Challenges and Prospects of Using ICT Tools and Resources to Facilitate Internal Communication at the Workplace: A Case Study of the Then Koforidua Polytechnic

Elikplim Dagba*, Akwasi Sarfo Agyemang** & Lydia Amponsah***

Assistant Registrar, Kumasi Technical University, Ghana;

**Head of Students Affairs and Alumni Relations, Kumasi Technical University, Ghana*

***Junior Assistant Registrar, Kumasi Technical University, Ghana*

ABSTRACT

Communication is the lifeline to every organization and it cuts across all levels of any organisation. The communication process involves the sender sending a message through a common system to the receiver who decodes the message and makes meaning out of it. Internal communication is very important because it is the process used to maintain good relationships, describe tasks, communicate goals and philosophy of the organization, and also give instructions in the workplace. In the past, memos, newsletters and fliers printed and circulated in hard copy and by hand used to be the internal communication tools. However, since communication is always changing, this 21st century has brought in ICT tools to complement some of these long-existing methods, making communication in organizations easier and faster. This study was designed as a quantitative survey to explore the challenges and prospects of using ICT tools and resources to facilitate internal communication at Koforidua Polytechnic. The respondents were chosen from staff of Koforidua Polytechnic using the quota and convenience sampling methods. The study found out that currently, the Polytechnic uses memos delivered in hard copy and by hand as its predominant mode of communication. Some of respondents were of the view that introducing new ICT support tools for internal communication is the way forward. Majority were however uncertain as to the availability of resources to do it. However, they expressed their willingness to get training and to use the new ICT support tools if introduced. Technology has made it possible for communication to be instant and fast - just with a click on a button and the staff of Koforidua Polytechnic cannot afford to be left out.

KEY WORDS: *Communication, Technology,*

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

"Organizational communication, in today's organizations has not only become far more complex and varied but has also become an important factor for overall organizational functioning and success" (Kirti Rajhans, 2012: Pg. 81).

Communication is the process by which we exchange meanings through a common system which could be symbols, signs or behaviour and has an essential element of meaning (Pearson et al., 2003). Communication involves a sender, receiver and a communication channel. It may happen between two or more people. The most basic forms of communication are verbal and non-verbal communication. Both body posture and facial expressions must relay the same message as spoken words to avoid confusion. In the work place it is important to be sure that communication is clear, concise and well understood. Misunderstandings and conflicts may result from barriers to communication and this could be very detrimental to employee performance.

Communication can be either internal or external. Within an organization, internal communication is the symbolic interaction that occurs among organization members (Pearson et al., 2003). Internal communication occurs when messages are sent and received within the boundaries of an organization. The importance of internal communication can never be overemphasized. Workers buy into the visions and mission statements of an organization when these are properly communicated to them. Workers receive and comprehend messages that are well communicated and this informs them to act accordingly and even give feedback.

However, internal communication can only be effective if the appropriate tools of communication are used. In times past, internal communication tools used to be memos, newsletters and fliers printed and circulated in the hard copy and by hand. In this 21st century electronics and computer technology is often combined with long-existing methods (such as telephone), as new tools being adopted to make communication in organizations better through less paper work (Beven and Bailey 1991as cited by Meera Gipinath, 2001). Technology has made it possible for communication to be instant and fast - just with a click on a button. These electronic communication channels include email, social networking, twitter, instance messaging, video conferencing and the intranet made solely for internal communication.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Even though Koforidua Polytechnic uses the internet to reach the public, inside the Polytechnic community, communication is mainly done through manual means. All meetings are held in a 'face-to-face environment', notices and memos are sent through manual means and communication is basically manual. Apart from the existing internal telephone communications popularly known as 'intercom', which is not very functional, the Polytechnic has not adopted any ICT method for internal communication.

This research would look at the channels of communication that are currently in use in the Polytechnic and assess the feasibility of introducing ICT channels for internal communication.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The main purpose of this study was to find out the challenges and prospects of using ICT tools and resources to facilitate internal communication at the workplace using Koforidua Polytechnic a case study.

The objectives of the study are:

1. Identify the channels of communication between employees of the Polytechnic.
2. Ascertain the current state of the use ICT tools for internal communication in the Polytechnic.

3. Assess staff members' perceptions on the use of ICT supported tools for internal communication and determine the extent to which they will be willing to use these technologies in place of the present modes of communication.

1.4 Research Questions

The study sought to answer the following questions:

- What channels of communication are currently being used in the Polytechnic?

- What is the state of ICT usage in internal communication?

- What are staff members' perceptions of the use of ICT supported tools for internal communication at the polytechnic?

1.5 Scope of the Study

The study was focused on one of the promising Polytechnics in the country today - Koforidua Polytechnic located in the Eastern region of Ghana. The research is being conducted bearing in mind that the situation at other Polytechnics in the country might be slightly different either for the better or for the worse. However, it is hoped that the findings of this research could be generalized and applied to other Polytechnics in Ghana.

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1   Definition of Communication

Pearson et al. (2003) define communication as the process of exchanging meaning between individuals through a common system of symbols, signs or behaviors. Communication is an activity, an exchange, or a set of behavior and as such, it is a process. According to Rothwell (1998), communication is interactive; a transactional process of sharing meaning with others. For communication to take place, the sender of the message must encode the message and pass it through a medium to the receiver who decodes it. The sender initiates the message by encoding a thought and the receiver translates the message into an understandable form to make meaning. (Robbins et al, 2011).

2.2   Internal communication

Pearson et al. defines internal communication as "the symbolic interaction that occurs within organizations and among organization members". Internal communication also known as organizational communication occurs when messages are sent and received within the boundaries of an organization. Internal communication process is used to maintain good relationships, describe tasks, communicate goals and philosophy of the organization, and also give instructions (Ferreira, 2006). O'hair et al. (2005) says that when policy statements, notices, memos and instructions are sent from superiors, internal communication is formal. Communications that take place in the hall ways, the canteen, the restroom etc. are also part of internal communication but they are less formal.

2.11 The use of ICT in communication

According to Pekka Lindroos and Misha Pinkasov (2003), today, ICTs are starting to have a deeper impact on workplace organization. Indeed, in this first decade of the 21st century, our world has become much smaller and communities more closely knit. Above all, we live in an information society, with information and communications technologies (ICTs), rather than just electronics, at its heart. P. M. Heathcote and C. Highmore in their book Applied ICT for GCSE (double Award) added that organizations employ ICT to ensure that people in different departments communicate with each other in both formal and informal ways through the use of newsletters, intranet, video conferencing, memo's, letters etc. He added that ICT is used to communicate effectively internally, manage and control production processes, manage finance (including payroll, budgeting, processing transactions and reporting), manage stock control etc.

The Ghana Ministry of Education ICT policy defined ICTs as basically information handling tools – a varied set of goods, applications and services that are used to produce, store, process, distribute and exchange information. Notable among the results of the effective usage of ICTs according to the policy are, the improvement on educational management processes; the widening of the traditional sources of information and knowledge; collaboration, creativity, higher order thinking skills; and provision for flexibility of delivery.

2.12 An overview of Communication scenario at Koforidua Polytechnic

Koforidua Polytechnic is a bureaucratic organization that uses the downward, horizontal and upward flow of communication according to their organizational structure. Koforidua Polytechnic has adopted ICT for communication but mostly to the outside environment. There is the internet facility in the Polytechnic and the Polytechnic even has a website. Advertisements are made for admission, employment and the website is functional.

METHODOLOGY

3.2 Research Design

The research was designed as a quantitative survey. The survey method represents one of the most common and popular types of quantitative research design used in business and management research. The researcher selected a sample of respondents from a population and administered a standardized questionnaire to them. The purpose of the survey was primarily to sample views, opinions and perceptions of respondents on the subject matter of this study.

The aim of the research was to use the known concepts of communication; the methods and media and information transfer and apply them to the Polytechnic's work environment rather than identifying new concepts in the research. Therefore the choice of the quantitative approach is deemed as appropriate.

3.3 Research Population

Koforidua Polytechnic staff currently has three employment statuses, which are the senior members, senior staff and junior staff. Total research population is 578 (Okai, R., 2012) with an average of 115 senior members, 347 senior staff and 116 junior staffs.

Table 3.1: Population and sample chosen

Staff Category	Population	Sample	Percentage (%)

Senior Member	115	10	8.69
Senior Staff	347	30	8.64
Junior Staff	116	10	8.62
Total	**578**	**50**	**8.65**

Source: Researcher, 2013

3.4 Data Analysis and Presentation

The analysis was done quantitatively. Most of the results were analyzed quantitatively and inferences made from them presented in tables, graphs.

RESULTS

4.1.   Analysis of the Questionnaire

4.1.1. Demographic Features

Table 4.1: Demographic Features of Respondents

Age	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Cum Percentage (%)
21 – 30	26	52.00	52.00
31 – 40	16	32.00	84.00
41 – 50	6	12.00	96.00
51 and Above	2	4.00	100.00
Marital Status			
Married	23	46.00	46.00
Single	27	54.00	100.00
Sex			
Female	19	38.00	38.00
Male	31	62.00	100.00
Highest Level of Education			
Professional	2	4.00	4.00
Secondary Education	5	10.00	14.00

Tertiary Education	43	86.00	100.00

Length of Work

3years and Below	20	40.00	42.00
4 – 6 years	21	42.00	84.00
7 – 9 years	8	16.00	100.00
10 years and Above	1	2.00	2.00

Employment Status

Junior Staff	10	20.00	20.00
Senior Member	10	20.00	40.00
Senior Staff	30	60.00	100.00

Employment Sector

Academic	7	14.00	14.00
Administration	38	76.00	90.00
Support Staff	5	10.00	100.00
Total	**50**	**100.00**	**100.00**

Source: Researcher, 2013.

4.1.2. Means of Communication between Employees

Fig. 4.1: The Predominant Mode of Official Internal Communication between Employees

Fig. 4.2: Preferred Predominant Mode of Official Internal Communication
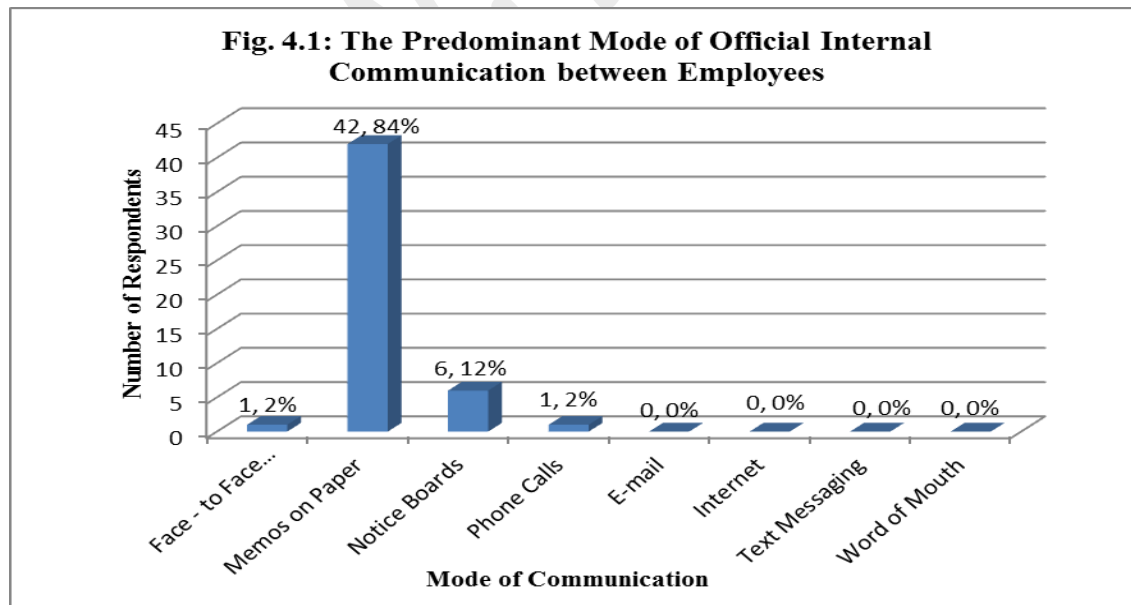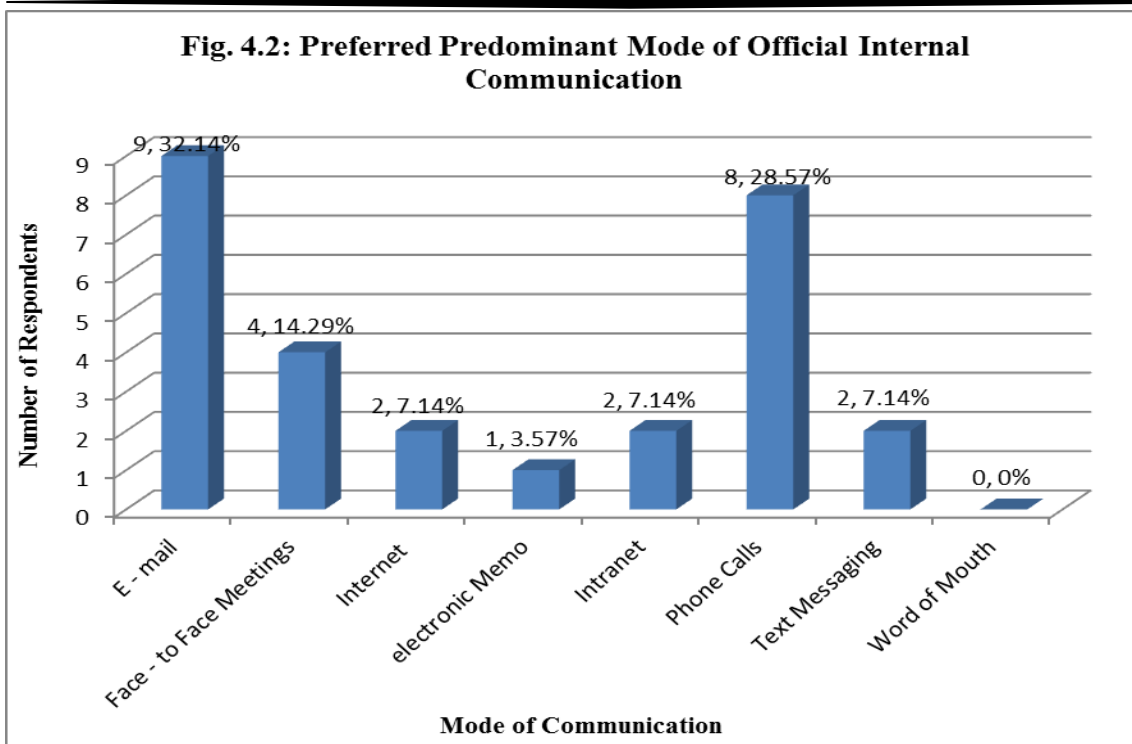
Employees' Perceptions on Current State of Internal Communication Practices in General

Table 4.2: The Perception of Respondents on Current State of Internal Communication Practices in General

Perception	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree
Open Communication Channels between Employees	7, 15%	15, 31%	8, 17%	16, 33%	2, 4%
Always get Information on Events on Time	7, 14%	25, 50%	5, 10%	12, 24%	1, 2%
All Worker feel Free to Voice Opinions	11, 22%	15, 31%	18, 37%	5, 10%	0, 0%
Information always Communicated whenever required	7, 14%	7, 14%	21, 42%	14, 28%	1, 2%

Most Employees Kept in Dark about Dealings with outside world	1, 2%	8, 16%	12, 24%	19, 38%	10, 20%
Most Internal Communication is one way (Top to Down)	0, 0%	7, 14%	15, 31%	17, 35%	10, 20%
Staff Members give Timely Feedback	2, 4%	16, 33%	19, 39%	12, 24%	0, 0%

4.1.3. The Current State of the Use Of ICT Tools For Internal Communication

Table 4.3: The Perception of Respondents on Current use of ICT for Internal Communication

| Perception	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree
Every Worker has Official Email for Official Internal Communication.	13, 26%	17, 34%	10, 20%	9, 18%	1, 2%
Polytechnic Encourages use of other ICT tools for internal Communication.	13, 26%	17, 34%	10, 20%	9, 18%	1, 2%

4.1.4. The Perception on the Use of ICT Support Tools

Table 4.4: The Perception of Respondents on the Use of ICT Support Tools

Perception	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree
Polytechnic Should facilitate Use of More ICT Tools.	0, 0%	0, 0%	3, 6%	21, 42%	26, 52%
Polytechnic Should train more staffs in the use of ICT tools for Communication.	1, 2%	1, 2%	0, 0%	19, 38%	29, 58%
Polytechnic not Presently in Position to include more ICT Tools and Resources in Internal Communication.					

9, 18%   8, 16%   17, 35%   10, 21%   5, 10%

4.1.5. Extent To Which Respondents will be Willingly To Use ICT Tools

Fig. 4.3 Staff Members will be Willing to Change the Way they Presently Communicate and adopt ICT Tools
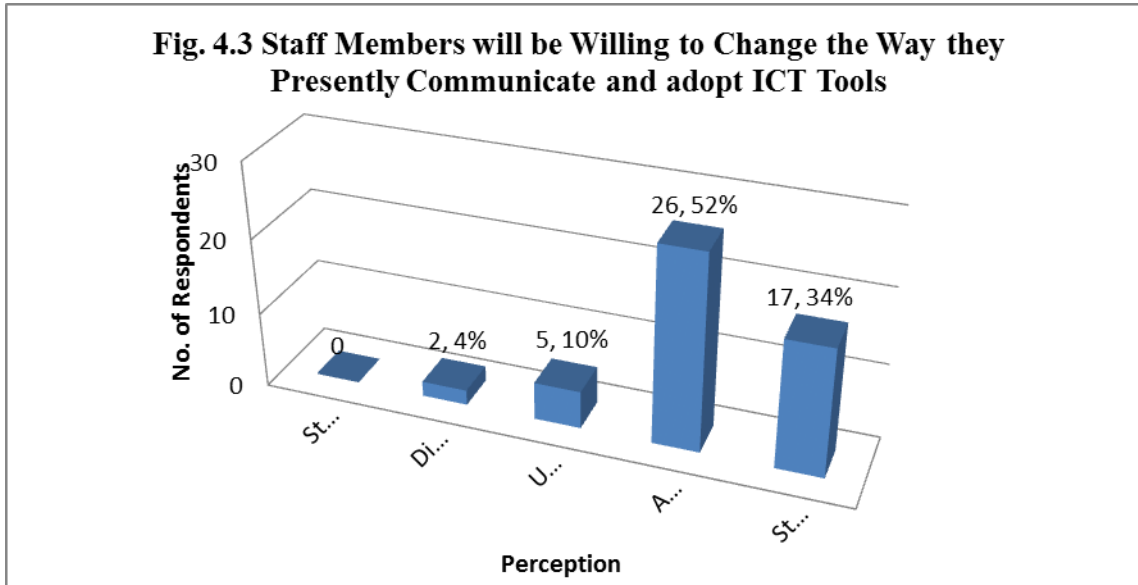
CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.4 Conclusions

The following conclusions have been made in this study:

The current state of internal communication at Koforidua Polytechnic needs a lot of improvement. With Memo's being the highest form of communication, information is delayed or received late. The introduction of ICT supported tools for internal communication is the way forward. Since staff members expressed their willingness for this change, it makes the implementation a lot easier.

The major challenge here is if the Polytechnic has the needed resources to undertake such a project and if management would be willing to implement it.

5.5 Recommendations

- Management of the Polytechnic should consider and adopt ICT supported tools like email, intranet or text messaging for internal communication.

- The use of Memos should not be completely abolished but it should be supported with the ICT supported tools to enhance information richness.

- Communication channels used in the Polytechnic should be left open. Information should get to the receiver in time.

- Workers should also be allowed to voice out their opinions and concerns freely and honestly without any form of intimidation. Ghana is a country that believes in freedom of expression and this should be reflected in the workplace.

- Management should communicate to staff about the schools dealings with the outside world. When organization members are kept in the dark, they resort to informal networks to supplement information that the management, accidentally or deliberately, has not formally disclosed and this reflects their perception about the organization (Pearson et al., 2003; Fox 2001).

- Internal communication should be interactive; a transactional process of sharing meaning with others. It should be a two way affair and timely feedback should be encouraged to ensure that the message sent was understood as the sender intended.

- The Polytechnic should encourage the use of ICT tools for official correspondence between staff.

- The Polytechnic should organize training for staff members on how to use the ICT tools for communication.

REFERENCES

i. Rothwell, J. (1998). In mixed company: small group communication. Fort Worth, TX: Harcourt Brace

ii. Heathcote, P. M. Highmore C. (2002).Applied ICT for GCSE (double Award)

iii. Kirti Rajhans. Effective Organizational Communication: a Key to Employee Motivation and Performance, Pg. 81

iv. Meera, Gopinath. (2001)Effectiveness of the intranet as an employee communications tool (thesis)

v. Ministry of Education. (2008). Republic of Ghana. ICT in Education Policy

vi. O'hair et al. (2005) Strategic Communication in Business and the Professions; fifth edition

vii. Pearson, J. Nelson, P. Titsworth, S. Harter L. (2003).Human Communication.

viii. *Pekka Lindroos and Misha Pinkasov, OECD Science, Technology and Industry Directorate, Information society: The ICT challenge. Available at*

http://www.oecdobserver.org/news/archivestory.php/aid/1146/Information_society: The_ICT_challenge.html © OECD Observer No. 240/241, December 2003

ix. Okai, R. (2012). History. Available at http://www.koforiduapoly.edu.gh/global/kduapoly/p/about-us/history

x. Okai, R. (2012). Office of the Rector. Available at http://www.koforiduapoly.edu.gh/global/kduapoly/p/about-us/management-structure/office-of-the-rector

xi. Okai, R. (2012). Forward. Koforidua Polytechnic - 9th Congregation brochure.

xii. Robbins, S. P. Judge, T. A. (2011).Organisational Behavior: fourteenth edition