

Types and Channels of Internal Communication at Nanumba North Municipal Education Directorate, Bimbilla

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Abstract

Information dissemination in educational establishments is crucial and contribute largely for the sustenance of such organisations. The study interrogated the types and channels of communication at the Nanumba North Municipal Education Office. The study is a qualitative case study that sampled five personnel at the office for the study. Media Richness theory was adopted to examine the various issues that came up in the study. The study found that vertical, horizontal and diagonal communication are the official types of communication at the office. The study also showed that grapevine is also a form of informal communication at the Education Office. The study finally found that newsletters, bulletin boards, face-to-face, phone calls and sms are the channels of communication at the Education Office.

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Information transmission is something that occurs in organisations all over the world. Organisations in their day-to-day activities transfer and receive information in order to remain relevant and maximize productivity. Communication as an integral part of management is “the central means by which individual activity is coordinated to devise, disseminate, and pursue organizational goals” (Gardner, et al. 2001, p. 7). Communication is one of those everyday activities that are intertwined with all of human life so completely that we sometimes overlook its pervasiveness, importance and complexity (Littlejohn & Foss, 2005). In most educational organisations, communication flows from management to the employees and the vice-versa. Effective communication therefore, is vital as it enables organizations relate well with its internal and external publics.

Nanumba North Municipal Education Directorate is the supervisory authority of education at the Nanumba North municipality. It monitors and evaluates educational activities at both the basic and secondary levels. At the Municipal Education office, the main tool that is employed by both management and staff to facilitate its operations is communication.

The Municipality has thirty-six public Junior High Schools, ninety-eight public primary schools, two well established kindergarten and two Senior High schools. The Bimbilla Senior High School is the only public Senior High School in the Municipality. The Education Directorate requires the most appropriate channels of communication to be able to carry out its duties diligently.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Every organization depends on communication to achieve its goals and objectives (Brown, 1990). The Nanumba North municipal Education Directorate, like other organisations, uses communication as a means to achieve its ends. The municipal Education office where this research is being conducted has both the management and the other staff who need effective communication to carry out their day-to-day activities and other duties. Even though, there seem to be a public relations officer, he seems not to be a trained practitioner. The motivation for this research is to interrogate the types and channels of internal communication at the Education office.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To examine the types of communication at the Nanumba North Municipal Education Office.
2. To identify internal communication channels used at the Nanumba North Municipal Education office.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What are the types of communication used at the Nanumba North Municipal Education Office?
2. What are the channels internal communication at the Nanumba North Municipal Education office?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Media Richness Theory (Daft & Lengel, 1986)

The study adopted the Media Richness theory that was propounded by R.L. Daft and R.H. Lengel in 1986. The theory is based on two assumptions. The first assumption is that organizations process information to reduce uncertainty and equivocality (Daft & Lengel, 1986). In practice, when flow of information increases, uncertainty and equivocality decrease.

The Second assumption is that the effectiveness of certain communication channels vary from organization to organisation. For instance, WhatsApp messages as a medium of communication could be economical,

preferred and better in one institution whereas in another institution, the medium could be less preferred or effective. The need for media to be rated from high to low became urgent thereby leading to the creation of the following order; face-to-face, telephone, written, addressed documents and unaddressed documents (Daft and Lengel, 1986). They argued therefore that face-to-face is the richest medium of communication while unaddressed documents, the lowest medium.

Communication

“Perfect or clear message exchange between managers and employees in an organisation, is an indication of good Communication. In order for the information to be transmitted successfully to another individual, the receiver, needs to know which communication channel is good in the contemporary era (Blundel, 2004, 2-4).” In organizational communication, one significant element that goes through is the compelling effects of how information flow within the organisation – the effect could trigger a response, fulfilment of need or cement an existing relationship. In any organization where there is no communication, then, there is no relationship and where there is no relationship, the organization dies abruptly. Communication therefore, is covertly and overtly the life-blood of any organization.

Internal Communication

The kind of communication that takes place within an organization is referred to as internal communication. Ana, Dejan and Krishnamurthy (2012) say internal communication could be defined as a management function within an organisation. That is to say, in managing any organisation, especially, an educational organisation, one of the key management functions of such an organisation is to ensure prudent deployment of information within the organizational set up. Harrison (1995) also opines that although the practice of internal public relations is sometimes seen as rather routine in comparison to dealing with external audiences. Good internal communications are vital as a requirement for the success of an organisation’s overall communications. Internal communication is therefore, crucial in educational institutions because employees expect improvement but not exploitation. The Nanumba North Municipal Education Directorate like many other organisations, has its hierarchy and on top of the pyramid is management. This suggests that communication flow is downward in the form of instructions and information and upward in the form of suggestions or feedback to top management. The Ministry of Education under whose jurisdiction the Nanumba North Municipal Education Directorate operates, exists to carry out the Government's vision of improving quality education delivery to accelerate the nation's socio economic development through training and research.

Weick (1995) posits that in an organization, each working group has its own communication system; people who work in the same office communicate among themselves. Groups communicate with groups both at the same level and across the levels.

Internal Communication Types

In organisations, communication often flows in a vertical, horizontal or lateral manner. It could also take the form of grapevine which occurs informally from all directions in an organization. There is both internal and external communication in organisations (Lussier, 1996).

Vertical Communication

This is the kind of communication that allows information to move both upward and downward in the chain of communication in an organization. It is an official way of disseminating information in an organization. Lussier (1996) asserted that status and power are not equal among participants in vertical communication and that information flows downward in the form of instructions from a superior officer to a subordinate and upward in the form of feedback from a subordinate to a superior officer. Lunenburg (2010) argued that traditional views of the communication process in school organizations have been dominated by downward communication flows. The assertion of Lunenburg (2010) may not always be the case because in schools, students report abuses, their wants and in some instances their views about happenings in and around them. Teachers equally, give reports to their heads and these basically constitutes upward communication. Downward communication flows from people who are at high levels of management to those at lower levels in the company. Canary (2011), identified five characteristic features of upward communication as follows; 1. Problems and exceptions 2. Suggestions for improvement 3. Performance reports 4. Complaints and disputes 5. Financial and accounting information.

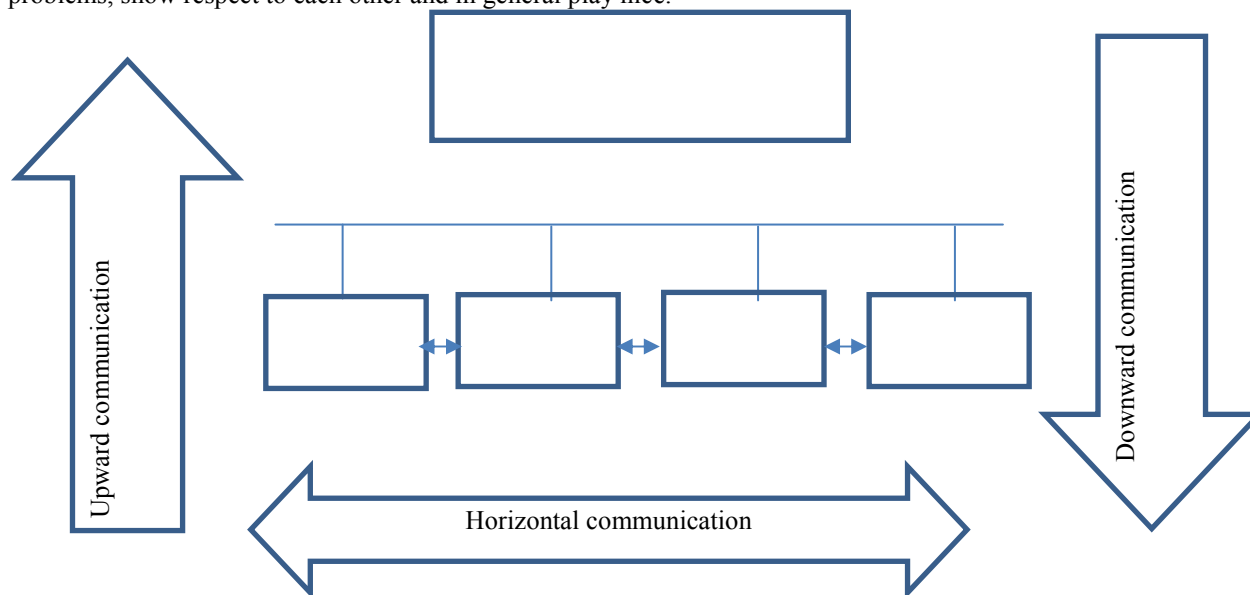
Downward Communication

Communication from top management to the subordinate officers could be described as downward communication. Canary (2011) postulates five general purposes of downward communication: 1. Implementation of goals, strategies, and objectives of the organisation. 2. Communication of Job instructions and rationale of the organisation. 3. Communication of Messages that describes the Procedures and practices 4. Performance feedback. Departmental movement reports and performance evaluations. 5. Socialization in terms of adopting the organization’s culture.

Horizontal communication

This is the flow of information between officers who are of comparable status in an organization. The information transmission could be formal or informal and it is often used for coordination of activities within the

organization. Lussier (1996) concludes that workers in organisations are expected to share information, identify problems, show respect to each other and in general play nice.



(Lunenburg, 2010)

Grapevine

Pandey, Pandey and Dutte (2016) explain Grapevine communication as unstructured and Informal network formed on social relationship rather than organizational charts or job descriptions. That is the informal way by which information flow in an organization. Grapevine is usually affected through rumors and spreads faster than even the official information. It may occur when management hides information from employees and when the grapevine is fed with perceived incorrect rumors, usually turn to be corrected (Lussier, 1996).

Municipal Director:

She/He is the chief executive officer of the Education Directorate at the Municipal level. She represents the directorate and attends meetings for and on behalf the Education Directorate.

Front Line Directors:

They are the Deputy Director in charge of Finance and Administration, Assistant Director in charge of Supervision, Assistant Director in charge of Planning and Assistant Director in charge of Human Resources. They constitute the decision-making body of the directorate and ensure the day-to-day administration of the directorate.

Circuit Supervisors:

These are personnel of the outfit who are responsible for the day-to-day administration of the circuits in the Municipality. They report to the front line director and in some instances to the director on matters affecting their circuits. They serve as intermediaries between the Municipal Office and their Circuits.

Finance office:

The finance office comprises of the finance officer, budget officer, accountant and all the employees who work in the finance office.

Public Relations Officer:

The office has only one PR officer who performs both the managerial and the technician roles respectively.

METHODOLOGY

Qualitative Research

Kothari (2004) explains qualitative research as that type that “concerns itself with qualitative phenomenon. That is; a phenomena relating to or involving quality or kind (p. 16).” Thus; “Qualitative approach to research is concerned with subjective assessment of attitudes, opinions and behaviour. Research in such a situation is a function of researcher’s insights and impressions. Such an approach to research generates results either in non-quantitative form or in the form which are not subjected to rigorous quantitative analysis (p.18).” In this study, the researchers though subjectively assessed the phenomenon under investigation using the responses of the research participants. It stands to reason that even though there is some subjectivity in qualitative research, such subjective interpretation of data must fall within the auspices of the responses of the research.

Yin (1989) also opines that qualitative research affords social scientists the opportunity to study a given phenomenon because it gives room for flexibility and the attainment of a deeper meaning of the phenomenon. Here, the researcher understands every nook and cranny of the issue under investigation because he/she can go

beyond the surface meaning embedded in the data.

The qualitative approach was used for this research so as for the researcher to go beyond the bare facts to the details. In all five members of the directorate were purposively selected and interviewed. The selection of the interviewees was not meant to generalize the issues but to find out how effective communication could be enhanced at the education office. The case study method was used because it excels in bringing us to an understanding of complex issue or object and can extend experience or add strength to what is already known through previous research (Yin, 1984, p.23).

Design

In Case Studies, cases are bounded by time and activity, and researchers collect detailed information using a variety of data collection procedures over a sustained period of time (Yin, 1999). This study looks at internal communication at the Nanumba North Municipal Education Office and the activities of the office are bounded by both time and space that is why the study adopted case study as the design.

Purposive Sampling Technique

Kothari (2004), aptly defines purposive sampling as “Deliberate or non-probability sampling. This sampling method involves purposive or deliberate selection of particular units of the universe for constituting a sample which represents the universe (P. 28).” The target sample for this study are drawn from only the education office and that justifies the purposive sampling technique.

Sample size

A large sample of fifteen was the target but only five members of the Education Office was used for the research because not all members were available and not all those who were available were ready to be interviewed.

Data Collection Instrument

Interviews:

Rapley (2004) argued that interviews are social encounters where the interlocutors collaborate in the provision of information about a given phenomenon. An interview guide was used in collecting the data. The interview guide comprised both open-ended and close-ended items which enable the researcher to gather his data.

Findings

The structure of an organization should provide for communication in three distinct directions: downward, upward, and horizontal (Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2008, cited in Lunenburg, 2010)

Vertical communication (Upward and Downward Communication)

The respondents indicated that there was both upward and downward communication at the Nanumba North Municipal Education office. At the Municipal office, downward communication occur when Superior officers give instructions to subordinates using the organizational structure. R1 stated,

When we the senior officers want something to be done, we give instructions to those working under us. Even director gives information to us like that. For example, he can ask you to bring your reports when you organise workshops and others.

Subordinates officers also engage in upward communication by responding to queries and providing feedback. For instance, R2 stated,

When we receive information from head teachers/headmasters about enrollment and request for teaching/learning materials, we forward the information to the top. When management is satisfied, then they instruct us what to do. So the information will go up and come down.

The study reveal that upward and downward communication at the Nanumba North Municipal office sync with the second principle of Canary (2011). Which states that downward communication occurs in the issuance of instructions. Vertical communication which comprises both upward and downward communication as explained earlier in this study is the most appropriate formal means of communication in a formal organisation and the study showed that at the Municipal Education Office, vertical communication is maximally utilized.

Horizontal Communication

The study indicated that between staff who were of equal status, the communication that existed was sharing of ideas on how to achieve organizational goals and objectives. This syncs with the position of Lunenburg (2010) when he argued that people of similar ranks in an organisation communicate laterally along the line. Staff at the Municipal Education office, who are of comparative status communicate within their folk in a non - threatening environment. The communication basically is for information sharing. As R4 stated,

As front line directors, we talk to each as and when we need to do so. For example, I am in charge of supervision so when the director in charge of human resource, wants to post newly trained teachers or transfer teachers, we consult each other.

This supports what Canary (2011) averred when he indicated that in horizontal communication no, superior/subordinate relationship exists; it's strictly a case of two people with roughly equal amounts of power and prestige.

Diagonal Communication

The study found that staff communicate across the established lines of duty at the Municipal Office. For instance,

the front line directors communicate directly with other staff who do not work directly under their purview and the vice-versa. R3 stated,

As a circuit supervisor, I sometimes contact the accountant to know when those whose salaries have been embargoed and those whose salaries have been upgraded. Also, the store keeper sometimes give us information about materials to be sent to schools.

Grapevine

The study found that staff sometimes get information from rumours which is typically informal. This supports Pandey, Pandey and Dutte (2016) when they observed that grapevine occurs in organisations through the informal and unsanctioned information network. R3 indicated,

At the office, we sometimes get information about issues before the official once come. Sometimes, the information comes from our colleagues or from other senior officers. Other times when we need information badly, we try to get it from other sources.

Below is a diagram developed to illustrate the types of communication at the Nanumba North Municipal Education Office.

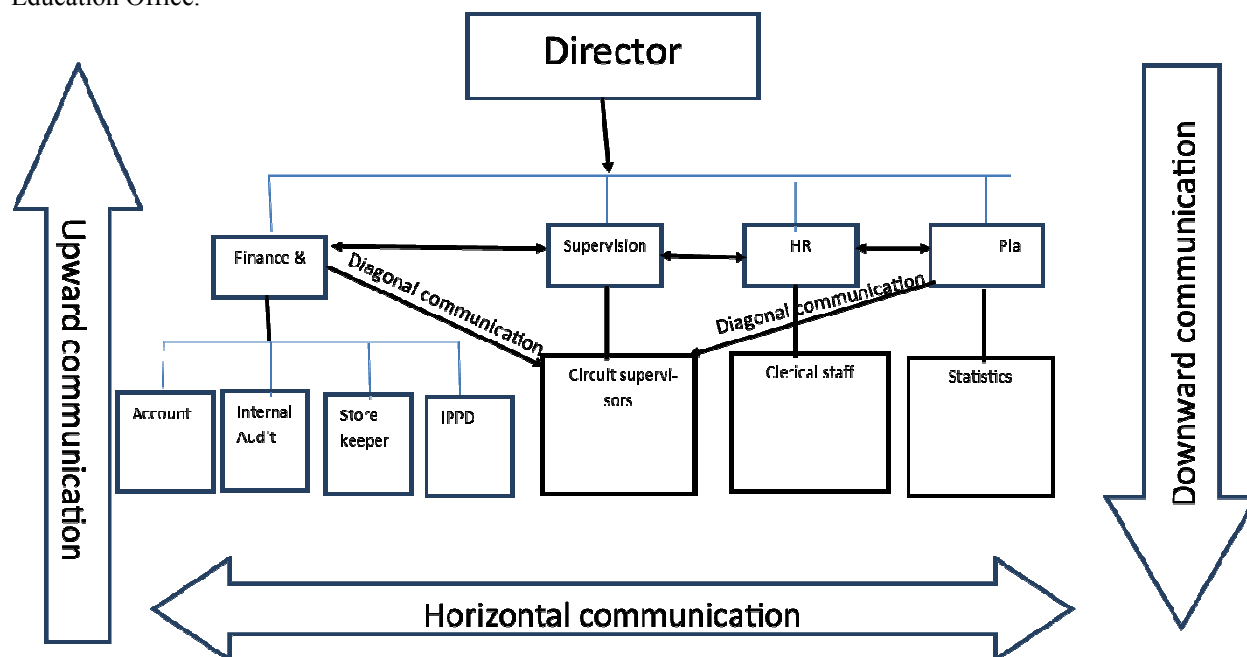


Fig. 1 Upward, Downward, Horizontal and Diagonal Communication Channels of communication at the Nanumba North Municipal Education Office

When individuals know the channels needed for effective communication at work place, it leads to efficient usage and high productivity in an organisation. (Gerson, 2007). Respondents stated that the available channels of communication at the Municipal office included; bulletin boards, memoirs, phone calls, face-to-face, letter heads and sms. For example, R2 stated,

As for this office, we pass information to each other by making calls, talking to each other straight in the office. We also, send text messages to each other, make phone calls and many others.... Other medium that we use include sms, bulletin boards, memoirs, newsletters and others. Some of us use this means to send information because we don't have WhatsApp phones and it is cheaper sending just a text message.

The revelation about the medium of communication above syncs with David, (1998) when he recommend that organizational communication culture must have several channels. Several channels are employed at the Municipal office for effective communication. Those once that are used more are face-to-face and phone calls. This supports the position of Daft and Langel (1986) when they contended that some media channels are more preferred in some organisations than others. This is typical of the Nanumba North Municipality where the preferred channels of communication are face-to-face and phone calls. It was also revealed that modern channels of communication such as emails, Facebook, twitter and Instagram are not utilized at the Municipal Education Office.

Summary of Deductions and Findings

The research revealed that the front line directors and the director as defined in this study communicate with the other staff at the Municipal Education Office using upward and downward communication. Other forms of communication such as horizontal and grapevine are used in some situations for communication. The commonest type of communication used by the director and the front line directors is the downward

communication.

The study showed that the Channels of Communication are newsletters, bulletin boards, memoirs, phone calls, face-to-face and sms which according to them saved a lot of time and cost. The study also indicated that WhatsApp is occasionally used as a channel for some few personnel at the office to maximize productivity. The study finally showed that even though we are in the era of technology, new media such as Facebook, WhatsApp, emails and instagram are not used as channels.

Employees outlined delays in feedback and dissemination of some vital information in the office that leads to grapevine. The delays as they indicated are as a result of the use of the letterheads and memoirs which are too bureaucratic and advocated for the use of the new media.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to interrogate the types and channels of communication that take place between employees at the Nanumba North Municipal Education Office. The study conclude that the types of communication at the Nanumba North Municipal Education Office are; vertical, horizontal, diagonal and grapevine. The study also concludes that face to face, phone calls, sms, memoirs, letterheads and bulletin boards are channels of communication at the office. The use of newsletters and memoirs lead to bureaucracy which is responsible for the presence of grapevine at the Education Office.

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