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Article

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UTMS Journal of Economics

Provided in Cooperation with:

University of Tourism and Management, Skopje

Suggested Citation: Gramatnikovski, Sashko; Stoilkovska, Aleksandra; Serafimovic, Gordana (2015) : Business communication in function of improving the organizational culture of the company, UTMS Journal of Economics, ISSN 1857-6982, University of Tourism and Management, Skopje, Vol. 6, Iss. 2, pp. 266-279

This Version is available at:

<https://hdl.handle.net/10419/146364>

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BUSINESS COMMUNICATION IN FUNCTION OF IMPROVING THE ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE OF THE COMPANY

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Abstract

This paper presents an action research conducted in function of proving the connection between effective communication and organizational culture. Bearing in mind that we communicate daily wherever we are, including our work places, we can conclude that communication is a part of our daily behavior. It is precisely our daily behavior that shows us our habits, norms, standpoints and value systems; the ones we have accepted and through which we manifest our behavior. Recognizing organizational culture within these frames is the challenge that this paper has taken on and it presents a successful attempt of proving the connection between business communication and organizational culture. The research has been conducted with a total of 282 examinees from the first ten of the top 200 organizations for 2013 in the Republic of Macedonia. The same has proven the general hypothesis about the connection between business communication and organizational culture.

Keywords: business communication, organizational culture, feedback information, effective listening, verbal communication.

Jel Classification: L20

INTRODUCTION

We all learn to communicate from the earliest age. It is interwoven with all the additional elements that the family teaches its child and they have to do with family, social or national culture. It is with this culture, additionally refined from the social functioning of the individual up until his/her employment, (i.e. the educational system and all the remaining formal and informal organizations in which the individual has participated and

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communicated, which in turn have affected his/her behavior) that he/she enters the new organization.

The culture of behaving presents a mixture of manners and actions that the individual uses and through which he/she manifests them in the surrounding. Each individual is different because he/she presents a product of various cultural influences: family, social, educational, informal and formal organizational associations.

Organizational culture refers to a core set of attitudes and practices that are shared by the members of the organization and that determines their behavior. (Engelen et al. 2014). The organizational culture can be noticed by the clients who frequently communicate with the employees, by the manner of communicating as a dominant form of communication, etc. This is a sign of good or bad organizational culture and contributes to building the image of the company. Each company strives towards building an image and self-branding or branding its products, yet that cannot be achieved without appropriate communication as part of the organizational culture.

1. BUSINESS COMMUNICATION

Communication has been widely accepted by scholars and academics as the lifeblood of an organization, because communication is needed for exchanging information, exchanging opinions, making plans and proposals, reaching agreement, executing decisions, sending and fulfilling orders and conducting sales (Blalock 2005).

Communication is essential for the success and growth of an organization (Udegbe et al. 2012). It is widely accepted that business management and business educators perceive communication skills as highly valuable to employees and organizations alike (Conrad and Newberry 2011). Communication in context of the activities of one organization (products, services, clients, coworkers...) is called business communication. It is a process of generating, transmitting, receiving, and interpreting messages in interpersonal, group, public, and mass communication contexts through written and verbal formats. This type of communication is aimed toward organizing activities that will lead the members of the company to making a profit. (Safran 2010).

Business communication is done in and outside the organization; of course within the context of the organization itself. Effective business communication is the key to planning, leading, organizing, and controlling the resources of the organizations to achieve objectives, and may be formal or informal in nature (Hynes 2005). Unlike formal communication, informal communication is not tied to the work place and hierarchy. This communication, in any type of form, no matter whether in or outside the organization is done quickly.

The vertical communication which is communication between a superior and a lower ranked employee is most often formal, unlike the lateral communication which is mostly informal.

Since communication is a precondition to development, access to and control over the means and processes of communication are properly questions of great social importance. (Hoover, Venturelli, and Wagner 2009). Even though the basic goal of every sender in every communication is for the recipient to get the information precisely and fully, this does not always happen. Sometimes the information does not reach the recipient, fully or partially, due to various barriers in the surrounding. There are two types of communication barriers: external and internal.

There are also two sides in the communication process. Both the sender and the recipient of the information have to take certain steps in order to overcome or eliminate the communication barriers. From this aspect, each side has important obligations in the communication process.

2. ETHICS IN COMMUNICATION

Ethics is a sum of principles about what is right and wrong. Ethical decisions are based on universal principles of rights and wrong as well as situational factors in which decisions are invoked (Johnson 2001). For example, when any employee talks to a client or coworker, it is ethical that he/she provides correct information before persuading the client or coworker to take some action.

The personal ethics of the individual is connected to his/her culture, previous experience, as well as the society in which he/she grew up and was educated. Each individual has a distinctive blend of personality traits, values, moral principles that enable them to act ethically. Personal ethics refers to personal principles such as “love, kindness and respect for human dignity...in the exercise of power” (Kirman 1992). While personal ethics is connected to the individual, the ethical principles are connected to the group. They show generally accepted attitudes that do not have to be written, yet are simply considered right in a society. For example, for a lot of people stealing is wrong and they do not do it. When a lot of people agree on a principle, it most often becomes part of the law.

The attitudes of the members of one specific profession can also be the same no matter whether they are written or not. There are professions that have written codes of ethics. An effective code enhances social responsibility and clarifies the norms and values the organization seeks to uphold (Stevens 2009). For example, in medicine there is a codex that every doctor must abide by or (as it is already well known) before he/she begins this profession, they swear an oath to respect the ethical codex of doctors.

Ethics stands at the very core of our working lives and of society as a whole, defining the public image of the business community and the ways in which individual companies and people behave (Ciulla, Martin, and Solomon 2011). Every organization, as a sum of employees with their own personal and professional ethics, builds an organizational identity in terms of practicing this working ethics. The company ethics obliges the employees to behave ethically in different communicational situations, especially with clients and coworkers. Thus, in the workplace, individuals are “challenged to have moral imagination and the courage to do the right thing” (Kreitner and Kinicki 1995). Lying can easily be noticed and even though it is a part of the behavior of an individual, it can still seriously contribute to the destruction of the image of a company. We do not need to remind here that image, especially the image of an organization, is very difficult to build, yet very easy to ruin. Thus, there is no doubt that ethical communication or making organizational decisions in the spirit of ethics is crucial.

Even though honesty and proper behavior toward the clients or coworkers is of great importance, we have to emphasize that honesty does not end there. The employees have to be honest with their superiors as well.

Some professions insist on secrecy in working. Taking information out of the organization should not only be prevented by the fear of punishment but it should also

be a part of the ethical behavior of the individual and the responsibility he/she feels towards the organization.

All medical workers, lawyers, bankers, court clerks and workers with access to secret trading information concerning the competitive advantage of the organization have professions in which secrecy on the part the employees is insisted on. These employees have to be ready for such a responsible task as is keeping the information a business secret.

3. COMMUNICATION WITH CLIENTS

Every working organization exists in order to realize the common goals of the people that are part of it. All those goals are dedicated to meeting the clients' needs, no matter if it is a service or product. This means that the clients are the reason why the organization exists and without them not one single organization would have a reason to hire workers. How to satisfy and maintain relationship with customers in order to have customer loyalty is the essential survival of profit organizations (Deng et al. 2010).

Clients' loyalty can be explained to a substantial degree by customer satisfaction, trust, and communication (Ball, Coelho, and Machas 2004). Hence it is clear how important it is for the clients to be satisfied with the work that the employees do and, naturally, the daily business communication which they have with the clients has a significant part in all this.

Communication is mainly face to face and via the phone, even though it must be said that electronic communication and written communication is also present.

4. CUSTOMER SERVICE CULTURE

The companies that have set their clients as a priority are strongly dedicated to building a behavior culture toward the consumers. This is why they often organize trainings for their employees about how to behave with clients. The superiors encourage the employees to innovate new models of behavior toward their clients. The individual approach toward the clients is completely given for assessment to the employees and the successful solving of certain situations by individual employees is particularly rewarded, which actually provides support for the undertaken responsibility.

In such companies where the advantage of the clients is the policy of the organization, the employees are fully introduced to the organizational policies; what they mean and what is also expected of them as employees. These organizations often provide freedom to the employees concerning specific actions towards the consumers, for example: the possibility of giving a discount to a client, changing a false appliance with a new one, etc.

The employee must make a good impression with every contact that he/she makes with the client, no matter whether the contact is in person or via electronic communication.

5. INTERACTION WITH CLIENTS

Interactions with clients play a central part in our lives. From health care to auto repair to banking, to clerical support, service interactions have become a significant part of our daily routines and the nature of these interactions may dramatically impact our overall quality of life (Ford 2001).

The moment a client makes visual contact with the employee, the interaction has begun. This means that we cannot actually say that if the client has not asked for a service, he /she did not need anything. The impression made on the client can be spread very quickly with today's efficient electronic communication channels. This is why it is of great importance that the impression left on the client is positive. Positive impression turns the client into our presenter of services or products, i.e. our marketing agent.

If we also bear in mind that the client can share the good or bad experiences he/she had with the company, then each employee that makes contact with a client in order to satisfy his/her needs must be aware that clients should be provided a good atmosphere and surrounding in order for them to feel welcome.

The moment a client enters, all other work should be put aside and attention should be paid to the client. The room has to be clean and tidy in order to leave a good impression. Since customers differ, it is necessary to observe them and within the shortest possible time interval assess their wishes, for example: some like to look around by themselves, while others want a product to be offered to them. In cases when it is inevitable for a client to wait to be served, it is advisable to explain to him/her the reason for waiting, to provide a pleasant atmosphere while he/she waits and if the client cannot wait one must be ready to provide an alternative solution.

It is good to keep casual contact with the client in order to be able to timely assess his/her demands, but to also show due respect.

The companies which are dedicated to their clients must train their employees to be able to provide quality service. This means that they should be able to give different things to different people. Quality service encompasses a continual combination of the following: politeness, careful listening and individual treatment.

In a service orientation context, since customer service becomes important to service organizations, employing good service employees may take a meaningful part for an organization's success (Baydoun, Dale, and Emperado 2001). Therefore, it is important for organizations to improve and to change the way of communication and interaction with clients in order to adapt the rapid change of service orientation (Ford 2001).

6. ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

Organizational culture is known as "normative glue" means to hold the overall organization together (Tichy 1982).

The definitions on organizational culture are divided into two groups by some authors. The first group of definitions emphasizes the cognitive elements of the content of organizational culture such as are: basic assumptions, beliefs (attitudes), values and behavioral norms.

These definitions highlight organizational culture as an ideology that people interpret with their behavior.

The second group of definitions has to do with the material part of the content of organizational culture. The material symbols are the most visible part of an organizational culture. These are the consequences of the used value of the acting of culture: repeated behavior, noticeable interaction, language of communication, metaphors, jargon, symbols and material artifacts in the organization.

Actually, the organizational culture presents a system of assumptions, values, norms and attitudes manifested through symbols that the members of an organization have developed and adopted through common experience and ones which help them determine the meaning of the world that surrounds them and how to act within in.

The organizational culture directly influences the organization's performances through the entire influence of the organizational elements and management.

The organizational culture influences the functioning and management of the organization. This, before all, means influencing the organizational strategy in the making of every decision. This is also connected to the control over the behavior of the employees because with entering the organization, every employee accepts the imposed cultural values and norms and in time adopts them as his/her own rules, ways of thinking and manners of behavior.

The organizational culture is connected with the organizational structure. In order to create an appropriate organizational design, the creators, i.e. top managers have to take their common assumptions about the people, organization and surrounding as a starting point.

Motivating the personnel to work is also connected to the organizational culture. In organizations with strongly emphasized cultures, there are clearly established value systems concerning career developments that actually force the employees to individually assess themselves and according to their personal wishes and aspirations aim toward certain promotions. This in turn forces them to be motivated about the work that they do.

The assumptions set in the organizational culture also have to do with the leader of the organization. The leadership style is significantly determined by the organizational culture. The expectations of the followers, concerning the behavior of the leader, are important in terms of how he/she will influence the followers.

The organizations that have a built organizational culture with a value of *we are the best* have to continually work with each individual on making him/her be the best in what he/she does. Actually by employing them, the manner of behavior of the colleagues becomes an imperative for the newly employed members as well.

6.1 The strength of the organizational culture

Organizational performance is one of the most important constructs in management research. Reviewing past studies reveals a multidimensional conceptualization of organizational performance related predominately to stakeholders, heterogeneous product market circumstances, and time. (Richard et al. 2009)

Since the goal of every organization and its management is achieving high organizational performances and since the strongly expressed culture precisely leads to improving the organizational performances, it is expected that the theoreticians deal with determining the strength of the organizational culture. The connection between the organizational culture and the success of the organization is understandable if we know

that the value systems, dedication and motivation are all part of the organizational culture. Organizational culture provide sustainable aggressive advantage under three conditions; first, the culture must be viable, second the culture must be rare and have attributes and third culture must be imperfectly imitable. Hence, if the organizational culture is strong, then it eliminates the negative elements, such as destructive conflicts, and in turn activates the energy of the employees toward realizing the organizational vision.

In order to consider that organizational culture exists, the assumptions and value systems should be widely accepted and practiced by the employees. In terms of how many employees have to be encompassed with the practicing of the organizational culture, part of the theoreticians consider that the organizational culture is either strong or does not exist at all. In such cases, the subcultures become stronger. (Hatch and Zilber 2011) Yet there are also theoreticians who think that even though the organizational culture is weak, it does not mean that it is nonexistent within the organization.

7. RESEARCH

The object of research in this paper is the influence of the improvement of business communication on the development of the organizational culture.

Thus, the problem that will be looked into in this paper is the inappropriate communication with clients and coworkers and its influence on the development and establishment of the organizational culture.

The research has been conducted on a representative number of 282 examinees from the first ten of the top 200 organizations for 2013. The research includes employees, clients and product/service consumers. It is precisely this that gives weight to the research. It was necessary to collect data on the clients and to contact them. Namely, 90 employees and 192 clients, i.e. product/service consumers, from the examined companies make up the research sample.

The research was conducted during January and February 2015. A survey was used as a research technique and two questionnaires have been used as measuring instruments (for employees and for clients). The questionnaires are of closed type and the examinees could answer the questions with one of three given options (yes/sometimes/no).

The general hypothesis is: If the communication led by the organization with its clients is effective and efficient, then it will help its organizational culture become recognizable.

The general hypothesis is divided into specific and individual hypotheses. The specific hypotheses deal with the types of verbal and written communication through the individual hypotheses.

8. RESULT ANALYSIS

There were two questionnaires prepared for this paper, each with 31 questions and all of a closed type. The survey was conducted in the first ten of the top 200 organizations for 2013 in the Republic of Macedonia.

A total of 90 answers from 192 clients were part of the research. Basically, the questions from both questionnaires are the same but they are adapted for two separate

groups, i.e. the clients and the employees. The questions were formed out of necessity for confirming the assumptions set in the hypothetical frame.

In the first set of questions prepared for the employees and the clients, the efficiency of communicating with the clients in person was researched. The received results point to a high level of communication during which the employees actively listen to their clients, assess the expectations clients have of them and react to that appropriately. For this set of questions, the fifth question for the employees was chosen as a representative question and it is as follows: *According to the assessment of the client's expectations of me, I behave appropriately.* 25 examinees answered 1 (Yes) which presents 28%, 55 answered 2 (sometimes) which is 61% and 10 answered 3 (No) or 11%.

The same question but this time for the clients is: *The employee behaves according to my expectations.* All the examinees answered this question and with the following results: 160 examinees answered 1 (Yes) which presents 83%, 32 examinees answered 2 (Sometimes) which is 17% and no one answered 3 (No) or 0%.

The results have been visually presented in figure number 1. From it we can see that even though the employees are not quite sure that they have succeeded in meeting the client's needs (61% Sometimes), 83% of the clients consider that the employees behave according to their expectations.

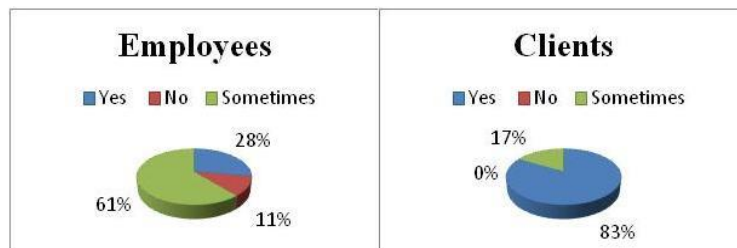


Figure 1. Expected behavior

The eleventh question is another example in which we can see that the behavior of the employees is highly regarded by the clients, even more than the employee's themselves expected. The question for the employees is: *I pay attention to what the client's behavior can show me,* to which all the examinees answered as follows: 50 examinees answered 1 (Yes) which presents 56%, 20 examinees answered 2 (Sometimes) which is 22% and 20 examinees answered 3 (No) or 22%.

The eleventh question for the clients is: *The employee fully respects my behavior.* All the examinees answered the question and with the following results: 144 examinees answered 1 (Yes) which presents 75%, 48 examinees answered 2 (Sometimes) which is 25% and no one answered 3 (No) or 0%.

The results have been visually presented in figure number 2.

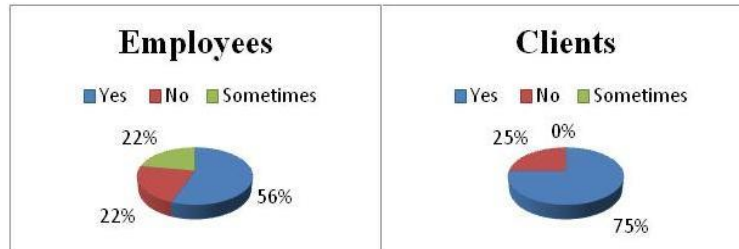


Figure 2. Attention to clients

The next set of questions refers to the quality of cooperation between the clients and the company/ies. From the answers it can be concluded that the employees succeed in making their clients long-lasting coworkers through communication. The clients are also sure in the recommendations they give to their friends and relatives about using the services of the company/ies. Question number 13 has been chosen as a representative question for this set. The question is as follows: *I am satisfied with the number of coworkers which is a result of my good communication with them.* 70 examinees answered 1 (Yes) which presents 78%, 10 examinees answered 2 (Sometimes) which is 11% and 10 examinees answered 3 (No) or 11%.

The same question referred to the clients *I recommend this organization to my friends/relatives because of my good experience*, was answered by all examinees with the following results: 160 examinees answered 1 (Yes) which presents 83%, 32 examinees answered 2 (Sometimes) which is 17% and no one answered 3 (No) or 0%. The results have been visually shown in figure number 3. From the figure we can see that the answers of the employees and the clients are almost identical.

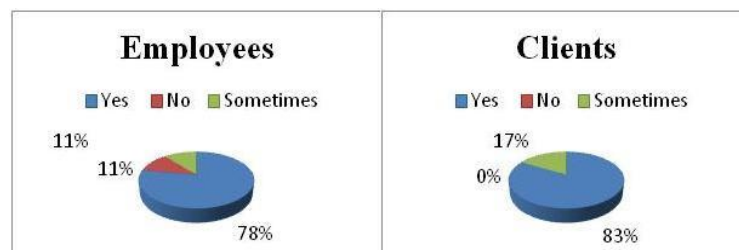


Figure 3. Recommending the company's services by the clients

The fourth set of questions refers to the written communication of the companies. It was concluded that the companies contain the features and positive tone of communication while addressing the clients, also the technical and editorial accuracy is at an admirable level and the content of the written text has been carefully chosen. Question number 19 has been chosen as a representative for this set of questions and it is as follows: *The letters that we send to the clients have carefully written contents.* All the employees answered this question and with the following results: 65 examinees answered 1 (Yes) which presents 67%, 5 examinees answered 2 (Sometimes) which is 5% and 25 examinees answered 3 (No) or 28%.

The nineteenth question is: *The letters I receive from the organization have carefully written contents*. All the examinees answered this question and with the following results: 176 examinees answered 1 (Yes) which presents 92%, 16 examinees answered 2 (Sometimes) which is 8% and no one answered 3 (No) or 0%.

The results have been visually presented in figure number 4. In this case as well, we can see that the results received from the clients are better/higher than those with which the employees had rated themselves, i.e. the company.

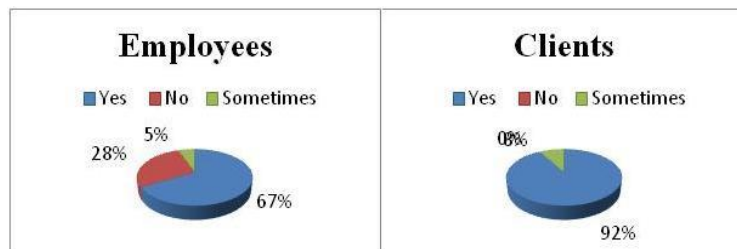


Figure 4. Quality of the written communication

The fifth set of questions refers to the recognizable culture of the company/ies. The following has been researched: the dress code of the employees, the interior and exterior style, whether the organizational policy is recognizable, as well as the nurtured tradition. The answers point to a recognizable organizational culture in all of the 10 researched companies. The twenty-fifth question, referred to the employees, has been chosen as a representative for this set of questions and it is as follows: *The traditions nurtured by the companies are recognizable to the clients*. Here are the employees' answers: 55 examinees answered 1 (Yes) which presents 61%, 5 examinees answered 2 (Sometimes) which is 6% and 30 examinees answered 3 (No) or 33%.

The same question referred to the clients is: *The traditions nurtured by the company are recognizable to me*. All the examined clients answered this question and with the following results: 144 examinees answered 1 (Yes) which presents 75%, 48 examinees answered 2 (Sometimes) which is 25% and no one answered 3 (No) or 0%.

The results have been visually presented in figure number 5. From the results received we can conclude that the company's tradition is recognizable to the clients.

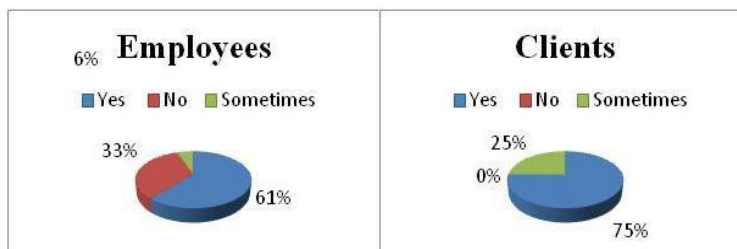


Figure 5. Company's tradition

The last set of questions refers to the web pages of the top ten companies in the Republic of Macedonia. The answers provide information about how often the web pages are visited, the structure as well as the accessibility to the needed information for the

clients. The last, thirty-first, question has been chosen as a representative for this set. The question addressed to the employees is as follows: *The clients think that the web page of the company is at the level of the world standards*. All the examinees answered the question and with the following results: 70 examinees answered 1 (Yes) which presents 78%, 5 examinees answered 2 (Sometimes) which is 5% and 15 examinees answered 3 (No) or 17%.

The same thirty-first question addressed to the clients is as follows: *The web page of the company is at the level of the world standards*. The examined clients gave the following results: 167 examinees answered 1 (Yes) which presents 92%, 16 examinees answered 2 (Sometimes) which is 8% and no one answered 3 (No) or 0%.

The results have been visually presented in figure number 6. The answers of both the clients and employees are almost identical and clearly show that the web pages of the researched companies have been created in accordance with the absolute standard.

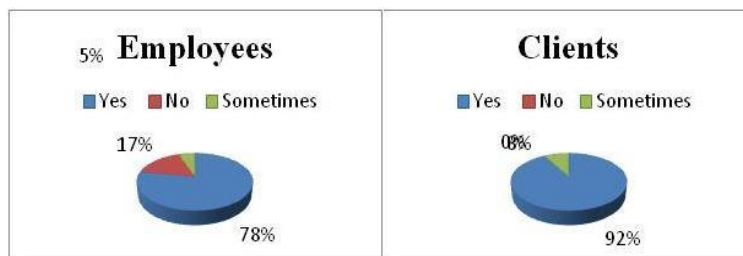


Figure 6. Absolute standard of the webpage

The results received have been grouped and calculated with an arithmetical mean, meaning that the received results prove the general hypothesis and also connect the effectiveness and efficiency of the business communication of the company with the recognizable organizational culture. These two variables have been shown comparatively in figure 7.

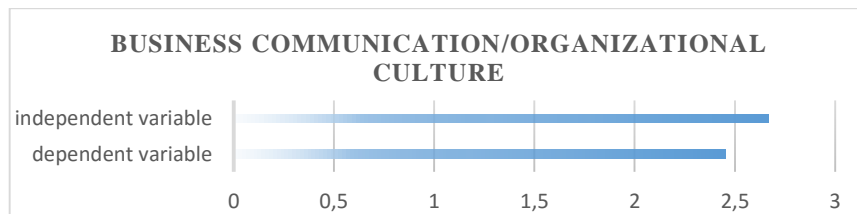


Figure 7. Proof of the general hypothesis

CONCLUSION

The paper encompasses a highly serious research segment which is business communication in context of building the organizational culture. This is a category which is very difficult to measure, hence the seriousness in the empirical approach of the paper.

Business communication is inevitable in every working organization, for every individual employee and every individual communicating with the company. Most often, the daily conducted activities are done routinely and not a lot of attention is paid to them.

Actually, they become a manifestation of a currently built organizational or personal culture. The success of the company, as a built image or its branding, is precisely the result of the built organizational culture. With this, the meaning of the organizational culture is of essential nature if we want to achieve success in the business world.

From the results received we can make several conclusions which correspond to the expected results set during the outlining of the research. The conclusions are unambiguous in terms of proving the hypotheses. This speaks of a highly built organizational culture, as well as business communication that meet the standards of current acting. It is important to mention that this research has been conducted in the best ten companies, hence the justification of the high results. Therefore, the results should not be generalized for all the companies in the Republic of Macedonia.

The results received while proving the quality of the communication which is led in the researched companies, i.e. its effectiveness and efficiency, are positive. Again, the results received from the employees in the companies are the same with those received from the clients concerning different elements of the professional behavior of the employees during communication with clients, which speaks of a high quality of established communication.

With their way of communicating and their behavior, the employees succeed in winning over the clients as their coworkers. The answers undoubtedly point to a confirmation of the satisfaction from the mutual cooperation both by the clients and the employees, which in turn results with recommending the companies to other potential clients so that they can use the services of particularly that company.

The research also deals with the written communication of the researched companies with their clients. Through it the existing states of written communication between the clients and the employees have been discovered. The use of the logo, the necessary information of the organization, the use of memorandums for written communication or the use of a positive tone in the content of the letters have been identified as elements which are present in the written communication.

The web communication with the clients has been considered in this paper as a segment of business communication. The results received are in context of the quality of the web communication of the companies with the clients. The following points have been used as confirmation: the attitudes of the clients and the employees about how often the web pages are being opened, whether they contain all the necessary information which are of interest to the clients, how original they are and how much similar they are with the international ones according to absolute standard. Again, in this set of questions, the received answers are positive and yield a high result. It is safe to conclude that in the researched companies the web communication is at the level of the international standards.

Apart from the quality of business communication of the researched sample, the received results show nurturing of organizational policies on the basis of set value systems which can be seen in their organizational culture. The results have been received by asking the clients and the employees questions in context of whether the organizational culture which is nurtured in the companies is recognizable to the clients. The findings received from the research procedure show that the clients recognize the policies of the companies, the dress code, and the uniqueness of the interior, the traditions nurtured in the companies, the logo and the way in which the companies treat their clients. All the answers have a high percentage of positive answers.

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