



Organizational Communication of Frontline Staff in a Catholic School

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Abstract. *Learning how to communicate effectively is an essential skill for any career nowadays. Surprisingly, almost all organizations strive day in and out to assist their employees, especially the frontline staff, to learn how to communicate effectively. They even institute coaching or develop training and development programs on how to continuously improve their communication with fellow workers, department heads and clientele. The main objective of this study was to determine the effectiveness of the communication network of Columban College, Inc. in Olongapo City, Philippines. It utilized the descriptive design of research using all the frontline staff as the respondents. The researcher used a survey-questionnaire to generate relevant responses from the respondents, while observations and interviews were conducted to offer supplementary resources. Coordination/ Knowledge sharing, the effectiveness of communication and reliability revealed very strong agreement among the communication dimensions, while strong agreement on communication flow, barriers to effective communication, timeliness and media effectiveness was disclosed. On communicating company news and updates, the communication tools were generally rated as somewhat effective, whereas very effective for communicating information.*

Keywords: *Organizational communication, communication network, communication media, communication dimensions, frontline staff, Catholic school*

INTRODUCTION

Communication plays a significant process in any organization. People in the workplace spend most of their time communicating with one another in meetings, over the phone, through email, etc. Communicating effectively means being able to convey messages across the organization that is accurate and explicable. When communication flows effectively and accurately, the organization will run smoothly (Zimmerman, 2015). However, if there is a disruption in the communication flow or inaccurate information, the organization is likely to face problems or issues relative to its performance.

Communication likewise plays an essential role in increasing the efficiency of employees. Employees need to interact with one another more often to break the ice and feel comfortable in the workplace. Problems arise when information does not flow in its desired form.

Effective communication facilitates the free flow of information among employees and reduces misunderstandings and confusions. Effective communication ensures that everyone is in the same phase (Zimmerman, 2015).

Throughout the interviews of Baltatzis (2008) in Melbourne and Singapore, it became unequivocally clear among companies at this time that face to face interaction was the perceived optimal means of communicating with colleagues. When this was not feasible, it was the conventional tools that were predominantly used - the telephone, teleconferencing, and email.

The result of the study conducted by Villa, Goncalves, & Odong (2017), revealed that “the proper design of internal manuals and procedure guidelines, coupled with formal strategies to foster stakeholder dialogue in organizations increase the perceived performance of humanitarian programs. Similarly, it also divulged the importance of designing effective communication strategies that permit humanitarian organizations to use their communication channels properly and improve operations based on lessons learned and the concerns of stakeholders.

Managers need to give correct information to their employees so they can best perform their jobs. Employees need to understand what their superiors expect out of them. Employees should have the liberty to express their views and opinions, brainstorm ideas on a common platform to arrive at unique solutions which eventually lead to increased efficiency. Effective communication plays an essential role in motivating employees. Managers need to interact with their team members on a regular basis for them to develop a sense of loyalty towards the organization. Make their team members feel important. Sit with them, give them truthful feedbacks, guide them and help them deal with changes with a smile. Employees perform better when their grievances are addressed by their reporting managers.

This study of organizational communication aimed to examine the perceptions of the effectiveness of internal communication, communication flow, and preferences concerning communication media of the frontline staff at Columban College, Inc. in Olongapo City,

Philippines; thereby identifying the strengths and weaknesses of its communication network.

METHODOLOGY

This study utilized the descriptive design of research. Bueno (2016) specified that the descriptive method is used to gather information about existing conditions. Furthermore, he defined the descriptive method as something more and beyond than just data gathering. The meaning of the data collected should be reported from the point of view of the objectives and the basic assumptions of the study. Specifically, the researcher used a cross-sectional design. The cross-sectional design is an observational study using a validated instrument. This means that researchers recorded information from the participants without manipulating the study environment. In short, the researchers tried not to interfere while the participants were surveyed using a well-defined instrument and compared the different perceptions and various variables within the specified time frame (Bueno, 2017). The facts obtained may be accurate expressions of central tendency or deviations or correlations; however, the report is not as research unless discussion of data is carried out up to the level of adequate interpretation (Bueno, 2019).

This study primarily aimed at determining the effectiveness of the communication network (communication dimensions and communication media) at Columban College, Inc. during the summer term of the Academic Year 2019-2020. To identify the strengths and weaknesses of its communication network, a modified survey-questionnaire was distributed among the respondents, both in the Main and Barretto Campuses of Columban College, Inc., Olongapo City, Philippines. The responses generated by the survey-questionnaire were tabulated and later analyzed and interpreted.

The respondents of the study were comprised of all the six (6) administrative assistants and five (5) secretaries at Columban College, Inc. in Olongapo City, Philippines.

Questionnaires were distributed to the participants in their respective work stations. The researcher obtained permission from the school president, explained the purpose of the study. A brief introduction was made to them, followed by an explanation of the intent of the study. The participants were then asked if they were willing to participate in the study and those who agreed were given the questionnaires to fill on the spot. Before filling the questionnaires, they were given full assurance that participation was voluntary, and refusal will not have any consequence on their job

performance. Confidentiality was assured by asking them not to write their names anywhere on the questionnaires. Thus, as the study involved engagement with humans, the research was also ethically cleared. The items of this survey-instrument were forced choice and a five-point Likert type scale (from 5 = “Strongly Agree/ Highly Effective” to 1 = “Strongly Disagree/ Not effective”) was used to measure the participant’s level of agreement with each statement. For the internal consistency and reliability, the researcher measured the Cronbach’s alpha, which is a method of estimating internal reliability. The researcher got a Cronbach’s alpha coefficient of 0.81 for the items. Cronbach’s alpha should be greater than 0.7, so this questionnaire was reliable. The researcher used descriptive statistics in analyzing the data.

The profile of the respondents in Table 1 exposed that there were 10 or 90.91% female and 1 or 9.09% male; 6 or 54.55% fell under the 41-50 age bracket, 4 or 36.36% under 21-30, and 1 or 9.09% under the 31-40; and 4 or 36.36% each have served for 16-20 and 0-5 years, 2 or 18.18% for 11-15 years, and 1 or 9.09% with 21-25 long years of service to the school.

Table 1
Profile of the Respondents

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	1	9.09
Female	10	90.91
Total	11	100%
Age	Frequency	Percentage
21-30	4	36.36
31-40	1	9.09
41-50	6	54.55
Total	11	100%
Length of Service	Frequency	Percentage
0-5	4	36.36
6-10	0	0
11-15	2	18.18
16-20	4	36.36
21-25	1	9.09
Total	11	100%

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Communication Flow. The communication flow in Table 2 revealed strong agreements on the information directly coming from the head of the unit or department, that the daily communication received by the frontline staff come in the form of a “directive” from the administrators of the College, and they comfortably share this information with the head of their unit or department. The overall weighted mean for communication flow is 4.07 with a descriptive rating of

agree. There are two main approaches to defining the relationship between communicating and organizing: the container approach assumes that organizations exist independently of communication and serve as containers that influence communication behavior of employees like organizational structures, such as hierarchical, are assumed to exist independently and influence the content and directional flow of communication. Nonetheless, the social constructionist approach assumes that communication creates the form and shape of organizations.

Table 2
Responses on Communication Flow

Communication Flow	WX	DR
1 Most of the information I receive on a daily basis comes from my head.	4.55	SA
2 In this organization, my ideas are frequently passed on by the administrators.	3.90	A
3 Most of the information I receive on a daily basis come from my fellow workers.	3.91	A
4 I feel comfortable sharing ideas directly with members of the administration.	3.45	A
5 Most of the daily communication I receive comes in the form of "directives" from the administrators.	4.36	SA
6 I feel comfortable sharing ideas with my head.	4.64	SA
7 In this organization, the lines of communication are "open" all the way to the administrators.	3.91	A
8 The institution frequently holds "town-hall" meetings to pass along information.	3.82	A
Overall Weighted Mean	4.07	A

Coordination/ Knowledge Sharing. According to the frontline staff, important pieces of information are a generous resource for the College, which they readily share in the success of the project or program of the department or the institution at large. The sharing of this information between and across units or departments garnered strong agreement among the respondents. Regular attendance to meetings was also important to them so they could gain accurate and worthwhile information they need to effectively carry out their duties and responsibilities. Coordination/ knowledge sharing had an overall weighted mean of 4.30 which is equivalent to strongly agree as reflected in Table 3. The word secretary has been existing for a very long time, precisely when business organizations came into being. The Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary defined a secretary as an employee in an office, who deals with correspondence, keeps records, and makes

arrangements and appointment for a particular member of staff. He or she enjoys a principal administrative support position in an office and increases the effectiveness of program staff by coordinating the paper flow of the office and carrying out the day-to-day administrative support activities required to accomplish the work of the organization (The Human.kind Group, 2016). Moreover, the tasks which the secretaries perform fall into four broad categories, namely: communication, coordination, organizations and records maintenance. Within these categories, secretaries perform a variety of tasks which enable managers and staff to accomplish the mission of the organization. It is therefore imperative that a secretary should be a more frontline who demonstrates the ability to assume responsibility without supervision, who functions interdependently with the unit or department head and who makes decisions within the scope of entrusted authority.

Table 3
Responses on Coordination/ Knowledge Sharing

Coordination/ Knowledge Sharing	WX	DR
9 In this organization, important information is a generous resource.	4.36	SA
10 In most situations, I receive the information I need to effectively perform my job.	4.18	A
11 My fellow workers and I readily share important information that is critical to our success.	4.64	SA
12 I receive most of the information I need through information channels.	3.91	A
13 My department readily shares important information with other departments.	4.45	SA
14 Other departments readily share important information with my department.	4.27	SA
15 The information that is shared by employees in other departments is not bias and do not reflect their own personal interest.	4.09	A
16 Most of the group meetings I attend are informative and worthwhile.	4.45	SA
17 Most of the interdepartmental meetings I attend are useful for obtaining the information I need to do my job.	4.36	SA
Overall Weighted Mean	4.30	SA

Barriers to Effective Communication. As shown in Table 4, responses divulged that before the frontline staff could share ideas or information with other school officials, they have to first seek advice or order from their department heads, while these administrators are not hesitant to communicate news about the

organization to staff in the lower level. This practice only proves that the lines of communication between and among the frontline staff and their heads or other administrators are “open”, thereby creating no barriers in the effective flow of communication. However, it shows that the respondents neither agreed nor disagree that the information they receive on a daily basis is passed down through the “grapevine”. Grapevine communication is an informal communication network within an organization. It is used to spread information, bypassing the usual formal communication structure. It is formed by individuals and groups in an organization. The people in the groups have something in common that links them together. For example, a secretary can belong to a group of women that go to lunch together every day. He or she can also belong to another group of non-teaching personnel that talks about work in informal ways. He or she could have a third group of people scattered throughout the school with which he or she shares with other common interest outside of work. The staff in this example is likely to pass information across his or her three main, informal networks. In some ways, he or she is verifying the accuracy of the rumors he or she hears. When more than one of her networks is in agreement about a given rumor, he or she is bound to believe that it is true (People Communicating, 2014).

The persistent growth of new media means that information consumers are now far less obliged to what passes through traditional gatekeepers and are able to bypass gatekeepers altogether and turn directly to primary sources of information; many of which are information consumers themselves. Therefore, in new media environments, the gates are now located not only with the information providers but also with the information consumers, who are acting as their own gatekeepers (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 1999). This change has created a shift from the traditional notion of “gatekeeping” to what Bruns (2008) has referred to as “gatewatching.” Gatewatchers are unable to control the gates through which information passes, but instead keep a constant eye on the gates, and pass what flows through those gates into others who then make the choice about the topic relevance and usefulness. This notion of “gatewatching” is echoed by Sundar (2008), who stated that, “The digital media universe, thus presents a dual challenge: (1) the overload of information, entertainment, and other offerings that constantly need organizing and (2) the lack of assurance of any uniformity in content quality, which necessitates a continual monitoring of credibility on the part of users”.

Table 4
Responses on Barriers to Effective Communication

Barriers to Effective Communication	WX	DR
18. In order to share ideas/ information with the administrators, I must go through my department head.	4.45	SA
19. In most departments, important information is not hoarded by one or two people.	4.18	A
20. Administrators are not hesitant to communicate news about the organization to lower level employees.	4.27	SA
21. In the organization, there is no group of individuals who controls the flow of important information.	3.82	A
22. Most of the information I receive on a daily basis is passed down through the “grapevine”.	3.36	NAD
23. There are no “gatekeepers” in the organization that hinder the flow of information.	3.64	A
24. The organization is committed to keeping the channels of communication “open”.	4.27	SA
25. The organization encourages the sharing of information between and among departments.	4.18	A
Overall Weighted Mean	4.02	A

Effectiveness of Communication. Results in Table 5 show that the frontline staff strongly agrees that most of the information they receive from their unit or department heads were detailed and accurate, as well as the information passed down from the administration. Effectiveness of communication garnered an overall weighted mean of 4.22 or a descriptive rating of strongly agree. Effective communication is not very easy. There are many barriers to effective communication. Because of these barriers, effective exchange of information cannot take place. Heads of offices must be aware of these barriers in communication. These barriers to communication can be classified into five groups – process, physical, semantic, psychological, and technological, and these barriers cause disruptions in the effective flow of communication in an organization. Effective communication cannot take place unless the barriers are overcome. Although it may not be possible to eliminate the barriers, it is possible to minimize them. For eliminating barriers, formal and rigid organizational structures should be minimized and the use of group activities, such as teams, quality circles, task forces, committees, etc. should be maximized. These practices bring people together from different levels of the organization to pursue its goals. Improving communication process, reducing physical barriers, simplifying the language, promoting interpersonal relationship are the methods to enrich effective

communication. These management strategies facilitate communication within the organization (Turaga, 2019).

Table 5
Responses on the Effectiveness of Communication

Effectiveness of Communication	WX	DR
26 Most of the information I receive on a daily basis is detailed and accurate.	4.18	A
27 Most of the information I receive from my head is detailed and accurate.	4.45	SA
28 Most of the information I receive from my fellow workers are detailed and accurate.	4.18	A
29 Communication from other departments is typically detailed and accurate.	4.00	A
30 Most of the information passed down from the administration is detailed and accurate.	4.27	SA
Overall Weighted Mean	4.22	SA

Reliability. The frontline staff were confident that the information they receive from their heads are reliable, while directives are clear and consistent. This perception also provides them comfort in passing along or sharing this information to their fellow workers in the organization. Reliability had an overall weighted mean of 4.23 or strongly agree as reflected in Table 6.

Table 6
Responses on Reliability

Reliability	WX	DR
31 My fellow workers and I receive reliable information from our head.	4.36	SA
32 The directives that come from the administrators are clear and consistent.	4.27	SA
33 My fellow workers regularly pass along reliable information.	4.09	A
34 I feel comfortable passing along information that I receive from my head to my fellow workers.	4.36	SA
35 The information we receive from other departments is consistently reliable.	4.09	A
Overall Weighted Mean	4.23	SA

Perceived source credibility becomes an increasingly important variable to examine in social media, especially in terms of crisis and risk information. This is because with the increasing amount of information available through newer channels, the gatekeeping function seems to shift away from producers of content and into consumers of that content (Haas & Wearden, 2003). Traditionally, there are many people who act as gatekeepers, including journalists,

editors, and possibly even advertisers and owners (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009). Along the way, these gatekeepers are assumed to be checking the information for veracity, and can be an important part in the process of ensuring the credibility of that information (Salcito, 2009), and are likely perceived to be doing so by the public (Reese & Ballinger, 2001).

Timeliness. Results exposed that the respondents receive the information they need to perform their job promptly. However, there was a slight agreement in terms of delay in the information, the release of news and updates, and feedbacking. Timeliness got an overall weighted mean of 3.96 or agree as shown in Table 7. Honest communication is the key to organizational transparency. Even if communications are occurring regularly, if they don't address the employees' interests or what is really on their minds, they can feel empty or even breed mistrust. In this situation, staff members are likely to appreciate their leaders' acknowledgment of the issue, even if they don't know all the answers. An honest statement about what is known, with a plan for sharing further information when available, will go far toward establishing transparency as an organizational value. Another way to ensure that organizational communications are relevant and meaningful is to strive for timeliness. It reveals opportunities to communicate along the organization's ongoing timeline. In these cases, remarking on known information in a timely manner is better than saying nothing until every answer is known, but rumors have long since spread across the organization.

Table 7
Responses on Timeliness

Timeliness	WX	DR
36 I receive the information I need to perform my job in a timely manner.	4.27	SA
37 I am not delayed in my job because I always have the information I need.	4.00	A
38 The organization releases news and updates in a timely manner.	4.18	A
39 I usually hear company news and updates or feedbacks right after the event has happened.	3.64	A
40 I am not late to find out what is happening in the organization.	3.73	A
Overall Weighted Mean	3.96	A

Media Effectiveness. Findings showed that most of the information about news and events the frontline staff gets are through their unit or department heads and phone-in calls. Nevertheless, they neither agree nor disagree on receiving daily information about company

news and updates through email, intranet/ website and publications or newsletters.

Table 8
Responses on Media Effectiveness

Media Effectiveness	WX	DR
41 I get most of the information about company news and events through email.	3.18	NAD
42 I get most of the information about company news and events through the intranet/ website.	3.36	NAD
43 I get most of the information about company news and events through the company publications or newsletters.	3.36	NAD
44 I get most of the information about company news and events through memos or faxes.	4.18	A
45 I get most of the information about company news and events through my head.	4.27	SA
46 I get most of the information about company news and events through phone-in calls.	4.27	SA
47 I get most of the information about company news and events through my fellow workers.	4.0	A
48 I get most of the information about company news and events through departmental meetings.	4.0	A
49 I get most of the day-to-day information I need to do my job through email.	3.0	NAD
50 I get most of the day-to-day information I need to do my job through the intranet/ website.	3.18	NAD
51 I get most of the day-to-day information I need to do my job through the company publications or newsletters.	2.91	NAD
52 I get most of the day-to-day information I need to do my job through memos or faxes.	3.73	A
53 I get most of the day-to-day information I need to do my job through my head.	4.0	A
54 I get most of the day-to-day information I need to do my job through phone-in calls.	3.91	A
55 I get most of the day-to-day information I need to do my job through my fellow workers.	3.82	A
56 I get most of the day-to-day information I need to do my job through departmental meetings.	3.82	A
Overall Weighted Mean	3.69	A

Media effectiveness gathered an overall weighted mean of 3.69 or agree as reflected in Table 8. In the 21st century, businesses have access to a number of methods of communication which can be utilized with both internal and external customers. The main methods of communication include the traditional meetings and social media of the new age. While a lot of attention

is received by the methods of effective communication that are new, the value along with the relevance of the traditional methods of communication still exists (Westerman, Spence, & Van Der Heide, 2013). Written communication is inevitable in the workplace. It is present everywhere and consists of traditional paper and pen, documents and letters, text chats, emails, typed electronic documents, SMS and anything else that might be conveyed by the use of written symbols like language which is part of the daily office routine. Thus, it is indispensable for any formal communication and also for the issue of authorized instructions such as formal proposals, press releases, memoranda, contracts, brochures, handbooks, among others (Vicky, 2019).

Communicating Company News and Updates. In communicating news and updates, frontline staff finds the email, social media, the department head, and fellow workers to be very effective, while the intranet/ website, publications, and newsletters, memos/faxes, phone-in calls, and departmental meetings are found to be somewhat effective. Communicating company news and updates obtained a rating of 4.20 or somewhat effective as shown in Table 9.

Table 9
Responses on Communicating Company News and Updates

Communicating Company News and Updates	WX	DR
57 E-mail	4.27	VE
58 Social Media	4.45	VE
59 The company intranet/ Website	4.0	SE
60 Publications or newsletters	3.64	SE
61 Memos/ faxes	4.09	SE
62 Department Head	4.73	VE
63 Phone-in Calls	4.09	SE
64 Fellow Workers	4.36	VE
65 Departmental Meetings	4.18	SE
Overall Weighted Mean	4.20	SE

Formal communication is the official channel of communication. It flows through an established line of authority, and controlled and regulated by the top management. The management decides which information to share, with whom, and when, to include official letters, memoranda, notices, newsletters, reports, staff meetings, etc. (Rohn, 2019). The downward communication deals with instructions, plans, procedures, policies, etc., while upward communication concerns the employees, suggestions, grievance procedures, meetings, or problem-solving committees. Social media seem to be designed to cater to those who want information in real time. Levinson (2009) has pointed out the importance of immediacy of messages. Fogg, et al. (2001), found that one of the biggest markers of “amateurism” as they present it is the speed (or recency) of updates. In fact, the biggest impact

on credibility deal with recency of updates, such that updating more frequently is associated with higher credibility. Furthermore, if, as the machine heuristic (Sundar, 2008) suggested that information provided by a system-generated cue offers especially valuable credibility information because of people's general operating heuristic that "machines don't lie," and when this heuristic is paired with the recency principle highlighted by Fogg, et al. (2001), a strong influence on credibility judgments may exist.

Communicating Information. In communicating information, frontline staff finds the email, social media, department head, fellow workers and departmental meetings to be very effective, while the intranet/ website, publication, and newsletters, memos/faxes, and phone-in calls are found to be somewhat effective. Communicating information gained a rating of 4.29 or very effective as reflected in Table 10.

Table 10
Responses on Communicating Information

Communicating Information	WX	DR
66 E-mail	4.45	VE
67 Social Media	4.73	VE
68 The company intranet/ Website	4.09	SE
69 Publications or newsletters	3.45	SE
70 Memos/ faxes	4.09	SE
71 Department Head	4.73	VE
72 Phone-in Calls	4.18	SE
73 Fellow Workers	4.55	VE
74 Departmental Meetings	4.36	VE
Overall Weighted Mean	4.29	VE

According to Men (2015), the internal communication role of the chief executive officers influenced relational outcomes. CEOs most frequently use email and face-to-face channels to communicate with employees. The social media presence of CEOs positively and strongly correlates with their communication, responsiveness and quality, as well as employee-organization relational outcomes. Moreover, social media tools can be used in an effective way in organizations for the purpose of communicating between departments and employees. Nonetheless, email communication in organizations has become very common and is a highly essential tool for the sharing of information. It is a significant component of the communication, easily accessible and inexpensive.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Organizational communication relative to coordination/ knowledge sharing, the effectiveness of communication, reliability, demonstrated very strong agreement among the frontline staff, while the

communication flow, barriers to effective communication, timeliness, and media effectiveness garnered only strong agreement. While the institution is commendable on circulating and sharing reliable information, there is a need to recalibrate its communication flow by feasibly creating a centralized network structure of information security, converging confidentiality, integrity, and availability among offices and within the organization as a whole. Proprietary information concerning the department or the institution should be quickly disseminated, through appropriate channels, to establish "open" lines of communication without the need for employees to venture on speculations. With the advent of technology, the exchange and access of relevant daily information using email, the intranet/ website and publications or newsletters among frontline staff may be practiced. In communicating news and updates, a strong agreement was noted. However, the institution should capitalize on the use of other communication networks like the intranet/ website, publications or newsletters, memos/faxes, phone-in calls, and departmental meetings. Furthermore, in communicating information using email, social media, the department head, fellow workers and departmental meetings, and the institution should look at the intranet/ website, publications or newsletter, memos/ faxes and phone-in calls as equally effective means of communicating information among its frontline staff. Finally, the results imply that organizational communication unites employee together and closer to one another. It is an essential management function closely associated with all other management functions because it bridges the gap between individuals and groups. Since information is the most vital aspect of communication, it must be verified, analyzed, interpreted, and transmitted efficiently and effectively, because it impacts organizational success.

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