

# Chapter 14

## Internal Communication Failure in Times of Change

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### ABSTRACT

*The purpose of this chapter is to explore internal communication failure that occurs during changes related to total quality management implementation. The author undertook a review of the literature on internal communication during such organizational change, with particular focus on failure factors. The chapter's contribution is to highlight the complexity of internal communication and provide best practices for practitioners. This literature review synthesized key research on internal communication strategies and provides an interesting reference base for academics and practitioners with an interest in communication in times of change.*

### INTRODUCTION

Environmental factors such as globalization, emerging economies, and technological advances lead organizations to reconsider their positions in respective markets and implement total quality management (TQM) for competitive advantage (Douglas & Judge, 2001). In recent years of economic challenges, change has become nearly synonymous with doing business. Firms undergo a myriad of changes in doing business and maintaining a competitive advantage; these changes range from process improvement to cultural and organizational shifts for efficiency (Cameron & Green, 2012; Kramer, 2004; Powell, 1995). TQM implementation is often considered as an organizational change project (Whitney & Pavett, 1998). Indeed, TQM features—such as open culture, employee empowerment, or executive commitment—alter the deep structure of the organization (Tushman & Romanelli, 1985).

Effective communication has emerged as a decisive success factor in communicating and managing change during a TQM implementation project (Lofquist, 2011). Without an understanding of where the organization wishes to go, and the engagement of its employees as internal stakeholders, organizational change faces innumerable difficulties (Goodman & Truss, 2004; Welch, 2011). In the past, most studies have focused on the role of external communication, such as public relations, collaborative engagements,

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and advertising in successful organizational changes and transformations. Internal communication, however, has proven just as complex and important in the successful adoption and implementation of organizational change.

From training and development to employee identification, internal communication provides a two-way route for the exchange of information and the imparting of organizational values and strategic direction (Gilley et al., 2009; Mazzei, 2009). Internal communication approaches, however, must be tailored to the organizational culture, size, industry, managerial system, financial resources, employees, and nature of the business environment. This is especially true in periods of organizational change generated by TQM setting whereby resources are directed into the implementation and assessment of this change, and employees' engagement is of high importance.

From a theoretical perspective, internal communication and organizational change approaches share common influencing factors such as management styles, leadership approaches, and organizational structures and culture (Kramer, 2004; Lies, 2012; Mazzei, 2009). With deeper examination, the two constructs also interact and affect one another in determining the success or failure of change. In this literature review chapter, organizational change related to TQM implementation and internal communication will be addressed as different constructs with an understanding that they have common influencing factors. Given the vast nature of literature addressing change communication, the chapter will focus on internal communication failure that occurs during change. The chapter's objective is to highlight the complexity of internal communication during changes related to TQM implementation by emphasizing the importance of failure. This literature review is especially relevant for two main reasons. First, little has been done to synthesize key research on internal communication strategies during change related to TQM implementation. Second, organizational change crosses the boundaries of multiple fields, and this review provides an interesting reference base for academics and practitioners with an interest in communication in times of change.

## **Method**

To conduct this narrative literature review, only journal articles in peer-reviewed, reputable journals were used. Also included were a few books that covered early theoretical work in organizational change and internal communication. Journal articles published over the past 20 years were focused upon, especially those since 1995.

Several main keywords were entered as search criteria: "internal communication," "organizational change," "change management," "TQM implementation," and "transformation." Also used in the search were keywords to reflect the main analysis focus, which is failure; these included keywords such as "fail," "failure," "shortcoming," and "ineffectiveness." Databases searched included the following: Business Source Premier (EBSCO), ABI/INFORM Global (XML) (ProQuest), CBCA Business (CSA) (ProQuest XML), Small Business eCollection (Gale), EconoLit, and PsycINFO, PsycARTICLES. We excluded from our set of articles the following pieces: newsletters, corporate materials, editorial pieces, book reviews, trade articles, and other commentary-type articles. Also excluded were journal articles that focused on external communication (determined as those containing keywords such as "public relations" and "advertisement").

After that, we undertook a more systematic review of the content; we used Cohen (1990) PQRS method. This method is referred to as the preview, question, read, summarize (PQRS) system. In the preview stage, we reviewed the abstracts, titles, and sometimes even the introduction of each article to

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