



*"Helping Organizations Reach New Heights through Effective Communication"*

### **Our Mission Statement:**

*"We believe that it is our obligation to provide our client with the highest level of quality, insight, and confidentiality. We strive to discover the best communication solutions while understanding the unique needs and goals of our clients"*

## Executive Summary

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The following report is an analysis of (client) compiled by Blue Ridge Communication Consultants. The purpose of this audit is to provide the (client) with useful and helpful feedback that will reiterate their communication strengths and outline opportunities for growth. Using data collected from observing meetings along with data obtained from interviews and a survey, we have created a list of recommendations for our client in hopes of continuing their success as an organization. In this report, you will find our analysis of our client's strengths and opportunities for improvement followed by the recommendations we have provided.

*We have found through observations, interviews, and surveys that major strengths within this organization are; use of appropriate communication channels, relationship quality and information adequacy.*

- One of our key findings was that the organization benefits highly from the use of face to face communication. This is enhanced by the open door policy.
- The overall climate of the organization is conducive to the quality of the members' individual work.
- Members have a passion for serving the students to the best of their abilities

*We have also noted potential opportunities for improvement within the organization.*

- There is substantial concern for coworker's feelings when bringing up conflict
- Breaks in the chain of command can lead to misunderstanding

## **Introduction**

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Through a complete and thorough communication audit of (client), Blue Ridge Communication Consultants have evaluated the organization's internal communication. Blue Ridge Communication Consultants received authorization from Mary Meade-Saunders, the Director of the (client), to perform this audit in September of 2011. This report focuses on the internal communications within (client) between the employees and students working there and how this communication affects the organization overall.

### ***Research Methods***

During the course of the communication audit, Blue Ridge Communication Consultants obtained data through several methods. The members of the team attended several meetings throughout the audit. Six randomly chosen members of the (client) were interviewed in confidentiality about the communication within the organization. Informed Consent forms were signed prior to all interviews. In addition, there was a voluntary online survey that was distributed to all members of the organization.

### ***Meetings/ Observations***

By attending several staff and counselor meetings, the members of Blue Ridge Communication Consultants were able to observe face-to-face communication between the members of the (client). Audit consultants took notes on what they observed during these meetings and were able to recognize some strengths and weaknesses of the organization. The main focus of the notes was on verbal and non-verbal communication tendencies of the organization. The meetings were observed in the (client) offices from September through the end of October 2011.

### ***Interviews (Appendix B)***

There were six members of the (client) that were interviewed about the communication within their organization. The six interviewees were randomly chosen from a list of all of those who work in the (client). Blue Ridge Communication Consultants received most of the data we used through these interviews. There were several strengths of the organization that we had observed in meetings that were reinforced by these interviews, while at the same time, light was able to be shed on some potential issues the organization is having.

### ***Survey (Appendix A)***

Through an online survey, provided by the *SurveyMonkey* website, Blue Ridge Communication Consultants were able to collect data about the (client's) internal communication. The survey was sent to the director of the organization via e-mail who was then asked to distribute the survey to the rest of the organization. Some questions in the survey were derived from the Downs & Adrian Communication Satisfaction Survey while others were added by the members of the team to obtain further insight into some areas of inquiry. The survey was completed by eight of the ten members of the organization. Some of the themes that were addressed were the relationship qualities in the organization and the adequacy of information exchanged between members of the organization.

### ***Limitations***

The results of the audit prepared by Blue Ridge Communication Consultants are based on brief observations over a short period of time. Also, the interviews and survey were completely voluntary. We do realize that the interview and survey results are based solely on individual's perceptions of the organization and may not accurately represent a realistic representation of the organization as a whole. Some areas of our audit may be misinformed because of the time constraints on the audit process and because the interview and survey process was administered to those that expressed their opinion.

### ***Report Organization***

Through a comprehensive analysis of (client), Blue Ridge Communication Consultants were able to identify both strengths and opportunities for growth for the organization. After evaluating these key points, we offer recommendations to the(client) that will hopefully further their communication effectiveness as an organization.

# Organizational Strengths



The information for this section was gathered through interviews, surveys and observations. The following is a summary of the strengths of communication within (client):

- Face-to-face Communication
- Relationship Quality
- Information Adequacy

### **Communication Channels: Face-to-Face**

According to our observations, interviews, and survey results, we found that the members of this organization prefer to use face-to-face communication. Our research shows that they are actually receiving more face-to-face information than they feel is needed, which is very positive.

Our survey indicated that 43% of employees wanted to use this channel more often and 57% said they receive most information through this channel. The members of this organization feel that they wouldn't be able to perform their job properly if they only communicated through telephone or email.

A strong form of face-to-face communication includes the open door policy. This is a highly preferred form of interaction.

### **Relationship Quality: Trust**

Our observations show that this organization is a very community with plenty of trust felt one another. The members feel confident sharing information without fear of being criticized, which further proves that there is a strong sense of trust.

When asked to describe the climate of the work place, everyone commented that it was quite comfortable. "The quality of information employees receive from their supervisors and coworkers is positively related to their job satisfaction and commitment to the organization" (Sias, 2005).

Trust makes it easier for tasks to be accomplished. Since this is an organizational strength, members stated that they feel satisfied when entering the work place.

### **Information Adequacy**

The members of this organization share information in an organized manner, which includes using agendas to stay on track during staff meetings. When it comes to the amount of information given, everyone feels that they are given the proper amount and never feel overloaded.

According to David (2011), "In 'normal', day-to-day circumstances, internal communication is vital to the proper functioning of an organization." It was stated that members don't need every bit of the information given, but it is easy to see what is important.

Within this organization, more than half of the members responded in the survey that they receive information in a timely manner so that it is useful in completing their tasks.



# Opportunities for Growth



Information for this area was gathered through observations of meetings, interviews and surveys. In the following section you will find an explanation of the following areas of improvement and growth:

- Relationship Quality and Conflict Management
- Under-Load of Information
- Communication Directionality and the Chain of Command

### **Relationship Quality**

Downs and Adrian (2004) define relationship quality as how the types of relationships in the workplace can impact how employees work and communicate with each other. It is also important to note that the way in which an individual is perceived by their coworkers will affect how they are able to communicate with them.

In applying this theory, we observed that relationship quality within the can cause problematic communication issues. Constructive criticism that moves upward and horizontal within the chain of command is a scarce resource, and an organization can lose valuable resources if it is not utilized.

Successful organizations create an environment where new ideas are welcome. Researcher Karl Weick proposed that organizations are living and learning beings. Organizations must learn new ways to adapt and will fail in its mission if it does not change.

Conflict is similar to a credit card. If you pay as you go, it may be cumbersome in the moment, but if the conflict builds, the organization faces a large cost at the end.

We found a reoccurring pattern during interviews that members feel concerned because they do not want to disrespect their co-workers, thus causing them to avoid bringing up issues that are bothering them. Downs and Adrian (2004) state that the communication between different positions in the workplace can either “build, maintain, or destroy a relationship.”

The chain of command plays a large role in relationships and communication patterns in the organization as well. As is common, individual members are closer to some coworkers than others, which can lead to reservation in approaching issues. An interview indicated that some members fear that retaliation will occur if they approach conflict resolutions.

### **Under-Load of Information (Information Adequacy)**

As mentioned previously in our report, information adequacy is the level of importance, timeliness, and amount of information given to accomplish a job (Downs and Adrian, 2004). After conducting observations and face-to-face interviews, we found that members that are out of the office by chance are not typically filled in on what is going on when they return.

Because the organization consists of so much planning and flow of information, members seem to fall out of the loop easily due to lack of information being passed along. Research shows that the less information adequacy expressed by office personnel involving policies and performance, the lower the organization's environment is "perceived to be in clarity, supervisor support, and innovation" (Rosenfeld et al. 2004).

It was reported that sometimes two versions of information can be released, and this may cause misunderstandings. Consequently, miscommunication may lead to an unexpected conflict, which then in turn is not necessarily approached correctly by members.

### **Communication Directionality (Communication Channels)**

It is imperative that the direction of communication flowing from each member within the chain of command is done properly and beneficially.

Information traveling within the organization is commonly skipped over members throughout the chain of command. This leaves people feeling lost or "out of the loop" on certain topics that may be extremely important.

It was a common theme during interviews that members felt hesitant to communicate upward (to their superiors) about expressing conflict.

## Recommendations

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The following Recommendations have been made for this organization:

- Create a way to reframe conflict into a tool
- Highlight the flow of the chain of command
- Maintain the “Open Door” Policy

**Create a way to reframe conflict from being something to avoid, into a tool to that makes improvements within the organization**

Based on our interviews, we have found that several employees believe that conflict is not entirely dealt with and/or pushed aside in order to avoid hurting the feelings of others. In order to create a comfortable environment, we suggest that a portion of the weekly staff meetings be devoted to kudos. People crave positive feedback, and this encourages the open flow of communication.

We feel that this recommendation will provide a more structured way of dealing with conflict, and attempts to help avoid any tension from building within the organization.

### **Enforce the flow of the chain of command and make it clear to the members of the organization**

Our interviews indicated that occasionally certain steps in the chain of command are skipped, which leads to information not effectively distributed. This makes it harder for employees to be on the same page.

To avoid this, we recommend that employees are reminded of the importance of the chain of command. We also recommend that a system be put in place that allows employees to be aware of their co-worker's absences, so they may be kept in the loop.

The distribution of minutes after each meeting would help in keeping the members up to date with the progress and information given out during each meeting.

### ***Maintain Open Door Policy***

Based on survey data and interview results, we found that an overwhelming number of organizational members prefer face to face communication within the office. The "open door" policy that is currently in place within this organization helps the members find comfort and strengthens the bonds between the co-workers of this organization.

We find that this policy is necessary for this organization, because it has proven to help create an enjoyable environment for the workers, and as a result, they are satisfied with their work life.

We would also like to suggest that in keeping this open door policy, the workers keep within the boundaries of the organization and respect the wishes of their co-workers.

## Conclusion

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Throughout the audit process, Blue Ridge Communication Consultants have recognized several organizational strengths within the (client). These include, but are not limited to; the organization's ability to communicate to each other through face-to-face communication, working relationships the members have with their co-workers, the sense of dedication the members feel toward the organization and the quality and quantity of information to be effective contributors to the organization.

We would like to see the (client) continue to utilize these strengths and continue to build a stronger organization. Additionally, there are opportunities for growth available that may further enhance the organization.

Expanding upon these opportunities for growth, we have developed some recommendations that we believe will help the (client) to continue to improve their internal communication. We understand that implementing some changes will take effort from all members of the organization and may not be received well at first, but we strongly believe that they are in the best interest of the organization and will help prevent future issues from arising.

Blue Ridge Communication Consultants believe that the (client) is a strong and unified organization at Longwood University. The members sincerely believe in what they do and get a feeling of satisfaction from their work. We have confidence that this audit can only enhance the organizations effectiveness and will make the organization even stronger as a unit. We would like to challenge the members of the organization to reflect without bias on the recommendations we have made and to utilize this audit as a tool for growth.

## References

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## Appendix A

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### Survey Questions and Rating Scale

*The following questions correspond to Information Adequacy*

**1. Amount of information I receive now:**

*Rated on a scale from 1 (Very Small Amount) to 5 (Very Large Amount)*

How well I am doing my job	1 2 3 4 5
How my job-related problems are being handled	1 2 3 4 5
How my job relates to the total operation of my organization	1 2 3 4 5
I respond via e-mail with an adequate amount of information	1 2 3 4 5
My co-workers respond to me via e-mail with an adequate amount of information	1 2 3 4 5

**2. Amount of information needed to receive to do my job well:**

*Rated on a scale from 1 (Very Small Amount) to 5 (Very Large Amount)*

How well I am doing my job	1 2 3 4 5
How my job-related problems are being handled	1 2 3 4 5
How my job relates to the total operation of my organization	1 2 3 4 5
I respond via e-mail with an adequate amount of information	1 2 3 4 5
My coworkers respond to me via e-mail with an adequate amount of information	1 2 3 4 5

**3. Follow-Up (Responses and Feedback) on Information Sent: Amount of follow-up I receive now:**

*Rated on a scale from 1 (Very Small Amount) to 5 (Very Large Amount)*

From subordinates	1 2 3 4 5
From coworkers	1 2 3 4 5
From immediate supervisors	1 2 3 4 5

**4. Follow-Up (Responses and Feedback) on Information Sent: Amount of follow-up needed:**

*Rated on a scale from 1 (Very Small Amount) to 5 (Very Large Amount)*

From subordinates	1 2 3 4 5
From coworkers	1 2 3 4 5
From immediate supervisors	1 2 3 4 5

**5. Timeliness of Information Received From Key Sources:**

*Rated on a scale from 1 (Much too late to be helpful) to 5 (Is well ahead of time)*

From subordinates	1 2 3 4 5
From coworkers	1 2 3 4 5
From immediate supervisors	1 2 3 4 5
From grapevine (discussion within the workplace)	1 2 3 4 5

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*The following questions correspond to Organizational Communication Relationships*

**6. Organizational Communication Relationships:**

*Rated on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree)*

I trust my coworkers	1 2 3 4 5
My coworkers get along with each other	1 2 3 4 5
My relationship with my coworkers is satisfying	1 2 3 4 5

I trust my immediate supervisor	1 2 3 4 5
My immediate supervisor is honest with me	1 2 3 4 5
My immediate supervisor listens to me	1 2 3 4 5
I am free to disagree with my immediate supervisor	1 2 3 4 5
I can tell my immediate supervisor when things are Going wrong	1 2 3 4 5
My immediate supervisor praises me for a good job	1 2 3 4 5
My immediate supervisor is friendly with subordinates	1 2 3 4 5
My supervisor understands my job needs	1 2 3 4 5
My relationship with my immediate supervisor is satisfying	1 2 3 4 5
I trust top management	1 2 3 4 5
Top management is sincere in efforts to communicate with employees	1 2 3 4 5
My relationship with top managers is satisfying	1 2 3 4 5
My organization encourages differences of opinion	1 2 3 4 5
I have a say in decisions that affect my job	1 2 3 4 5
I influence operations in my unit or department	1 2 3 4 5
I have a part in accomplishing my organization's goals	1 2 3 4 5
Our organization effectively does their job	1 2 3 4 5

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*The following questions correspond to Channels of Information*

**7. Amount of Information I Receive Now :**

*Rated on a scale from 1 (Very Small Amount) to 5 (Very Large Amount)*

Face to face	1 2 3 4 5
Telephone	1 2 3 4 5

Written memos/letters	1 2 3 4 5
E-mail	1 2 3 4 5
Meeting with supervisor	1 2 3 4 5

**8. Amount of Information Needed to do my Job Well:**

*Rated on a scale from 1 (Very Small Amount) to 5 (Very Large Amount)*

Face to face	1 2 3 4 5
Telephone	1 2 3 4 5
Written memos/letters	1 2 3 4 5
E-mail	1 2 3 4 5
Meeting with supervisor	1 2 3 4 5

**9. Preferences:**

*Rated on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree)*

I prefer face to face rather than telephone	1 2 3 4 5
I prefer telephone rather than e-mail	1 2 3 4 5
I prefer e-mail rather than staff/supervisor meetings	1 2 3 4 5

## **Appendix B**

### **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?
2. What factors tend to facilitate your effectiveness on the job?
  - a. Please give an example.

3. What, if anything, inhibits your effectiveness?
4. Describe the chain of command in this organization and how it operates.
5. What kinds of communication are necessary for you to have with other co-workers?
  - a. How well does this communication work?
6. What are the major communication strengths of the organization? Be specific.
7. What are the major communication weaknesses of the organization? Be specific.
8. Describe the communication relationship you have with:
  - a. Your immediate supervisor
  - b. Top manager
  - c. Coworkers
  - d. Subordinates, if applicable
9. When conflict occurs, how is it resolved?
  - i. What normally causes conflict here?
10. How would you describe the general communication climate here?
11. How would you evaluate the communication from top management?
12. 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?
13. How does communication here affect your job satisfaction?
14. How do you know what you need to send to others?
15. How do you make the decision to initiate communication? Do you receive many requests for information?
16. Do you find yourself requesting information to your job? What kind? Why is this not sent routinely?
17. Is there any way in which you do not get to participate in an evaluation of superiors or supervisors?
  - a. Would you find such participation useful?
  - b. How high up would you like to evaluate?
  - c. What would happen if you could do that?

