Organizational Communication

Bridging the Gap Between Managers and Employees

A thesis

Presented to the Faculty in Communication and Leadership Studies

School of Professional Studies

Gonzaga University

Under the Supervision of Professor Nobuya Inagaki

Under the Mentorship of Dr. Kristine Hoover

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts in Communication and Leadership Studies

By

Ramona L. Gabriel
Abstract

The purpose of this study is to explore the perceived communication practices between management and employees at the County Wide Probation Department specifically delving into the challenges presented in communication between management and staff. This study’s purpose is not to draw a clear conclusion about miscommunication, but rather to make a distinction that identifies a problem exists and provide suggestions towards rectifying those issues. Some of the areas of concern include the various mediums through which important information is disseminated: lack of face-to-face the clarity and continuity of communication between management and employees. In any organization, managers should make every effort to facilitate an environment where employees feel that the communication is clear and welcomed. Anything less may invite a negative and toxic environment. Therefore, it is vitally important for management to be able to effectively communicate with staff if they wish to foster a positive and productive organization. A survey, including fourteen Likert-scale questions was conducted and distributed to a sample size of 302 participants. Overall, the reviews were positive, with the exception of one or two questions where responses were mixed. However, despite the positive nature of the employees’ answers, communication at the probation department can benefit from making some minor adjustments.
We the undersigned, certify that we read this thesis and approve it as adequate in scope and quality for the degree Master of Arts.

[Signatures]

Thesis or Project Director

Faculty Mentor

Faculty Reader

Gonzaga University

MA Program in Communication and Leadership Studies
Table of Contents

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION 4
    Importance of the Study 4
    Statement of the Problem 5
    Definition of Terms 6
    Organization of Remaining Chapters 7

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE 8
    Theoretical Basis 8-9
    The Literature 10
    Research Questions 16

CHAPTER 3: SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY 17
    The Scope of the Study 17
    Methodology of the Study 18
    Research Design 19
    Validity 21
    Reliability 22

CHAPTER 4: THE STUDY 25
    Introduction 25
    Data Analysis 25
    Results 28
    Discussion 31

CHAPTER 5: SUMMARIES AND CONCLUSIONS 32
    Limitations of the Study 33
    Further Recommendations 34
    Conclusions 35

REFERENCES 37

APPENDIX 41
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

In an organization, communication between managers and employees is inherently important. Employees view managers as leaders, and it is in that idea that leaders are required to resolve conflicts, answer questions, or deliver departmental or procedural changes. Conrad & Poole (2005) define communication as "a process through which people, acting together, create, sustain, and manage meanings through the use of verbal or nonverbal signs and symbols with a particular context" (p. 4).

Effective communication by managers is also a basic tool for motivation. When communication is flowing, morale and productivity of the employees has a tendency to increase. When managers possess poor communication skills it eliminates an important feedback loop from employees. Employees can then become resentful, unmotivated and their concerns will go without resolution, because they do not perceive managers to be receptive. Hansen (2004) one frustrating problem managers, at the core of operational snafus, is poor communication.

Another key component to manager-employee relationships is the means by which managers convey information. It is not enough to communicate through emails or voicemails; there are times when employees want to see a face from the top. Face-to-face contact can wipe away a multitude of unanswered questions. Whereas, the incessant reliance on using emails, especially when the information may have a direct effect on an employee, can often times create undue angst.
The Problem

For too long, managers and employees have grappled with the idea of trying to find an end to the communication impasse that bogs down many organizations. Either employees feel that management does not effectively communicate or management feels they communicate well, and it is the employees that have the problem. Regardless of fault or blame, at some point, the two sides have to come together, resolve where the breakdown in communication is and move towards a place of co-existence. Myers and Myers (1982) define organizational communication as a central binding force that permits coordination among people and thus allows for organized behavior. Rogers and Rogers (1976) argue that the behavior of individuals in organizations is best understood from a communication point of view. Effective communication is a prerequisite for implementing organizational strategies as well as for managing day to day activities through people. Managers can spend much of their day communicating. Communication is found to make the biggest relative contribution to the employees. Or in other words, good communicators are more likely to be adjudged as effective managers employees through the effective communication practices will voluntarily listen to their managers and carry out instructions.

The purpose of this study is to explore the perceived communication practices between management and employees at the County Wide Probation Department. Some of the common complaints from employees are: managers do not communicate effectively important information is delivered through emails when, in some cases, face-to-face meetings seem more appropriate. If managers and employees are going to have a
positive working relationship, it is important for managers to know a problem exists and once learning of the problem(s), implement solutions to quell those issues.

Chester Barnard (1938) identified communication as an important management activity, and examined its elements and issues. According to him, communication is the major shaping force in the organization. Communication both makes the organization cooperative system and links the organization purpose to the human participants. The study provides the ability to start a conversation about the lack of communication within an organization. It is imperative that managers and employees come together and have positive discourse as opposed to both parties knowing a problem exists, yet does nothing to provide any solutions.

Definition of Terms

1) Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC): The process by which people create, exchange, and perceive information using networked telecommunications systems (or non-networked computers) that facilitate encoding, transmitting, and decoding messages
2) Face-to-face Communication (F2F): Being in the presence of another person.
3) Leader-member exchange: Leaders often develop relationships with each member of the group that they lead, and Leader-Member Exchange Theory explains how those relationships with various members can develop in unique ways.

Communication: The imparting or exchanging of thoughts, opinions, or information by speech, writing, or signs
Organization of Chapters

This thesis is organized into five chapters. In chapter two, it deals with a review of existing literature in the field of study and sets out the hypotheses. Chapter three describes the scope and methodology for the study and contains an overview of assumptions and hypotheses. Chapter four contains a review of data from the study and discussion of the findings, and compares those findings against the original hypotheses. Chapter five summarizes the thesis and discusses limitations and further recommendations for study in this area.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Basis

For any organization to be successful, managers and employees have to work together to build sustainable relationships. One effective way to reach a positive relationship can be attained through Leader-Member Exchange (LMX). The leader-member exchange theory focuses on the two-way relationship between supervisors and subordinates. Research on LMX has been growing since the 1970’s. According to Deluga (1998) he indicates that the theoretical development in the area of LMX has undergone many refinements, and the current theory is vastly different from previous research.

Lee (2002) went on to further explore the extent to which the quality of leader-member exchange (LMX) affects subordinates' perceptions of communication satisfaction in multiple contexts. His findings indicate that the quality of LMX may have a strong impact on a subordinate’s influence pertaining to communication, satisfaction in interpersonal communication, group, and organizational contexts. Graen & Bien (1995) supports that finding and says that the use of LMX in an organization should strive to bring employees and managers together. Conversely, according to Gersnter & Day (1997) they argue that over the past 30 years, LMX research has primarily focused on the
outcomes of LMX relationships while much less attention has been paid to antecedents. Relatively few studies have been conducted that have looked at subordinate personality variables as possible antecedents to LMX.

Communication is understood in various ways by theorists who have identified with the field in which they have studied. These studies focus on communication being central to the human experience, which involves understanding how people behave in creating, exchanging, and interpreting messages. Communication theory has one universal law posited by. S. F. Scudder (1980) said that that all living creatures can communicate through sights, sounds or movements. He also inferred that communication is the only way of survival. Dweck and Leggett (1988) theorized that implicit theories create an analytic framework for interpreting and responding to the events that an individual experiences. Consequently, they proposed that implicit theories have important motivational implications.

Understanding how people communicate is vital for helping people get along and interact with one another. Often times, when communication is poor, people lack motivation and will react in a negative manner. Hansen (2004) showed the connection of how effective communication incites positive productivity from employees. “If managers want to improve safe behavior, they must be guided by three core truths of effective communication:

1. Communicate through supervisors (to build strong first line trust and credibility),

2. Require that communications be "face-to-face" (to allow for feedback, expression and dialogue), and
3. Communicate information that is specifically relevant to employees and their work. (p 66)

The Literature

Anything less than lucid or a lack of communication can bring about confusion and mistrust. It is usually in these cases that employees become unproductive people. Managers who fail to adequately communicate with their employees may create an environment where employees feel that they are not "truly" a part of the company.

In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire (2007) states,

“One of the basic elements of the relationship between oppressor and oppressed is prescription. Every prescription represents the imposition of one individual’s choice upon another, transforming the consciousness of the person prescribed to into one that conforms with the prescriber’s consciousness.” (p 47)

One problem that managers sometimes find is that they are force-feeding information to their employees. In many cases, employees feel as though they do not have a voice in an organization. This statement is important to understand because effective communication skills will reduce conflict and prevent unnecessary misunderstanding. However, some people might argue that communication is the explanation to all conflict within the organization; therefore, it is not only important for managers to be good communicators but also to understand the process of how to communicate with their subordinates.

Mediated Communication v. Face-to-Face Communication

In the 21st Century, society has seen a jump in the latest technological developments. Cell phones have the capability of doing so much more. With so many features, some phone companies offer classes, just to point out the rudimentary factors of
the phone. Whereas twenty years ago the cell phone could only make phone calls instead cell phones are equipped with games, the Internet and a host of other fun applications.

Research in computer-mediated communication addresses the nature of how humans interact with other humans via third type of (digital or Internet-based) means. In general, computer-mediated communication studies the addition of the computer as an intermediary machine, examining the impact of this non-verbal and non-visual medium. (Thurlow, Lengel & Tomic, 2004).

Glendinning (2006) points out that e-mail affects our use of time in other ways.

He states, “Consider the time lag between when a message is sent and when it’s answered. Most of the time, this time lag is no big deal; we rarely give it a second thought. E-mails place the burden of advancing the correspondence entirely on the receiver who may or may not have the time, interest, or expertise to provide an answer (p 83).”

In research conducted by Ilona Vanergriff (2006) she stated that although F2F communication is more effective, CMC can also be equally as effective. The author made the comparison by stating, “In FTF and CMC discussions, however, where language use is interactive, reception is never passive.” (p 110) Rather, listeners/message recipients play an active role in building and advancing common ground by collaborating with speakers/message senders (e.g., by indicating their current level of understanding).

Few general aspects of organizational life are more paradoxical than interpersonal communication. One of the most valuable skills that a manager can possess is the ability to effectively communicate with others.” (p 28)
In a classic study, Henry Mintzberg (2001) concluded that private sector managers typically spend approximately 80 percent of their time communicating with others. Yet another classic study indicates that in no more than half the instances studied did a subordinate receive the message sent by the superior. One conclusion to be drawn is that interpersonal communication is among the most central, yet least effective, activities of organizational life. Organizations echo too frequently the refrain: Are managers too busy to communicate with their staff or are they too lazy, and it is easier to type an email to get the point across?

Effective Communication

If managers want to be successful, they need to group effectively with their employees, who can help accomplish the organization’s goals. No small team or large bureaucracy operates with a single mind (Burtis & Turman, 2010, p 7). Conrad and Poole (2005) write that in the modern world, people can accomplish relatively little acting alone (p 109). To be effective, organizations must utilize two critical linkages to sustain positive intra-organizational relationships: open and clear communications (Mosley, Leon & Petri, 2001, p 290).

Although one of the first major literature reviews of this field was produced in about 15 years after much of the early foundation research had been completed, there have been roots in social psychology, human relations, and organizational and behavioral theory and behavior that has prompted organizational communication to emerged in the last 25 years bringing along its own content, methodology, and applications (Guetzkow, 1965). Societies and organizations are continuously constructed by their members through communicative process (Johansson, 2007, The Case of Sweden). Active
communication is important in creating a positive and productive environment. When an organization allows there to be open honest communication, it fosters solid relationships. This is vitally important and can possibly help reduce employees calling in sick; only doing what is expected of them and not giving managers full respect.

In *Message Matters* (2007), Rebeccal Leet states that communication is the basis for all cooperative action and an essential ingredient in making change (p 4). However, just as subordinates can become frustrated by a manager’s communication style is the same way managers can be frustrated when the information is not understood. When information is being conveyed, it is incumbent that managers are communicating effectively. If staff members are not clear this may cause managers to re-evaluate how they communicate.

The Grapevine

In an article written by Larry Hansen (2004), he says the thing that frustrates managers the most is poor communication managers the most is poor communication. Schmisseur, Stephens and Weir (2006) state,

> In fact, communication must be a priority for every manager at every level of the company. It is important for the messages to be consistent, clear, and endlessly repeated. “Open and honest communication builds trust and is essential in a membership organization.” Additionally, poor communication can be the result of information being provided through the old faithful “grapevine network” (p 43). Every office has this network. It is when staff members have taken portions of a topic, mixed it with their own version (or interpretation) and passed this faulty information to their colleagues. By the time, the information has been passed around its
original meaning has been misconstrued. And instead of managers getting ahead of the situation, they allow the misinformation to fester until it has become a massive problem.

Getting the Message Across

“It is one thing to assume that the primary purpose of communication is to get a message across, to shape up other’s behavior, or to teach new information, as dominate traditions of teaching and research about the topic appears to suggest (Anderson, R., Butler, L.A., Cissna, K.N. 2007, p 1). When managers are communicating, they should be asking themselves, “What do they want the end result to be?” or “How would they like their subordinates to react to what is being communicated to them?”

Often times, managers have to look at how they deliver their information. In a study conducted by D’Aprix, Greenbaum and Gordon (1997) they talk about a leader having at least four activities: Leading, informing, listening and involving. The effective communication process today is an ongoing and complex interaction among leaders, workers and coworkers. Romano (2002) says that it is not enough for managers to possess positive communication skills, but they have to also be good listeners. Listening is the cheapest, yet most effective, concession they can make to their employees. It gives employees "a hearing" and lets them ventilate. Above all, people want to be understood. Spears (1998) says listening encompasses getting in touch with one’s own inner voice and seeking to understand what one’s body, spirit, and mind are communicating. Yukl (2006) people tend to feel alienated and unappreciated they receive little information about the plans, activities and achievements of their team or department (p 336).
Literature Review Summary

Grates (1998) indicates that most managers are credible and reliable sources of information. Another crucial characteristic of world-class communication is that managers and supervisors are key communicators. Recognizing and employing them as such reinforces a strong focus on the importance of interactive communication at the employee level. Anything short of this type of reinforcement managers will not be able to use leadership communication as an instrument of inspiration for sustainable productivity and change.

Good communication between managers and line staff also involves delivering a message that gets the point across without being over-bearing. Kumuyi (2007) confirms this by stating, “Leaders still in love with inflexible top-down command-and-control leadership style miss this point and its advantage. They issue instructions and orders but seldom pause to find out if they are heard. They hardly wait for feedback, stopping the communication before it runs its full cycle (p 42).”

Communication between managers and line staff has been a struggle in many organizations for years. Depending on the organization, some leaders have made attempts to bridge the gap of communication lapses, while others go with the status quo.

According to Jablin and Krone (1994), leader-member exchange between superiors and subordinates constitutes a social system that operates within larger systems not in isolation, but embedded within such systems; which indicates that communication has to be clear and concise when coming from the top. A leader shuns communication skills at his organization's peril. Without good communication abilities, the most brilliant
of all leaders will fail to deliver on the bottom-line. Active communication is important in creating a positive and productive workplace.

Research Questions

RQ1: Is communication being used effectively between management and employees at County Wide Probation Department?

RQ2: Are managers using a balanced approach between using verbal communication and computer-mediated means?
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

County Wide Probation Department was chosen for this study because it is where the researcher works; the place where employees have complained about the breakdown of communication, and the access to participants is doable. The department’s leadership team consists of four levels of management: Chief of Probation, Deputy Chief(s), Director(s) and Probation Services Managers. Communication is utilized through emails, interoffice correspondence and face-to-face meetings. In general, the lines of communication are usually informal.

There are approximately four hundred and forty-three employees. Line staff employees consist of clerical, management, probation officers and group supervisors. Because this is a study to understand the viewpoint of communication with employees, management will not be participants. Additionally, those group supervisors who work swing and graveyard shifts will not be included in the study, because attempting to distribute and collect the surveys might prove somewhat difficult. Three hundred and ten surveys were distributed and three hundred and two employees participated.

A quantitative exploratory research study was conducted in order to examine the impact of perceived communication practices between management and line staff. Hoyle, Harris and Judd (2002) indicate that some research aims specifically at drawing conclusions about a given target population, which is specified in the research goals and hypothesis from the outset. This study’s purpose is not to draw a clear conclusion about miscommunication, rather to make a distinction that identifies a problem exists and provide suggestions towards rectifying those issues.
A plethora of literature has proved vital to have a better understanding of the relationship between managers and line staff. The study was distributed at County Wide Probation Department. The survey given to the employees was to examine their interpretation of the communication practices between management and line staff. The survey consisting of a five-point level Likert scale measured the overall impact that the lack of communication has on a respective employee. The questionnaire posed questions such as: 1) is management effectively communicating, 2) does management have a balance between emails and unit meetings to inform staff of departmental changes, 3) is management open to feedback.

Sample

The sampling procedure is purposive, and the goal is to test theoretical propositions about the causes and effects of specific aspects of those experiences (Hoyle, Harris, and Judd, 2002, p 219). The Chief of Probation received a letter requesting permission to conduct the study. The second section of the study involves every employee receiving the letter of intent, outlining the survey’s purpose. If only three quarters of employees opt not to participate, validity could be problematic.

An anonymous survey and letter of intent was submitted to participating employees.

Instrumentation

The researcher designed the survey used in the study. The survey was provided to a fellow colleague for appropriateness and clarity of questions. The questions were created to measure the overall feelings of employees’ thoughts about how management currently communicates. The distribution of the survey was structured in a manner that
collection was convenient and fluid. The participants were asked to answer fourteen questions relevant to whether or not they “strongly agreed” to “strongly disagreed” about communication practices within the department. The feeling of the researcher was to ensure that participants felt that the process was relatively easy and not complicated.

Instrumentation development and content

Questions were asked concerning the perception of the participants’ feelings on how management communicates. The questions were created based on conversations that this researcher has had in the past about management and their communication styles. The literature allowed this research to clarify the current state of communication problems, possible modifications or enhancements that are needed in the probation department. Several types of research communication textbooks, journals and other sources were helpful in defining the topic that was to be researched. The letter of intent to the employees is included in Appendix A. The questions for employees are included in Appendix B.

Procedure

After receiving approval from the Chief, a letter of intent was emailed to all potential participants. Since the questions were limited in terms of number, the researcher was able to distribute and collect the surveys after participants finished answering.
Analysis

The researcher went through each survey, tallied the responses and provided a percentage based on each person’s answer or descriptive statistics. Confidentiality did not pose a problem, because each participant was encouraged not to provide his or her name. In the case of a participant including their name or the name of their supervisor that information was redacted from the survey. Great care was taken to report the information with sufficient detail and appropriate context to allow future readers the ability to make their own informed decision of the findings.

Strengths of the Study

The reviewed empirical studies represent a rich and realistic image of organizational communication activities. Often this type of research is called for – in order to enhance our understanding of theoretical implications in daily practice (Putnam and Fairhurst 2001). Furthermore, the strong empirical base both suggests and points to the possibility of a close link between research and practice.

With all things being equal, employees would love to have managers who are thoughtful, considerate, forth coming, and openly communicative. Moreover, managers would enjoy having employees who do not question departmental changes, authority and do as they are told. Unfortunately, the two desires are often met with a great deal of backlash and opposition. Many times employees do not voice concerns for fear of retaliation or their complaints being ignored. The study process allows the employees an opportunity to use an anonymous survey, not to indict management of their faults, but simply to let them know that problems do exist. In turn, the responses could move to open the lines of communication between managers and line staff a bit wider.
Validity

The theory of validity, and the many lists of specific threats, provides a useful scheme for assessing the quality of research conclusions. The theory is general in scope and applicability, well articulated in its philosophical suppositions, and virtually impossible to explain adequately in a few minutes (www.socialresearchmethods.net/kb/introval.php).

Validity of a specific measure refers to the extent to which that measure captures the construct it is designed to test by being free of systematic errors or operation. (Harris, et al., 2002).

To do any research, we must be able to measure the concepts we wish to study (Harris, et al, 2002, p 4). The construct validity can be determined by examining how the data is related to the objective measures; thereby making the survey valid for measuring the amount of communication between managers and employees. However, these same items may not be appropriate for measuring other communication issues such as quality of communication or satisfaction with communication.

For this study, the employees’ perception of how management communicates was measured. However, the way the questionnaire was designed should make it easy to find a modicum of validity, because it is not designed to find definitive answers: only what employees believe to be true for themselves. To control the researcher’s own bias, certain personal assumption and expectations at the outset of the study had to remain in check. Because the author is also an employee, it can be tempting to allow her own negative thoughts towards management and make judgments about participants’
responses. Searching out data that disconfirms the researcher’s explanations demonstrates checking and rechecking to improve credibility of the reported findings (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002).

Reliability

Each employee will be receiving the same survey. Therefore, any errors pertaining to the research will be completely reliant on how each participant views the question and responds. Additionally, to maintain the integrity of the department, the actual name was also changed.

Ethics

Ethics according to Harris, Hoyle, and Judd (2002) states experiments should never be used to deceive participants. In some cases, providing false feedback is considered deceptive. Even if the results are not what participants wanted to see, it is incumbent upon the researcher to be honest and upfront with the results.

Employees are relying on all facets of the study to be spelled out. The survey cannot have one bit of information and later other additions are made without participant’s knowledge. Hoyle, Harris & Judd (2002) state, “Respect for persons thus serves as the basis for the most fundamental ethical principle underlying research with human participants, which is the idea that researchers should obtain informed consent from people who are freely and voluntarily choosing to participate in the research” (p 48).

Additionally, there is an overall understanding that the questionnaire is going to remain confidential. It would not be prudent to write the names of participants on their
respective survey, just for the sake of wanting to know who has the issues with management. To share any part of a participant’s information, regardless of the intentions, nullifies the purpose of the study. Nefarious acts may also prevent trust for future research studies. To ease any angst and minimize uneasiness, participants were informed that the Chief was notified about the survey, and he was on board. Letting the participants know that this study is not being conducted in a clandestine manner assures that the findings are potentially error free and that might ensure a greater participatory rate.

Respect

The questions are formatted in a way that shows employees their concerns are being considered. If the employees felt there is the tendency to lean towards making this survey more manager friendly, the results can be skewed.

Another form of respect is the issue of confidentiality. To ensure the integrity of research results, data must be treated with a scrupulousness that exceeds the care with which we treat most information in daily life. Fabrication or falsification of data are of course unacceptable; but there are many other matters of responsible data collection, retention, sharing and interpretation that bear on the integrity of data or on other matters of research ethics: Fair treatment of respondents, preservation of confidentiality of research subjects are two that come into play.

Additionally, the participants have to trust that the research is above board. If there is a feeling that certain improprieties have taken place, the value of the research is threatened. “In conclusion, doing ethical research is not simply a matter of resolving to
always do good because doing good in one way can involve doing bad in another way.”
(Dr. Popa, Gonzaga University, Lecture #7, 2010)

Beneficence in context of the study means that no harm should come to any of the participants. As previously mentioned, every precaution has been made to ensure that participants are fully aware of what is to be expected. They have been informed that the research is anonymous and participation is voluntary. Using these safeguards should minimize any potential unforeseen problems.

Justice

According to Hoyle, Harris & Judd (2002) researchers should seek representative samples and avoid choosing certain groups of participants (e.g., the economically disadvantaged, the very sick, or the institutionalized) simply because they are more accessible. All of the participants work for the same department. That will be the only group used for this study.
CHAPTER 4: THE STUDY

Introduction

This study allowed participants of the County Wide Probation Department to share their views of the current communication practices with management. The responses were evaluated and recorded by percentages. Three hundred and two employees, who participated in this study, answered questions using a summated Likert scale. When it was appropriate, additional comments submitted by some participants were also recorded.

Data Analysis

The data collected for this study was simple and non-evasive. Participants were asked fourteen questions regarding their own interpretation of the way management communicates. Asking more than fourteen questions was greatly weighed. However, if there were too many questions, some participants might have glossed over questions and not answered honestly. The potential dishonesty of a question might have taken away from the validity of what the study was attempting to accomplished: open and honest answers about management and the way they communicate.

The table below used a descriptive statistics format. The statistics provides summaries about the fourteen questions posed; and based on the findings percentages were tabulated.
Table 1: Communication between employees and management

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Management communicates effectively.</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>242</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>When management communicates a message, it is clear and concise.</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>195</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Management keeps staff well informed about departmental and procedural changes.</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>200</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>66%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Management communicates information in a way that misunderstandings are never apparent.</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>99</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I am satisfied with how my manager communicates.</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>158</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>52%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I find that my manager has an open line of communication.</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>214</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>43</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10%</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>When problems arise, management is quick to point out the problem and effectively communicate a resolution.</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>149</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>66</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>49%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I feel comfortable communicating with my manager.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>201</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>72</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6%</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I often hear about procedural changes in informal conversations, before an official announcement is made.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>214</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I feel management is trustworthy and forthright in communicating departmental information.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>69</td>
<td>154</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>43</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23%</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When information leaks out and becomes rumors, management does a good job to quell any grapevine information.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>175</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>39</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I find face-to-face communication more useful than communicating through computer-mediated means.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>45</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>100</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

My manager strikes a good balance between communication through emails and face-to-face.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>78</td>
<td>163</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>40</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26%</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

During unit meetings, I find my manager to be patient and they take time to listen to each concern voiced.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>68</td>
<td>173</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>45</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Results of the Study

Many of the responses indicated an overall satisfaction that management, on all levels, communicates fairly well. However, there were some participants who did not have the same sentiment and disagreed that management (on all levels) are effective communicators. Although, this study did not provide an “explain” section, some of the participants took it upon themselves to add why they disagreed to a particular question. It seemed prudent to make those comments available as well.

Some answers revealed that participants thought managers have personal grudges against certain employees. Because of that alleged perception, employees felt that sort of negativity plays a role in how those employees communicates with a particular manager. In the same regard, some employees who were not happy in their current assignment felt slightly disgruntled, and their lack of communication with management was not going to improve until transfers to other units took place.

Research Question 1

RQ1 asks if communication is being used effectively between management and employees. There was overwhelming acknowledgment that employees felt management, as a whole does communicate positively – or 80% of employees strongly agreed. 36 or 12% strongly disagreed. Four of the participants indicated that their supervisor micro-managed and was not as open to suggestions, criticisms or otherwise. Of the 36 participants, 14 indicated that their manager was an ineffective communicator. The remaining participants simply did not like their current unit and are waiting to be transferred. Anderson, Baxter and Cissna (2004) “Participants in dialogue engage with
one another, not for or about the other...the goal of dialogue is not to persuade the other, through understanding of another as other, to transform the issue and the quality of contact between those in a similar and common struggle (p 34).”

Many of the participants also felt that management does a good job in ensuring that the information they are conveying is understandable. There was a strong showing in terms of whether or not management keeps staff informed of departmental changes. Staff is required to know, at all times, when policies change. Because some policy changes might have a direct effect on staff, it is imperative that management does their best to make the information available, as soon as possible, in order for employees to implement the procedures accordingly.

One question that caused the researcher to scratch her head was the question involving “grapevine” information. Interestingly enough 60% of the participants indicated that they often times hear about information through the “grapevine” before management makes any announcements. That is a very high number. According to Keith Davis (1969) the grapevine is the informal passing of information through the organization. It does not necessarily follow the formal structure of the organization and can bypass individuals without restraint. It can be more direct and faster than the formal channels of information since the information is not being screened or controlled. One would have to wonder if managers are telling certain employees about changes or decisions, hoping that the employees remain trustworthy and keeps the information to themselves until formal announcements are made.

When asked if management takes employees concerns into consideration, 57% responded positively. However, 15% of the participants did not feel as though they have a
voice when they expressed a problem to management. Three of the participants explained that their manager has "something personal" against them, and considers these employees to be "complainers." Although every nuance of a problem will not be dealt with in a timely manner, if ever, the participants did appreciate that, at the very least, their managers showed some concern. Romano (2002) confirms this when he states that it is not enough for managers to possess positive communication skills, but they have to also be good listeners.

Research Question 2

RQ2 asks if managers use a balanced approach between the use of verbal communication and computer-mediated means. In the wake of the latest technology, it is easy to become caught up in the use of texting, sending emails or using video conference. Question number 14 the numbers were fairly even between those who agreed - 29% versus those who disagreed - 33%. Whereas question number 14 seems to contrast with question number 13, in that 54% thought that management used a nice balance between providing information verbally and sending information through emails. In other words, there are a number of managers that supervise their individual units. With that individuality, there is no one way to submit information to employees. While one manager enjoys the personal touch, another manager feels more comfortable communicating primarily through computer-mediated means. There is no right or wrong way to communicate as long as information is matriculating to employees and it is clear once employees receive said information.
Discussion

In general, it appeared that communication between management and employees is positive. Notwithstanding that point, there are some small adjustments that management could make to ensure employees’ perception of communication remains unified. Some participants expressed concern about managers who share confidential information with non-management employees prior to formal announcements being made. As Johansson (2007) explained, to foster positive relationships between management and employees, there has to be honest and open communication. Employees want to trust that management is always working from an even playing field. Employees want to have a sense that everyone is treated equally as opposed to feeling insecure because they know that some managers have better relationships with certain employees than others.

Additionally, the idea that managers, who are supposed to be leaders, hold grudges was also a concern. Managers are supposed to be credible. Kouzes and Posner (2003) say that managers have to earn the trust and confidence of their employees. That sort of credibility can only be obtained through fair and impartial leading tactics. In other words, managers have to treat all employees the same.

Some participants felt management should engage in more face-to-face contact as opposed to sending incessant emails. In some cases, very long emails are submitted, describing departmental or budget issues. When communication is distributed through computer-mediated means, it takes away the employee’s opportunity to ask follow up questions. This can leave employees left “guessing” what management meant.
Although, this study showed employees are concerned about the number of emails sent, it was noted that management is available if an employee wishes to discuss various matters. Many of the participants’ answers did reflect a certain level of disappointment because of the way management currently communicates. There was an indication of “not wanting to be bothered” providing feedback or responses, because many in management are not receptive. Leader member exchange is important when it comes to how employees feel about their managers. Managers should invest time into asking employees how they feel about their work load, or the content of their work, do they feel management has an open door and open year. This managerial approach would definitely help in eliminating some employees’ feelings of alienation.

Conrad and Poole (2005) stated that very little can be accomplished in the world when people act alone. Employees, in some cases, are the backbone to many organizations. If there is no one to do the work and organization cannot and will not prosper; therefore, management has maintain open lines of communication, especially if they want to sustain a positive organization.
Chapter 5: Limitations and Conclusion

Limitations of the Study

Case studies are often deceptively descriptive in nature, often revealing deeper explanations and a thorough understanding of communication issues and activities, which of course can be subject to further testing in a larger number of organizations with other research methods. When it comes to weaknesses, obviously an important shortcoming of a case study tradition is the difficulty of generalizing results. As mentioned, results from one or a few organizations have to be subject to further testing before their validity is established.

All attention should be paid to limit any perception of bias from this researcher. The questionnaire has to be constructed in a manner that appears employee friendly. In other words, if the questions lean more towards management, the study could be in jeopardy of errors and the validity of the questionnaire called into question.

For the most part, this study proved to be quite positive. Many of the employees perceived management communicated effectively, and the organization cared about the employees. However, the scope of the study could have been broadened in terms of the number of survey questions asked. Additional questions, regarding an employee’s personal feelings about management and leadership style might have been helpful in better understanding employee, management relationships. In some cases, managers who prove not to be effective leaders can disrupt communication between managers and employees. An additional limitation was not allowing participants to explain their answers. It would have been helpful to understand why participants answered positively or negatively with respect to a certain question. The few participants who provided
qualifying questions proved beneficial; however, if every participant had the opportunity
to explain their answer, this study might have been able to look into what
recommendations to provide in developing more effective communication.

Further development of leader-member exchange would have gone far in
enhancing this study’s ability to connect the dots on communication and relationships
between managers and employees. For both parties to be able to come together, there has
to be a fundamental understanding as to what the other does. For instance, managers are
in charge. Managers set the scene and tone to an office. So, it is incumbent upon
managers to recognize their position and govern themselves accordingly. The idea of
favoritism in an office should be avoided at all cost. By the same token, employees
should understand their own value and realize that they are paid to fulfill an idea or
function that has already been set. It is not their job to argue; debate or even decide they
do not want to do it, simply because they do not like certain rules and regulations.
Failing to delve deeper into that concept limits the idea of bridging the gap and making
the two sides stronger. Paying attention to the quality of leader-member relationships
looks at the extent that through the human relations assumptions managers gain
compliance from employees by promoting interpersonal relationships and satisfaction of
social needs.

Further Study Recommendation

There is not an abundance of studies on leadership-member exchange. It would
be beneficial for additional studies to be conducted in organizations where more
emphasis is placed on employees’ feelings about the communication practices. In many
cases, studies have been conducted involving management only. Going straight to the
source of the problem could also prove positive for managers to understand what employees are looking for in a respective manager.

Conclusion

Management and employee relationships are necessary to connect authentic self-expression to creating value and it is the responsibility of management to build a strong foundation for a healthy organization. This is confirmed by Gary Yukl, who wrote (Leadership in Organizations) (2006) people tend to feel unappreciated when they receive little information about the plans, activities and achievements of their team or departments” (p. 336)

The ultimate goal of positive communication is for people not to resist but to adapt and learn from change. It is further recommended that management continue to be focused and clear when identifying changes. One example to improve upon communication would be for managers to have quarterly unit meetings. Frequent meetings can move towards quelling uncertainty about policy changes and may also limit the amount of information that is passed along through “grapevine” measures. Another way to improve communicate might be for managers to take time and meeting with their staff individually. Usually employees will not voice his or her concern in a public forum; however, they might be more inclined to let their supervisor know some of the problems that exist and offer solutions.

There is no better internal communication external communication to generate a positive image proud to own components of an enterprise. While this study did find that employees and management currently enjoy positive communication, management has to continue to strive to make communication increasingly better. The way a manager might
have communicated with one group may not work for the current group that they supervise. Whether better communication is learned through training or is given through feedback from employees, managers should make all efforts to reinvent their own specific way in which they communicate. “The key to getting employees to communicate better and to keeping the company’s progress on track is to build a quality interaction between the employee group and the management team. Breaking through the barriers and getting employees and managers working together helps everyone advance a strategic vision and attain goals” (Encouraging Employee Communication)

The heart of any organization is communication. It is like a heart pumping. As long as blood is flowing, the heart will continue to pump. When blood is slow in getting to the heart or there is a blockage, the heart ultimately fails. When communication ceases or is blocked, employees become concerned and on edge. It is very difficult to imagine an organization without the presence of transmitted communication between management and employees being effective if one, or the other stops talking.
References


Grates, G.F. (1998). Building a world-class organization. 6(15)


Research Methods: Knowledge Base.


Appendix A

To whom it may concern,

I am currently pursuing a Master Degree in Communication/Leadership from Gonzaga University in Spokane Washington. For my thesis, I will be evaluating the communication practices at the San Mateo County Probation Department between management and employees.

I would like to invite you to participate in a short survey, asking questions about your perception of how management currently communicates in the department. There are only 14 questions, asking you to answer from “Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree.” Your participation is strictly voluntary and will be confidential. The surveys will be collected one week from the distribution date. Please do not send the surveys back to me. Please let me thank you in advance for your time.

Sincerely,

Ramona L. Gabriel
Appendix B

1. Management communicates effectively.
2. When management communicates a message, it is clear and concise.
3. Management keeps staff well informed about departmental and procedural changes.
4. Management communicates information in a manner that misunderstandings are never apparent.
5. I am satisfied with how my manager communicates.
6. I find that my manager has an open line communication.
7. When problems arise, management is quick to point out the problem and effectively communicate a resolution.
8. I feel comfortable communicating with my manager.
9. I often hear about procedural changes in informal conversations, before an official announcement is made.
10. I feel management is trustworthy and forthright in communicating departmental information.
11. When information leaks out and becomes rumors, management does a good job to quell any grapevine information.
12. I find face-to-face communication more useful than communicating through computer-mediated means.
13. My manager strikes a good balance between communication through emails and face-to-face.
14. During unit meetings, I find my manager to be patient and they take time to listen to each concern voiced.