

dr Paweł Łukasik

Katedra Zachowań Organizacyjnych,
Uniwersytet Ekonomiczny w Krakowie

Communication methods used in marketing activities directed for organizational learning and innovation

Wykorzystanie metod komunikacji w działaniach marketingowych ukierunkowanych na organizacyjne uczenie się i innowacje

Abstract: "Communication methods..." contains short description of marketing actions and the research of these operations, which are directed for:

- acquiring knowledge through customer remarks analysis,
- getting information about competition,
- seeking breakthroughs in products, technology and methods.

The research concentrates on communication methods used in these operations. I researched the use of over thirty communication methods in South Poland organizations such as information gathering interviews, counselling interviews, meetings, Lessons Learned, moderation, Internet, Intranet, surveys etc. The article describes these methods and also reveals communication method functions in the above mentioned marketing operations. This is especially innovation supporting.

Keywords: methods of communication, marketing, innovation

Streszczenie: Wykorzystanie metod komunikacji w działaniach marketingowych ukierunkowanych na organizacyjne uczenie się i innowacje zawiera krótki opis działań marketingowych i opis tych działań, które są ukierunkowane na:

- pozyskiwanie wiedzy poprzez analizowanie uwag klientów,
- zbieranie informacji o konkurencji,
- poszukiwanie przełomów w produktach, technologiach i metodach.

Badanie koncentruje się na wykorzystaniu metod komunikacji w tych operacjach. Zbadano wykorzystanie ponad trzydziestu metod komunikacji w organizacjach Polski południowej, jak wywiady informacyjne, rozmowy konsultacyjne, spotkanie, Lessons Learned, moderacja, Internet, Intranet, ankiety itp. Artykuł opisuje te metody i odkrywa funkcje, jakie pełnią we wspomnianych wyżej działaniach. Jest to w szczególności wspieranie innowacji.

Słowa kluczowe: metody komunikacji, działania marketingowe, innowacje

Introduction

The marketing concept is defined in different ways. I chose a definition proposed by L. Garbarski, I. Rutkowski and W. Wrzosek¹. They described marketing as an integrated system of instruments and operations used for market research

¹ L. Garbarski, I. Rutkowski, W. Wrzosek, *Marketing – punkt zwrotny nowoczesnej firmy*, Państwowe Wydawnictwo Ekonomiczne, Warszawa 1996, s. 23.

and shaping². Therefore a market survey plays the main role in this approach to marketing. Customer remarks analysis and collecting information about competitors are two elements of the market survey, which should be supplemented with the analysis of the breakthrough in products, technologies and methods. I chose these activities because they are especially directed for knowledge collecting, which is both the element of organizational learning, as well as, knowledge management. I used the organizational learning concept in this research. B. Miłkula defines organizational learning as the process with the use of information and knowledge which leads to enrichment of knowledge resources and may cause organizational behaviours to change. This process also can lead to enhancement of the adaptive capacity of the organization, leading it to the condition of high reactivity and proactivity³. However, organizational learning is an important process in contemporary organization, but innovation is the main factor of getting competitive advantage. Therefore it should have an effect on organizational learning. There is also one element, which is crucial for innovation development through organizational learning. This is communication. There are two aspects of communication: psychological and methodological. If we look at communication from the psychological point of view we think about perception, emotions, language, thinking etc. This approach is used in many articles and books describing communication models and functions. But this approach does not answer a question: how to use communication to reach business goals? The methodological approach was used in this paper, because it gives an answer for this question. The use of thirty seven communication methods in getting knowledge through customer remarks analysis, getting information about competition and breakthrough seeking. This research also reveals communication methods functions in actions mentioned above. Hypotheses were used to show complex relationships between marketing activities directed for organizational learning and innovation.

Hypothesis and research tasks

The main hypothesis of this paper is that communicational support of marketing activities oriented for organizational learning, e.g. information obtained from customers, collecting information about competitors and breakthrough seeking is performing different functions, and especially leads to innovations. I state the following supportive hypothesis:

1. Communication methods are performing many functions in marketing activities directed for organizational learning
2. The communication methods used in the marketing operations directed for organizational learning supports innovations.

The above stated hypothesis were proved through statistical analysis of 207 surveys completed by external and doctoral students. This research is divided into two tasks:

² Ibidem, s. 23.

³ B. Miłkula, *Organizacje oparte na wiedzy*, Wydawnictwo Akademii Ekonomicznej w Krakowie, Kraków 2006, s. 48.

1. The percentage calculated from organizations using each of 37 communication methods in customer remarks analysis, collecting information about competitors and breakthrough seeking and conclusion making.
2. The percentage calculating answers indicating functions performed by communication methods in customers remarks analysis, collecting information about competitors and breakthrough seeking.

The next part of the paper presents a short description of communication methods.

A communication methods outline

I divided communication methods into three groups: interpersonal communication methods, group communication methods and organizational/mass communication methods. This is consistent with the McQuil model of communication forms⁴. But irrespective of the type of method, each method is defined as a systematically used way of doing something which is directed for the achievement of the goal⁵. So the first element of each communication method is the goal. Message dispatching is the goal of each communication method. But there are some special goals, which are more typical for each communication method. For example, persuasion is the aim of the presentation⁶ or negotiation⁷, problem solving is the aim of the moderation⁸, meeting⁹ or counseling interview¹⁰. The afore mentioned objectives are very important in management, therefore communication methods are useful tools for every manager.

Interpersonal communication includes different types of the interview like an information gathering interview, a counseling interview, a performance appraisal interview. The first step in each interview is the goal setting, which is the part of the planning made before the talk¹¹. Table 1 shows different types of the interview and typical problems and actions. For example, feedback giving and career path planning are typical goals of the performance appraisal interview. The psychological climate is an important factor of each interview, because an interviewee's attitude to the interviewer influences the effectiveness of the communication. Therefore every interviewer, who wants to get information or resolve the problem has to get to know the person, who he will talk to. The interaction between an interviewee's character and the topic of the conversation is very important. For example, even a calm or open person can be irritated or secretive because of the problem which is the topic of the conversation. Therefore a psychological climate anal-

⁴ B. Dobek-Ostrowska, *Komunikowanie polityczne i publiczne: podręcznik akademicki*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warszawa 2006, s. 71.

⁵ Z. Martyniak, *Organizatoryka*, Państwowe Wydawnictwo Ekonomiczne, Warszawa 1987, p. 126.

⁶ P.H. Andrews, J.E. Baird Jr., *Communication for Business and the Professions*, Wm. C. Brown Publishers, Dubuque 1989, p. 330.

⁷ W. Mastenbroek, *Negocjowanie*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warszawa 1998, s. 96-97.

⁸ G. Łasiński, *Rozwiązywanie problemów w organizacji. Moderacje w praktyce*, Polskie Wydawnictwo Ekonomiczne, Warszawa 2007, s. 123-161.

⁹ D. Sharman, *The Perfect meeting*, Century Business an Imprint of Random House UK Limited, London 2003, s. 8-9.

¹⁰ A.P. Beaumont, *Human resource management*, SAGE Publications Ltd, London 1993, s. 94.

¹¹ D. Fisher, *Communication in organizations*, West Publishing Company, St. Paul 1993.1993, s. 46.

ysis includes three elements: the interlocutors' mutual trust assessment, the assessment of the willingness to disclose information or solving problems and the identification of differences of opinions, which can hinder agreement¹².

Table 1. Types of the interview

Type of Interview	Interviewer's Major Purpose	Key Problems and Issues	Some Routes to Successful Outcomes
Employment interviews	Test for job-applicant match Learn both "historical" and "here and now" facts about applicant	Risk of misevaluation due to information overload Danger of overlooking key facts Requires self-analysis by applicant "Selling" conflicts with information gathering	"Behavioural interviewing" Thorough preparation by parties
Orientation interviews	Acquaint new employee with the job and the organization Motivate the employee	How to build relationships and transmit large amounts of information How to be demanding yet supportive	Prepare by assembling all information the employee will need Prepare others for new arrival
Counselling interviews	Provide help with personal and work problems	Choice between empathy, confrontation, or a combination	Develop listening skills Work toward a specific plan of action Openness and honesty of interviewee
Performance Appraisal Interviews	Feedback to employee about work Give recognition Plan for improvement	Evaluation can evoke defensiveness Employee can be reluctant to disagree	Objectively measure performance against targets Prior self-evaluation by employee
Grievance Interviews	Respond to complaint brought by employee Gain information useful to management	Lack of openness by employee Danger of a power struggle	Establish a climate of openness Employ a "clinical approach" Sense the opportunity for counselling
Correctional interviews	Correct inappropriate behaviour	Defensiveness, fear of counteraction, damage to relationships	Quiet surroundings, calm attitude Be tactful, avoid accusations Let employee speak fully Delay action if uncertain
Exit interviews	Learn employee's reaction for leaving	Interviewee's reluctance to criticize the organization	Build trust State who will see and use information Avoid evaluation by interviewer
Information-Gathering Interview	Obtain information	Is interviewee willing to reveal information? The risk of poorly framed questions	Planning Arrange a favourable climate Consider question types and sequence Use neutral questions

Source: D. Fisher, op. cit., s. 464

¹² Ibidem.

The planning for each type of the interview includes four stages¹³:

- 1) goal setting,
- 2) content learning and getting to know the interviewee,
- 3) interview anticipating psychological climate,
- 4) set of the interview structure.

Table 2 includes supportive questions referring to the above stages.

Table 2. Supporting questions for successful interview preparation

The purposes
Are purposes stated clearly enough to guide question design? Are purposes tailored to the particular type of interview? Are all relevant purposes stated?
The interviewee and Key Areas to be Discussed
Has available data about the interviewee been reviewed? Is sufficient supporting evidence available(e.g. for appraisal and correctional interviews)? Is interviewer well briefed on all matters to be discussed?
Psychological climate
What degree of trust will exist at the outset? What will the motivation level be? What possible biases may exist?
The structure of the interview
How should the interview be opened? Should the interview be directive, nondirective, or both? How will rapport be established? How will the purpose of the interview be stated to the interviewee? What questions will be asked in what sequence? How will inadequate responses be dealt with? How will the interview be summarized and concluded?

Source: D. Fisher, op. cit., p. 463

Preparing and planning for the interview is crucial for successful communication, because managers often forget to prepare themselves to conversation and managers who prepare well can be more effective than others. But realization, which is the second element of the interview, is equally important. Interview realization consists of three parts: the opening, basic part, conclusion¹⁴. The opening consists of reaching an agreement and clarification of the purpose of the conversation. The interviewer reaches agreement with the interviewee through a short conversation on casual topics like the weather or frame of mind. Then the interviewer should present the aim of the conversation to be in control of the communication process. The interviewer also can inform the interviewee about the time needed for the conversation¹⁵.

The basic part of the interview includes different stages. I will describe two types of interview in this article: an information gathering interview and a counseling interview. The information gathering interview consists of a sequence of questions. There are different types of sequences of questions. The funnel sequence

¹³ Ibidem, p. 463.

¹⁴ D. Fisher, op. cit., p. 467-475.

¹⁵ Ibidem.

is that the interviewer presents general questions at the beginning of the conversation and further on goes to particular questions. This sequence is appropriate if the interviewee has to express strong emotions. He or she can describe his/her point of view of the problem, and the interviewer can follow up the interviewee's opinions and formulate appropriate detailed questions. The sequence of the inverted funnel is that the interviewer gives particular questions at the start of the conversation and further on goes to open, general questions. This sequence is appropriate when the interviewee is an uncommunicative person. In such cases the interviewer can give a few short questions to encourage the interviewee to have a discussion and then give open questions¹⁶. The structure of the counseling interview is more differentiated. In principle, there is no particular structure of a counseling interview. But management literature consists of some good practices in this field. A.P. Beaumont¹⁷ suggests to identify the discrepancies between standard and reality and people responsible for the extension of these discrepancies. And then a counsellor should set up measurable, time oriented goals for organization. The counselling interview can be similar to a discussion between a patient and a doctor. Then the information gathering is the first stage. Next, a consultant makes a diagnosis of cases of the problem using the synthesis of collected information. And the last stage is setting up actions and making observations¹⁸. In turn A.E. Ivey, M. Bradford Ivey, C.P. Zalaquett¹⁹ suggest to use storytelling to help in the problem solving. An interviewee (in this method called client) should tell a story of the problem and then set up goals concerning the problem with the consultant. The next stage of this method is re-telling the story in a way leading to reaching goals stated in the previous stage²⁰. I think that this method is especially useful when a client is withdrawn. The end of every interview should contain a so called "thanks for your time" phrase²¹. Negotiations are another type of the communication methods. They are more oriented for financial targets, but also include similar elements to other communication methods, for example planning, preparation and realization²². Because of that they are frequently described in management literature, I do not describe them in this article.

Group communication methods include: briefings, meetings, Quality Audit Meetings²³, Lessons Learned sessions²⁴, moderations²⁵, informal meetings of Quality Circles or Communities of Practice, Open Space Technology, conferences²⁶ and also presentation²⁷. The main difference concerns presentation, because outside of presentation the above mentioned methods are in some sense a

¹⁶ Ibidem.

¹⁷ P.B. Beaumont, op. cit., p. 94.

¹⁸ A.K. Kinra, *Guidance and counseling*, Dorling Kindersley, Delhi 2008, p. 134.

¹⁹ A.E. Ivey, M. Bradford Ivey, C.P. Zalaquett, *Intentional Interviewing & Counseling*, Brooks/Cole, Cengage Learning, Belmont 2010, p. 211.

²⁰ Ibidem, p. 211.

²¹ Ibidem, p. 467-475.

²² Ibidem, p. 96-97.

²³ A. Potocki, R. Winkler, A. Żbikowska *Techniki komunikacji w organizacjach gospodarczych*, Difin, Warszawa 2011, s. 170.

²⁴ P. Carrillo, *Lessons Learned practices in the engineering, procurement, construction sector*, "Engineering, Construction and Architectural Management" 2005, Vol. 12, no. 3, p. 237-239.

²⁵ G. Łasiński, op. cit., p. 123-161.

²⁶ A. Potocki, R. Winkler, A. Żbikowska, op. cit., p. 187-188, 199, 220.

²⁷ P.H. Andrews, J.E. Baird Jr., op. cit., p. 329-331.

type of meeting. Several differences between communication methods mainly concern the goal of the method. The main goal of briefing is the distribution of tasks within the business day. A special form of briefings are the Japanese Quality Audit Meetings. They are the connection of reporting current business information with problem solving²⁸. The main aim of a meeting is to make important decision or problem solving, therefore meetings are organized less often than briefings, for example a few times a year or once a month²⁹. A meeting such as every communication method includes a planning and preparation stage and a realization stage. The planning stage includes: goal setting, preparing a list of invited people, making the agenda and preparing the room. The realization stage includes the beginning of the meeting, the main part of the meeting and the conclusion³⁰. The main purpose of Lessons Learned sessions is getting the knowledge through analysis of success and failures of completed projects³¹. The moderation method is a special methodology directed for problem solving. G. Łasiński³² is the main promoter of the moderation in Poland. He described the main stages of the moderation methodology. What distinguishes this method from others is the moderator, who is responsible for supporting the group work³³. Informal meetings are still other types of communication methods. Quality circles and communities of practice are the most popular types of informal groups³⁴. Quality Circles are informal groups of employees discussing quality problems³⁵ and Communities of Practice are social structures with different degrees of engagement³⁶. Every person belonging to the Community of Practice can choose the degree of engagement in community actions³⁷. In spite of several differences the thing, which is the same in both these methods is the problem solving. The presentation similar to other methods consists of the goal setting, the auditorium analyzing, the topic analyzing, the preparation of visual aids, the presentation's delivery including the introduction, the main part of the speech and the conclusion³⁸. The aforementioned presentation is a supportive method for conferences, its main purpose is to provide information. But it is the special type of conferences so called Open Space Technology which is used for problem solving. It is that common work on the problem notified by participants. This is very a modern method but requires a high level of trust among interlocutors³⁹.

Mass/corporate communication methods like the Internet or e-mail are described in details in the IT literature, so I will not describe them in this paper. The next part of this elaboration includes results of research.

²⁸ A. Potocki, R. Winkler, A. Żbikowska, op. cit., p. 203.

²⁹ R.B. Adler, *Communicating at work*, McGraw-Hill, Inc., New York 1989, p. 216.

³⁰ Ibidem, p. 224-232.

³¹ P. Carrillo, 2005, p. 237.

³² G. Łasiński, op. cit., p. 123-161.

³³ Ibidem.

³⁴ A. Potocki, R. Winkler, A. Żbikowska, op. cit., s. 187-188, 220.

³⁵ Ibidem, p. 220.

³⁶ <http://wenger-trayner.com/resources/slide-forms-of-participation/>, (30.06.2014).

³⁷ <http://wenger-trayner.com/resources/slide-forms-of-participation/>, (30.06.2014).

³⁸ D. Fisher, op. cit., p. 509-528.

³⁹ H. Owen, *Expanding our now: The Story of Open Space*, Bernett Koheler Publishers, Inc., San Francisco 1997, p. 1, A. Potocki, R. Winkler, A. Żbikowska, op. cit., p. 199.

Results of the survey

Customer remarks analysis is used by 76% of surveyed organizations. Organizations use the following communication methods in this action: information gathering interviews, counselling interviews, electronic mail, meetings, the Internet, grievance interviews, correctional interviews, surveys, letters, Lessons Learned sessions. All these methods provide a high level of interaction. Interpersonal and mass communication methods are used more often than group communication methods in customer remarks collecting and analyzing. Communication methods functions in customer remarks collecting and analyzing are presented in table 3.

Table 3. Communication methods functions in the customer remarks collecting and analyzing

Communication methods functions	strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree	strongly agree and agree
Better recognition of customer needs	1%	3%	8%	42%	46%	88%
Detection of irregularities in customer service	3%	2%	6%	43%	46%	89%
Disclosure of gaps in assortment of products	4%	3%	8%	43%	42%	85%
Change of thinking about client and customer service	3%	8%	15%	49%	25%	74%
Collecting of knowledge of competitors products or services	8%	7%	25%	36%	24%	60%
Incorporating clients in the process of new products/services creating and existing products/services improvement	9%	13%	24%	31%	22%	53%

Source: own elaboration

The majority of respondents considered that the use of communication methods in the collecting and analyzing of customers remarks supports: the recognition of customers needs, the disclosure of gaps in the assortment of products, the way of thinking change about client and customer service, the collecting of knowledge of competitors products or services, the incorporating of clients in the process of new products/services creating and existing products/services improvement. These results support hypothesis No. 1 that communication methods are performing a lot of functions in marketing activities directed for organizational

learning. Enabling of client participation in new product creation and the disclosure of gaps in the assortment of products also support hypothesis No. 2 that the communication methods used in the marketing operations directed for organizational learning supports innovations.

The information collecting about competitors is used by 61% of surveyed organizations. Organizations use the following communication methods in the collecting information about competitors: the Internet, information gathering interviews, reports, electronic mail, counseling interviews, meetings, the Internet forums. Mass/organizational communication methods are used in information about competition collecting. These methods are simple and do not provide a high level of interaction. The functions of communication methods in collecting information about competitors are presented in table 4.

Table 4. Communication methods functions in collecting information about competitors

Communication methods functions	strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree	strongly agree and agree
Timeliness of information	1%	1%	11%	58%	29%	87%
Getting simple access to information about competitors	2%	4%	17%	47%	30%	77%
Using big groups of communicants	4%	7%	21%	43%	25%	68%

Source: own elaboration

The majority of respondents considered that the use of communication methods in the collecting and analysing of customers remarks supports: receiving current information, getting simple access to information about competitors, using big groups of communicants. These results support hypothesis No. 1 that communication methods are performing many functions in marketing activities directed for organizational learning.

The breakthrough seeking is used by 29% of researched organizations. Organizations use the following communication methods in seeking breakthroughs in products, methods and technology: meetings, Lessons Learned Sessions, counselling interviews, conferences, information gathering interviews, the Internet, Grievance Interviews, the moderation method, briefings and presentations. Group communication methods directed for problem solving are the most frequently used in breakthrough seeking. These methods provide a high level of interaction, but the realization stage of these methods is difficult. Communication methods functions in breakthrough seeking are presented in table 5.

The majority of respondents considered that the use of communication methods in breakthrough seeking supports: the knowledge of ways of perception of changes in an organization's environment and inside the organization, a greater tendency for the people to perceive possible changes, the engagement of imagination which enables detachment from previous ways of thinking about products, services, production and the customer services process, the economic situation, knowledge of different opinions about possible changes, the enrichment of general

knowledge of workers, denial of previous ways of the perception of reality, perception even the most distant in time changes. These results support hypothesis No. 1 that communication methods are performing many functions in marketing activities directed for organizational learning. The engagement of workers' imagination and the increased tendency of employees to perceive possible changes also support hypothesis No. 2 that communication methods used in marketing operations directed for organizational learning supports innovations.

Table 5. Communication methods functions in breakthrough in products, technology, method seeking

Communication methods functions	strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree	strongly agree and agree
Knowledge of ways of perception of changes in organization's environment and inside the organization	0%	7%	23%	55%	15%	70%
Greater tendency of people to perceive possible changes	0%	5%	13%	62%	20%	82%
Engagement of imagination, which enables detachment from previous ways of thinking about products, services, production and customer services process, economic situation.	0%	0%	20%	42%	38%	80%
Knowledge of different opinions about possible changes	0%	0%	12%	55%	33%	88%
Enrichment of general knowledge of workers	0%	2%	17%	43%	38%	81%
Denial of previous ways of the perception of reality	0%	15%	38%	35%	12%	47%
Perception even the most distant in time changes	0%	5%	45%	40%	10%	50%

Source: own elaboration

Conclusion

Marketing activities directed for organizational learning are an essential part of modern management. Needs of the client are the first element in the long process in which companies create knowledge used in innovative products or services. The accurate recognition of customer needs enables the creation of the product, which will be purchased by customers. The necessity for the customer needs satisfaction enforces companies to seek new solutions in products or technology. Then managers have two ways: breakthrough seeking or competitors' observation. All these

operations require advanced communication and especially adequate use of communication methods, which leads to the release of peoples' creativity.

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