

MANAGERIAL COMMUNICATION IN THE CONTEXT OF THE DIGITAL ERA IN LIDL ROMANIA

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Abstract

Effective managerial communication can bring success to a company when the superior correctly and coherently conveys the message to subordinates. Communication is a vital implementation skill and as a result its role derives from its very simplicity and especially in the way we accept to use it. An important thing to mention is that the digital age has changed the way we communicate. This digital transformation is actually an integration of digital technologies into many essential aspects of a business. Today, organizations increasingly turn to technology to solve classic, traditional problems in their field of activity. Companies turn to that digital transformation to facilitate and at the same time modify existing processes at the level of the activity carried out, as well as in terms of customer experiences, as well as cultural changes and to collect information about certain data of a significant nature. These changes are often used to come up with answers to a constantly changing industry or to meet new business requirements.

Keywords: Managerial Communication, Digitalization, LIDL, Romania

JEL Classification: L2, L86, M10, M21

I. INTRODUCTION

Managerial communication defines the business world through its employees. Effective expression always leads to effective communication. They can understand tasks much more easily if they are transmitted in a simple and effective way, so as not to create the impression of misunderstanding. Technology can take over the modern business world, but at the same time it can improve a lesser-known business. Communication can be achieved through various systems that are used to transmit electronic information, for example those of radio, television, telephones or other computer networks (Mark and Anita, 2005). In this context, it can be expressed in the form of exchanges of information and expressions of feelings that can lead to a clearer understanding between a transmitter and one or more receivers.

Effective communication is not just about doing exactly what we are told, but trying to understand the real reasons why we are willing to do those things. Many companies adopt a communication system that often leads to discouragement, by the fact that employees do not communicate clearly with each other, the lack of feedback, the misunderstanding of a certain task they have to solve leads to a disruption of the relationship process.

We all know the principle of managerial decentralization and that pyramid example, in which the general manager sends a message to a manager at a lower level, who understands approximately 80% of the information transmitted. Later, due to intimidation or other factors present, the manager at a lower level delegates the authority to the head of department, who in turn understands half of what was transmitted to him, but like the other manager, for various reasons does not ask for clarification. Thus, the head of department, put in the position of not asking for details, unable to do anything wrong, delegates the authority to the employees who also understand half of what the head of department transmitted, but this time also do not ask for clarification. Ultimately, a managerial conflict is created, things are not resolved, the tension between employees and superiors increases and thus the lack of communication led to disorganization and failure.

This is how vital communication is in such situations and not only. From this example we can easily realize the importance of communication and how it acts through its very principles. It is vital to respect a minimum of principles and to realize the important things that are transmitted. Surely the most important thing in the communication process is to transmit clear messages in accordance with certain principles, but effective communication is based on a process of passive listening.

Within each organization, implicitly, communication leaves its mark in a special way. Regardless of the size of an organization, the object of activity they carry out, the mode of operation and the actual development of workflows, information prevails in an extremely important sense. By the simple fact that we carry out an activity at work or by the complexity given by the entire department or the entire organization, communication illustrates the flows of messages transmitted, so that their reception can lead to the efficiency of achieving objectives. Communication, in my opinion, is a fundamental component in management, having a central role in the activity carried out by each manager. Each manager must develop and promote a certain policy based on his own communication system in such a way as to allow him to continuously modify the organizational structure and process under conditions of maximum change. Moreover, managerial communication follows a specific ethics, in any organizational model, certain norms that are found in the organizational

culture, politics, but especially in the individual ethics of those employees who occupy leadership positions (Vlăduțescu, Budică et al, 2015)

II. THE INFLUENCES OF DIGITALIZATION ON THE ORGANIZATIONAL COMMUNICATION PROCESS

Digitalization is present to an increasingly deep degree throughout the world. Due to this fact, many of the activities that are carried out or, better said, were carried out before are predominantly facilitated or replaced by technological materials and supports. This sharp development is the result of several factors that have contributed in a more than satisfactory way to the activities of the entire society. We could say that businesses have experienced an easier side of carrying out some activities, which previously required a certain period of time. Many organizations see digitalization as a helpful and time-saving benefit, but we will see that there are also many inconveniences that arise, for example, in a certain business in an organization. The use of digitalization and technology has facilitated interactions with different business partners or colleagues not only from close geographical areas but also from other countries or continents. Technological innovations can be a valuable tool or, on the contrary, can hinder effective communication, depending on how they are integrated into the communication process (Avdeenko and Alettdiova, 2017).



Fig 1 Interdependencies of digitalization

Source:Hrmanger.com

Researchers propose a series of recommendations that can reduce the negative effect of technology in the business environment, so that it does not harm the interaction between people:

- maintaining a realistic perspective on technology, it attempts to replace traditional methods of interpersonal communication instead of being a tool for improving relationships;
- avoiding contracting a multitude of information leads to the impossibility of selecting correct information and increases the risk that employees become inefficient or stressed;
- technology should be used in a productive way, without spending too much time on the internet;
- avoiding addressing an important or informal message in the online environment, so as not to create room for interpretations or confusion (Marinescu and Șerban-Oprescu, 2019).

Digitization greatly improves access to information. In other words, technology allows users to quickly and comprehensively search for the information they need from anywhere and at any time. This process makes the invisible visible. Moreover, when we talk about accessing a document, thanks to technology, several people can access the same document at the same time. It also eliminates the problem of possible distance, since people no longer have to travel to locations that possess the support of the materials. Today, we are witnessing the constant acceleration of digitalization and whether we believe it or not, it will continue to improve and penetrate a wide variety of activities. That is why many organizations and institutions are taking initiatives to digitize their documents. Over time, digitalization has been defined by several authors, researchers who have given particular importance to digitalization and the effects it can have:

- Witten and David (2003) define digitization as a process of taking the traditional library and converting it into electronic form, which can be stored and manipulated by a computer.
- The Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) defines digitization as a process of converting, creating, and maintaining books, works of art, historical documents, photographs, and journals into an electronic representation so that they can be viewed at any time through computers and/or other devices (Saima and Mohsina, 2015).

Through digitalization, the leader forms a digital platform for his organization, based on various strategies. We also emphasize that leaders in a business must be clear and aware of digital trends, possible implications and at the same time capitalize on new technologies. Through digitalization, leaders discover new market segments, develop rapidly and can increase their profit margins over competitors.

Consequently, the role of the leader ensures the digital maturity of an organization with a strategic vision, an added level of management, bringing people together with the most performing processes, technological offerings, structures and involvement.

III. LIDL ROMANIA

Historically speaking, the LIDL company dates back to the interwar period, more precisely to 1930. It is part of the Schwarz group, and the first store was opened in Germany. Over the course of 90 years, the company becomes one of the most famous European retailers, with approximately 600 stores located in the UK and thousands of other stores opened in other parts of Europe. The company begins to launch its production outside the country in 1990. As a result of the expansion of this company into other markets, its market share has increased significantly. At the same time, LIDL becomes the dominant competitor on European territory.

In this context, we can synthesize a SWOT analysis of the company at an international level. In terms of strengths, the company has a strong business structure, which gives it the opportunity to sell its products at advantageous prices, it owns a wide range of private labels (which gives exclusivity and security), it has a high concentration of stores in the UK and Europe and it has a well-defined online presence. Among its weaknesses, LIDL has dysfunctions in expanding operations in some European areas, and consumers tend to associate low price with low quality. The opportunities it has are related to the potential to expand its activity in the UK and access to countries where it does not operate. The threats that may affect the optimal performance of the activity are related to a possible "war" between retailers, which may influence the decrease in competitiveness at competitive prices or the international expansion of new global brands leading to an increase in competition (Nevec and Marko, 2018). Eight years later, Lidl begins its story in Romania, in the Titan neighborhood of Bucharest, and launches the Lidl Tour project by 2016. In 2017, it revolutionizes the product level, a range of traditional Romanian vegetables, called "Roşia – Buzău", through the project "Cultivat în România, specific Românesc" in partnership with USAMVB. A year later, Lidl Romania publishes the first sustainability report according to the Global Reporting Initiative standard. Today, however, "you deserve to be surprised", Lidl has over 300 stores, approximately 10,000 employees and five logistics centers.

Lidl Romania states that supplier relations are one of its assets and that is why the innovation consists in including a much larger number of local products in the offer. They understand the Romanians' appetite for authentic products and have included locally developed products in the assortment, under the name of the "Cămara Noastră" range or fruits and vegetables from Romanian suppliers, found in the "Lidl Market".

The development of the goods market in Romania is a phenomenon determined by a variety of factors, which has somewhat exceeded the forecasts of specialists and some expectations of some investors. Moreover, European integration and adherence to Western security systems have encouraged specialized companies, which held foreign capital, to make consistent investments with maximum security. This is the case with Lidl, which has expanded in a more than satisfactory way throughout our country (Silviu, Florina et al, 2019). Lidl works in a fair and correct manner with its suppliers, while also respecting quality standards and legislative norms. Technology is always present in the conduct of its activity. Regarding the production of goods, food products that have their own brand are produced in certain factories that must necessarily hold the three important certifications:

- IFS (International Featured Standards), a standard that presents its usefulness in order to hear from food industry producers, focusing mainly on consumer health, food safety, product quality and the way in which they are processed;
- BRC (British Retail Consortium) is a standard that deals with product quality, the exercise of safety in processing and throughout the entire process chain, and in a way demonstrates to us that beyond the product, manufacturers fully comply with their legal obligations regarding consumer protection;
- FSSC 22000 (Food Safety System Certification) shows that suppliers use high-performance management systems to exercise food safety, meets ISO 22000 requirements, as well as customer expectations.

Within the company, the provision of services is mainly based on the human element that makes it possible to adapt and personalize according to the needs of the customer or consumer. Lidl Romania has a platform that details the range of products, ingredients, assortments and other actions that the company promotes and the actions in which it participates. Within this platform, the current offers, assortments, Lidl kitchen (recipes and other tips), Lupilu (baby range), information on "Lidl Plus", PARKSIDE (craft ideas), the health and nutrition section, a special section for the opinions of consumers who have used the respective products, Surprises, as well as the indispensable Sustainability report are presented. Lidl has an application called "Lidl Plus", through which it offers customers the opportunity to benefit from promotional products or weekly discounts, without the need for a physical, material card, which can be a great plus. Through this application, Lidl tries to get closer to customers by offering them the opportunity to browse the current catalog and make a shopping list at the best price. I believe that this method is not new, but it is customized so that customers can benefit for free, the application is found in the Play Store section of every smartphone (except Apple or Huawei).

Lidl was based on the fact that most Romanian consumers are concerned about the environment, demonstrating an increased awareness of the impact it has on sustainable production and consumption, by adopting a behavior that promotes green purchasing. The following trend is defined, in particular, by the role of sustainability. This concept is increasingly used and optimistically foresees the digitalization of business processes, in order to enable new sustainable business models (Theodor, Ioan et al, 2022).

The purpose of this research is to identify, among LIDL employees in stores located in Suceava County, the main managerial communication techniques existing in a digitalized environment and how technology influences their entire activity. It also aims to investigate the impact that technology has on market mechanisms in general and its importance at this time.

Objective 1: Identifying employees' opinions about the importance of communication within the LIDL company.

Objective 2: Identifying techniques used in customer relations.

Objective 3: Highlighting managerial communication in a digitalized and ever-changing market.

Objective 4: Integrating new technologies into current communication processes between managers, suppliers and customers.

Hypothesis no. 1: At the LIDL company level, both managers and employees use communication techniques based on fairness and mutual respect.

The concept of managerial communication is not so well quantified in our country, but nevertheless employees try to find effective ways to improve their communication with both managers and customers.

Hypothesis no.2: Motivating employees, stimulating them through various projects and competitions through which they manage to reach a maximum level of productivity, but at the same time using technology. Technology facilitates the carrying out of their activities and can be used as a fairly effective method of managerial communication. Thus, employees can connect with each other through various electronic means and have the opportunity to learn to use different electronic equipment. Moreover, the company encourages non-financial motivations, for example, stimulating mutual trust, winning in the relationship management process or involving them in important company decisions.

Hypothesis no. 3: A high level of education is a vitally important aspect that leads to attracting new initiatives and at the same time developing the company.

The company needs that freshness, if I may say, that topicality that an indisputable employer should possess. I mention this because the company needs people who have higher education and who know how to manage effective or deficient communication situations.

To validate the hypotheses presented above, the survey was used as a research method, and the questionnaire as a research tool, because it allows for the interpretation of much more detailed data, leading to a clearer conclusion regarding the use of managerial communication in the context of the digital age at LIDL.

The questionnaire includes 16 closed questions and one open question. The questions have a single answer option, highlighting more closely the communication techniques used. The first questions capture identifying elements, which provide much more real information about the respondents.

The questionnaire was designed to be completed by people employed in LIDL stores in Suceava County, as well as by their managers who supervise their activity.

Choosing the research method, the survey and the research instrument, the questionnaire, we applied it to the LIDL company in Suceava, to be completed by employees who are directly involved in communication relationships, both with managers, colleagues and customers, but also with managers who supervise and coordinate the area's activity.

In this context, contact was made with several employees from different stores located in the cities of Suceava county, physically, from whom we received help in collecting this data. Thus, the questionnaire was distributed physically, but also through technology, more precisely through emails to these employees on 05.06.2022, in which a number of 60 respondents participated.

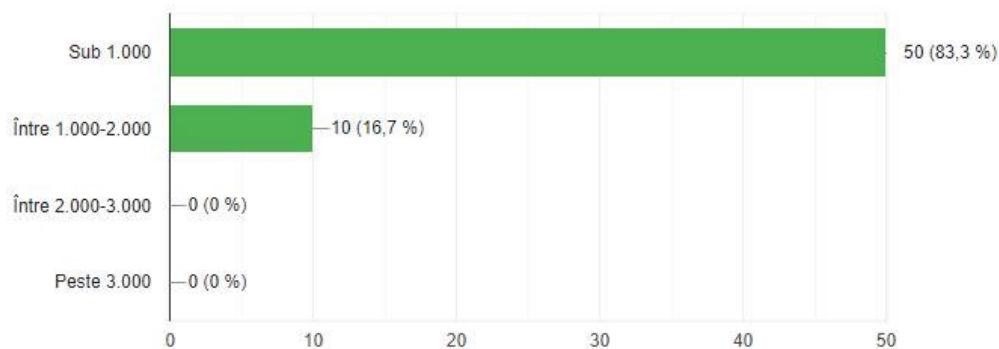


Fig 2 Average monthly expenses at LIDL/ in RON

Source: Own processing by the author

Following the analysis of the figure above regarding the average monthly expenses at LIDL, it is observed that the majority of respondents shop for less than 1,000 RON, approximately 83.3%, and 16.7% of respondents shop at LIDL for amounts between 1,000 and 2,000 RON. However, there are no respondents who have an average monthly expense at LIDL that exceeds 2,000 RON, which may highlight the fact that the supermarket has affordable and easy-to-find products.

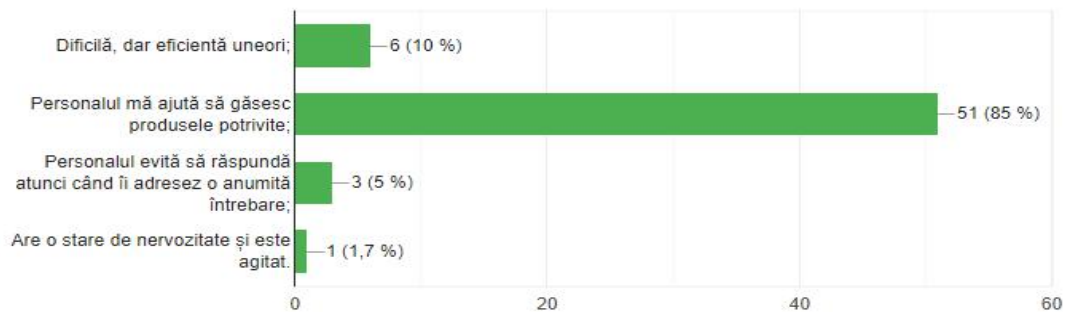


Fig 3 Characteristics of the customer-employee relationship

Source: Own processing by the author

Analyzing the figure above, we can see that the store staff is friendly and available. Thus, the majority of respondents, i.e. 85% of them, believe that when they are in stores, the staff helps them find the right products. 10% of them consider the relationship with the staff difficult, but sometimes effective. The lowest shares, however, are for reasons that are less pleasant for customers. Among these are 5% of respondents who believe that the staff avoids answering when they are asked, and 1.7% of them responded that the relationship between them and the staff is based on nervousness and agitation.

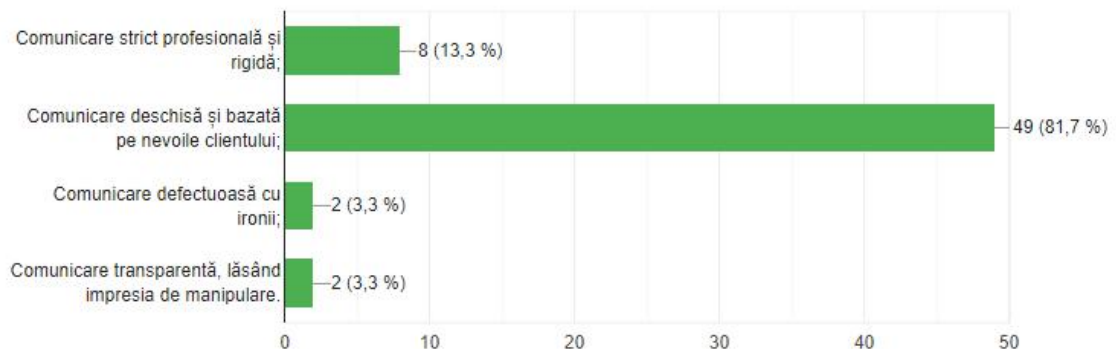


Fig 4 Communication techniques to consider if you choose to be part of the LIDL team

Source: Own processing by the author

Analyzing the figure above, we can see that the communication techniques used vary among the respondents. Thus, 81.7% of the respondents believe that the staff should rely on open communication and focused on the client's needs, and 13.3% of the respondents believe that the staff should adopt a strictly professional and rigid communication. 3.3% of them believe that the staff should adopt a defective communication, and the other 3.3% a transparent communication, avoiding the impression of manipulation.

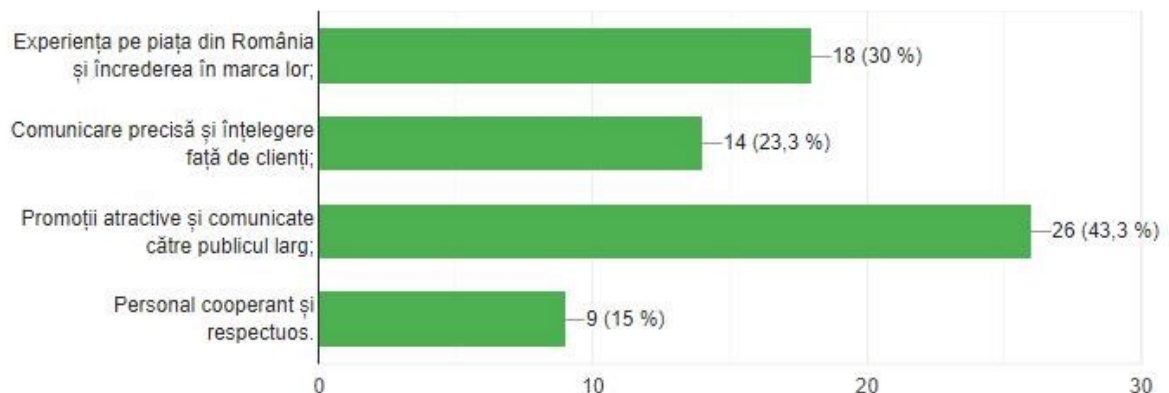


Fig 5 Reasons behind purchasing LIDL products

Source: Own processing by the author

Analyzing the graph above, we can see that the reasons behind purchasing LIDL products are multiple. Thus, 43.3% of respondents buy LIDL products due to attractive promotions communicated to the general public, 30% of them purchase due to the supermarket's experience in Romania and trust in their brand. The lowest shares are recorded among the motivations related to precise communication and understanding towards customers 23.3%, and cooperative and polite staff 15%

If we refer to the last question in the questionnaire, which captures the respondents' opinions on the role of communication through technologies in this digital age, we can say that most respondents have an opinion based on personal experiences. Thus, they consider that communication relationships are beneficial due to the possibility of promoting existing products on the market and that they make work easier at the same time. Another category of respondents believe that the role of communication is increasingly important, being a useful and fast means of communicating any information through digitalization. Moreover, communication through technology facilitates the distribution of information, but despite this, there are people who either do not have a digital means of information or do not know how to use it properly and it can become deficient. Another part of respondents say that it is an opportunity, because if you need a certain product and you are not sure that you can find it in the store, you can order it online and then pick it up from the store, so it is much easier to read about the product online than if you were to ask employees questions.

IV. CONCLUSION

Therefore, communication is the stabilizing factor in any communicational, managerial activity in a context of digitalization. Its challenges in corporate activity are largely influenced by responsive and efficient management, at the same time in the management of commercial languages. However, it is important to maintain an attitude and communication styles that encourage cooperation and develop empathy. In a company, management must be based on egalitarian communication styles, because they are the most effective. We refer to both verbal and written communication. A freedom to express ideas to understanding comes with the risk of working harder to adapt them, in order to understand consumers and develop the business. When we communicate effectively, we only promote ethics and follow market trends.

Digitalization affects HR activities in a certain way, changing the roles of strategy-oriented managers. The opportunities and potential challenges for them are numerous, to increase employee productivity but also profitability, using digital technologies effectively, as well as a prudent organizational structure. The emergence of new human resources leads to the creation of new strategies to cover the digital skills deficit, while creating loyalty and commitment. Given the purpose of these HR managers, communication leaves its mark by defining positions as strategic managers or technology promoters. Managers must fulfill this set of digital skills and perfect their digital skills.

By analyzing and comparing different opinions about managerial communication in this digitalized context, I could say, we can extract a multitude of meanings and pertinent conclusions that have laid the foundation for more effective communication in the workplace, using state-of-the-art technology. Digitalization is developing more and more in recent times and cannot always be a positive factor. Like anything else, technology can have a negative impact when it is not correlated or used effectively. Thus, many companies are not the most receptive when it comes to technology and try through different methods to be able to understand and use this technology correctly. In this context, language elements are very important, nuances that every manager must take into account, in order to be able to communicate effectively with staff, but also with each business partner.

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