

Original Article

Experiences of university faculty members regarding communication in work environment

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Abstract

BACKGROUND: Individuals have different understandings, beliefs, values and attitudes, and follow their own specific approach to express their feelings. The present research was aimed to study the experiences of the faculty members of nursing and midwifery department regarding communication in work environment.

METHODS: As the phenomenon to be studied in the current research is the human experiences, the study was accomplished in nursing and midwifery department of seven universities, including Isfahan, Shahid Beheshti, Tehran, Iran, Mashhad, Shiraz, and Tabriz universities of medical sciences. The most common data collection technique in qualitative studies is the participants' observations, interview, and their written texts. In the present study, Collaizzi's seven steps were applied.

RESULTS: . We interviewed 36 individuals, including 20 women and 16 men. The intra-organizational communications influence the physical and mental health as well as performance of staffs in their work environment.

CONCLUSIONS: This study expressed in the themes formulated from statements of the units under study.

KEY WORDS: Experience, faculty members, communication, work environment.

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The world wherein we live is called "communication world". Communication provides the social atmosphere which is necessary for human life.¹ As Mosayeb and Goodarzi state, it is only through proper communication that people in society can assist each other in solving the problems, since man has to share with others his/her demands, tendencies, feelings, knowledge, information, and experiences, and the social life will be disturbed without communication. In other words, people can develop their capabilities through appropriate communication.² One of the situations in which communication takes place is the professional environments or organizations. Collaboration of individuals in an organizational group to sustain specific objectives requires that their relations with each other would be definite. Parker mentions the goals of communication in

occupational environments as follows: 1) transferring and using information, knowledge, and experiences; 2) meeting the mental and social needs; 3) developing the capabilities; 4) accomplishing the responsibilities assigned to the individual. If people reach these goals in their communicative scope, effective communication has occurred.³

Numerous studies have been conducted in recent years concerning effective communication in work environments. Committee on Occupational Health and Safety in the Care regarding organizational communication mentioned that communicative skills in organizations is of much importance in organization's efficiency, and also plays an essential role in occupational satisfaction of employees.⁴ It is evident that proper communication in an organization increases staffs' motivation.⁵ Fur-

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thermore, one of the most significant factors in reaching organization's goals and reasonable decision-making is the intra-organizational communication between manager and staffs in a proper manner.⁶

Since individuals have different understandings, beliefs, values and attitudes, and follow their own specific approach to express their feelings which is in most cases different from or in contrast to others' approaches, the probability of an effective and successful communication decreases.⁷

Following the failure in an effective communication, these consequences are yielded: unemployment, not reaching an agreement, reduction of enthusiasm, inefficiency and causing mistake, decrease of efficiency, hostility, low self-confidence, absence in work environment, not being interested in work environment, sleeplessness, weakening the team-work mentality, reduction of creativity, weak mentality, and depressed personnel.⁸

As at least one-third of each day is spent in work environment, peace in this environment should be considered more. One of our responsibilities towards ourselves and our colleagues is to try to reach a desirable level of peace. Kind attitude as well as an effective and respectful communication towards managers, coworkers, and inferiors in the work environment can lead to a peaceful atmosphere in the organization.⁹

To reach such an attitude, people's feelings and experiences in their communication in work environment should be considered. Therefore, asking questions about direct experiences of individuals is an important strategy to get familiar with their attitude towards communication in the work environment.¹⁰ On the other hand, faculty members of nursing and midwifery department are responsible for educating human force to maintain physical and mental health of society individuals and must teach them how to form an effective communication and also they themselves must be an exemplar in this regard. Therefore, it seems necessary to get familiar with their behavior, feelings, and experiences concerning communication, especially in work environment. The present

research was so accomplished to study the experiences of the faculty members of nursing and midwifery department regarding communication in work environment.

Methods

As the phenomenon to be studied in the current research is the human experiences, we use phenomenology which is a method of thinking about human life experiences and researcher's main emphasis is on people's experiences regarding the desired phenomenon.¹¹ To look into deep layer of individuals' experiences, the researcher makes use of descriptive phenomenology which enhances his/her understanding of people's life experiences.

Study Environment

The study was accomplished in nursing and midwifery department of seven universities, including Isfahan, Shahid Beheshti, Tehran, Iran, Mashhad, Shiraz, and Tabriz universities of medical sciences. Interviews were made in a safe environment.

Study Criteria

The interviewees had tendency to participate in the study and they were fulltime faculty members of nursing and midwifery department in the mentioned universities.

Sampling Method

The most common sampling method in phenomenology is purposeful sampling, since the main emphasis is on individuals' professional knowledge. In qualitative studies, emphasis is more on information obtained from the situation or phenomenon, than on the sample size. Accordingly, randomized methods are not used for sampling since it is possible that some individuals with significant information about the desired phenomenon may be removed.¹² So, sampling continued until information saturation.

Data Collection

The most common data collection technique in qualitative studies is the participants' observations, interview, and their written texts. By ask-

ing the question that “what is your experience regarding communication with colleagues in the department?”, the researcher started the interview and subsequent questions were asked depending on their response. The researcher recorded all words of the participants and also took note of their non-recordable points and nonverbal gestures. Hence through recording the interviews, the opinions, insights, values and beliefs of the participants were collected.

Methodology

After obtaining the required permission letter, the researcher met the participants and acquired their written consent subsequent to introducing herself and explaining the study goals. After choosing the participants according to the mentioned criteria, she again introduced herself completely and explained more about the goals, importance, and procedure of the study as well as about data collection. Time for interview was appointed with participant’s agreement. To later check the authenticity of information and findings during and after the interviews, all of the interviews were recorded on cassette tapes by a voice recorder. Furthermore, data collection as note-taking was performed if needed. After the interview finished, the participant immediately listened to the recorded tape. Then, the interviews in this tape were written down. After that, data analysis was performed and finally the participants were met to assure the authenticity of information.

Accuracy and Rigor of the Study

The correctness of changes and interpretation of information were validated by the participants. The researcher met the participants, validated her description of their experiences, and added or deleted necessary points with their consent.

Data Analysis

In the present study, Collaizzi’s seven steps were applied as follows:

1. The researcher read all important descriptions and findings of the participants and acquired a sense to understand them better;

2. In extraction step, significant sentences, terms, and statements related to the phenomenon under study were extracted;

3. Meanings were formulated from the significant extracted statements;

4. The researcher reviewed the statements of the participants and organized the formulated meanings into themes. For the sake of authenticity, she referred to the original statements and, in the case of difference, removed those data which were not consistent;

5. The researcher integrated the themes into an exhaustive description;

6. The researcher formulated the essential structure of the phenomenon;

7. For validation, the participants evaluated the results of analysis and the idea obtained from research findings were made more obvious.¹³

Results

The findings reflect the interview with faculty members of nursery and midwifery departments in the mentioned seven universities. We interviewed 36 individuals, including 20 women and 16 men.

The findings acquired from participants’ experiences were summarized into 192 codes, 39 sub-concept, and 4 major concepts, including mental interpretation, emotional-centered, autonomy, and passivity.

Mental interpretation

It is one of the major concepts of this study and different types of it have been explained in following.

Prejudice

The participants frequently mentioned prejudice as an issue that they have experienced.

Participant #7 said: “Usually judgment about me depends on personal opinion of others, so they did not behave me as was suitable; the interesting issue to mention is that such a judgment originated from wrong mentalities which may be completely incorrect.”

Participant #19 stated: “Sometimes the system managers and others form a special relationship with a member; this directs their com-

munication and even influences other issues, such as evaluations, responsibilities, etc."

Cognitive balance

This assists us in keeping a balanced viewpoint as well as consistent and appropriate attitudes and values, which makes it an important factor in human communication. The units under study referred to this phenomenon as cognitive inconsistency (insincerity and distortion) and valuation (discrimination, reinforcement, and advertisement).

Cognitive inconsistency

Unit #5 stated that "In the department, managers are insincere toward the faculty members and they in turn behave similarly to others."

Another experience stated by the participants was that the communications were emotional-centered. When two or more persons are engaged in some kind of relation, some emotions are formed among them. If these emotions are not understood, they can act as a barrier against the desired goal.¹⁴

Emotion release (or emotional refinement) and emotional satisfaction were two other concepts experienced by the participants.

Units #27 stated: "There is a nervous person in the work environment, so I must always be cautious about what I say and how I behave, since if that person gets angry, it has a negative effect on my prestige."

Unit #15 stated: "In addition to organizational communication, we have desirable interpersonal relationships. These relationships extend from the watchman's room to the managers' rooms, with anybody they communicate. Greeting and sympathy in communication helps us form good work communication. Though sometimes annoyance is inevitable, people often forgive others."

Autonomy

In organizational communication, tendency to autonomous thinking takes place gently in which people tend to emphasize their own performance and remind it, so they pay more attention to what relates to them in organizational

decision-making and organizational performance. In the present research, the units under study mentioned concepts such as self-engagement (individualism), self-protection, and personal territory.

Unit #14 states: "Sometimes I feel that communications are based on egoism. Persons with no common activities have greeting and friendly relationships; however when this communication relates to their work activities,, egoism starts. People in the department generally behave so."

Another characteristic of every organization is the performance or passivity of its members. Experiences of different organizations indicate that by extension of the organization's domain of operation, passivity of its members increases. This issue was mentioned frequently in the current research by the units under study. They referred to concepts such as self-expression, interaction, being challenging, and legislation.

Unit #2 said that "I feel that the work environment does not satisfy me. Though I consider myself strong and motivated from scientific viewpoint, I gradually feel that I become isolated, as if I feel more safe so."

Also, unit # 9 stated that "People in the department should like each other and be honest towards others; unfortunately their communication is based on mutual deal, which causes disturbance in the department."

Discussion

Significance of interaction and inter-personal effects of the members of a group has been discussed in numerous studies. The aim of the present study was to look for and describe the experiences of faculty members of nursery and midwifery department regarding communication in work environment for getting a more in-depth insight about this phenomenon, which was expressed in the themes formulated from statements of the units under study. Mental interpretation was one of the major concepts in this study. Fay et al in their study entitled the effective factors on communication in academic education which was carried out in 2005 on 400 students of Nottingham University indicated

that, from the viewpoint of students, the professors' thinking style influences their judgment as well as their expectations of the students. The researchers emphasize that the mental templates are often reflected in social judgment, direct the communications, guide us in forming a communication, and then provide evidence for correctness of the initial mental template.¹⁵

Emotion release (or emotional expression) and emotional satisfaction were two concepts experienced by the participants. A great deal of evidence indicates that the conflict related to emotional problems in human can lead to serious emotional stress which in turn may cause a specific behavioral response or a severe disease. All of these actions result in the release of energy caused by stress. In psychoanalysis, this concept is called emotional refinement which is considered a wise process since it balances the inconsistent feeling.¹⁶

In the present research, the units under study also mentioned the autonomy phenomenon. Probst considers autonomous thinking and the absence of collective thinking as one of the signs of ineffective organizational communication; this is a phenomenon in which despite being in the organization's network the individuals think about their own interests and neglect organization's interests.¹⁷

Another property of an organization is the performance or passivity of its members. This was frequently mentioned by the participants of

this study as well. In this regard, the participants referred to concepts such as self-expression, interaction, being challenging, and legislation.

According to Wang et al the results of desirable and proper communication among people in definite environments are as follows: In a suitable interaction, each person influences others and is influenced by them. In addition to influencing on each other, the individuals become intimate and dependent, such that e.g. the events affecting one of the group members will also influence others and the consequences of the effect will be influential on all group members. Furthermore, the individuals spend their energy to reach the collective goal and maintain the team; thus the team will be stable and would not be easily disintegrated.¹⁸

The intra-organizational communications influence the physical and mental health as well as performance of staffs in their work environment; the type of communication, authority of manager, individuals' personality and communication style, and how they reach the organizational goals are effective on their mental health, their satisfaction of the work environment, and increase in the resultant work efficiency. Accordingly, it is necessary to pay sufficient attention to this critical issue, through e.g. holding educational workshops in which all organization members have to participate.

The authors declare no conflict of interest in this study.

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