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Nature Of Information Shared And Communication Methods Used In Small Manufacturing Firms

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ABSTRACT

Information sharing and gathering is need of the hour as business success and failure depends upon the nature, content and quality of information shared and communicated. Information sharing as a whole ensures numerous benefits in the form of increasing market share, competitive ability, customer satisfaction & retention and effective promotion and distribution of products & services. The present empirical study examines the nature of information shared and communication methods used in 44 small manufacturing firms operating in district Udhampur of J&K State. The research framework was examined by empirical analysis of primary data collected. The data was further analysed with the assistance of ranking tables. The results of ranking tables revealed that firms frequently shares information regarding markets & innovations with their wholesalers and retailers, face-to-face and telephonic communication is preferred in small manufacturing units and partners distinguishes facts from opinions on the basis of information shared and collected.

Keywords : Information sharing, Communication, Small Manufacturing Firms

INTRODUCTION

Information is considered as life blood of business now-a-days. If a business receives proper information and further appropriately analyses and interprets it then only a business can ensure its success in the modern era. Information sharing and communication acknowledges the true disclosure of facts and figures regarding business operations and its position comparative to its competitors. Increasing level of information sharing & communication in a channel network provides rapid access to the required information, more sensitivity towards the needs of the customers and improves operational efficiency resulting in short development time (Dyer, 1996), enhanced design quality (Takeishi, 2001), reduction in uncertainty (Daft & Lengel, 1986), improvement in development performance & delivery schedule compliance (Brown & Eisenhardt, 1995). Information sharing enhances operational efficiency and refers to cost control in performing business activities. It acts as a competitive tool (Eccles & Pyburn, and Beamon, 1999). Operational efficiency with the aid of information sharing focuses on distribution initiatives, enhanced transactional profitability, achievement in company goals & strategies, timely availability of information for ensuring market flexibility (Lee & Whang, 1998). It also improves competencies in specific areas of supply chain including cost, delivery, speed, quality & flexibility and ability to provide a differentiated customer service at a lowest possible cost (Fawcett & Clinton, 1996).

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature regarding information sharing and communication, has been overwhelmingly framed along efficiency criteria and its benefits (Gal-Or & Ghose, 2005). Li & Ye (1999) included logistics coordination & organisational relationship linkages, incentive alignment, collaborative performance systems, process improvements by imparting operational efficiency. A firm can inculcate operational efficiency in performing business activities with the help of proper information sharing and communication (Medori & Steeple, 2000) resulting in reduced cost, delivery speed & reliability, quality & flexibility, overall efficiency and ability to provide & differentiated customer services. Past studies report positive relationships between the level of supply chain information sharing on collaborative performance at market place (Cousins & Menguc, 2006 and Kim et al., 2006). The nature of information exchange encompasses diverse areas such as product, cus-

tomers, supplier, manufacturing procedure, transportation, inventory, competitive, sales & markets etc. The paper focuses on nature of information shared and communication methods used in 44 small manufacturing firms of district Udhampur, J&K State.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research methodology comprises area of research, nature of data/information (Primary or secondary), questionnaire/schedule, research tools applied etc. The research methodology adopted proceeds as follows:

The primary data for the study were collected from 44 functional manufacturing SSIs registered under District Industries Centre (DIC), Udhampur of J&K State sub-divided into ten lines of operation comprising cement (8), pesticide (3), steel (3), battery/lead/alloy (5), menthol (2), guns (2), conduit pipes (2), gates/grills/varnish (5), maize/atta/dal mills (3) and miscellaneous (11). Census method was used to elicit response from owners/managers of the SSIs. Information was collected by administering self developed questionnaire prepared after consulting experts and extensive review of literature. Items in the questionnaire were in descriptive form, ranking, dichotomous, open ended and five-point Likert scale. The data collected was further analysed with the help of SPSS (Version 16.00) for purification, checking validity and reliability. Ranking tables were used to elicit meaningful responses from the data.

DATA ANALYSIS AND MAJOR FINDINGS

Table 1.1 shows unit-wise mean rank of information relating to markets, innovations, products and prices shared by managers of small manufacturing firms with down stream channel partners. The ranking position to all the four variables is same among all the small manufacturing firms. "Information regarding markets" is ranked highest (one) by all the firms except for cement, guns and gates/grills/varnish/paint. Information "Related to innovations" ranked second, information "Regarding prices" as rank three and information "Regarding products" as rank four (lowest) by all managers. On the whole, the table reveals that firms frequently shares information regarding markets & innovations with their wholesalers and retailers. Information concerning prices and products is moderately shared by managers with respective down ward channel members.

Table 1.2 notifies unit- wise ranking of different communication methods used by managers of small manufacturing firms. The different communication methods identified are "Face-to-face", "Telephone", "Mail/Courier", "Fax" and E-mail/Internet. Face-to-face communication is ranked one followed by telephone and mail/courier. Fax and internet received low response due to cost & low computer literacy among managers. Unit wise analysis portrayed that cement, pesticides/insecticides, conduit pipes, guns, steel, gates/grill/varnish/paint and atta/maize/dal mills units depends more on face-to-face communication, though battery/lead/alloy, menthol and 11 miscellaneous units uses more of telephonic medium for information sharing and communication. The table clearly connotes that small manufacturing firms uses less of internet/e-mails, fax and mail courier.

Table 1.3 utters mean rank with regard to the content of oral communication by the managers of SSIs. The contents enticed are "Partners summarises facts", "Partners articulates clearly", "Partners distinguish facts from opinion" and "Partner understands suggestions". The mean ranks in descending order are I (Partners distinguish facts from opinion), II (Partners summarises facts), III (Partners articulates clearly) and IV (Partners understands suggestions). Its good to note down that partner distinguishes facts from opinion as facts can be sorted on the basis of information collected and disseminated rather than depending upon personal opinions which all the times doesn't proves good.

CONCLUSION

Information means to inform someone or to receive information from someone. Information sharing results in costs controls, enhancement in profitability, proper inventory management, reduces uncertainty and behaviours, improves market share, enhances product promotion and distribution, assists in building trust, cooperation and collaboration, analyses customers response towards product performance and features, makes comparative analysis with competitors and others. Information sharing in small manufacturing firms aids in all the above mentioned facts. Small manufacturing firms prefer more of face-to-face communication rather than e-mail, internet and further small manufacturing units firms frequently shares information regarding markets & innovations with their wholesalers and retailers. Information concerning prices and products is moderately shared by managers with downstream members (wholesalers, retailers, agents, dealers, customers, competitors). Even managers of these firms distinguishes facts from opinions and come up with rational decision making rather than on judgment, experience, exposure. However, the findings of the study is limited to small scale industries of district Udhampur of J&K State, so results drawn cannot be generalized for medium or large scale industries functioning in other parts of country having dissimilar business environment. Future research can be conducted on the basis of inter-firm communication in small and large scale industries operating in numerous parts of the country.

Table 1.1: Unit-wise Ranking of Nature of Information Shared by Firms with Suppliers

Units/Nature of Information	Regarding markets	Related to innovations	Regarding products	Regarding prices
Cement	1.8 (II)	2.8 (III)	3.6 (IV)	1.6 (I)
Battery/Lead/Alloy	1.4 (I)	2.2 (II)	3 (III)	3.4 (IV)
Pesticides/Insecticides	1.6 (I)	3 (IV)	2.3 (II)	3 (III)
Conduit pipes	1 (I)	3 (III)	4 (IV)	2 (II)
Menthol	2 (I)	2 (II)	2 (III)	4 (IV)
Guns	4 (IV)	1 (I)	2.5 (III)	1.5 (II)
Steel	1 (I)	3 (III)	3.3 (IV)	2.6 (II)
Gates/Grills/Varnish/Paint	2.2 (II)	1.8 (I)	2.8 (III)	3.2 (IV)
Atta/Maize/Dal mills	1.3 (I)	3 (III)	3.6 (IV)	2 (II)
Others (Miscellaneous)	2 (I)	2.7 (III)	2.90 (IV)	2.3 (II)
Mean & Rank	1.83 (I)	2.45 (II)	3.00 (IV)	2.56 (III)

Note: Where 1 denotes "highest rank" and 4 denotes "lowest rank"

Table 1.2: Unit-wise Ranking of Communication Methods Used by Small Manufacturing Firms

Units/Communication Methods	Face-to-face	Telephone	Mail/Courier	Fax	E-mail/Internet
Cement	1.12 (I)	1.87 (II)	3.5 (III)	4.28 (V)	4.14 (IV)
Battery/Lead/Alloy	1.6 (II)	1.4 (I)	3.5 (III)	4 (IV)	4.5 (V)
Pesticides/Insecticides	1.6 (I)	1.6 (II)	3.5 (IV)	3 (III)	5 (V)
Conduit pipes	1.5 (I)	1.5 (II)	3 (III)	4 (IV)	5 (V)
Menthol	3.5 (IV)	1 (I)	3 (II)	4.5 (V)	3 (III)
Guns	1 (I)	2 (II)	4 (IV)	5 (V)	3 (III)
Steel	1.3 (I)	1.6 (II)	3.6 (III)	3.6 (IV)	4.6 (V)
Gates/Grills/Varnish/Paint	1.2 (I)	1.8 (II)	4 (IV)	4.3 (V)	3.6 (III)
Atta/Maize/Dal mills	1 (I)	2 (II)	5 (V)	4 (IV)	3 (III)
Others (Miscellaneous)	1.9 (II)	1.6 (I)	3.2 (IV)	4 (V)	3 (III)
Mean & Rank	1.57 (I)	1.63 (II)	3.63 (III)	4.06 (V)	3.88 (IV)

Note: Where 1 denotes "highest rank" and 5 denotes "lowest rank"

Table 1.3: Unit-wise Ranking of Oral Communication Modes Used By Managers of Small Manufacturing Firms

Units/Standards	Partners summarizes facts	Partners articulates clearly	Partners distinguish facts from opinion	Partners understands suggestions
Cement	1.8 (II)	3 (III)	1.1 (I)	3.8 (IV)
Battery/Lead/Alloy	2 (II)	3 (III)	1 (I)	4 (IV)
Pesticides/Insecticides	1.6 (II)	3 (III)	1.3 (I)	4 (IV)
Conduit pipes	2 (II)	3 (III)	1 (I)	4 (IV)
Menthol	2 (II)	3 (III)	1 (I)	4 (IV)
Guns	2 (II)	2.5 (III)	1 (I)	2.5 (IV)
Steel	2 (II)	3 (III)	1 (I)	4 (IV)
Gates/Grills/Varnish/Paint	2 (II)	3 (III)	1 (I)	4 (IV)
Atta/Maize/Dal mills	1.6 (II)	3.3 (III)	1.3 (I)	3.6 (IV)
Others (Miscellaneous)	1.6 (I)	3.0 (III)	1.7 (II)	3.5 (IV)
Mean & Rank	1.88 (II)	2.99 (III)	1.15 (I)	3.75 (IV)

Note: Where 1 denotes "highest rank" and 4 denotes "lowest rank"

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