

Peter Schneckenleitner
Wolfgang Reitberger
Alexandra Brunner-Sperdin
Andre Haller *Editors*

RESEARCH

Conference Proceedings Trends in Business Communication 2020



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Editors

Peter Schneckenleitner
Marketing & Communication
Management / Digital Marketing
University of Applied Sciences
Kufstein, Tyrol, Austria

Wolfgang Reitberger
Marketing & Communication
Management / Digital Marketing
University of Applied Sciences
Kufstein, Tyrol, Austria

Alexandra Brunner-Sperdin
Marketing & Communication
Management / Digital Marketing
University of Applied Sciences
Kufstein, Tyrol, Austria

Andre Haller
Marketing & Communication
Management / Digital Marketing
University of Applied Sciences
Kufstein, Tyrol, Austria

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Preface

Since 2013, we have been highlighting the dynamic developments in marketing and communication with our academic conference “Trends in Business Communication” (TIBCOM). In 2020, the conference format itself became a trend setter, as we held our conference purely virtually for the first time. The corona pandemic has not only pushed digitalization further, but also made processes more efficient in some cases. We discovered several advantages that our virtual conference offered our participants:

We act in an environmentally friendly way. We don’t travel long distances and our CO₂ footprint remains almost unchanged.

We act efficiently. There are no long travel times or waiting times.

We act inclusively. A virtual conference doesn’t exclude anyone. Issues like visa problems or having too little budget don’t matter anymore.

We act globally. A virtual conference is the perfect platform for international networking.

These were the new framework conditions for our TIBCOM, which took place on December 4, 2020. And to say it right away, our conference was a great success. 10 international scientific speakers presented their latest research results in the fields of social media, consumer behavior, executive communication, eLearning or agile project communication—just to mention a few. All contributions went through a peer review process to ensure the quality of our conference. And all accepted scientific papers are now available in this conference proceedings.

Many thanks to our speakers who made this proceedings possible. To our readers, we are proud to present new scientific findings in the fields of marketing and communication.

The editors

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Leadership Communication with Multiple Managers and Its Influence on Internal Integration of Different Functional Areas

Berend Barkela

1 Introduction

Communication is essential in bridging different perspectives and solving conflicts (Krauss & Morsella, 2006). In organizations, different perspectives and conflicts are likely to arise in the collaboration of functionally different areas (Edmondson & Nembhard, 2009; Gittell et al., 2010). Therefore, internal communication not only serves to coordinate processes, but also to integrate different functional areas of an organization. Successful internal integration is in turn positively related with employees' job-satisfaction, individual performance (Arndt et al., 2011) and organizational success (Mackelprang et al., 2014). Previous research demonstrated the key role of leadership communication to foster interdepartmental or cross-functional collaboration (Edmondson & Nembhard, 2009; Korb et al., 2015).

However, most studies investigate the relation between single managers and employees from different areas of an organization. If an organization requires close cooperation between different areas, employees might also have relationships with multiple managers from different areas (Billinger & Workiewicz, 2019). Although there have been studies considering multiple managers in general (Benson & Pattie, 2009; Vidyarthi et al., 2014), there is hardly any work on leadership communication and internal integration in this context. So far, no study has investigated how leadership communication from managers in different areas affects the integration of these areas. This study addresses this gap by examining communication between multiple managers and employees across organizational areas in theatres and thus answering the research question: How can leadership

B. Barkela (✉)
University of Koblenz-Landau, Landau, Germany
E-Mail: barkela@uni-landau.de

communication from managers in different areas influence the integration of the areas? As an artistic organization, theatres are particularly suitable to investigate this research question since the different organizational areas are possibly conflicting. Artistic organizations are faced with an ongoing conflict between artistic and non-artistic considerations (Cray et al., 2007). These are reflected in different organizational areas that need to work closely together (Stein & Bathurst, 2008). These areas are not only distinguished by the structure of the organization, but also by specific ways of thinking that challenge cooperation; at the same time, mediation between these areas has been identified as a communicative leadership task (Barkela, 2019).

This study is guided by the overarching assumption that the better and the more consistent employees perceive the communication of managers from the different areas, the more employees will perceive internal integration across the areas. In the following, this assumption is elaborated in more detail. Initially, perceived internal integration is discussed and defined. Subsequently, the perceived leadership communication quality (PLCQ) and its consistency across different areas are presented as antecedents for internal integration.

1.1 Internal Integration of Different Functional Areas in Organizations

Organizations are characterized by the division of tasks and labor into different functional areas that need to be integrated in order for the organization to be successful (Lawrence & Lorsch, 1967; Mintzberg, 1979). This internal integration of different areas can be understood as a dimension of the organizational climate. The organizational climate is generally defined as a shared meaning that members of an organization attach to the organization's internal environment (Ehrhart et al., 2014), and integration, as a subdimension of the overall climate, is defined as mutual trust and effective collaboration between different areas (Patterson et al., 2005). This internal integration of different areas in terms of mutual trust and collaboration cannot be taken for granted. Research shows that employees working in different areas of an organization share different objectives or mental models due to their professional socialization (Edmondson & Nembhard, 2009). Differences in terminology and conceptualization of the product or daily work context have been shown as a reason for knowledge-sharing difficulties between different areas (Bechky, 2003). Different professional identities and specialized knowledge in different areas tend to reinforce intra-organizational functional barriers (Gittell

& Weiss, 2004). Furthermore, the specialization of areas can be a cause of conflicts between areas that interfere with cooperation (Gittell et al., 2010; Lovelace et al., 2001; Richter et al., 2006). Thus, collaboration across different functional areas can be a challenge due to differing perspectives.

At the same time, it is important to integrate different functional areas. Meta-analyses investigating the effects of organizational climate dimensions (e.g. cohesiveness, cooperation, conflict, mutual support) give evidence for a positive relation of organizational climate and employee-work-outcomes such as job-satisfaction, commitment, motivation or job-performance (Carr et al., 2003; Parker et al., 2003). Effective cross-functional cooperation in particular has also been shown as an antecedent for employee job-satisfaction and individual performance (Arndt et al., 2011). This relation in turn indirectly contributes to organizational effectiveness, for example in terms of customer satisfaction or financial performance (Mackelprang et al., 2014). Hence, it becomes clear that the integration of different functional areas can have a significant impact on organizational performance and success. Consequently, it is in the strategic interest of organizations and an important subject of organizational research (Pellathy et al., 2019).

1.2 Internal Integration of Different Functional Areas in Theatres

The integration of different functional areas can be examined in an exemplary manner using the example of theatres. A major challenge in the management of theatres is the integration of artistic, technical and administration areas which differ significantly in their work processes and ways of thinking. For example, while in the administration area normal office working hours apply, the technical area is characterized by shift-operation, and in the artistic area, there are usually no regulated working hours at all. The administration and technical areas usually plan more long-term and with standardized procedures; however, in the artistic field, planning is very short-term and flexible. Decision-making processes in the administration area are assessed with criteria such as efficiency and profit. In the technical area decision-making processes deal with questions of feasibility and security; whereas, in the artistic area, there is a very high demand for freedom and emotional rather than rational decision-making processes (Barkela, 2019; q.v. Cray & Inglis, 2011; Cray et al., 2007; Eikhof & Haunschild, 2007; Kleppe, 2018; Ropo & Eriksson, 1997; Stein & Bathurst, 2008).

These differences can easily lead to conflicts between the different areas. At the same time, these areas must work closely together under tight financial conditions and time constraints. Achieving cooperation is described by managers in the various areas as a communicative key management task, which aims at resolving conflicts in the short-term through short official channels and creating a culture of mutual understanding in the long-term (Barkela, 2019).

1.3 Cross-Area Leadership Communication Quality

As shown above, integration of different areas in organizations in general, and in theatre in particular, is a strategic management task. Cooperation does not happen by itself: organizations in which cooperation is actively supported and demanded by management achieve better integration (Emery, 2009). Accordingly, research on integration across different functional areas shows that managers influence the quality of collaboration (Birasnav & Bienstock, 2019; Edmondson & Nembhard, 2009; Mohsen & Eng, 2016). Taking into account that communication is crucial for the success of leadership (De Vries et al., 2010; Hackman & Johnson, 2013; Macik-Frey, 2007) and conducive to integrate differing perspectives (Bromme, 2000), the investigation of managers' influence on the integration of different functional areas should consider leadership communication. Since communication can be defined as an interpersonal interaction between individuals (Knapp & Daly, 2011), the present study considers leadership communication as an interactive relationship between managers and employees (Sias et al., 2002). This perspective fits theoretically well with the leader-member-exchange (LMX) theory (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). LMX suggests that leadership outcomes are best when the relationship quality between managers and employees is good.

Previous research revealed that LMX is well suited to investigate leadership communication (Erben et al., 2019; Fix & Sias, 2006; Schneider et al., 2015). With regard to the integration of different areas, existing research shows that LMX is positively related to inter-group-cooperation as perceived by employees (Kozlowski & Doherty, 1989). When employees perceive high LMX quality, work-unit factors such as team potency, cohesiveness or cooperation increase, and conflicts are reduced (Boies & Howell, 2006; Coglisier & Schriesheim, 2000). Furthermore, collaboration of employees can be increased by regular, brief, and two-way communication exchanges between managers and employees (Kramer & Crespy, 2011). Hence, PLCQ should influence the quality of perceived internal integration.

However, on the one hand, leadership in these studies is defined as a relation between a single manager and several employees in formal hierarchical structures. On the other hand, the use of informal communication (Pagell, 2004; Pinto & Pinto, 1990) and relations to multiple managers across functions (Stolze et al., 2016) has been shown to be a pre-requisite for the successful integration of functionally different organizational areas. Hence, communication relationships must also be considered beyond the formal structures. Although this has not yet been considered in research on integration of functionally different areas in organizations, there are some findings on effects of relationships between employees and multiple managers in organizations with matrix-structures, shared leadership or expatriates (Benson & Pattie, 2009; Gregersen & Black, 1992; Nguyen et al., 2013; Vidyarthi et al., 2014). Previous studies which extended LMX-relations between a single manager and several employees as well as relationships between multiple managers and employees demonstrated that when several relationships exist, each individual relation can affect employee work-related attitudes (Benson & Pattie, 2009; Vidyarthi et al., 2014).

In summary, first, since LMX and communication are essential in integrating different areas and leadership communication can be understood as the perceived leadership communication quality (PLCQ) in the LMX relationship, high-quality PLCQ should foster integration across areas. Second, since informal communication is an important prerequisite of integration, it is likely that employees have relationships with managers in several areas. Third, if employees have relationships with multiple managers across the artistic, technical and administration area, each relation should influence integration. Therefore, PLCQ with managers of all areas should be positively related to perceived internal integration between the areas. Hence, the first hypothesis states:

H1a: Employees' PLCQ with managers in the artistic area is positively associated to employees' perception of internal integration.

H1b: Employees' PLCQ with managers in the technical area is positively associated to employees' perception of internal integration.

H1c: Employees' PLCQ with managers in the administration area is positively associated to employees' perception of internal integration.

1.4 Cross-Area Leadership Communication Consistency

So far, it has been shown that communication relationships with several managers in different areas should affect the integration of different areas in an organization. However, as described above, there are clear differences between the artistic, technical and administration areas, which should also be reflected in the relationships. Research has shown that collaboration across areas is better if managers are sensitive to each area (Jamshed, Mohd Nor, & Bakar, 2017). Therefore, it is important, for example, that managers define common problems (Epstein, 2005), acknowledge different work cultures in different areas (Korb et al., 2015) or do not claim exclusive authority of one area over other areas (Rosen & Callaly, 2005).

For theatres in particular, this means that although artistic considerations define the organization to a considerable extent and managers are probably shaped by the rationalities of their respective area, managers from all areas (artistic, technical and administration) have to consider the needs and interests of all areas. This reasoning is theoretically described by the aesthetic leadership approach which assumes that managers must keep aesthetic and non-aesthetic areas ‘in flow’ to enable and foster cooperation across the areas (Guillet de Monthoux et al., 2007). To achieve this, managers need to maintain high-quality mutual relationships, regardless of their own individual competencies and those of their employees (Ropo et al., 2017).

Results from studies that investigate integration between different functional areas in organizations support this assumption. For example, managers in different areas need consensus on corporate strategies to foster internal integration (Pagell, 2004). Furthermore, taking LMX into account, not only the quality of each individual relationship with managers affects employees’ attitudes, but also consistency in the assessment of each relation (Vidyarthi et al., 2014). Accordingly, PLCQ should not only be of high quality in all employee-manager-relations, but PLCQ must also be consistent (i.e. ‘be in flow’) across the areas (Barkela, 2019). Thus, the second hypothesis states:

H2a: Internal integration is perceived high when employees’ PLCQ is consistently high in relationships to several managers.

H2b: Internal integration is perceived low when employees’ PLCQ is consistently low in relationships to several managers.

H2c: Internal integration is perceived low when employees’ PLCQ is inconsistent in relationships to several managers.

2 Method

In order to examine these assumptions, a cross-sectional survey was conducted in German theatres between May and October 2018. Using an address database of the Guild of the German Stage (GDBA, 2018) and existing contacts from the author's previous studies (Barkela, 2019), 1020 people were personally invited, of which 402 (39%) responded. In addition, theatre-related advocacy groups, labor union initiatives, and participants themselves recruited 291 additional participants. Out of these 693 initial participants, 240 did not fully complete the questionnaire. 8 participants were excluded because they had a relationship with only one area, and it was therefore not possible to examine them with regard to communication across areas. 31 were excluded because they were first-line managers without a leader, and 26 were excluded because of non-response in relevant variables for the analyses.

2.1 Sample

Out of the 388 participants included in the study, 53% indicated their gender as female and 1% as diverse. 29% were younger than 29 years of age, 53% were 30–49 years old, and 18% older than 50 years. 32% have been working for the same theatre less than three years, 21% more than three years, and 47% more than six years. 38% ($n = 148$) had relationships with managers from all areas, 62% ($n = 240$) had relationships with managers from two areas. Most often a relationship with managers in the technical area was missing (48%, $n = 187$). Only few participants reported no relation with managers in the artistic (2%, $n = 9$) or administration (11%, $n = 44$) area.

2.2 Measures

Perceived Internal integration was measured using the subscale “integration” of the organizational climate measure (Patterson et al., 2005) in its German translation (Schramm, 2016). The 5-item scale entails concepts of trust (e.g. “Employees in the different areas mistrust the other areas.”—reversed item) and cooperation (e.g. “The cooperation between the areas is very effective.”). The response scale ranged from 1 (completely disagree) to 5 (completely agree). Scale alpha was .81.

The perceived leadership communication quality (PLCQ) was measured with the 6-item German Perceived Leadership Communication Questionnaire (Schneider et al., 2015). The scale provides a short and reliable communication-based approach to the LMX relationship (e.g. “My supervisor and I can speak openly with one another.”; “Especially when problems arise, my supervisor and I talk to one another even more intensively in order to solve problems”). In order to consider communication quality across areas, the scale was repeated up to three times asking for the communication experience with supervisors in the artistic ($\alpha = .92$), technical ($\alpha = .90$) and administration ($\alpha = .94$) areas for each area in which participants had a relationship with. The response scale ranged from 1 (completely disagree) to 5 (completely agree).

2.3 Data Analysis

In examining H1a, H1b and H1c, it must be considered that not all participants have a relation with every area (see above). Consequently, if an employee did not have a relationship with a manager in one of the areas, he or she did not evaluate communication quality in this relationship and the value was missing. Technically speaking, these are not missing values in the sense of the common definition as non-observed, but observable values (Little & Rubin, 2019). However, such hypothetical missing data can be regarded as missing at random (Schafer & Graham, 2002) which makes it possible to apply a model taking the available data into account. Therefore, full information maximum likelihood estimation (FIML) was used to test the first hypothesis. In contrast to imputation procedures, in which probable values are determined to replace the missing data, FIML calculates a likelihood function for each individual case and missing values are ignored. In contrast to pairwise deletion, in which different subgroups of cases are compared variable by variable, FIML estimates parameters and standard errors based on the available raw data in one step and the correct sample size (Enders & Bandalos, 2001; Enders, 2001b; Peugh & Enders, 2004). Simulation studies have demonstrated that FIML yields unbiased estimates in the presence of missing values (Collins et al., 2001; Enders, 2001a, 2001b; Newman, 2003). The analysis was performed with the SEM-procedure of Stata 14.0 using ‘method(mlmv)’ for maximum likelihood with missing values estimation.

For H2a, H2b and H2c a procedure designed to categorize agreement-groups in studies on superior-subordinate self-other agreement (Fleenor et al., 1996) was adapted to categorize the consistency between three values. Therefore, the PLCQ ratings were standardized as z-scores ($M = 0$, $SD = 1$). Then, each rating

towards each area was categorized into high and low communication quality. If the standardized PLCQ-rating was greater than zero, it was considered as high communication quality. If the PLCQ-rating was less than zero, it was considered as low communication quality. Afterwards three types of consistency were determined. If all of the observed measures were considered as high communication quality, the participant was categorized as 'PLCQ consistent/high'. If all of the observed measures were considered as low communication quality, the participant was categorized as 'PLCQ consistent/low'. If observed measures were considered deviating, thus both high and low communication quality was present, the participants were categorized as 'PLCQ inconsistent'. To test for differences in the employees' perception of internal integration, univariate analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted and mean values were post hoc compared using Tukey's HSD test.

3 Results

In looking at the descriptive statistics of the study's measures (Table 1), mean internal integration as perceived by employees was rated rather mediocre ($m = 3.23$, $SD = 0.81$). Also, the PLCQ ratings were in the middle range of the scale, but somewhat higher for managers in the technical area ($m = 3.42$, $SD = 0.83$) than for managers in the artistic ($m = 3.10$, $SD = 1.00$) or administration ($m = 2.23$, $SD = 1.03$) area. Furthermore, evaluations of the perceived

Table 1 Descriptive statistics and intercorrelations of the study's measures

	Descriptive Statistics			Intercorrelations		
	n ¹	M	SD	1	2	3
1 Perceived Internal Integration	388	3.23	0.81	–		
2 PLCQ artistic area	379	3.10	1.00	.43*	–	
3 PLCQ technical area	201	3.42	0.83	.33*	.16*	–
4 PLCQ administration area	344	3.23	1.03	.42*	.28*	.30*

Note: ¹Deviations to $n = 388$: $n = 9$ no relation with artistic area; $n = 187$ no relation with technical area; $n = 44$ no relation with administration area; * $p < .05$

leadership communication quality in the three areas was correlated between artistic and administration areas ($r = .28, p < .001$), artistic and technical areas ($r = 0.16, p = .025$) as well as technical and administration areas ($r = .30, p < .001$). With regard to perceived internal integration, there are moderate correlations with PLCQ in all three areas (artistic area: $r = .43, p < .001$; technical area: $r = .33, p < .001$; administration area: $r = .42, p < .001$). Overall, it can be seen here that all communication relationships positively influence integration. Relatively high standard deviations and low correlations also indicate differences in the assessments of the various managers. Hence, these statistics not only indicate that PLCQ with managers in each area is positively related to perceived internal integration but also that PLCQ is not necessarily consistent.

As described above, H1a, H1b and H1c were tested in a FIML-model (Table 2). The results show a significant effect of leadership communication quality with managers in the artistic area ($b = 0.26; p < .001$), as well as with managers in the technical ($b = 0.19; p = .003$) and administration area ($b = 0.21; p < .001$). Accordingly, if employees have a communication relation with managers in several areas, their PLCQ with managers in each area is positively related to perceived internal integration. Hence, the first Hypothesis could be supported.

Considering H2a, H2b and H2c (Table 3), there was a statistically significant difference in perceived internal integration depending on different levels of PLCQ consistency across the areas as determined by the ANOVA ($F = 57.4, p < .001, \eta^2 = .23$). Tukey's HSD post hoc tests revealed that these differences are statistically significant between all groups. Perceived internal integration is best when PLCQ with managers in each area an employee has a relation with is consistently rated on a high level ($m = 3.83, SD = 0.65, n = 101$). Hence, H2a could be supported.

Table 2 FIML-model of perceived internal integration on PLCQ measures

	Perceived Internal Integration		
	Est		SE
PLCQ artistic area	0.26	***	0.04
PLCQ technical area	0.19	**	0.07
PLCQ administration area	0.21	***	0.05
Constant	1.10	***	0.20
R ²	0.32		

Note: $n = 388$; $n = 9$ missing PLCQ artistic area; $n = 187$ missing PLCQ technical area; $n = 44$ missing PLCQ administration area; * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Table 3 Means, standard deviations, and post hoc significance tests for consistency

	Perceived Internal Integration			Post-Hoc Tukey's HSD
	n	M	SD	
1 PLCQ consistent/high	101	3.83	0.65	1 > 2***; 1 > 3***
2 PLCQ consistent/low	86	2.75	0.71	2 < 3***
3 PLCQ inconsistent	201	3.13	0.74	

Note: n = 388: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Furthermore, perceived internal integration is perceived low if PLCQ is rated inconsistently across areas ($m = 3.13$, $SD = 0.74$, $n = 201$) and even lower ($m = 2.75$, $SD = 0.71$, $n = 86$) if PLCQ is rated consistently on a low level. Hence, H2b and H2c could also be supported.

4 Discussion

The aim of this study was to investigate the question of how leadership communication from managers in different functional areas of an organization affects the integration of these areas. In line with previous studies on internal integration (Birasnav & Bienstock, 2019; Edmondson & Nemphard, 2009; Kramer & Crespy, 2011; Mohsen & Eng, 2016; Pagell, 2004), results show a significant impact of leadership in terms of PLCQ on integration of different functional areas in organizations. Furthermore, it was confirmed that when employees have relationships with several managers, each of these relationships' PLCQ (Benson & Pattie, 2009; Gregersen & Black, 1992; Nguyen et al., 2013) and its consistency across all relationships (Vidyarthi et al., 2014) influence perceptions of employees. However, it was not expected that consistently negative PLCQ ratings would have a more substantial effect than inconsistent evaluations. Inconsistent evaluations do not seem as severe as expected. Employees still perceive a medium level of integration if PLCQ is both positive and negative between the areas. Future studies should investigate such deviating ratings in more detail, for example, whether it is generally beneficial if besides low PLCQ to some areas, PLCQ to other areas is high or if communication with managers in a specific area has usually higher effects. Since the PLCQ with managers in the artistic area showed higher effects in the FIML-analysis, this could be the case for artistic managers. However, this is a presumption that cannot be substantiated in the analyses; non-linear relationships between the three variables would also have to be considered. Such

an investigation of linear and non-linear effects of congruence and incongruence on a dependent variable is usually done with polynomial regression and surface analysis (Edwards, 1994; Edwards & Parry, 1993). Unfortunately, existing established methods are only suitable to examine congruence between two variables. An extension of the polynomial model by further interaction terms in order to represent the four-dimensional model required in this study, was considered, but not implemented because there are no fundamental studies to assess the reliability of this method. This is an open methodological issue that would need to be worked out in appropriate studies.

Regardless of this, these concerns do not affect the validity of the reported results in the context of internal integration. The overarching assumption—the better and the more consistent employees perceive the communication of managers from the different areas, the more employees will perceive internal integration across the areas—has been sufficiently confirmed. Thus, this study successfully applied LMX to multiple manager relationships and examined not only their quality but also their consistency in the context of internal integration. Vidyarthi and colleagues (2014) had taken a similar approach, but did not investigate internal integration, but focused on how relationships with multiple managers affect job satisfaction. Furthermore, the present study did not investigate dual leadership, but diverse relationships across different areas, which is more realistic in everyday organizational life. By applying the approach to internal integration and confirming previous results, this study provides theoretical implications on which future studies can build.

Beyond that, the results offer practical implications for the management of organizations which are structured into different functional areas. It is reasonable to assume that employees have relationships with multiple managers, and that this will become increasingly important in the future. Organizations are establishing flexible decision-making and reporting structures, for example through flat hierarchies or matrix reporting (Billinger & Workiewicz, 2019). For theatres in particular, models of shared management are recommended as a sustainable future form of organization (Schmidt, 2017). But even if not required by structure, informal relations between managers and employees are significant for internal integration (Pagell, 2004). In view of this context and the results of this study, managers must ensure that they maintain good communication to all employees they have a relation with—independent of the functional areas and line management structure.

Since this study provides a first approach to investigate the integration of different functional areas in the light of leadership communication across these areas, this study of course has limitations besides those already discussed. First, since