

The Nature of Transparency in Internal CEO Communication and its Role for Trust towards Employers

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Abstract

Transparency in internal CEO communication will become even more important in the future. Our study from 2019 showed this. But, what does transparency exactly mean for the responsible persons in employee communication and HR? And, what role does it play for gaining trust from employees? In the present study we examined these research questions. We based our examination on literature to transparency in leadership and its implications on trust towards employers. This theoretical foundation was used to establish an interview guide for conducting 10 semi-structured expert-interviews each with one person responsible for employee communication and one for HR. These experts each work in one of the 120 largest companies in Switzerland concerning number of employees. The interview transcripts were subjected to a qualitative content analysis. Besides the deductive orientation at the literature we let space in the interviews for inductive statements to the understanding of transparency. The consolidating analysis enabled us, among others, to establish the three main aspects of transparency: Consistency and clarity; authenticity and sincerity; interaction and dialogue. These insights and those to the connection of transparency to trust were used to do additionally a survey among the 120 largest companies in Switzerland. 41 of them participated. Although we aimed for a higher participation, the results (descriptive statistics) show tendencies which aspects, and parts of them are more important and which are less important concerning transparency and for supporting trust.

Keywords: Internal CEO communication, employee communication, transparency, trust, large companies