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Impact of Transparent Communication in HR Governance: Fostering Employee Trust and Engagement

Mohsin Raza[1], Muhammad Fayyaz Khokhar[2], Muhammad Zubair[3], Mughesa Rubab[4]

Abstract
This comprehensive study investigates the dynamic landscape of Human Resources (HR) governance in modern organizations, particularly in the context of diverse industries in Pakistan. Executives specializing in internal communications and HR were interviewed to glean insights into the evolving role of HR and its intersection with effective internal communication strategies. The research employed a qualitative approach, conducting in-depth interviews either face-to-face or via telephone, recording and transcribing the conversations. The participating executives, selected through a snowball technique, provided diverse perspectives from financial services, utilities, retailing, and more. The study employed cluster analysis to code interview data, identify key themes, and visualize patterns using a mindmap. The findings illuminate the heightened significance of employee engagement, the strategic management of organizational reputation, trust-building through dialogue, ownership of communication channels, and the enduring value of face-to-face communication in shaping contemporary HR practices. While the study acknowledges its limitations in sample size, it lays the groundwork for future research directions and contributes valuable insights to the evolving landscape of HR governance in the Pakistani organizational context.
Keywords: Human Resources, HR governance, internal communication, employee engagement, organizational reputation, trust-building, communication channels, face-to-face communication, contemporary organizations

1. Introduction

A study by the Great Place to Work Institute found that employees enjoy working in an environment where they "trust the people they work for, have pride in what they do and enjoy the people they work with" (Carroll, 2006, p. 1). Such positive work environments are typically characterized by open communication. Business ethics scholar Carroll (2006) argued that ethical organizations take care of their employees, working to build trust through positive communication efforts, as well as demonstrating respect for employees and acting with integrity in all employee relations. Carroll further argued that employees trust their managers to the extent that they demonstrate honesty, transparency, genuine caring, support, and a willingness to listen. More recently, the Edelman Trust Barometer (2012) also found that businesses that are more trusted "treat employees well" and openly share information.

In the contemporary corporate landscape, organizational success is no longer solely dependent on efficient operations and financial strategies; rather, it is intricately tied to the cultivation of a motivated and engaged workforce. This paradigm shift underscores the pivotal role played by Human Resources (HR) governance in shaping the trajectory of organizations (Jackson, 2020). HR, once viewed primarily as an administrative function, has evolved into a strategic partner essential for aligning human capital strategies with broader business objectives. The realization that the success of an organization is fundamentally linked to the well-being and performance of its workforce has elevated HR governance to a paramount position in the corporate hierarchy.

As businesses navigate through dynamic market conditions and confront the ever-evolving expectations of their workforce, the significance of transparent communication within HR processes has risen to the forefront. The research by Smith and Johnson (2019) highlights the critical role that transparent communication plays in fostering trust and engagement among employees. In an era where information flows rapidly, employees seek transparency as a means to understand the rationale behind organizational decisions, policies, and changes. This need for transparency is not merely a preference but a crucial factor in shaping the perceptions and attitudes of employees towards their workplace.

The dynamism of the modern business environment, marked by technological advancements, globalization, and demographic shifts, has led to a transformation in the expectations of employees. They no longer view their roles merely as a means of earning a livelihood but as a significant aspect of their identity and fulfillment. Transparent communication within HR governance becomes the bridge that connects organizational objectives with the personal aspirations of employees. It provides employees with a clear understanding of the company's mission, vision, and values, fostering a sense of purpose and alignment.

Moreover, as organizations strive to attract and retain top talent, the transparency of HR processes has become a defining factor in employer branding. Potential candidates evaluate organizations not only based on salary and benefits but also on the openness and fairness of the work environment. Transparent communication within HR practices serves as a testament to the organization's commitment to honesty, fairness, and inclusion, influencing the employer brand positively.

1.1. The Evolution of HR Governance in Modern Organizations

In recent years, the function of Human Resources (HR) has undergone a transformative evolution, transcending its traditional administrative role to emerge as a strategic partner in the overall success of modern organizations (Brown, 2018). Historically viewed as a department primarily responsible for personnel management, payroll, and compliance, HR has adapted to the dynamic nature of the contemporary business landscape. This evolution is characterized by a shift from a transactional approach to a more strategic and proactive role. Brown's (2018) research emphasizes the significant departure from the conventional perception of HR as a mere support function. Instead, contemporary HR governance is recognized as a critical component that contributes to an organization's strategic objectives. This strategic partnership involves aligning human capital strategies with broader business goals to ensure that the workforce is not only effectively managed but also becomes a driving force behind the organization's success.

[1] National College of Business Administration and Economics, Pakistan, mohsinrazaobhaya665@gmail.com
[2] PhD in Public Management School of Public Administration Yanshan University Qinhuangdao Hebei China, malik.mfayaz983@gmail.com
[3] Department of Zoology Bahauddin Zakariya University, Multan, Pakistan, zubairahmad8742@gmail.com
[4]Institute of Southern Punjab, Multan, Pakistan, mughesa@gmail.com

Jones et al. (2021) elaborate on this evolution by highlighting the expanded purview of HR governance. Beyond the traditional responsibilities of recruiting, hiring, and personnel administration, HR now plays a pivotal role in shaping and executing human capital strategies. This includes talent development, succession planning, and workforce optimization to meet the evolving needs of the organization in a rapidly changing business environment. The evolution of HR governance is reflective of the recognition that human capital is a valuable asset that, when strategically managed, can provide a sustainable competitive advantage. Central to this evolution is the recognition of the integral role of effective communication within HR practices. Johnson and Lee (2017) underscore the importance of transparency in disseminating information related to policies, decisions, and organizational changes. As HR transitions into a strategic partner, the need for clear and open communication becomes paramount. Transparent communication ensures that employees are not only aware of the changes within the organization but also understand the rationale behind these decisions.

In the modern organization, transparency in HR practices goes beyond simple information sharing; it is a fundamental aspect of building trust and fostering a positive organizational culture. As HR governance expands its influence, transparent communication becomes a tool for promoting understanding, mitigating resistance to change, and creating an environment where employees feel valued and informed.

1.2. Defining Transparent Communication in HR

Transparent communication in the context of HR governance refers to the open and honest exchange of information between the organization's leadership and its employees (Roberts, 2016). This encompasses clear communication of policies, decision-making processes, performance expectations, and organizational changes (Adams, 2019). Transparent communication aims to demystify HR processes, ensuring that employees are well-informed and feel a sense of inclusion in the decision-making fabric of the organization (Taylor, 2020).

Trust is a cornerstone of any healthy employer-employee relationship (Smith, 2018). Transparent communication acts as a catalyst in building and sustaining trust within the organizational framework (Brown & Miller, 2022). When HR practices are transparent, employees perceive the organization as honest and reliable, leading to a strengthened foundation of trust (Wilson, 2015). This trust, in turn, becomes a vital component in enhancing overall employee satisfaction and commitment (Johnson et al., 2018).

Employee engagement is a multifaceted concept that encompasses the emotional commitment and involvement of employees towards their work and the organization (Gupta, 2021). Transparent communication serves as a catalyst for heightened employee engagement by providing a clear understanding of the organization's vision, values, and expectations (Chen & Smith, 2017). When employees feel informed and involved, they are more likely to become active contributors to the organization's success (Adams & Taylor, 2019).

1.3. Problem Statement

The transition of Human Resources (HR) from a traditional administrative role to a strategic partner in contemporary organizations presents a challenge in implementing transparent communication within HR practices. The dynamic business environment, coupled with the evolving role of HR, creates a gap in understanding the effective integration of transparent communication, prompting the need for comprehensive exploration.

1.4. Significance of the Study

This study is crucial for HR practitioners and organizational leaders, offering practical insights into enhancing transparent communication within HR governance. It informs strategic decision-making, contributes to academic literature, and addresses the link between transparent communication, employee trust, and engagement. The findings are expected to benefit employee well-being, satisfaction, and contribute to organizations gaining a competitive advantage in attracting and retaining top talent.

1.5. Research Question

This research aims to investigate the impact of transparent communication within HR governance on employee trust and engagement. Specifically, the study explores the practices, challenges, and outcomes associated with transparent communication strategies in HR. To gather insights, the research utilizes a combination of surveys, interviews, and case studies conducted with HR professionals and employees in various organizational settings.

2. Literature Review

In recent years, a paradigm shift has occurred in the role of Human Resources (HR) within organizations, evolving from a traditional administrative function to a strategic partner crucial for organizational success (Brown, 2018). As organizations recognize the significance of their human capital, the need for effective HR governance becomes paramount. This literature review delves into the exploration of the impact of transparent communication within HR governance on employee trust and engagement.

2.1. Evolving Role of HR in Contemporary Organizations

In the dynamic landscape of contemporary organizations, the role of Human Resources (HR) has witnessed a profound transformation. Traditionally confined to administrative functions such as payroll processing and compliance management, HR has evolved into a strategic partner essential for organizational success (Brown, 2018). This metamorphosis signifies a departure from the conventional perception of HR as a support function to an active participant in shaping the overall trajectory of the organization. The shift is not merely semantic; it represents a fundamental change in the way HR is perceived and leveraged within the organizational structure.

The metamorphosis of HR into a strategic partner underscores its pivotal role in driving organizational success. The shift from a support function to an active participant signifies a departure from traditional paradigms, reflecting the evolving nature of contemporary organizations (Brown, 2018). As organizations recognize the value of their workforce as a strategic asset, HR's role becomes not only instrumental in day-to-day operations but also in steering the organization towards its long-term objectives.

Brown's insights emphasize that HR, in its evolved role, is an essential component in shaping the dynamics and trajectory of modern organizations.

2.2. Transparent Communication in HR Governance

Roberts (2016) provides a foundational definition of transparent communication within the context of HR governance, emphasizing its fundamental role in establishing trust and fostering employee engagement. Transparent communication is articulated as the open and honest exchange of information between organizational leaders and employees. This entails not only disseminating information but also ensuring clarity in conveying policies, decision-making processes, and organizational changes. Adams (2019) further underscores the importance of transparent communication, emphasizing its goal to demystify HR practices and create an environment where employees can comprehend and engage with the processes that govern their professional lives.

In unpacking the elements of transparent communication, Roberts's definition highlights a departure from traditional top-down communication models. Transparent communication implies a reciprocal and open dialogue where employees are not only recipients but also contributors to the information exchange. The clarity of communication becomes paramount, ensuring that organizational decisions and changes are not only comprehensible but also aligned with the broader goals and values of the organization.

According to Argenti (1996), the corporate communications function, often synonymous with "public relations," is aptly positioned to handle internal communication, specifically in disseminating information to employees during periods of organizational change or crises. Cheney (1999) proposed a broader perspective, suggesting that workplace values can be discerned through the lens of communication's role, with transparent organizations being characterized by widespread information sharing. Broom, Casey, and Ritchey (2000) concurred, emphasizing the pivotal role of communication in evaluating relationships between the organization and its stakeholders, where open communication serves as an indicator of a robust relationship. The study of internal communication, a continually expanding professional domain, has been extensively documented. A 2012 study by the University of Southern California's Annenberg School of Communications revealed an impressive 11% growth in internal communications positions within just one year, underscoring the field's ongoing development and relevance.

2.3. Building Trust in Transparent HR Practices

Trust, recognized as a cornerstone of a healthy employer-employee relationship (Smith, 2018), holds a central position in the discourse surrounding transparent Human Resources (HR) practices. Brown and Miller's (2022) research accentuate the instrumental role of transparent communication in establishing and sustaining trust within organizations. The critical interplay between transparent HR practices and trust is illuminated as employees perceive the organization as honest and reliable, thereby contributing to the cultivation of a positive workplace culture.

Internal communication emerges as a pivotal factor in bolstering trust not only between employees but also between employees and managers (Gavin & Mayer, 2005). Chia (2005) emphasizes the intertwined nature of trust and commitment, citing those processes and policies designed for satisfactory relationships, such as open, appropriate, clear, and timely communication, serve as their byproducts. Trust, defined as a concern for each other's interests, is identified as a product of open communication, reinforcing the idea that transparency in organizational communication contributes significantly to the establishment of trust (Denison & Mishra, 1995; Mishra & Mishra, 1994; Mishra, 1996).

The significance of clear communication in fostering trust extends beyond the organizational context. In the public relations literature, trust is regarded as a critical element in the organization-public relationship (Botan & Taylor, 2004). Wilson (1994) emphasizes the importance of perceptions of commitment, trust, and mutual respect in understanding organization-public relationships. Bruning and Ledingham (2000) affirm the positive impact of trust on customer satisfaction, underscoring the pervasive influence of trust across various facets of organizational interactions. The link between trust and communication is reiterated by Ki and Hon (2007), who assert that trust is a key construct for measuring successful relationships due to its measurement of honesty and reliability.

However, the fragility of trust is acknowledged, with Quirke (2008) noting that management credibility and trust can be compromised by confused and poorly integrated communications. This sentiment is echoed by Paine (2003), who suggests that organizations should critically assess their communication channels to understand the best ways to disseminate messages and maintain trust within the organization. The literature collectively emphasizes the intricate relationship between transparent HR practices, effective communication, and the establishment and sustenance of trust within organizational contexts.

2.4. Employee Engagement: A Multifaceted Concept

Employee engagement, encapsulating the emotional commitment and involvement of individuals with their work and the organization, stands as a multifaceted concept in the realm of organizational behavior (Gupta, 2021). Transparent communication within HR processes is identified as a critical factor contributing to the enhancement of employee engagement. Chen and Smith (2017) posit that when employees are well-informed and feel included in decision-making processes, they are more likely to exhibit high levels of engagement.

The multifaceted nature of employee engagement is underscored by various definitions provided in both management and internal communications literature. Kahn (1990) defines engagement as the ability to harness an employee's personal enthusiasm in their work roles. Quirke (2008) in the internal communications literature describes engaged employees as those who feel a strong emotional bond to their employer, recommend it to others, and commit time and effort to help the organization succeed. Hewitt Associates (2009) contribute to the discourse by defining an engaged employee as one who demonstrates emotional and intellectual commitment to their organization and its success.

Under this comprehensive definition, engaged employees are more likely to contribute to a high-performance organization by speaking positively about the organization, remaining committed, and actively participating in efforts to enhance organizational effectiveness (Robison, 2012). A Gallup Management study further supports this notion, revealing that engaged employees are

deeply committed, leading to significant improvements in various business outcomes, including reduced absenteeism, turnover, shrinkage, safety incidents, and product defects (Robison, 2012).

The temporal aspect of employee engagement is highlighted by Caywood (1997), emphasizing the critical nature of engagement efforts, especially early in an employee's tenure. Trahant's (2009) findings reveal that employee engagement, which is initially high, may experience a decline within the first year and up to 5 years after entry. Consequently, internal communication professionals are urged to be actively involved from the outset by orienting employees to the organization, developing their professional skills, seeking feedback, and attentively listening to their concerns.

Building on this foundation, Therkelsen and Fiebich (2003) emphasize the significance of employee publics in organizational engagement. They identify front-line supervisors as key influencers, with employees responding positively to perceived support from their supervisors (Saks, 2006). Saks (2006) further underscores the importance of clear and consistent communication to achieve employee engagement, emphasizing the need for organizations to invest in effective communication practices to foster a highly engaged workforce.

3. Methodology

The research methodology employed in this study encompassed interviews conducted either face-to-face or via telephone, aiming to gain insights into the perspectives of executives responsible for internal communications and/or Human Resources (HR) within their respective companies. The six participating executives were purposefully selected from alumni and visitors associated with the first author's university. To ensure diversity, executives from various industries, including financial services, utilities, and retailing, were chosen using a snowball technique, deemed appropriate for establishing trust between the researcher and interviewees (Atkinson & Flint, 2001).

Due to logistical constraints, not all executives could partake in face-to-face interviews; hence, some opted for telephone interviews or responded to questions via email. For those who chose email responses, subsequent follow-up and clarifying questions were exchanged to allow executives the opportunity to elaborate on their insights. The resultant email correspondence, combined with recorded conversations conducted either in person or via phone, served as the foundational data for analysis. The interview questions were specifically tailored to explore how each participant manages internal communications within their respective firms.

All participating executives held significant roles in internal communications and/or HR within their organizations. The profile of executives includes Subhan Ali, HR President of Corporate Communications at a financial services firm; Rimsha Maqsood, Vice President of Corporate Communications at an energy firm; Junaid Allah yar, Director of Internal Communications at a software firm; Mubeen Bukhsh, Manager of Employee Communications at a utility firm; Sajid Ali Joya, Corporate Board Secretary (and family member) with communications responsibility at a family-owned construction materials firm; and Mahmood-Ul-Hassan, District Manager of an international retail firm, with responsibility for internal communications.

This study was conducted in Pakistan, and the executives selected represent a diverse mix in terms of gender, with five male executives and one female executive. Four of the executives have specific responsibility for corporate or employee communications, while two hold other roles that significantly influence communications within their firms. The study aligns with the goals of engaging employees, managing reputation, building trust through dialogue with key audiences, owning all communication channels, and emphasizing face-to-face communication. The subsequent sections present the key findings surrounding each theme, offering valuable insights into the context of internal communications and HR practices within the Pakistani organizational landscape.

4. Results

In exploring the results of the interviews conducted with executives specializing in internal communications and HR within their respective organizations, the overarching theme of employee engagement emerges as a central focus. All six executives, namely Subhan Ali, Rimsha Maqsood, Junaid Allah Yar, Mubeen Bukhsh, Sajid Ali Joya, and Mahmood-Ul-Hassan, highlighted employee engagement as a pivotal goal of internal communication.

Notably, three executives, Sajid Ali, Subhan, and Rimsha explicitly mentioned "employee engagement" as one of their primary responsibilities. This resonates with Wright's (1995) findings, emphasizing the understanding among HR professionals about the priority of employee communication. The executives articulated that the concept of employee engagement represents a relatively new perspective within their firms regarding the communication role, a viewpoint communicated from their CEOs. This aligns with existing literature, where CEOs are identified as catalysts for promoting employee communication (Wright, 1995).

The executives collectively underscored the belief that engaged employees are those who perceive their contributions aligning with the company's goals. Rimsha emphasized the importance of helping employees comprehend the company's mission and their role within it, stating that engagement involves employees understanding and buying into the organizational strategy. Sharon added that awareness and access to information are essential for employees to become engaged contributors.

Subhan provided further insights into the significance of employee engagement within his firm. He shared that, upon assuming his role, he contemplated renaming his title to "director of employee engagement" to encapsulate the broader vision of increasing employee engagement. For his firm, the elevated purpose of employee communications is to enhance employees' understanding of the company's goals, fostering a sense of alignment and contribution. Rimsha emphasized that research consistently demonstrates that a well-informed and engaged workforce leads to higher productivity, improved morale, and lower turnover.

Subhan also mentioned that when he started his job, he spent the first year reorganizing the entire corporate communications department and toyed with the idea of making his title “director of employee engagement.” He said, that for his firm

The bigger, sort of the higher-level, picture of the employee communications role is to increase the engagement of employees into what the company is trying to do. Helping the employees understand what the company’s goals and objectives are, how they fit into

it, helping them buy into the strategy . . . the research shows the more employees understand and feel like they're contributing or in line with the company strategy, the more productive they are and the higher the morale and lower turnover.

Certain executives acknowledge the challenges associated with employee engagement. According to Sajid Ali, the objective of fostering employee engagement is a crucial aspect of his role and his department's responsibilities. However, he has encountered difficulty in recruiting qualified individuals to fill new positions within his department. Sajid Ali attributes this challenges to the evolving nature of the job, emphasizing a shift towards prioritizing employee relations over traditional media relations practices prevalent in larger companies.

While media may be captivating and conspicuous, the impact lies in employee relations. There exists a plethora of defensible statistics demonstrating that an engaged workforce translates to increased happiness and productivity. Therefore, investing in employee engagement is deemed worthwhile. This commitment entails involvement in various initiatives such as employee meetings, webcasts, collaboration with senior managers on presentations—including roadshow presentations to employees—and the establishment of feedback mechanisms. The ongoing assessment of communication tools is a continuous effort to align with the company's overall objectives.

4.1. Managing Reputation

The second priority many of the executives expressed was protecting and managing their company's reputation. Mahmood-ul-Hasan, the vice president of corporate communications from the financial services firm, said, "I feel [as if] corporate communications is helping [the] corporation manage its reputation with all of its stakeholders." Mahmood believes that his firm's reputation, both internally and externally, is driven by behavior and not corporate communication slogans. He expressed it this way:

The management decisions that you make about how you're going to treat customers and employees will determine what your reputation is no matter what we tell the news media. No matter what statement we make, it's really about your behavior. We always want our statements to be honest and accurate, so it starts with your behavior and the decisions you make to determine what we can then say about them.

Junaid agreed that managing the firm's reputation was a priority in his position and that it impacted employees and other stakeholders. He said,

I think reputation is one of our most important roles. Managing and protecting the reputation of the company. Positioning the company in the marketplace with customers, with key stakeholders, with employees, and to some extent with investors and shareholders, although that kind of bleeds over into investor relations. What is our story and how do we promote that story and also reputation protection? How do you protect a company when bad things happen that threaten the image or reputation of the company?

4.2. Building Trust through Dialogue with Key Audiences

The third theme identified when analyzing the executive interviews is their goal of building trust by promoting dialogue with key audiences, including employees and external stakeholders. Along with promoting employee engagement and managing the company's reputation, these executives believed that their role included building trust through two-way communication with their key audiences or stakeholders. For example, Rimsha described her job as promoting "dialogue from the company's leadership with various audiences—media, key leaders, employees. We place a huge emphasis on relationships with our elected officials and regulators. To maintain those relationships, we have to be perceived well by our customers." The participants also relayed how dialogue with key audiences influenced employee relations. Rimsha described the importance of internal relations, indicating that employee communication was critical to rebuilding trust in her firm after a recent merger. She explained,

That cynicism is also due to the fact that Punjab was acquired in the merger. They feel the previous management team was not straight with them, and so there's a lot of lingering distrust. In the Sindh, most employees are happy to work for this company. The company pays well, particularly compared with others in some of the rural communities where our facilities are located. So, you start off with most folks feeling pretty positive.

Rimsha also described her department's goal as "letting [employees] know the company." She wants her efforts to help employees become more knowledgeable about the company and their place in it.

Junaid also agreed that his job is to "facilitate communication." He said,

the objective is to create an environment where individuals feel an integral part of a unified team and comprehend the organization's objectives. This aspect holds significant importance, and there is an increasing acknowledgment among CEOs and companies regarding the substantial value of fostering such cohesion and understanding.

4.3. Owning All Channels of Communication

The fourth theme that emerged from the interviews is that these executives feel that they have an array of communication channels accessible to disseminate messages to employees. All of the executives said they are responsible for all channels of communication with employees, including company intranets, company e-newsletters, social media such as forums and company blogs, and traditional employee communication such as employee meetings and print materials. Mahmood described his firm's approach:

For employee communications, we own all the channels to communicate to the employees. For all of our electronic communications, we have a daily electronic newsletter. We have several other regular communications vehicles that go out to employees from human resources, IT and things like that. That's one big chunk of the work–it's managing that process of delivering the information

One of the tasks these executives described in their interviews was determining which communication vehicles to use, when, and for what purposes. Rimsha finds that her internal clients, whom she counsels on internal communication, prefer to communicate with their direct reports by issuing written memos either in hardcopy or by e-mail. She believes, however, that occasions arise (such as performance feedback) that call for a more intimate approach, such as face-to-face communication. She tries to help her clients determine the most appropriate approach for each situation.

Junaid believes that rather than guessing how employees want to receive communication, he asks them to express their preferred information channel for receiving information on important issues. In his experience, employees want to receive any information about their company benefits in writing, so that they can take that information home to read and digest the details. He explained,

What you have to do is you really have to find out from employees how they like to be communicated to. There's been plenty of research on things that are effective, but what you find is there are certain kinds of information that people like to get a certain way. For example, for HR information, benefits, and things like that, most employees like to get a printed document. If it's to review their health plan and their benefits, we still find that employees like to have something to look at in front of them. But, if it's just like quick company information, announcements, and things like that, they like e-mail or electronic newsletters.

Rimsha acknowledges that the intention of the communication is just as important as what form is chosen. She explained

In our task-focused, operations-driven business consistent management announcements made in weekly meetings along with the proper follow up from management have been successful. Additionally, small groups or one-on-one meetings have proven to be successful. Even a quick email from a manager when the week's production goals have been met can go a long way. When employees feel like they're important and their contributions matter they feel like a part of the company's overall success.

Several of the executives mentioned that it was also important to match the medium with the message.

Junaid noted that his firm has found that the mode of communication depends on the circumstance for the communication. He noted,

We've seen in our research a strong and growing preference for electronic communication. For us that means the daily e-mail and the intranet. However, this format works best to inform. Major change management initiatives—where employees actually have to take action or face radical changes to their work—are better done through some sort of face-to-face interaction. I think there is also a role for print, particularly if you need to educate employees around a particular set of issues.

In summary, these executives find that they have a range of communication vehicles from which to choose when communicating with employees. They also believe, however, that it is best to ask employees how they want to receive specific types of information. The next theme is the executives' belief that despite this breadth of communication vehicles, face-to-face communication still plays an important role in the way they communicate with employees.

4.4. Face-to-Face Communication

Despite the variety of media available to the executives interviewed, they all believe in the benefit of maintaining regular face-to-face communication. Mahmood summarized the general feeling of all the executives: "There is nothing better than face-to-face communication." Rimsha discovered that when her firm conducted its own inhouse employee communication study, the response "face-to-face communication with my boss" was the most satisfactory way employees in her firm said they wanted to receive information. She explained

We [can] say based on what we know from social science and based on what we know from our own surveys of employees, that the most effective communication is one-onone with [the] manager. Then, I would say beyond that would be in a meeting—a face-to-face meeting with your manager [with] five to ten people there or a hundred people there. A face-to-face meeting would be the most effective way because people get the body language, and they can make a decision as to whether or not they think it's credible. They can ask questions if they don't understand something.

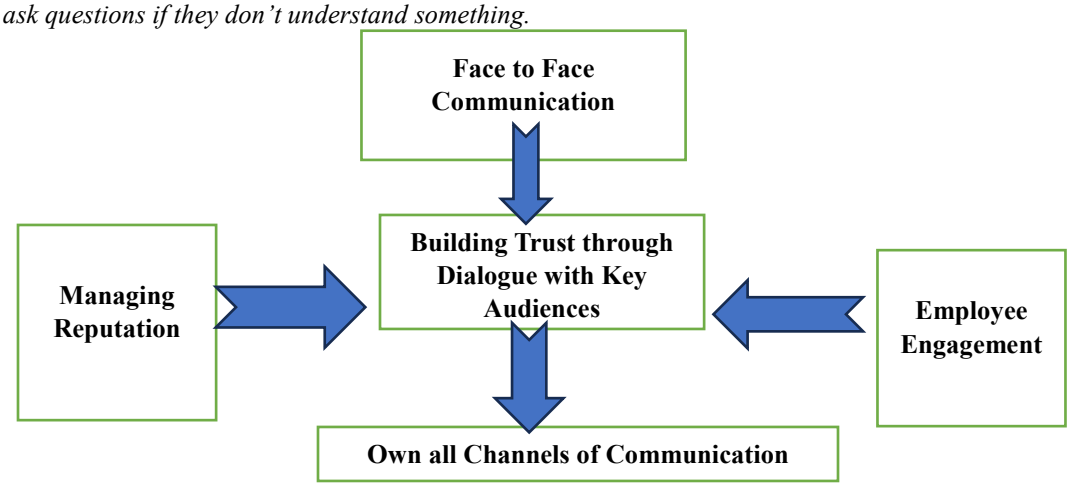

Figure 1: Mind map of executives' perceptions of their role in promoting internal communication

In summarizing the executives' responses about face-to-face communication, the data show that this type of communication serves a dual purpose. First, it keeps employees informed, and second, it helps them feel secure about their place in the company because they are getting information directly from their boss.

4.5. Interviews Summary

In dissecting the insights derived from interviews with executives specializing in internal communications and human resources, a prominent theme emerged, underscoring the paramount importance of employee engagement. The six executives—Subhan Ali, Rimsha Maqsood, Junaid Allah yar, Mubeen Bukhsh, Sajid Ali Joya, and Mahmood-Ul-Hassan—unanimously positioned employee engagement as a focal point of internal communication strategy. Remarkably, Sajid Ali, Subhan, and Rimsha explicitly designated "employee engagement" as a principal responsibility, aligning seamlessly with Wright's (1995) documented understanding among HR professionals regarding the precedence of employee communication. The executives concurred that engaged employees are those who perceive their contributions as integral to the organization's objectives. Subhan, contemplating a title change to "director

of employee engagement," provided deeper insights, emphasizing the role in fostering employees' understanding of the company's goals and strategy. However, challenges were acknowledged, with Sajid Ali highlighting difficulties in recruiting qualified personnel, attributing this to the evolving nature of the job. The executives also emphasized the critical role of transparency, fostering trust, managing the company's reputation, and strategic ownership of all communication channels.

Moreover, the executives articulated a collective commitment to managing the company's reputation, identifying it as a second key priority. Mahmood-ul-Hasan and Junaid underscored the significance of corporate communications in shaping and safeguarding the company's reputation. They emphasized that reputation is intricately linked to behavior, transcending mere corporate communication slogans. Mahmood asserted that management decisions, particularly in the treatment of customers and employees, profoundly influence the company's reputation, reinforcing the notion that actions speak louder than words. This sentiment was echoed by Junaid, who highlighted the strategic positioning of the company in the marketplace with various stakeholders. The executives acknowledged that managing and protecting the company's reputation is a multifaceted task, involving storytelling, promotion, and proactive reputation protection. In essence, the executives articulated a holistic approach, recognizing that their role extends beyond conveying information to actively shaping and preserving the company's image and standing in the eyes of stakeholders.

5. Discussion and Contributions

The findings from the executive interviews shed light on several critical facets of internal communication within the realm of Human Resources (HR) and corporate communications, echoing and expanding upon the themes identified in previous scholarly research. The central theme revolving around employee engagement underscores a paradigm shift where organizations increasingly recognize the pivotal role of HR in fostering a workforce that is not merely informed but actively engaged in the company's mission and objectives (Wright, 1995). The executives' emphasis on employee engagement aligns with contemporary literature, which posits that engaged employees contribute significantly to organizational success, as evidenced by heightened productivity, improved morale, and lower turnover rates (Robison, 2012). Subhan Ali's contemplation of renaming his role to "director of employee engagement" signifies a conscious effort to encapsulate the broader vision of HR in fostering a workforce that comprehends, aligns with, and actively contributes to the organizational strategy. This aligns with the evolving role of HR from a traditional administrative function to a strategic partner actively involved in shaping the organizational trajectory (Brown, 2018).

Additionally, the executives' recognition of the challenges associated with employee engagement, particularly in recruiting qualified individuals, highlights the evolving nature of HR functions. The shift from a focus on media relations to prioritizing employee relations, as noted by Sajid Ali, reflects a strategic redirection in response to changing organizational dynamics (Wright, 1995). This transition underscores the need for HR professionals to adapt to evolving roles, emphasizing the importance of interpersonal skills, employee relations, and strategic workforce management.

The executives' collective acknowledgment of the significance of managing the company's reputation adds another layer to the evolving landscape of HR governance. Mahmood-ul-Hasan's assertion that reputation is fundamentally tied to behavior rather than communication slogans underscores the need for organizations to align their actions with communicated messages (Wright, 1995). The executives' commitment to proactive reputation management suggests a holistic approach that extends beyond traditional communication practices to include behavioral considerations, fostering authenticity, and building trust.

Furthermore, the discussion around owning all channels of communication underscores the multifaceted role of HR professionals in disseminating information through diverse mediums. The executives' recognition of the need to tailor communication channels to the nature of the information and preferences of the audience reflects a strategic approach to internal communication (Wright, 1995). The emphasis on face-to-face communication, despite the array of available media, highlights the enduring value of personal interactions in fostering understanding, credibility, and trust among employees (Robison, 2012).

In conclusion, the insights from the executive interviews contribute to the evolving discourse on HR governance and internal communication, building upon the foundations laid by previous studies (Brown, 2018; Robison, 2012; Wright, 1995). The executives' narratives reflect a dynamic landscape where HR professionals navigate challenges, adapt to changing roles, and strategically contribute to organizational success by fostering employee engagement, managing reputation, and embracing diverse communication channels. These findings offer valuable insights for HR practitioners, scholars, and organizational leaders seeking to enhance HR governance in alignment with contemporary organizational dynamics.

6. Conclusion

In summary, this comprehensive exploration into the dynamics of Human Resources (HR) and internal communication, as illuminated by interviews with executives from diverse industries, has unveiled critical insights that contribute to the evolving landscape of contemporary organizations. The overarching theme of the study revolves around the profound transformation of HR, transcending its historical boundaries from a traditional support function to a strategic partner essential for organizational success. This evolution is characterized by a strategic focus on employee engagement, a multifaceted concept intricately linked to organizational culture, productivity, and employee satisfaction. The executives' narratives align with and extend the findings of previous studies, reflecting a departure from traditional paradigms and emphasizing the strategic repositioning of HR within organizational structures.

The study underscores the pivotal role of transparent communication in HR governance, emphasizing the importance of clear, open, and honest exchanges of information between organizational leaders and employees. The executives' commitment to building trust through transparent communication is echoed in the literature, where trust is recognized as a cornerstone of a healthy employer-employee relationship. This commitment is further manifested in their endeavors to manage and protect the company's reputation, recognizing that reputation is intricately tied to behavior and organizational decisions.

The exploration of communication channels and the executives' recognition of the enduring value of face-to-face communication illuminate the nuanced and strategic approach HR professionals adopt in disseminating information. The acknowledgement of challenges, such as recruiting qualified individuals and adapting to the evolving nature of HR functions, adds a layer of realism to the study, reflecting the dynamic nature of contemporary organizations.

In conclusion, this study not only unveils the multifaceted and strategic role of HR professionals in contemporary organizations but also contributes valuable insights for HR practitioners, organizational leaders, and scholars seeking to navigate the complexities of HR governance. As organizations continue to evolve, the study emphasizes the need for HR to play a proactive and strategic role in shaping organizational culture, fostering employee engagement, and contributing to overall organizational effectiveness.

6.1. Limitations

While this study provides valuable insights into the evolving role of HR and internal communication, it is essential to acknowledge its limitations. Firstly, the sample size, though diverse, consists of executives from specific industries within Pakistan. This may limit the generalizability of findings to organizations in other regions or industries with distinct contextual factors. Additionally, the reliance on self-reporting from executives may introduce potential biases or subjective interpretations. The study's focus on internal communication and HR governance also omits a broader examination of external factors influencing organizational dynamics.

Another limitation pertains to the cross-sectional nature of the study, capturing a snapshot of perspectives at a particular point in time. Organizational dynamics are dynamic and subject to change, necessitating caution in drawing overarching conclusions. Furthermore, the study primarily emphasizes qualitative data, providing rich narratives but potentially limiting the depth of quantitative analysis.

6.2. Future Directions

To address these limitations and further enrich our understanding of HR governance in contemporary organizations, future research could adopt a longitudinal approach. Tracking the evolution of HR roles and practices over time would facilitate a more comprehensive understanding of trends, challenges, and innovations. Additionally, expanding the sample to include a broader range of industries and global contexts would enhance the study's external validity.

Incorporating mixed-methods research designs would provide a more holistic view, combining the depth of qualitative insights with quantitative measures to validate and generalize findings. Moreover, investigating the impact of specific organizational contexts, such as size, industry dynamics, and cultural nuances, could offer nuanced insights into the diverse challenges and opportunities faced by HR professionals.

Exploring the perspectives of employees at various hierarchical levels could also contribute valuable insights into the effectiveness of HR practices from different vantage points. Understanding the reciprocal relationship between HR initiatives and employee experiences would provide a more comprehensive picture of the internal communication landscape.

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