

Change management in Dublin-based tour operators

Effective use of communication in change projects to prepare employees for upcoming change

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ABSTRACT

Continuous developments in ICT or the challenges of globalisation are only some influences businesses have to address and use to their advantage. To do so projects and changes are part of the daily challenges of businesses. Lack of communication and resistance to change were identified to influence the success of projects. This dissertation aims to identify communication practices during change projects and their value with regard to the success of these projects in Dublin-based tour operators. Web-based questionnaires were sent out to tour operators to examine communication techniques and effectiveness, employees' perception of lack of communication and employee involvement in change projects. The findings of the empirical study were analysed and discussed with regard to the hypotheses asked and the relevant literature.

The study finds that while general communication is perceived as being executed well, change-specific information is not passed on to employees as efficient or accurate and change communication could be improved. Furthermore it was shown that employees would like to be more involved in company projects and changes.

Recommendations based on the primary research to improve the situation include the review of the communication process within the company. The use of change agents, direct communication between employees and their direct manager, and integrating employees early in the collection of information and the decision-making process are among these recommendations.

Finally implications for further research include the influence of cultural differences in communication on change processes and change communication. Furthermore researching the topic with the use of focus groups, observational studies or case studies is a recommendation for future research.

Author's key words: Change communication, project management, resistance to change, tour operators, change in tourism

INTRODUCTION

One of the most challenging parts in projects are the people who are affected. This is a result of the reaction people have on the varying level of uncertainty projects bring along. These reactions can include resistance to change which can affect the project success negatively, e.g. delays, cost increases, or cancellation. (Anca, 2013, p.137; Prosci, 2012; Umble and Umble, 2014, p.17)

Involvement and communication are seen as tools to minimise resistance. (Matos Marques Simoes and Esposito, 2014, p.325; The Standish Group, 2010, p.3)

Nevertheless still a great number of projects fail (63% according to a recent study of the Standish Group (2012, p.1).

Changes in the tourism industry are common, but the research in this area is scarce; especially with the focus on communication during change processes. (Bareil, 2013, p.61; By and Dale, 2008, p.306). This leads to the following research specifics:

• **Objectives:** evaluate the employees' perception of lack of communication within the company and further on the possibility of existence or generation of resistance to change.

• **Research Question:** Are change projects and their processes communicated well in Irish tour operators in order to overcome or minimise possible resistance to change and its possible negative effects on these projects?

• **Hypotheses:** Resistance to change of all level employees has an impact on the change process and its outcome (overall success or failure). Effective and open communication will minimise resistance and increase commitment to the project/change process.

- **H1:** Communication in tour operators can be improved.
- **H2:** Employees want to be more involved.
- **H3:** Employees are informed and updated regularly about projects/changes.
- **H4:** Employees are informed about projects/changes before they start.

METHODOLOGY

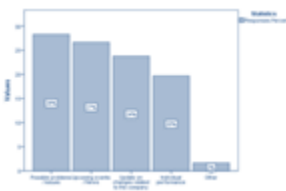
An interpretive and critical realism philosophies are applied because of the people focus of the research and the recognition of the impact of multiple realities. The research approach is deductive. (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2009)

A web-based questionnaire was created using Google Drive and sent to employees of all levels at Dublin-based tour operators.

The gathered information was then coded and analysed with IBM SPSS version 22.

RESULTS

Overall communication is experienced as successful and well executed. Various meetings are used to inform, update and share information within the company. Mostly discussed are possible problems or issues and updates on news or events.



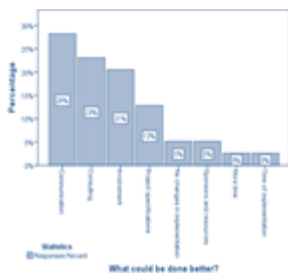
The majority of the participants identified changes in the first place, but some were only able to name changes when examples were given.

Projects executed and changes experienced in the companies include changes in the management, changes in the office like refurbishing or relocating, and restructuring.



At the end improvements in the change communication as performed in the companies were asked.

Suggested improvements included communication, consultation, involvement and project specifications.



DISCUSSION

H1: Specifically change related communication can be improved. This includes increased transparency of information, the type of information shared (more project specific not only updates on general development) and the time of information (as early as possible in the project life cycle)

H2: Suggestions of improvements for future projects show that people want to be more involved during projects and consulted before they are executed.

H3: It was shown that employees are updated and informed regularly but the information received was not sufficient enough to answer project specific questions. Therefore the importance and accuracy of shared information is questionable, resulting in no clear rejection or acceptance of this hypothesis.

H4: Information of employees takes place before changes happen is clearly identified in this study. Also the impact on their daily work is mostly made clear.

CONCLUSIONS

The overall hypothesis was only supported to a certain extent through combined findings of secondary data. The primary data did not give enough information to accept or reject this specific hypothesis.

While not all hypotheses could be confirmed (H3 unclear), the study showed that, project or change-related communication can be improved, especially regarding more specific information on changes within the company.

Furthermore it indicated that employees would like to be more involved in projects and more specific information wants to be received.

If this is realised a greater sense of commitment and support of employees for the changes can be expected.

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