

TEAM KILIMANJARO

Communications Audit

Office of Student Affairs

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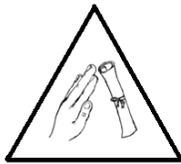
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MISSION STATEMENT

Kilimanjaro seeks to establish connections with a client, obtain information concerning the current structure and communication within, and then to produce a thorough audit of the organizational advantages and needs. With these efforts, we pursue excellence in team performance, quality of obtaining and presenting information, and, most importantly, the overall satisfaction of our client. We look forward to becoming the hands that support our client's future.



KILIMANJARO

Reach.Connect.Succeed.



Hannah L. Lawrence: **Team Co-Leader:**

Contact info: Hannah.lawrence@live.longwood.edu

- Hannah brings a wide variety of leadership experience including President of Lambda Pi Eta Communication honor fraternity. Her experience ensures quality performance from her team.

John W. Berry Jr: **Team Co-Leader**

Contact info: john.berry@live.longwood.edu

- John brings management experience to the team including Chair of PRIDE LGBTQIA organization and his membership with the Student Diversity & Inclusion Council. His editing and attention to detail ensures not only client satisfaction but overall team success.





Sarah A. Banschenbach: **Survey Coordinator**

- Sarah brings survey and management experience to the team including her roll as treasurer of Sigma Phi Lambda Christian sorority as well as her employment with RCL. Her skills with survey-monkey show her dedication to gathering and utilizing quality information that is key to the client and team's purpose.

Mary K. Tingen: **Creative Design**

- Mary is a Spanish major full of color and culture. Her creative skills and experience that she learned in art and media classes have given her a better understanding of colors and design. She will contribute greatly to the client and team satisfaction. She ensures professional visual and aesthetic elements of final audit report.



Melissa R. Allison: **Interview Coordinator**

- Melissa shows experience, from her sisterhood in the Delta Zeta sorority, in developing quality interviews and obtaining the necessary and overall most beneficial knowledge of client's needs, concerns, and perspectives.
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Executive summary

The purpose of this communication audit report is to identify major strengths and areas for improvement within the office of Student Affairs. Through the use of qualitative and quantitative research, we have identified the following as important elements in the communication of this office.

Strengths

•Leadership

Generally, the leadership of the office of Student Affairs is exemplary. Through the audit process, we discovered that the leadership of the organization fosters healthy superior-subordinate relationships and values trust among staff. In addition, the use of person-centered communication, communication that focuses on the opinions and voice of others, is directly related to the high level of job satisfaction within the organization.

•Directionality

The directions in which information is sent within Student Affairs are chiefly upward and downward on the chain of command. Results from interviews and observations show that members of the department choose effective channels within their networks to share information, whether those channels are face-to-face or technology-based channels.

Areas for Improvement

•Information Overload

Generally, the information being presented to members of the Student Affairs department is too frequent and a large amount of information is being given through a variety of channels, particularly via email. According to our interviews, many employees reported feeling overwhelmed by the amount of information being sent to them over email.

•Usage of Technology

Overall, from the observations, interviews, and data collected from the surveys, we have found that technology is an important role in this organization. Though it is beneficial to the organization there are grey areas on how and when technology should be used in the work place.

Recommendations

•Information Overload

In order to reduce the effects of information overload, we recommend the usage of face-to-face communication whenever it is possible or in the instance that information is ambiguous in any

way. When possible for emails, including a summary of all information in one email may be more manageable for staff than several emails per day for various issues.

- Usage of Technology

To address the issue of technology being used during organizational meetings, we recommend implementation of a policy that governs such usage where said technology is or is not appropriate.

Introduction: An Overview of the Communication Audit

The purpose of this audit was to assess and evaluate communication strengths and areas for improvement within the office of Student Affairs. This report provides results from the audit findings as well as recommendations for continued communicative success within the office. At the beginning of the fall 2011 semester, Vice President for Student Affairs, Dr. Tim Pierson, authorized Team Kilimanjaro of Dr. Naomi Johnson's Applied Organizational Communication class, to perform a communication audit of the office of Student Affairs.

Scope and Research Method

Four main areas of communication were assessed during the audit:

- Leadership
- Technology
- Directionality
- Information load

We conducted observations, interviews, and surveys to study these aspects of communication to, from, and within the office of Student Affairs. We observed 2 one-on-one meetings and 2 group meetings. Ten key members were selected and interviewed for the audit. The survey was distributed to 61 individuals who work with the office of Student Affairs. Of the 61 surveys sent out, 36 (60%) were completed and returned.

Interview and survey participants were asked about how channels of communication, technology use, professional relationships, and [blank] with the office of Student Affairs affects their satisfaction in the work place.

Limitations

We were able to draw several conclusions from our research but we acknowledge that our understanding of communication within this office is limited in the amount of time we spent in observations, number of people we were able to interview and survey, and the amount of time spent, overall, throughout the audit process.

This report will include results from our research including areas of communicative strength, areas for improvement, and some recommendations for ways to enhance communication within the office of Student Affairs.

STRENGTHS

Leadership

One of the major strengths of the office of Student Affairs is the excellent leadership skills. Leadership is defined as a process by which a person influences others to accomplish an objective and directs the organization in a way that makes it more cohesive and coherent.

In general, the leadership of this organization is highly praised and valued. Through an interview it was discovered that, “The major strength is Tim Pierson in his openness, straight forwardness, good communication skills and he is an active listener. He is the strength; he determines his tenure about the broader picture of the University.”

Tim Pierson has proven to be an asset to the office and his leadership skills are shown through the following survey results:

90% of participants agree with the statement, “My supervisor is honest with me.” There were no responses that yielded a negative result.

Downs and Adrian (2004) stress the importance of superior subordinate relationships in an organization. The level of trust present in the relationship will determine the effectiveness of communication within that relationship. As seen in Figure 1, approximately 83% of survey respondents reported feeling satisfied with the statement, “Extent to which my supervisor trusts me.”

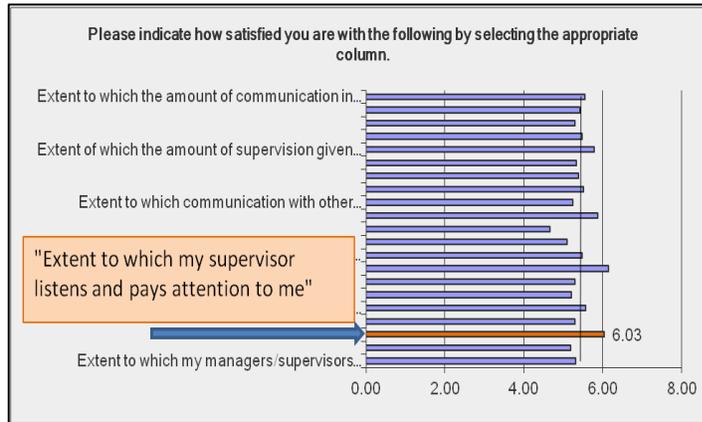


Figure 1

Approximately 85% of survey respondents reported feeling satisfied with the “Extent to which my supervisor listens and pays attention to me.” In addition, over 90% of respondents reported feeling personally satisfied with their jobs. Fix and Sias (2006) report the importance of the ability of superiors to listen and take subordinates’ opinions seriously. The results of Fix and Sias’s study links positive superior-subordinate interaction with job satisfaction. The researchers found that when leaders use communication that is considerate of subordinates’ opinions and perspectives, known as person-centered communication, subordinates are more likely view interactions with their supervisors as positive and therefore be more satisfied with their jobs.

Information Directionality/Flow

Through both quantitative and qualitative aspects of our research, we found that the directionality and flow of information is a strength of both superiors and subordinates. Generally among members in an organization, information is sent and received in three directions; horizontal (across the same level of authority), upward (up the chain of command), and downward (from high levels of authority to lower levels). Within the Office of Student Affairs, upward and downward communication are employed more so than horizontal.

The following information has been drawn chiefly from the interview and observation results we have collected and analyzed.

According to Downs and Adrian (2004), there is generally a difference within organizations between the superior members' thoughts of what employees need to know and what the employees want to know. The office of Student Affairs has strength in this area of communication because, overall, results show that information flows easily to and from the office. One interview participant stated, "Everyone knows whom to contact for everything and everyone has the same information." Leadership has an open-door policy that gives members and others the opportunity to bring information and concerns directly to leadership when necessary. An interview participant said, "All of the departments stay informed with open communication." This openness allows information to flow easily from department to department and appears to help create and maintain a comfortable atmosphere for members. The fact that everyone has the same information helps ensure all members stay informed about important issues.



Downs and Adrian (2004) explain that, in some organizations, in order to preserve their image, employees purposefully filter their upward communication to avoid seeming like the "bearer of bad news." These needs of self-preservation cause employees to filter out any thoughts or results that may make them seem like their job was not done properly. Within Student Affairs, many employees state feeling comfortable in being honest. Because of this, information is not filtered to the extent that the weight of the message is compromised. One interview participant stated, "I have open communication with my immediate supervisor. We have a great deal of verbal and face-to-face communication in the office." The strength in upward communication lies with the presence of much face-to-face communication. Face-to-face communication allows for better understanding and clarity of complex issues.

Information directionality is a major strength as a whole because, with accurate choice of channels through which information is sent, organizational members are kept in the loop and information regarding important issues is readily available to anyone who needs it. Downs and Adrian (2004) state that the direction in which the information is being sent determines other

factors including the channel through which the information is to be sent. Examples of channels include face-to-face, email, phone (voice), texting, and social media. One interview participant stated that they use email in most instances to communicate upwardly, but if the information is “heavy” or could be misinterpreted, they have no problem walking to the office of the superior person and communicating face-to-face.

AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

Information Overload

It is important to note that many members reported that they receive adequate amounts of information from the department. Some members reported they have “full knowledge of what’s going on” and “definitely lots of good information is being given.” However, this finding was also countered by reports information overload.

Overload is defined as receiving too much and/or too frequent information (Downs and Adrian, 2004). Some members report frequently receiving large amounts of information.

Sometimes when discussions of certain issues were lengthy, nonverbal communication by some members, such as staring around the room, indicated that members became disinterested in the conversation. Some interview participants stated, “Would prefer if little things such as ‘hey, let’s meet to chat about this’ be phone calls instead” “Can be frustrating with extra meetings and such.” Many members of the department mentioned that the specific amount of information needed is being exceeded in e-mails and meetings.

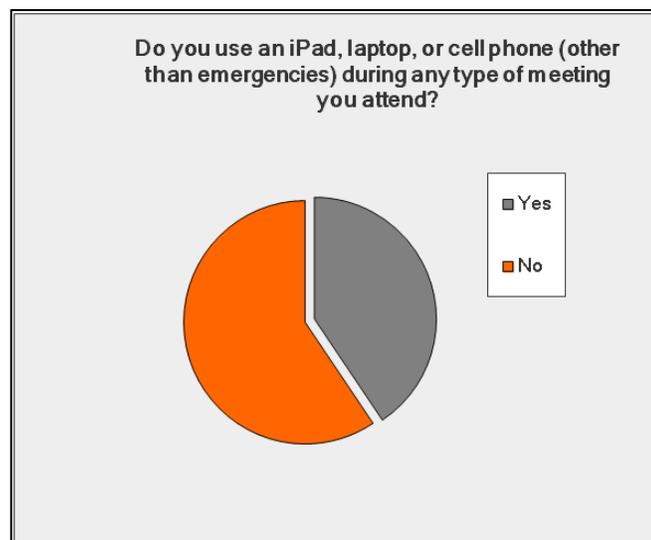
According to Rothwell (2004), decision-making and critical thinking processes are hindered by excessive amounts of information because group members find it difficult to sort through the information to extract the most important facts. According to Rothwell (2004) there are four main consequences of information overload: impedes critical thinking, promotes indecisiveness, encourages “information bulimia,” and promotes group Attention Deficit Disorder. “Information bulimia is a binge-and-purge cycle of information processing” and group Attention Deficit Disorder occurs when “megamountains of information competing for group members’ attention makes focusing on any one idea, concept or problem extremely difficult” (Rothwell, 2004). Each consequence is very critical to how one obtains information. When information overload is present these consequences go into effect causing hindered decision-making processes.

Use of Technology

Overall, from the observations, interviews, and data collected from the surveys, we have found that technology is an important role in this organization. We have found that the general consensus is that the presence of technology in the work environment is a positive thing. From the information we have collected there are pros and cons of technology that have been put to our attention during the audit. We will be focusing on how the organization uses a form of technology in a group setting and how it affects themselves and others. Technology plays an important role in the function of the Student Affairs office.

Through the Observations, we noticed that at times the use of technology can sometimes create barriers during the organizations meetings. According to Katherine Miller, many communication media “filter out” cues that would be available in face-to-face interactions. This source is important because, it was observed that there is a mixture of workers who use and don’t use technology. Therefore, it’s important to keep the personal aspect of communication in a work space to catch the nonverbal, “facial cues” during meetings. And from our surveys, most of the organizations channel of communication is through meetings and email.

From our surveys roughly 40% of workers felt that the presence of technology can be distracting. Stated from an interview, “It can take away from your attention, even if you don’t realize it. There is a barrier with people who do have them and with people who don’t. The expectations of the technology are not clearly defined.” According to Downs and Adrian, Technological advances in communication systems have made it possible to always be “in touch” with the office, home, and friends. This is important because, while technology offers efficiency and quick ways to communicate it also creates a temptation to use the devices when not needed.



RECOMMENDATIONS

We, as an internal audit team, have acted as consultants for our client by acknowledging strengths and areas that are in need of improvement. In order to provide our client with a basis for advancing passed the audit process, we have strategically come up with the following recommendations:

With information overload, reducing the number of emails by including more information in one email and also using phone or face-to-face interactions could reduce the immense load of information. Sheer and Chen (2004) found that self-presentational needs and goals influence the choice of which channels people use to send messages. In some circumstances we observed, members of our client are concerned with how they will look if they present negative information through certain channels. This may be a result of many factors such as fear of rejection of ideas or not wanting to appear negative or presenting problematic information. We suggest that using more face-to-face interactions will make information more clear and understandable and causing ambiguous issues to be better explained. If emails are going to be sent, perhaps creating cumulative emails for each person and sending them once per day or twice at most would be a suitable option. That way, the person is receiving only one email with all of the information rather than fourteen emails with different details about one issue.

In regards to the usage of technology, we recommend a policy be added to the set of employee expectations that governs usage of technology such as cell phones, iPads, iPods, laptops, etc. in all meetings where said technology may be used. This policy could potentially rule out any disorientation of meeting structure and cause greater attentiveness among attendees. Shockley-Zalabak (2009) relates the idea that healthy interpersonal relationships affect productivity in the workplace. When electronic devices such as cellular phones and iPads are used frequently during organizational meetings, the barrier the devices cause hinders attentiveness and completion of the learning process. Wood (2010) explains listening as a process that includes being mindful, physically hearing, organizing the information, interpreting, and responding. When listening is hindered by a barrier, such as a meeting attendee looking at Facebook rather than meeting notes, the relationship between organizational members suffers and causes productivity to be reduced.

Implementation of a policy governing these behaviors will effectively increase productivity and interpersonal relationship satisfaction. The policy could take many forms. In effect, it could provide a way to choose which meetings are “technology-friendly” and which meetings require more “rich” forms of note taking such as pen and paper. If such determinations are to be made, we suggest that an agenda be sent to all meeting attendees prior to each meeting. The agenda will not only give information about meeting items to discuss, but provide a precursor for what types of technology will or will not be appropriate for the meeting. If there are regular weekly, biweekly, etc. meetings, then a standard could be set for such meetings. Also,

whether the choice is made to send out a technology disclaimer before meetings or not, agendas are a systematic way to keep all meetings on track and organized. Therefore, we recommend that agendas be created and distributed prior to all meetings.

Conclusion

Overall, the strengths we have identified reflect the effectiveness of the communication policies and procedures, which are already being employed within Student Affairs. Among the most important findings related to strengths, the leadership of the organization at the various levels proves to be a major asset. Also, the ways in which information is communicated both upward and downward brings up the fact that the organization as a whole communicates with whom, for what purposes, and through which channels they need to in order to preserve organizational function. We encourage all employees to continue in the patterns of open-minded, friendly communication that causes them to feel satisfied and secure in their positions. Finally, we challenge all members of the organization to be mindful of the presence of too much information being sent at once and the usage of technology. As we have recommended, employee expectation policies would be an effective way to address such concerns and to preserve the standards already in place.

Appendix A

Interview Questions

1. Describe your position in the organization
 - a. What are your chief responsibilities and duties?
 - b. With whom or with what positions do you regularly communicate?
 - c. What factors tend to facilitate your effectiveness on the job? Please give me an example.
 - d. What, if anything, inhibits your effectiveness?
2. Describe the way decisions are made in your organization.
 - a. What decisions do you normally make?
 - b. What information do you need to make these decisions?
 - c. Are these formal or informal policies that determine how you get information?
3. Describe the organization's/unit's primary objective for this year.
 - a. How does the organization know when it has done a good or bad job? What are the criteria for success?
 - b. What are your own personal objectives?
 - c. What communication strategies does one use to achieve them?
4. What kinds of communication are necessary for you to have with other work units? How well does this interunit communication work?
5. What are the major communication strengths of the organizations? Be specific.
6. What are the major communication weaknesses of the organization? Be specific.
7. What do you see as the greatest *unresolved* problem of this organization?
8. What would one like to see done to improve communication here?
 - a. Why hasn't it been done already?
 - b. What are the major obstacles?
 - c. If you had a suggestion to improve communication, how would you make it?
9. When conflict occurs, how is it resolved? What normally causes conflict here? Give examples
10. Describe the communication relationship you have with:
 - a. Your immediate supervisor

- b. Top management
 - c. Coworkers
 - d. Subordinates, if applicable
11. How do most people react to their managers?
12. How would you evaluate your manager in terms of:
- a. Openness to new ideas?
 - b. Willingness to share information?
 - c. Ability to clarify expectations?
 - d. Ability to coordinate the work in the unit?
13. How do you get ideas about how your superiors feel about your work?
14. How would you evaluate the communication from top management?
15. How would you describe the general communication climate here?
16. How often do you receive information of little value? Give an example.
- a. How often are you overloaded with information?
 - b. How often do you feel you get too little information?
17. How does communication here affect your job satisfaction? Is this typical for others?
18. How does communication here affect your productivity? Is this typical for others?
19. Describe the formal channels through which you typically receive information. What kinds of information do you tend to receive? How often?
20. Describe the informal channels through which you typically receive information.
- a. What kind of information do you hear?
 - b. How active are informal channels?
21. Do you use any sort of electronic device during any of the meetings you attend? (devices include cell phones, laptops, iPads, or any other digital/electronic note taking or communication device)
- a. If you do, why do you choose to use said device? If not, why do you abstain?
 - b. Whether you use an electronic device or not, how does the presence of such devices in meetings affect your attentiveness and responsiveness during the meeting?
 - c. Does use of devices around you hinder or increase note taking and interest in what is being said/discussed?

- d. In what situations and/or for what purposes do you think that it is acceptable to use such devices during meetings?
- e. Is there a specific type of meeting that you wouldn't use a device, and why?

22. Is there anything that I have left out that I should have included?

Appendix B