluation, 84% for personal development and 75% for core values. The reliability of knowledge sharing and teamwork both at 94%, interdepartmental communication at 92%, employees' relationship at 91%, training 89% and the reliability of organizational climate was 85%. The Cronbach's alpha value is quite high for all the variances and is reliable to use these grand means value to represent the factors for further analysis.

Table 3 Grand means, standard deviation and Cronbach's alpha for each of the factors

HR practices	Mean	Std. Deviation	No of variables	Cronbach's alpha
Core values	3.80	0.58	5	0.75
Organizational goals and job objectives	4.14	0.63	3	0.86
Job satisfaction	4.02	0.68	3	0.85
Performance evaluation	3.99	0.66	4	0.85
Personal development	4.04	0.70	3	0.84
Organizational climate	3.91	0.68	4	0.85
Employees' relationship	3.92	0.70	5	0.91
Trainings	3.95	0.69	5	0.89
Knowledge sharing	4.01	0.63	10	0.94
Team work	3.99	0.62	11	0.94
Interdepartmental communication	3.95	0.63	6	0.92

Multiple regression

A multiple regression analysis was conducted using “effectiveness of interdepartmental communication” as the dependent variable and HR practices dimensions as the independent variables. Table 4 shows four dimensions of HR practices (teamwork, training, core values and personal development) exerted positive correlation with the interdepartmental communication ($p < 0.00$ and $p < 0.01$). Teamwork scored highest beta value (0.46); followed by training (0.21), core values (0.16) and personal development (0.09).

Table 4 Results of Regression Analysis

Model	Unstandardized		Standardized	t	Sig.
	Coefficients		Coefficients		
	Beta	Std. Error	Beta		
Constant	0.28	0.14		1.95	0.05
Team work	0.46	0.05	0.45	9.95	0.00
Training	0.21	0.04	0.23	4.92	0.00
Core values	0.16	0.04	0.14	3.55	0.00
Personal development	0.09	0.04	0.10	2.57	0.01

Remark a. Dependent Variable: interdepartmental communication

Discussion and Suggestion

This article aimed to examine the key factors influencing the effectiveness of interdepartmental communication in 4-5 star hotels in Phuket. Since the tourism industry in Thailand continues to play a vital role and the number of hotels has been increasing, especially in Phuket as a renowned tourist destination worldwide, with its continually growing number of hotel rooms and fast developing transportation system, hotels need to stay competitive. Moreover,

to be able to stay competitive, reduce turnover rate, and attract more professional employees, hotels should implement more competitive HR strategies. Those HR strategies should be linked with the company's strategy to enhance the internal communication.

The theoretical framework consisted of certain HR practices having an impact on the effectiveness of interdepartmental communication that has been found from the literature review had been tested, evaluated, and analyzed. The results of this study showed that certain factors of HR practices have positive relationships with the interdepartmental communication (Figure 1). These results are supported by Rahimi (2014), Bardi (2006), and Zeithaml, Berry, and Parasuraman (1988). Hotels should focus on and maintain a positive organizational culture, provide more training for skills development of their staff, and build up teamwork atmosphere to ensure that their employees can work together with a higher level of interdepartmental communication. Even though teamwork scored the highest mean value, it is important to mention that a positive organizational culture with nourished and shared core values and beliefs can also contribute to a more united team, therefore affecting the teamwork in an organization. Formal appraisals, informal feedback, and open communication (Molineux, 2013) will contribute to a personal development of the employees. Training dependant on good communication, appropriate organizational culture, and climate promote trust between employees and managers (Davidson, McPhail, & Barry, 2010). For a better understanding of other departments' work, the hotels should go one step further from the traditional SOPs and arrange the cross-trainings for their employees (Paraskevas, 2001). Aggregation of these measures can significantly improve interdepartmental communication.

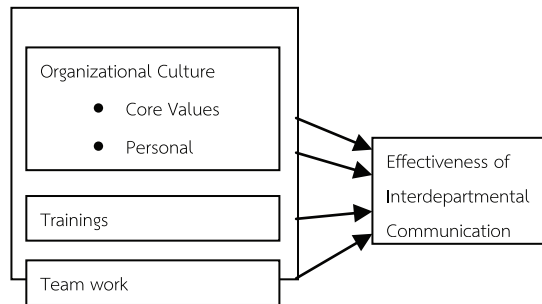


Figure 1: The relationship between HR practices and interdepartmental communication.

Suggestion for further research

Due to the limitation of time, this research investigated only the key factors influencing the effectiveness of interdepartmental communication in 4-5 star hotel employees in Phuket. For future research, it would also be interesting to expand a research area, investigate different types of hotels (e.g. independent, domestic chain, and international chain), have different HR practices which could lead to having an impact on the effectiveness of interdepartmental communication, and show different working levels versus the perception towards HR practices and interdepartmental communication.

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