

CONSTRAINTS MILITATING AGAINST ORGANISATIONAL COMMUNICATION IN A MULTI-CAMPUS UNIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT

Despite the important roles communication plays in the development of every institution, communication in the University of Education, Winneba (UEW) is perceived as being poor resulting in a gulf in information flow and delay or distortion, noticeable on the composite/satellite campuses. This situation could have effect on employees' motivation, morale and work performance. This study examined the challenges militating against organizational communication in UEW, a multi-campus University. Multistage sampling technique was used to select a sample of 313 staff using Krejcie and Morgan Table from a population of 1,739. Data was collected using questionnaires and interviews. Descriptive and inferential statistics in the form of percentages, means, factor analysis and chi-square were used to analyse the data. The results revealed a good perception of the communication in the University with five point likert scale resulting to a grand mean value of 3.86, though bureaucracy and red-tape were pervasive. The most serious constraints militating against communication flow in the University were inexperience of some staff, inadequate qualified human resource, distance to offices/ laboratories, unclear organisational structure leading to role conflict, lack of supervision, and lack of communication skills among others. For a University to have good organisational communication and effective administrative performance, the bottlenecks hindering communication performance must be done away with. This research revealed a tall list of communication challenges in UEW which were classified into four main constraints (human, systems, administrative and structural). Appropriate recommendations including the need to communicate effectively to motivate staff put up their best and avoid misinterpretation and misunderstanding, ensure speed in information flow and feedback and adopting more than one means of communication to reach recipients were made to management of UEW.

Key words: Constraints, Multi-Campus University, Organisaional Communication, Staff

INTRODUCTION

Paradoxically, effective communication flow takes place to enhance administrative performance between staff members and management of any work setting and indeed among humans. According to Aderetiet al. (2006), it is when data have been put into a meaningful and useful context that one can say communication has taken place with another and a decision is made. Communication allows organizations to exploit the value that information has for their proper functioning, effective and efficient performance, competitiveness and continued success. Communication in every organization is, therefore, a critical resource for performance. Samuel (2001) indicated that information on the other hand is data for decision-making collected as a resource and passed on as acquired and used in order to make an informed decision. Consequently, accessing communication is implicit across organisations, while disseminating information is explicit to staff. Cramton (2001) indicated that management of knowledge resources for knowledge workers in different locations is often more difficult than management of centralized knowledge workers. This implies that communication could constitute a great asset to organizations if the appropriate quantity and quality of information obtained is seriously considered. Shoveller (1987) posited several reasons for distortion in organizational communication resulting in communication dissatisfaction which includes: individuals failing to accept the responsibility to communicate and the lack of interest on the part of the receiver as well as non-convergent in meaning of what are being communicated. For instance, in some organizations with dispersed centers or branches, members often face difficulty or inability to create and maintain mutual knowledge and understanding about work-related issues. This may thus cause misunderstanding, distrust or even frustration among staff of the organisation.

In a typical multi-campus institution, its mission drives the policies, practices, services, and organisational structure at each campus. Holland and Sullivan (2005) indicated that a multi-campus institution most often has a complex and challenging administrative perspective. Campuses that are part of a large University system generally have diverse student populations, including those from senior secondary schools, moving through a four-year program, or mature students who are much older and employed. In addition, individual campuses and their schools/faculties, typically develop business processes at different times using a variety of systems. For instance, different tuition and fee, academic year calendars, human resource policies and communication issues vary too. These differences could result in a large diverse constituency that takes into consideration uniformity in communication and general implementation of activities. Yingxian-Zou (2011) in a related study, pointed out the disadvantages of multi-campus University in China to include: less exchange between teachers and students, the time wasted on the way for teachers, the additional traffic costs for the universities and the environmental pollution caused by additional traffic caused among campuses.

The role of communication in modern organisations, therefore, emphasizes its importance in human interaction, of which this research focuses that true communication is difficult to achieve since the communication process faces numerous potential obstacles (Appelbaum et al., 2000) and may lead to "confusion or distortion", "misunderstanding or different interpretations". Effective communication in an organisation should involve free transfer of information from the executive to subordinate and the vice versa. However, as organisation becomes bigger and more complex, communication also becomes more difficult

necessitating the need for quality institutional communication (Kalla, 2005). Barth (2003) added that the subject under review is the lubricant that keeps the machinery of bureaucratic organisations functioning; it is the means through which roles are identified and assigned; and, serves as the life-blood of an organisation.

Statement of Problem

The multi-campus nature of UEW presupposes that regular, prompt and effective communication within and between staff of the University could support the realization of her *mission* (to train competent professional teachers for all levels of education as well as conduct research, disseminate knowledge and contribute to educational policy and development) and *vision* (to be an internationally reputable institution for teacher education and research). The result of this encourages standardization and effective processes in delivery, resulting in cost reduction and quality promotion. Apart from this, the University tends to utilize other alternative channels of information flow, allowing for more open communication between individuals and group members in the University. Despite the important roles communication plays in the development of every institution, communication in UEW is perceived as being poor resulting in a gulf in information flow and delay or distortion, noticeable on the composite/satellite campuses. One major setback as a result of this is that the University could easily lose sight of its mandate. This situation sometimes creates myriads of communication arc, for instance between the management (the sender) and staff (the receiver) and the vice versa. These communication challenges could have adverse effect on administrative performance in terms of causing frustration and erode good-will. It is against this backdrop that this study sought to find answers to the communication challenges in UEW.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Barriers to Communication

Bird (2002) discusses three communication-related barriers to ethical behavior in business organizations. These barriers were summarized briefly in the following terms:

- Moral silence, which means failing to speak up about issues that are known to be wrong;
- Moral deafness, meaning a failure to hear or attend to moral concerns raised by others; and
- Moral blindness, which is the failure to recognize the moral implications of actions.

The quality and effectiveness of communication flowing through any channel therefore could depend ultimately on the communicative practices adopted by users.

‘Many people in business fail to speak up about their moral convictions. They fail to do so in a number of different ways. As a result, many of the ethical issues and concerns facing business are not addressed as fully, as clearly, and as well as they would be if people voiced their concerns. Moral silence is occasional and reinforced by the correlative phenomena of moral blindness and moral deafness as well as the quite contrary practice of giving voice to moralistic concerns’ (Bird, 2002).

Hofstede’s (2001) famous definition of culture highlights the differences that are measured across these dimensions. He treats culture as ‘the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another’. Tayeb (2000a) with other researchers, hold different perspective of culture, as an enduring source of difference in convergence in meaning in communication process debate. It is certainly the case that ‘culture clash’ remains an important barrier to communication, but there are increasing doubts about the continuing relevance of this perspective in the multi-cultural settings of many contemporary organisations (Holden, 2002). According to Luft (2000), research into the communication barriers experienced by deaf employees indicated that organisations need to address a much more complex set of social and cultural factors beyond those directly related to hearing loss.

Shahin and Wright (2004) has challenged parties in the communication process stating that even though managers spend most of their time communicating, one cannot assume that meaningful communication occurs in all exchanges. Once a memorandum, letter, fax, or e-mail has been sent, many are inclined to believe that communication has taken place. Communication does however not occur until information and understanding have passed between the sender and the intended receiver. Okiy (2005) points out poor and inadequate telecommunication facilities; poor level of computer literacy, even within the academic community; poor level of computer facilities; poor level of awareness of internet facilities among policy makers, government officials and the ruling class in general; and minimum involvement of academic institutions in network building as challenges militating against communication.

One major drawback in communication, according to Cramton (2001), in dispersed collaboration is the organisation’s members’ difficulty or inability to create and maintain mutual knowledge and understanding about work-related issues. This situation could cause misunderstanding, distrust or even frustration among staff of the organisation. Communicating information, especially in any decentralized organisation is perceived to suffer from severe communication problems. According to Taylor (2004), barriers to communication in the workplace could include not thinking clearly, not listening intelligently, not selecting appropriate media, poor timing and place of communication, using inappropriate language, not obtaining feedback and if care is not taken could be disastrous, resulting in failure of communication all-together. Fleury (2005) also believed that one may also consciously or unconsciously engage in selective perception or be influenced by fear or jealousy.

Relating to effective decentralised organization, Maznevski and Chudoba (2000) opined matching communication patterns with their on-going tasks and activities. It is therefore important to know that there are benefits or something vital still to be known in managing communication in decentralised locations and virtual organisations (Barth, 2010). According to Chory and Hubbell (2008), hostility statements and interpersonal aggression act like starting rumors about someone and putting down phone calls.

These kinds of negotiations arise from unhealthy communication and it shows how communication is important for organisational success. In addition to this communication barrier that interrupts organisational activities, all commence from limited capacity building to providing required information due to lack of money and time. That is why Morreale et al., (2007) have mentioned the scarcity of the formation of necessary relations between resource and receiver is another obstacle.

Effective communication is one of the most critical goals of organisations but challenges exist and cannot easily be avoided (Spillan et al., 2002). Again, Sperry and Whiteman (2003) also argued in similar direction that, to plan strategic communication, managers must develop a methodology for thinking through and effectively communicating with their superiors, staff, and peers in five components as:

- Outcome: the specific result that an individual wants to achieve
- Context: the organisational importance of the communication
- Messages: the key information that staff need to know
- Tactical reinforcement: tactics or methods used to reinforce the message
- Feedback: the way the message is received and its impact on the individual, team, unit, or organisation.

McDonough et al., (2001) indicated that personal barriers could arise due to an individual's frame of reference or beliefs and values. They are based on one's socioeconomic background and prior experiences and shapes and how the messages are related. Macro barriers in communication, according to Ulmer (1998) include:

- Information overload
- Lack of subject knowledge
- Cultural differences
- Organizational climate
- Number of links

While Micro barriers are:

- Perceptions of sender/receiver
- Message competition
- Project jargon and terminology

Cultural differences could be a great barrier to communication too. Pearce (2002) intimated that it is common to mix up quotations from ancient classics, trying to describe what the 'English' are like by quoting Chaucer and mixing observations made. Holden (2002), however, said it was possible to take a more critical approach to communication practices and the principles that underpin them. Tayeb (2000b) also noted that confining behaviour to a handful of dimensions presents a simplistic and unidimensional picture of reality in organisations. Pearce (2002) outlined an approach and argued that, professional communication in international settings could not be standardised around the practices of a single social or cultural group. Culture jamming according to Klein (2000), suggests that, jamming resulting from a combination of technological advances and an underlying popular resentment against the overpowering commercialism of the leading corporate brands. A more fundamental challenge to culture jamming is demonstrated by the ease with which corporate advertising and branding has been able to succeed in its techniques for its own purposes (Klein, 2000). In some cases, lack of confidence in a person as a result of lack of prior experience and fear of being exposed to external criticism could result in barrier to communication (Ruderstam and Newton, 2001). However, as many authors have commented, the activity of writing is itself a source of learning, as one engages with the subject and begins to think about the ways that information sources are connected (Phillips and Brown, 2000). In that vein, Putnam (2004) advises that when writing to communicate effectively for audience, the writer needs to take into account:

- Apparent cultural differences,
- Unspoken cultural differences, and
- Unconscious cultural differences.

Hofstede (2007) intimated that a culture that takes a collectivist approach to life, would welcome in the cover letter to a report, personal aspect of a relationship such as complementing a recent achievement, whereas this might be seen as unnecessary and distracting in a more individualist culture. Long introduction which illustrates the genesis of the issue to be examined and provides a retrospective analysis or historical overview of the issue is a must, regardless of the wording of the question (Whitley, 2000). A British reader, however, would see this as lack of "convergence" to the point, or even "waffling", engaging in a long and irrelevant discussion until the second page of the essay that concepts expressed are regarded as being really pertinent, and aimed at answering the question (De Vita, 2001).

Bureaucracy in Communication

According to Bozeman (2000), bureaucracy, sometimes termed as "red tape", is the rules, regulations and procedures that remain in force and entail a compliance burden but do not advance the legitimate purposes the rules were intended to serve. Other studies focused on factors that can cause and determine perceptions of red tape (Brewer and Walker, 2006; Pandey and Patrick, 2000). Several other research have dealt with red tape as an independent variable that can influence various organisational issues, including motivation, satisfaction, work alienation, and innovation (DeHart-Davis and Pandey, 2005, Pandey and Patrick, 2000; Scott and Lane, 2000; Brewer and Walker 2006). Government is likely to have higher degrees of perceived red tape in general due to external control, the need for accountability, and the shift to inter organisational governance arrangements for the delivery of public service (Brewer and Walker, 2006). Scott and Lane (2000) have indicated that red tape has been considered as a barrier to improve benefits provided to clients. This study sought to advance the research on organisational communication and to assess

the impact of red tape on communication in the University. The question remains whether the perceptions of red tape really differ according to persons with whom employees communicate; and if so, the kinds of factors that mediate the relationship between communication types and red tape.

METHODOLOGY

This study used survey to ascertain from employees the constraints militating against organisational communication in a multi-campus University, UEW. The survey design was used because it is flexible, efficient and the results are generalisable (McMillan, 2004). The population of study was 1,739 comprised of management members, senior members, senior staff and junior staff from all the four campuses of the University. A sample size of 313 was determined using Krejcie and Morgan Table of 1970. The various campuses were stratified into groups namely Winneba, Kumasi, Mampong and Ajumako from which a simple random sampling was used to select the required respondents.

Systematic stratified sampling procedure was used for the study to ensure that all four campuses and all categories and levels of staff were represented in the study. Sampling size was large enough to meet a valid alternative to a survey (as supported in deVaus (2002) who opined that the smaller the absolute sample size of the relative total population sampled, the greater the margin of error and such errors also decreases for larger sample sizes).

The research instruments employed for the study were combination of questionnaires and interviews. The instruments for data collection were developed with the support of four experts in the area of study. Out of the number of questionnaires administered, 309 questionnaires were received from respondents in all campuses after several follow ups. In all however, 304 respondents answered all the 133 questions which resulted in the Cronbach Alpha of 0.83 valid in content and in measurement.

Data was analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20.0. Descriptive and inferential statistics in the form of percentages, means, factor analysis, cluster analysis, and chi-square were used to analyse data which results were presented in tables. The Kendall Coefficient of Concordance (W) was used to rank constraints to communication in the University. It is a tool that was used to assess agreement among respondents. The researcher also used factor analysis with the Varimax rotation method to categorise the constraints.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Ranking of constraints militating to communication flow

Communication constraints were measured from 30 statements on a five-point Likert scale with the following response categories: 1 = no constraint, 2 = not serious, 3 = somehow serious, 4 = serious and 5 = very serious constraints. The Kendall's coefficient of concordance was used to rank the 30 constraints as reported by the respondents. The overall mean rank showed a value of 0.04 with chi-square value (χ^2) of 389.895 (df = 2) $p < 0.01$.

The results in Table 1 indicated that, lack of suggestion boxes is the least constraint militating against communication with a mean rank of 19.02. Inadequate office spaces, laboratories and poor transportation system were ranked as the second least communication barriers with means of 17.95 each. Bureaucratic procedures has a fair share of 17.19 and was ranked as the third least factor affecting communication in the University. Low staff morale and attitude to work had mean ranks of 17.12 and 16.87 respectively, and were ranked as the 24th and 25th least barriers to communication flow in the University. Other variables such as inadequate motivation, distributed information, personality differences, absence of mentors, among others had mean ranks of between 16.75 and 14.51. four variables indicated in Table 1; Unclear organizational structure and lack of supervision had a mean value of 13.17 each and ranked as the 4th constraints. Distance in the location of offices or laboratories, inadequate qualified human resource and inexperienced staff were ranked the most serious constraints in communication patterns with mean values of 12.98, 12.24 and 12.16 respectively.

In conclusion distance in the location of offices or laboratories, inadequate qualified human resource and inexperienced staff are the most challenging barriers to communication in the University whilst physical communication facilities such as lack of suggestion boxes, inadequate office space and poor transportation systems are the least communication constraints in the University

Table 1: Coefficient of concordance (W) rank of communication constraints.

NO.	CONSTRAINTS	MEAN RANK	POSITION
1	Lack of suggestion boxes	19.02	28
2	Inadequate office space/ laboratories	17.95	27
3	Poor transportation system	17.95	27
4	Bureaucratic procedures	17.19	26
5	Low staff morale	17.12	25
6	Attitude to work	16.87	24
7	Inadequate motivation	16.75	23
8	Inadequate consultations	16.72	22
9	Inadequate/poor equipment	16.42	21
10	Distortion of information	16.38	20
11	Inadequate lighting system	16.31	19
12	No exit interview	16.24	18
13	Personality differences	16.09	17

14	Little grievance procedures	15.96	16
15	Dysfunctional systems	15.64	15
16	Not communicating	15.34	14
17	Geographical location of Campus	15.3	13
18	No open-door policy	15.2	12
19	Ambiguous communication	15.17	11
20	No mentors	14.9	10
21	No meetings/fora	14.74	9
22	Unclear responsibilities	14.71	8
23	Poor room conditions	14.54	7
24	Lack of capacity	14.51	6
25	Lack of communication skills	14.3	5
26	Unclear organisational structure	13.17	4
27	Lack of supervision	13.17	4
28	Distance of offices/laboratories	12.98	3
29	Inadequate qualified staff	12.23	2
30	Inexperienced staff	12.16	1

Kendall's W 0.044 χ^2 389.895 (df = 29) $p < 0.01$. 1 = Highest constraint and 28 = Least constraints

Source: Field Survey, 2012

Factor Analysis on Constraints

Respondents were made to identify 30 factors thought to be militating against organizational communication in the University. From the given factors a factor analysis (Table 2) was conducted to reduce the data for further analysis using the Alpha Factoring method for the extraction. The scaling less than 0.5, were insignificant as communication constraints and were suppressed leaving the scaling equal to or greater than 0.5. These factors were regrouped for further analysis. The rotated factor matrix analysis in Table 2 shows the variables with factor scaling greater than 0.5. The factors classified in Kendall's coefficient of concordance (W) was adopted to rank the classified variables to assess which ones highly militated against organisational communication in the University. The rotated factors were grouped under four major headings as: Human, System, Administrative and Structural constraints.

Human Constraints

Factor 1 from the rotated factor matrix table (4.12) was classified as 'Human Communication Failure' which comprised the following factors: personality differences (0.755), not communicating (0.788), inadequate motivation (0.539), inexperienced staff (0.670), low staff morale (0.669), distortion of information (0.690), no meetings/fora (0.677) and lack of communication skills (0.698). However, Human Communication Failure is ranked fourth according to Kendall's mean rankings. From Table 2 it could be inferred that, Personality centredness of staff was assessed to be a major constraint followed by inadequate consultation. Differences among staff in the University could affect communication, especially when they decide not to communicate. Bird (2002) discussed three communication-related barriers to include ethical behaviour in business organizations as: moral silence (failing to speak up about issues that are known to be wrong), moral deafness (failing to hear or attend to moral concerns raised by others) and moral blindness (failure to recognize the moral implications of actions).

Inadequate motivation and inexperienced staff also militate against communication as shown in Table 2. This finding confirms the study of Johnson (2003) that motivation was given inadequate attention by models on specific individual differences that influence performance and further proposed an expanded model of how individual differences could influence administrative performance in organisations. Low morale among staff, distortion of information, lack of meetings/fora and lack of communication skills among staff affects communication between and among the staff of the institution. Here again lack of confidence in a person as a result of lack of prior experience and fear of being exposed to external criticism could serve as a barrier to communication (Ruderstam and Newton, 2001).

System Constraints

Factor 2 from Table 2 was also classified as 'System Constraints' in communication and values obtained after the analysis were all above 0.5. These variables included: Inadequate/Poor equipment (0.553), Inadequate qualified staff (0.588), Inadequate lighting system (0.572), Unclear organisational structure (0.568), Lack of supervision (0.600) and Unclear responsibilities (0.706). The results indicate that all the constraints were significant since they were all above 0.5, emphasising general consensus of respondent. Okiy (2005) stated that in an academic environment in Nigeria, poor and inadequate telecommunication facilities, poor level of computer literacy, poor level of computer facilities, poor level of awareness of internet facilities among policy makers, government officials and the ruling class in general and minimum involvement of academic institutions in network building, were challenges militating against communication. Similarly, Chisenga (2004) surveyed the use of ICTs in public libraries and listed poor equipment and unqualified staff as some of the factors militating against information, communication and technology development in Africa.

Administrative Constraints

Bureaucratic procedures (0.566), No exit interview (0.527) and Inadequate consultations (0.537) constituted the third factor. Again from Table 2, all figures were above 0.5 and classified as 'Administrative Constraints'. This suggests that in a way, administrative bottlenecks such as bureaucratic procedures, no exit interviews and inadequate consultations militate against

communication and could affect performance in the University. Scott and Pandey (2000) have indicated that red tape has been considered as a barrier to improving benefits provided to clients through communication.

Structural Constraints

Factor 4 is classified as 'Structural Constraints' in Table 4.12 with values significant at 0.5 and above. The factor comprises: distance of offices/laboratories (0.500), inadequate office space/ laboratories (0.555), poor transportation system (0.707) and lack of suggestion boxes (0.592). From the general findings, the four factors mentioned have the tendency of affecting communication performance since they are constraints determined at significant level. In line with Taylor (2004), he opined that barriers to effective communication in the workplace included: staff not thinking clearly before communicating, not listening intelligently, not selecting appropriate media, poor timing and place of communication, using inappropriate language and failing to obtain feedback. He adds that if care is not taken, structural constraints could be disastrous and result in failure of communication all-together. In addition, distance of office and laboratories, inadequate office space and laboratories, poor transportation system and lack of suggestion boxes in the University; all influence the way staff communicate, as they are not of any form of support in the communication performance process. Similarly, Tourish (2010) contends that a message is distorted if it travels a great distance from its sender to the ultimate receiver through the formal organisation hierarchy.

Table: 2 Communication Constraints : Rotated Factor Matrix^a

	Factor Loading/Scaling			
	1	2	3	4
Geographical location of Campus				
Distance of offices/laboratories				.500
Inadequate/poor equipment		.553		
Inadequate qualified staff		.588		
Inadequate lighting system		.572		
Poor room conditions				
Inadequate office space/ laboratories				.555
Poor transportation system				.707
Lack of suggestion boxes				.592
Dysfunctional systems				
Unclear organizational structure		.568		
Lack of supervision		.600		
Unclear responsibilities		.706		
bureaucratic procedures			.566	
Ambiguous communication				
Lack of capacity				
No exit interview			.527	
Little grievance procedures				
No mentors				
No open-door policy				
attitude to work				
Inadequate consultations			.537	
Personality differences	.775			
Not communicating	.788			
Inadequate motivation	.539			
Inexperienced staff	.670			
Low staff morale	.669			
distort of information	.690			
No meetings/for a	.677			
Lack of communication skills	.698			

Extraction Method: Alpha Factoring.

Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.

a. Rotation converged in 12 iterations.

Source: Field Survey, 2012

CONCLUSION

The most serious constraints militating against communication flow in the University are inexperience of some staff, inadequate qualified human resource, distance to offices/ laboratories, unclear organisational structure leading to role conflict, lack of supervision and lack of communication skills among others. For a University to have good organisational communication and effective administrative performance, the bottlenecks hindering communication performance must be done away with. This research revealed a tall list of communication challenges in UEW. These challenges were classified into four main constraints (human, systems, administrative and structural).

With human constraint in the University, individuals and groups were perceived to be the sole cause of challenges at work. It is recommended that such staff are identified and given further training and education in communication, human relations, and appropriate ethical behaviour and supported with the needed motivation. On systems constraint, the use of machines, equipment and other resources (unreliable power supply, poor telephone network and lack of computers) were identified as challenges. It is recommended that priority is given to the provision of appropriate and adequate innovative and durable machines and equipment to ensure effective communication. Administrative constraint was related to bureaucracy as a major constraint to effective communication and information flow in the University. It is again recommended that the administrative structure be examined and the possible causes of delays in information flow removed to ensure effective and timely information dissemination within and without the University system. There is also the need to create awareness among staff through education and training on work ethics so as to make them more effective and efficient in their work. Some structural constraints identified in the study were poor transportation system, lack of suggestion boxes, long distances and lack of adequate space. It is further recommended that management of the University should make provision for the procurement and supply of those items in future budgets.

In brief, superiors in the University need to communicate effectively in order to motivate staff put up their best and avoid misinterpretation and misunderstanding among staff, ensure speedy information flow and feedback and apply more than one means of communication (using the principle of redundancy) for effective information flow among staff.

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