THE CONSTRINTS FCED BY STAFF IN EFFECTIVE COMMUNICTION IN KENYN PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES

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Abstract: *This study was conducted at Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology.It was designed to investigate the constraints faced by Staff ineffective Communication in Kenyan public universities.The study specifically investigated the constraints faced by staff in effective communication in theKenyan Public Universities.Literature was reviewed in relation to the above stated objective. The study sample was drawn from MMUST and involved both academic and administrative staff. The sample size was one hundred and fifty two (152) which represents 77.6% of the target population. Stratified random sampling techniques based on the respondents' job descriptions were used. The instruments for data collection involved use of questionnaires and information from secondary data materials for instance the University Act of 2007 and the employee survey findings of 2006. Data was analyzed using descriptive statistics. The major findings revealed that MMUST staff had experienced constraints in effectively communicating to other members of staff. The study identified the constraints faced by the MMUST staff in conveying messages citing lack of adequate working equipment and office space. The study therefore, recommended that MMSUT develops appropriate communication policies to curb the communication based problems affecting the university.*

Key Words: *Organization, Communication, Influence, Teaching, Research, Channel, Barrier , Constraints*

INTRODUCTION

Effective communication is an important ingredient within the university management structure. Anyakoha, et.al. (1995) stated that effective communication within the university is crucial because it enables the various actors within the institution to clarify individual perceptions and discern institutional precepts. It also helps individuals to produce the co-operation needed to reach institutional goals. She further explained that communication within the university is likely to affect the staff in all they do, as they organize and establish goals for their work, interact with students, balance their diverse responsibilities, participate in institutional affairs, and proceed through their careers.

Poor communication among the various actors within the university community has been identified as contributing to the conflict situations that characterize universities in Africa African Universities, for instance Nigerian Universities are characterized by internal conflicts, including those between administration and academic staff. Anyakoha,et.al. (1995) stated that some of the conflicts often lead to work stoppage or even closure of universities and they stemmed from poor communication. Kenyan public universities have also experienced riots and conflicts usually between students and managers or staff and managers. For instance at Kenyatta University, in March 2009 students rioted and destroyed property which lead to its closure and interruption of academic programmes (Daily Nation18[th] March 2009). In May the same year, UASU was also locked in disputes with University Councils over pay issues (The Standard May 25, 2009). MMUST has also had disputes between staff and administration, students and administration over different issues for instance, PSSP payment, attachment fees payment, lack of enough teaching and laboratory facilities, delayed salaries, among others which have been attributed to communication breakdown. Distribution of information to MMUST centres and campuses have also been a problem leading to delayed decision making or working behind deadlines. Yet to date there is no study in Kenya that has addressed this problem in university management. The puzzle still remains; could there be weaknesses in the communication policies used in public university management? More specifically, what is the impact of the communication policy employed at Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology on its management practices?

The organizational structure of MMUST is based on the University Act of 30th December, 2006.The University is run by the University Council as the supreme organ with the day to-day activities run by Senate, chaired by the Vice Chancellor. The Senate comprises of the Vice Chancellor, Deputy Vice Chancellors, Deans of Faculties, Directors of Institutes, Schools and Centres, Chairpersons of Teaching Departments, the University Librarian, representatives of Librarians, faculty representatives, professors, student representatives, trade union representatives and Coordinators of Campuses and other directorates. At all levels of administration and management, there is usually upward, downward horizontal and lateral communication. There are issues of concern that require managers and administrators to consult over and make decisions that guide provision of services as promised in the service charter. The coordination of administrative, financial, academic functions of the University is placed in the

offices of the Deputy Vice Chancellors supported by professional experts. The Management and Administrative hierarchy are shown in Appendix I and II. It was in view of the above that the study was done to investigate the influence of communication on management practices at MMUST.

This study used the technical theory .The technical view of communication is associated with information theory and is traced back to Shannon and Weaver (1949). Shannon, portrayed communication as a mechanistic system. The mechanistic system considers how an information source gets a message to a destination with minimal distortions and errors. The technical view of communication is relevant in this study since the communication process consists of the message, sender, channel, receiver and feedback. In this case, the message should be encoded correctly and an appropriate channel of communication chosen for the message to reach the recipient with minimal distortions thus preventing barriers to communication. The mechanistic system is shown in Figure 1.1 below:
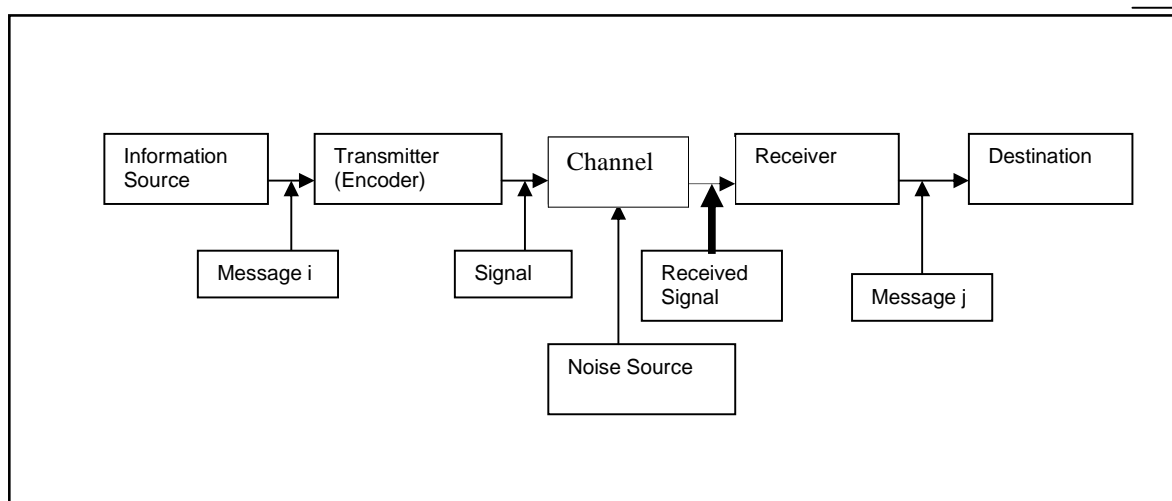

Figure 1.1: Communication as a mechanistic system
Adopted from Shannon and Weaver (1949)

According to Shannon and Weaver's model in Figure 1.1 above, a message begins at an information source, which is relayed through a transmitter, and then sent via a signal towards the receiver. But before it reaches the receiver, the message must go through noise (sources of interference). Finally, the receiver must convey the message to its destination. Shannon and Weaver's (1949) model clearly demonstrates why even the simplest communication can be misunderstood. Transmitting a signal across additional media only adds to the complexity of the communication and increases the chances for distortion. It is suddenly easier to understand why other people cannot comprehend what is already in the public domain. In this study therefore, the mechanistic approach is relevant since it depicts how information moves from the source to the recipient and back to the source. The approach ascertains that communication can occur with minimum distraction and therefore can be responded to appropriately.

Huber (1991) explained that communication, whether in organizations, personal relationships, politics or public information campaigns, is one of the most complex and strategic activities of human beings. It may have limited effectiveness for two interacting reasons. The first obstacle to effectiveness is the lack of congruence between the sender (source, persuader, and speaker) and the receiver (recipient, addressee, and listener). As many contributions have emphasized, the latter is unlikely to trust the former's statement or recommendation if their interests diverge.

The second obstacle is also widely recognized, but has not yet been embodied into economic modeling. A'la Holmström(1982), stated that the acts of formulating and absorbing the content of a communication are privately costly, and so communication was subject to moral hazard in team as follows;

(i) As academics know too well, the sender must expand time, attention and other resources to communicate effectively her or his knowledge. Because the same message may convey different meanings to different receivers, the sender must address the receiver's knowledge (absorptive capacity, language, perspective). Similarly, the message should not be so concise as not to convey the relevant information, but should also not include information that is redundant, or irrelevant or else well-known to the specific audience, so as not to distract attention or discourage absorption.

(ii) Conversely, the receiver must pay attention, decode, understand, and rehearse the acquired knowledge. He must decode the literal meaning, and, like the sender, take the properties of the other side into account in order to make a proper inference of what the intended meaning was.

Anyakoha, et.al. (1995) added that problems encountered in universities result from miscommunication. What recipients understand of a message may not always be the message intended by the sender. A number of barriers can distort effective communication. Sillars (1999) reiterated that, however carefully an organization or an individual plans acts of communication, it is inevitable that the breakdowns will sometimes occur. They can be classified into two groups as follows; those caused by people or organizations concerned with communicating, and those which are due to external factors.

Saiyadain (2000) identified three categories of communication barriers namely; human factors, context or mode factors and organizational factors and explained them as follows;

(i) **Human Factors -** include filtering, that is, the information is manipulated to suit the receiver. The major determinant of filtering is the number of levels in an organization structure. Another factor is the selective perception where the receivers selectively see and hear as on their needs, motivation, experience, background and other personal characteristics.

(ii) **Content or Mode Factors**
These factors are included in the content, process of encoding and decoding and the mode of content communication. Among the factors is the ***communication overload*** where

individuals have more information than they can sort out and use. They tend to select out, ignore, pass over or forget information. Regardless of the cause, the result is lost information and therefore less effective communication.

(iii)   Organizational Factors

These are factors such as hierarchy, status and overall climate, which contribute to the pattern of communication in the organization. For example, as Singhal (1993) states that the level in bureaucracies distorts and delays information due to screening or additional information relating to idiosyncrasies.

With all the problems, potential and real, in the communication process, it is obvious that a "perfect" communication system is unlikely. Although perfection, like rationality, might not be achieved, organizations can have mechanisms by which they can attempt to keep the communication system as clear as they could. Downs, (1967) pointed that several devices can be available to reduce the distortions and other complications in the communication process. A common solution to at least some communication problems is the ubiquitous meeting which is quite valuable, but it is obvious that time spent in meetings is time not spent on other activities.

Some organizations have turned to "project groups" as a means of solving communication problems. These groups consist of personnel from a variety of organizational units who develop a new product of service for the organization. Katz and Kahn (1982), explained that one analysis of research and development project groups composed of scientists and engineers found out that such groups became increasingly isolated from key information sources within and outside their own organizations.

Hall (2003), stated that advanced communication technology was not the cure for organizational communication problems. These problems are rooted in the nature of organizations, their participants, and their interactions with their environments. On the other hand, Nzuve (1999) gave the solutions to communication barriers as sending messages effectively and listening to messages attentively.   While sending messages one should set communication goals to be accomplished and should also use appropriate language which has been clarified for easy understanding, and practice emphatic communication where the sender should understand the received message, and improve sender credibility.

METHODLOGY

Sampling Techniques and Sample Size

This section presents sampling techniques, sample size and instruments for data collection.

Sampling Techniques

MMUST had twenty six (26) departments at the time of the study. The 26 departments were divided into two major strata, that is, twenty one (21) teaching and five (5) non teaching departments. Out of these ten (10) departments representing 37% of the population were selected using random stratified sampling to participate in the study.

The strata were further subdivided based on members sharing a specific attribute or characteristic for instance lecturers, administrators, secretaries, technicians among other cadres of staff. A random sample from each stratum was taken, in a number proportional to the stratum's size when compared to the population. These subsets of the strata were then pooled to form a random sample. The subjects from the selected population were selected to ensure that they were a representative of the population in terms of such critical factors as sex, faculties, years of experience and rank.

Sample Size
To arrive at sample size of 152 individuals , the researcher adopted a sample determination table used in social research. (Saunders, et al, 2009:212). The ideal was 196 but because the response rate was not 100%; the researcher contended with this sample which represents 77.6%.

Sixty (60) lecturers, forty (40) administrators, eleven (11) secretaries, five (5) accountants, ten (10) technicians, twenty (20) office assistants and six (6) other staff were purposively sampled and participated in the study. A total of one hundred and fifty two (152) members of staff were sampled for the study as shown in Table 3.1 below;

Table 3.1: Sample size

Category	Population on Permanent & Pensionable Terms	Sample	Percentage (%)	Sampling Technique
Lecturers	180	60	33.3	Random
Administrators	120	40	33.3	Random
Secretaries	33	11	33.3	Random
Accountants	16	5	31.2	Random
Technicians	30	10	33.3	Random
Office Assistants	60	20	33.3	Random
Others (Clerks and Cleaners)	21	6	28.5	Random
Total	**460**	**152**	**33.0**	

Instruments for Data Collection
The researcher used the questionnaires to collect data.Walonick (1993) emphasized that questionnaires were easy to analyze, and most statistical analysis software can easily process them. He explained that they are also cost effective when compared to face-to-face interviews, mostly because of the costs associated with travel time. He further asserted that written questionnaires become even more cost effective as the number of research questions increases.
Therefore, the study was greatly influenced by the above sentiments thus the use of written questionnaire. The questionnaire used consisted of both open and closed ended questions that captured the respondents' personal background, channels of communication used in MMUST,

influence of communication on management practices and communication barriers experienced. Section A of the questionnaire sought the personal characteristics of the respondents while Section B, C and D sought information specific to the topic and objectives of study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Barriers to Communication faced by MMUST Employees
This section deals with Efficiency of Communication in relation to the respondents' job designation and their perception on barriers to Communication in Relation to the Respondents' Job Designation.

Efficiency of Communication in relation to the respondents' job designation
Respondents were asked to indicate their job designations and their perception of efficiency of effective communication in the university. The results are as presented in table 1.

Table 1: Efficiency of Communication as per the Respondents' Job Designation

Job Designation of the Respondents	Does information about work get to you on time?	
	Yes	No
Lecturers	75.0%	25.0%
Administrators	55.6%	44.4%
Secretaries	66.7%	33.3%
Accountants	100.0%	.0%
Technicians	50.0%	50.0%
Office Assistants	75.0%	25.0%
Others	36.4%	63.6%

The results in Table 1 above illustrate the efficiency of communication at the University in relation to the Respondents' Job Designation. All the cadres of staff agree that information gets to them on time as follows;75.0% of the Lecturers 55.6% of Administrators,66.7% of Secretaries,100% of Accountants,50% of Technicians and 75% of Office Assistants. The Other

category of staff did not agree and 63.6% said no. The following reasons were given as explanations to the respondents' negative answer; that it resulted in delayed information and thus delayed decision making. This was as a result of receiving information late due to the delay in distribution of memos to all the staff concerned for a particular meeting and also lack of a centralized notice board where information is put for all to read. At MMUST, notices are stuck on walls of buildings therefore some staff miss the information since they are unable to read all the information on all walls of the University buildings. In addition to the above sentiment, decision making is delayed due to information not getting to the staff concerned in time.

The respondents who said no also cited poor or wrong channel of communication for instance grapevine as the cause of delayed information. According to the respondents, communication through grapevine was not permanent and lacked clarity, therefore did not convey the information in reality thus confusing the staff on the type of decision to make incase of a crisis. In other cases, a phone call might be made to pass across the information and since the recipient of the call was not the intended receiver of the information, it got distorted by the time it gets to him/her. However, nearly all of the information within the grapevine is undocumented and is thereby open to change and interpretation as it moves through the network. The informal organization is less permanent and less stable (than the formal organization) because its leaders and patterns of action change readily. This occurs because of the dependency of the network on personalities, whereas the formal network is set up through structured policies nondependent on individuals.

According to Goldhaber (1983), the grapevine has both good and bad tendencies but its most significant characteristics indicate that it is fast and can be highly selective and accurate though always incomplete. It (the grapevine) is also considered desirable in an organization because it could give management some insight into the attitude of employees and help spread useful information. On the other hand, it could be undesirable when it spreads rumour and baseless information. Rumour about an organization could originate from a conspiratorial source of inter-organizational rivalry especially among
organizations that are into the same line of product.Therefore, organizations, most especially universities should minimize rumours by ensuring that the communication system in place is effective.

Although scholars recognize the importance of good communication in organizations, in practice the efficiency, or rather inefficiency, of communication systems and structures is often overlooked. Greenbaum and White (1976) noted that "communication problems will always exist in complex organizations. The challenge for management is to minimize the level of dysfunctional operation". However, identifying the causes of poor communication is a complex task. As Buchanan and Huczynski (2004) assert that the factors affecting communication are wide – ranging and often depend on multiple variables; "organizations systematically inhibit communication through hierarchical structures, power and status differences, the design and gendered differentiation of jobs, the nature of employment contracts, physical layouts, and rules".

However, the respondents who agreed that information always got to them on time explained that it was due to their closeness with their supervisors and that they had a good working relationship with other staff. The formal network, made up of memos, reports, staff-meetings, departmental meetings, conferences, university newsletters, official notices, was highly documented and as such had very little chance for change. Therefore, staffs that are usually in touch with their supervisors had a great advantage over those who were not. Therefore, barriers of communication exist at MMUST depending on the channel and nature of communication being passed across to staffs with different job designations.

Barriers to Communication in Relation to the Respondents' Job Designation
Respondents were asked to indicate their job designations and their perception of barriers of effective communication in the university. The results are as presented in table 4.6.

Table 2: Barriers to Communication in Relation to the Respondents' Job   Designation

Job Designation of the Respondents	Barriers to Communication	Frequency			
		1	2	3	4
Lecturers	language		50.0%		50.0%
	channel used	100.0%			
	head of department	33.3%		66.7%	
	All barriers		50.0%		50.0%
Administrators	language	16.7%		50.0%	33.3%
	channel used	33.3%	50.0%		16.7%
	head of department	42.9%	14.3%	14.3%	28.6%
	All barriers	20.0%	20.0%		60.0%
Secretaries	ranking language	12.5%	25.0%	62.5%	
	channel used	75.0%	12.5%	12.5%	
	head of department	50.0%	40.0%	10.0%	
	All barriers				100.0%
Accountants	language		50.0%		50.0%
	channel used	100.0%			

	head of department			100.0%	
	All barriers		100.0%		
Technicians	ranking language	50.0%	16.7%	16.7%	16.7%
	channel used	33.3%	16.7%	16.7%	33.3%
	head of department		33.3%	50.0%	16.7%
	All barriers	16.7%	33.3%		50.0%
Office Assistants	language	25.0%	25.0%	50.0%	
	channel used	75.0%	25.0%		
	head of department	25.0%	50.0%	25.0%	
	All barriers	33.3%			66.7%
Others	language	12.5%	25.0%	62.5%	
	channel used	70.0%	30.0%		
	head of department	33.3%	33.3%	33.3%	
	All barriers				100.0%

Results in Table 2 above show the Respondents' Job Designation in relation to the Barriers to communication experienced at MMUST.Lecturers ranked one the Channel used and Head of Department at 100.0% and 33.3% respectively. They ranked two the Language and All barriers at 50.0% each. The Administrators ranked one the Head of Department, Channel used, All barriers and Language at 42.9%, 33.3%, 20.0% and 16.7% respectively. Secretaries ranked one the Channel used, Head of Department and Language at 75.0%, 50.0% and 12.5% respectively. While all Barriers was ranked four at 100.0%.Accountants ranked one the Channel used at 100.0%,Language and All Barriers were ranked two at 50.0% and 100.0% respectively while Head of Department was ranked three at 100.0%.Technicians ranked one the Language, Channel and All Barriers at 50.0%,33.3% and 16.7% while Head of Department was ranked two at 33.3%.Office Assistants ranked one Channel, All Barriers, Head of Department and Language at 75.0%,33.3%,25.0% and 25.0% respectively. The Other Categories of Staff ranked one Channel, Head of Department and Language at 70.0%, 33.3% and 12.5% while All Barriers was ranked four at 100.0%.

From the results above, it was shown that the most barriers to communication experienced by all cadres of staff were Head of Department and Channel used. The respondents agreed that not all barriers listed were experienced but from the results it is realized that different cadres of staff experienced different barriers. Dull (1981), stated that staff needed to be cognizant of barriers to communication. These would not enable them to eliminate all roadblocks in communication, but

would enable them to skillfully handle communication barriers which could add significantly to the efficiency in communication over a period of time. The quantity and quality of supervisor-staff communications would be basic determinants to organizational effectiveness. Greenberg and Baron (2007) stated that an individual can improve their communication skills when simple and clear language is used, when one listens attentively, when one avoids information overload and when one gives and receives feedback. Most barriers to communication are experienced due to the above highlighted reasons. However, the university can come up with ways of encouraging 360 degree feedback in which all people at the university give feedback to others at different levels and receive feedback from them, as well as other stakeholders. Suggestion systems could also be used.. Corporate hotlines, informal meetings and employee surveys are also other ways in which the University Administration could use to curb the constraints faced in communication at the University.

According to the respondents, the effects of barriers of communication on the University operation were as follows; reduced staff productivity, morale and performance leading to them lacking direction due to erroneous information or lack of it therefore making wrong decisions. The above were as a result of delayed communications which lead to wastage of man hours and in ability to plan ahead. On the other hand, the respondents suggested that the best method of overcoming the communication constraints was that the university management should be organizing for meetings with all staff to enable them to express their sentiments openly and without fear. These meetings would precipitate a good working environment for all the staff at the university. In addition to that, the channels of communication should be chosen correctly to avoid distorting the intended information to the recipients. Also they were of the opinion that the Heads of Departments be interacting with other members of staff often to curb the different status and lack of trust between the staff and their Heads of Sections.

To overcome information overload, it was noted that it was important to realize that some information was not necessary, and make necessary information easily available. Also, the sender should give information meaning rather than just passing it on, and set priorities for dealing with the information flow since some information was not necessary. It was also proposed that to overcome the barriers to communication for complex messages, the sender should keep them clear and easy to understand. He/she should guide readers by telling them what to expect, use concrete and specific language, and stick to the point. He or she should be sure to ask for feedback so that one could clarify and improve on their message.Lastly,the respondents suggested that to overcome structural barriers, the university management should offer opportunities for communicating upward, downward, and horizontally (using such techniques as employee surveys, open-door policies, newsletters, memo, and task groups). Hierarchical levels should be reduced in order to increase coordination between departments, and encourage two-way communication.

From the research study, it was discovered that sometimes University staff came to grips with basic practical viewpoints which, when carefully articulated, could help all staff and the university at large. In a presentation to undergraduates, Howard Blauvelt said, "Business needs skilled communicators." This is a more kindly stance than that taken by many leading educators

who are appalled at the inability of undergraduates to spell, write simple effective English or express themselves orally. "The ability to listen, digest, distill, and further communicate information is fundamental". Blauvelt's message is clear in relation to this study. Robert Sarnoff said that: "Today's leaders are frequently men and women who have mastered the art of communication. They know how to get their ideas across. And successful people - those who are continually sought for key positions - effectively combine their ability to communicate with a solid foundation of knowledge. For knowledge is the predominant quality in the transmission of ideas."

CONCLUSION
The objective of the study was to determine the constraints faced in communicating messages at the university. The results showed that the constraints to communication were as follows; channel the head of department and language. The results further showed that the major communication constraint was the channel of communication used. This implied that all the channels of communication used were defective. The head of department was also cited as a barrier to communication since it was explained that they attended meetings and failed to communicate the deliberations of the meeting to their staff in time leading to the staff being informed late or not at all on important matters at the university. On the other hand, language as a constraint was only mentioned by a few respondents who explained that most written communication was either heavily worded or scantly worded making the recipients unable to understand the information.

The results of this study indicate that MMUST staff faces barriers to communication which included the communication channels used, the Head of Department and language. The three barriers experienced could also be as a result of other barriers to communication which include psychological and physiological factors. Lastly, both the staff and the administrators have enormous responsibilities in enhancing the effectiveness of the communication channels between them. Both groups (staff and administrators) should therefore be made aware of this fact in various fora such as workshops, seminars, and conferences

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