

## Professional Communication for Better Work-Life Balance

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### Abstract:

The quality of one's work life is determined by the type of communication that takes place in the one's organization. Formal and informal communications are important in workplace in order to sustain mental and physical vigour, and interest of the workforce. An attempt is being made, through this research study, to prove that 'How Communication' influences and contributes for the well being of the employees as well as success of the organizations. This paper discusses one of the prominent professional communication strategies namely, face to face communication and its impact on employee work-life balance. This study is undertaken by taking few select organizations in IT sector especially at managerial cadre as a sample for effectiveness of face to face communication in attaining employee work-life balance.

**Keywords:** Work-life balance, Strategies for communication, Motivation, Face-to-face communication, Conflict Resolution, Sustaining Relationship.

### 1. Introduction

"Effective communication is more of an art than a science. The methods, tools and media may change over time, but the goal is the same. The message that is communicated should be the message received." Work place communication in the 21st century has been rapidly changing into one that involves less oral communication, and more electronic sharing of information. While in the past, an employee might preferred to have a discussion with a co-worker face-to-face in order to find solutions to the problems they face at the work place; today people tend to communicate via email or short messaging service. Either way, the old practice of communication, which involves sharing of information orally, still holds good for effective communication in the workplace.

Lack of good and effective work place communication is a problem for individuals as well as for the organizations across the world. Success of an employee, a team or an organization depends mainly on efficient and effective professional communication in the workplace among the employees as well as between the staff and managers. Ineffective communication and misinformation affects the morale of the employees often results in stress and undercurrents of tension, poor cooperation and coordination among the workers and between workers and the managers, gossip and rumours, low productivity, and high absenteeism.

The quality of work- life is determined by the type of information and treatment employees receive from the organization. Thus, informal and formal communication is regarded as a crucial channel towards understanding, agreeing and sharing common goals in the workplace. This process, however, requires constant dialog and feedback where employees and employers find an opportunity to share their views in order to increase their levels of efficiency while realizing the individual's as well as organizational goals.

"The expression 'Work -Life Balance' was first used in late 1970s to describe the balance between an individual's work and personal life". Balancing work and life is a challenge for employees in a competitive work environment. They are often put to undue physical strain and mental stress resulting in psychological and social problems. For the past few decades, organizations have recognized the importance of addressing the problems faced by employees in maintaining a reasonable and effective balance between work and personal life, and have come out with a host of programmes and policies

such as child care, elder care, family leave, medical reimbursement for the family including dependents, and flexible work schedules etc..

But little attention has been paid to communication in the work place which plays a vital role in determining the commitment and performance of the employee. Good communication leads to better understanding of the colleagues and managers which in turn increases the dedication and sense of responsibility in realizing the organizational as well as personal goals

## 2. Motivation for Communication

**Communication** and **Motivation** are invariably the two sides of the same coin. The task of communication is incomplete without motivation on either side (speaker and listener).

**“Motivation,” according to McFarland, “refers to the way in which urges, drives, desires, aspirations, strivings or need to direct, control or explain the behavior of human beings.”**

Before the process of communication begins, Motivation, as defined in **Abraham Maslow’s** hierarchy of needs - **Physiological**: air, water, food, shelter and other basic needs, **Safety**: protection from danger, physical and emotional harms; **Social**: feeling of companionship, sense of belonging, acceptance, friendship and affection; **Esteem**: self-confidence, self-respect, feeling of competence, achievements, independence, autonomy status recognition, attention, prestige and appreciation; **Self-Actualization**: realization of one’s potential, self-fulfillment, growth and creative expression, of the Communicator and Communicate are to be taken care of in order to create a congenial atmosphere for the successful transaction.

## 3. Objective of the Research Paper

This research paper focuses on some contemporary aspects of both formal and informal communication which could be implemented successfully for the growth of the organizations as well as for the better work-life balance of an employee.

## 4. Communication Strategies

Research and experience show that there are many ways through which managers and employees can improve internal communication for better understanding, productivity, environment and work-life balance.

Here are some of the Communication Strategies

### 4.1 Face-to-Face communication

Face-to-face conversations are most effective. During these types of conversations, the speaker and listener have the opportunity to read non-verbal cues such as eye-movement, facial expressions and feelings, and relate better by reading each other’s body language. Additionally, the message receiver has the opportunity to ask questions and both can feel the energy the connection creates. Face-to-Face conversation, does not offer any scope for distractions. By sitting across the table, one can have the opportunity to discuss ones problems in a bold and frank environment expecting the other person to feel empathetic towards his concerns. While interacting, we should always be polite in our communications with others. “Courtesy lets people know that you care. The words “Thank You” show that you appreciate a person’s efforts. Try saying, “would you please...” instead of just, “Please...” Avoid using phrases like “I strongly object” or “I disagree” instead try phrases like “I would like to share my views on...” or “one difference between your point and mine...” or “I beg to differ with you.”

#### **4.1.1 Focusing on tone**

A tone refers to the modulation of the voice expressing a particular feeling or mood. The tone of a voice shows the attitude of the speaker and reveals his intention. The attitude and intent of the speaker can be understood through the tone of a voice. Sometimes, the verbal expressions we use may be accurate to the situation but they can be misunderstood by the receiver because of the Tone we adopt. In order to communicate effectively we need to be mindful about the tone we use to the particular occasion.

#### **4.2 Establishing Credibility**

Establishing credibility or a trust bond is not so easy unless we have confidence in ourselves.

- It has to be earned:
- By demonstrating knowledge or ability
- By having trust worthy intentions
- By being ethical, industrious, and dependable
- By enhancing personal charisma
- By being friendly, caring, enthusiastic, and positive

#### **4.3 Informal communication**

Informal communication exists in a formal organization. Informal groups within the formal structure can be seen in every organization: small or big, private or public.

##### **4.3.1 Grapevine**

“The grapevine consists of a series of small groups of people interconnected to one another until it covers everyone in the organization. Each group has a person at the centre as a leader who communicates the messages to every member in that group. The members of that group in turn transmit the same message to other member in another group and so on and the process continues.”

It is a tool of management because it influences the behavior and attitude of others. It is the responsibility of management to create informal environment conducive for effective communication. Grapevine is considered as one of the informal channels of communication.

##### **4.3.2 Proxemics**

Proxemics refers to the use of physical space to communicate. The three main aspects of proxemics that are used for communication are territory, things, and personal zones.

###### **4.3.2.1 Territory**

Private territory at the work place is a sign of status and authority. The larger our private space, the more status and importance we have. We tend to enjoy some privacy and dignity in discharging our duties by maintaining some distance from our colleagues resulting in increasing our efficiency and commitment towards our duties and responsibilities. We feel inconvenient if we are deprived of our private territory in our work places.

###### **4.3.2.2 Things**

The things that we keep within our space also communicate a lot to others. A clean desk and palm pilot communicates efficiency. Quotes on our personal notice boards reflect our mind and attitude to the readers. Expensive things communicate higher status than the cheap ones. Personal things, such as trophies, photographs, pictures, and other table tops convey some message to others.

###### **4.3.2.3 Personal Space Zones**

We all carry an invisible personal space zones much like a private air bubble. We feel proprietary right to this space and resent others entering it unless they are invited. The exact dimensions of these private zones differ from culture to culture and person to person. Americans and Northern Europeans are usually comfortable if the interacting distance is approximately two feet to four feet.

#### **4.3.3 Social gatherings**

Participating in social gatherings such as marriage functions, birthday parties, festivals etc., provide an opportunity for the staff to gather together and interact closely in a congenial atmosphere in order to share their happiness and concerns in an informal way.

#### **4.3.4 Interacting through social sites**

Internet has brought out sea changes in the lives of people across the world. It has made the world a global village. People living in different parts of the world can interact with one another at the click of the mouse. Exchange of knowledge, culture, customs, passions etc., has become a commonplace with the dawn of the net. Internet culture has paved way for creating social sites such as Face book, Twitter, LinkedIn etc, in order to maintain a net relationship with likeminded people. Interacting through social sites no doubt has its own advantages and disadvantages. The advantage is that the sender and receiver can share their common interests, concerns and knowledge, and can also be benefitted mutually through the relationship. The disadvantage is that sometimes our personal information may go into the wrong hands which ultimately lead to some problems. The social sites created, maintained and used by organizations are proved to be very successful in realizing their objective of keeping their family together by addressing their concerns and helping them in meeting their personal as well as organizational goals. Better work-life balance can be maintained if organizational social sites are effective in meeting the needs and demands of the employees.

### **5. Empathetic towards employees or colleagues**

Empathy plays a key role in sustaining the relationship between the worker and the manager. Empathy means ability to understand and share the feelings, experiences, opinions, and emotions of listeners. It is necessary to show every consideration for the listener that will create interest and persuade the listener. The morale of the worker can be strengthened by being considerate towards his feelings and concerns. Empathizing with the workers or colleagues is the projection of one's personality into the receivers in order to understand them better. This attitude of the speaker no doubt wins the heart of the listener and helps him to realize the very purpose of conversation.

### **6. Updating the priorities of the organization**

No one achieves success alone. Success of an organization depends on the collective team effort of all the stake holders concerned. Employees from different professional backgrounds need to be appraised of the goals and priorities of the organization on continuous basis in the form of printing and distributing handbooks, news bulletins, brochures, administrative manuals and booklets, etc., in order to help them ready by honing their skills for the challenges they face in the near future.

### **7. Problem Solving Skill**

*Problems are only opportunities in work clothes. Henry Kaiser (American Industrialist)*

Problem solving is a key skill, which one has to develop in order to make a huge difference in one's career. A positive attitude towards finding a solution for the problem at hand or in future has to be cultivated right from the beginning. The problems we face can be large or small, simple or complex, and easy or difficult to solve with. Regardless of the nature of the problems, a fundamental part of every employee's role is finding ways to solve them. So, being a confident problem solver is really important to our success. This however, depends on the positive communicative relations employees have among themselves and between the staff and management. We need to adopt a good process while approaching a problem and finding a solution to the problem. There are four basic steps in

problem solving – Defining the problem, Generating alternatives, Evaluating and selecting alternatives, and Implementing solutions.

#### **8. Conflict Resolution Skill**

In many cases, conflict in the workplace just seems to be a fact of life. Resolving conflict rationally and effectively is a challenge in work place situations. Different people with different goals and needs tend to involve in conflicts resulting in personal animosity and strained relations. “The fact that conflict exists, however, is not necessarily a bad thing: As long as it is resolved effectively, it can lead to personal and professional growth.”(C.S Rayudu 2009). By resolving conflict successfully, we can solve many of the problems that it has brought to the surface, as well as getting benefits that we might not at first expect:

- Good relationships- the first priority: As far as possible, we need to maintain good relations with our colleagues by treating them courteously and remain constructive under pressure.
- Keep people and problems separate: Recognize that in many cases the other person is not just "being difficult" – real and valid differences can lie behind conflictive positions. By separating the problem from the person, real issues can be debated without damaging working relationships.
- Pay attention to the interests that are being presented: By listening carefully we'll most-likely understand why the person is adopting his or her position.
- Listen first; talk second: To solve a problem effectively we have to understand where the other person is coming from before defending your own position.
- Set out the "Facts": Agree and establish the objective, observable elements that will have an impact on the decision
- Explore options together: Be open to the idea that a third position may exist, and that you can get to this idea jointly.

By following these simple rules, we can often keep contentious discussions positive and constructive.

#### **9. Practicing Open Door Policy**

Openness and frankness in the subject matter of communication should be given utmost importance to create confidence and commitment among the colleagues by practicing an open door policy. In an open door policy any one irrespective of designation is given freedom to interact and share his concerns, views, ideas freely and frankly in the interests of the organization in general and the individual in particular, with the person concerned. This opens up a good communication relation with the superiors and peers.

#### **10. Presentations**

Presentation is communicating and conversing with others. Presentation is not simply relating the right information but communicating the same in an appropriate way. Presentations on various activities of the organization will help the employees to know what exactly going on and the contributions they are expected to make for the company. By giving presentations, the managers of the company will come to know the mind and expectations of the staff. The preferences and priorities of the organization can be redrafted during interaction and feedback from the participants.

#### **11. Need for the Study**

- The major factors that contribute to the interest in work-life balance practices in India are
- The need for effective communication in work places.
- Higher rates of labour market participation by women.
- The long hours culture.
- Work intensification.
- Working at odd hours.
- New technology.
- Global competition.
- Renewed interest in personal lives/family values; and
- A young workforce.

## **12. Scope of the Study**

The study is restricted to ten organizations in IT sector. All the ten organizations are situated in the same geographical region of Hyderabad, Andhra Pradesh, India. Due to constraint of time it was decided to evaluate Face-to-Face communication and its Work-Life Balance outcome on the dimensions common to all the organizations in the IT sector. The aspects of looking into Face-to-Face communication and Employee Work-Life Balance outcomes from different sectors are beyond the scope of the study.

## **13. Research Problem**

- The literature review reveals that there are very few studies in India which explore the impact of Face-to-Face communication on Employee Work-Life Balance.
- After having extensive discussions with the academicians, key HRD people in IT industry, language specialists and colleagues, the research problem has been formulated keeping following questions in perspective:

## **14. Research Questions**

- Whether face to face communication strategy is being adopted by IT organizations in India and what are its possible outcomes?
- How face to face communication helps organizations in increasing employee Work-Life Balance?
- How Management and Coworker Support helps in smooth implementation of face to face communication in IT companies.

## **15. Objectives of the study**

- To study communication strategies in select IT organizations in Hyderabad.
- To study and analyze the influence of face to face communication on employee work-life balance.
- To study how management and co-worker support helps in smooth implementation of face to face communication in increasing employee work-life balance.

## 16. Hypothesis

After conducting an extensive review of literature, the following hypothesis predominantly in the alternate form is developed in line with the research problem and objectives.

**H<sub>a</sub>: There is significant impact of face to face communication on employee work-life balance**

## 17. Methodology and Sampling Design

### 17.1 Period of Study

The primary data was collected from Jan'2011 to June'2011

### 17.2 Data base

- The study is based on both the primary data and secondary data.
- Secondary data would be collected from various research journals, books, magazines, websites related to the field of the study.
- Primary data was collected by administering a structured questionnaire to the junior level & middle level managers of the sample companies.
- A 1-5 point Liker Scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree has been used to measure the statements in the questionnaire

## 18. Sampling Techniques and sample size description

- Ten IT companies are selected on the basis of non-probability sampling which is non-random in nature.
- A total of 300 samples with 30 samples (Asst.Managers, Managers, and Sr. Managers) from each company had been included from the 10 companies based on simple random sampling. The sizes of each of the junior level and middle level management depend on the population of respective cadre of managers.
- Managerial personnel from HR, Marketing, Finance, Operations and Technical functions are included in the study.
- Male managerial personnel-72.7% respondents and Female managerial personnel 27.3% respondents, Age:25 Yrs-above45Yrs,
- Married-93.3% and single-6.7%, Tenure of working-1 Yr to above 5 Yrs, working couple-81.3% and single parent working-12% respondents.
- All organisations have employees more than 500 each.

## 19. Statistical Tools

- Descriptive Statistics -Means, Standard deviation had been used.
- Correlation, Regression & ANOVA will be used.
- Statistical Package for Services & Solutions
- (SPSS 17.0) is being used for data analysis.

## 20. Limitations

- Only 10 IT companies are chosen due to time constraints.
- The study is confined to Hyderabad only

## 21. Statistical Analysis and Results

**When asked how important you think the following professional communication strategies?**

**For Face to Face Communication :** The data collected out of 300 Managerial personnel 25.3%-34.7% felt extremely important to important. 11.7% respondents felt neutral and 14.3%-14.0% felt somewhat important to not at all important.

When asked "I would feel employee work-life balance will increase if face to face communication is available". 24.2%-25.7% respondents felt agree to strongly agree. 15.3% respondents felt neutral and 17.3%-17.3% respondents felt disagree to strongly disagree.

**Table 1.1: Mean and Standard Deviation Scores of 'Overall Sample'  
 Descriptive Statistics**

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Increase in Employee Work-Life Balance	3.24	1.445	300
Face to Face Communication	3.47	1.357	300

**Table 1.1** gives the mean and standard deviation scores for the overall sample of 300 managerial personnel (which includes Assistant Managers, Managers and Senior Managers). It is interesting to observe that the averages of these domains are almost the same with lesser variation on increase in employee work-life balance. For face to face communication, the corresponding range is 1 to 5.

In order to measure the extent of linear relationship between the average face to face communication scores and the average Increase in Employee Work-Life Balance scores, Karl Pearson coefficient of correlation is computed; and is tested for significance. **Table 1.2** reveals that there is a positive correlation between Increase in Employee Work-Life Balance and Face to Face communication ( $r=0.689$ ,  $p=0.000$ ), and is found to be statistically highly significant. For future research, it may be suggested that Face to Face communication can be used to estimate Increase in Employee Work-Life



Balance. Since managers from all cadres for the purpose of work-life balance practices study are included, it reflects the importance of Face to Face communication to measure Increase in Employee Work-Life Balance.

**Table 1.2: Correlation between Increase in Employee Work-Life Balance and Face to Face Communication Correlations**

	Increase in Employee Performance	Face to Face Communication
Increase in Employee Work-Life Balance	1	.689**
Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
N	300	300
Face to Face Communication	.689**	1
Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
N	300	300

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The coefficient of determination  $R^2 = 0.475$ ,  $p=0.000$  highlights that Face to Face Communication contributes in Increasing Employee Work-Life Balance to a large extent (**Table 1.3**). Thus, Increase in Employee Work-Life Balance can be estimated from Face to Face Communication.

**Table 1.3: Coefficient of determination between Increase in Employee Work-Life Balance and Face to Face Communication of ‘Overall Sample’**

**Model Summary**

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. Change
1	.689 <sup>a</sup>	.475	.473	1.049	.475	269.114	1	298	.000

a. Predictors: (Constant), Face to Face Communication

The analysis of variance table (ANOVA) given in **Table 1.4** reveals that the regression model fits well for the data ( $F=269.114$ ,  $p=0.000$ ).

**Table 1.4: ANOVA for ‘Overall Sample’**

ANOVA<sup>b</sup>

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	296.201	1	296.201	269.114	.000 <sup>a</sup>
	Residual	327.995	298	1.101		
	Total	624.197	299			

a. Predictors: (Constant), Face to Face Communication

b. Dependent Variable: Increase in Employee Work-Life Balance

The regression coefficient and its associated test of significance are given in **Table 1.5**. The fitted regression model is as follows:

$$\text{Increase in Employee Work-Life Balance} = 0.733 \text{ Face to Face Communication} + 0.694$$

From the above regression line, the average score of Increase in Employee Work-Life Balance can be estimated for a given average score on Face to Face Communication. Further, the population regression coefficient is different from zero as  $t=16.405$ ,  $p=0.000$ . It signifies that when the average Face to Face Communication score increases, the average Increase in Employee Work-Life Balance score also increases proportionately.

**Table 1.5: Regression Coefficient and its Associated Test of Significance for ‘Overall Sample’**  
**Coefficients<sup>a</sup>**

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	.694	.166		4.172	.000
	Face to Face Communication	.733	.045	.689	16.405	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Increase in Employee Work-Life Balance

## 22. Findings and Conclusion

The findings have key implications to IT sector. How provision of professional communication strategies like face to face communication may benefit organizations by increasing employee work-life balance rate where employees can perform to the best of their potential and also helps policy makers to frame professional communication strategies to

employees in achieving work-life balance. Organizations should integrate face to face communication in core business objectives and also should use as a strategic tool for increasing employee work-life balance.

For effective implementation of face to face communication there should be both management and co-worker support. Organizations should also consider other professional communication strategies which will increase employee work-life balance.

During this economic downturn or global recession organizations should adopt face to face communication as a tool to increase employee performance because it does not add any cost to the organizations and moreover it adds many organizational benefits to the bottom line like increased satisfaction and productivity, retention of valuable employees ,decreased absenteeism apart from increasing employee performance.

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