Use of Internal Communication Tools among AG&P Employees

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Abstract

The complexity of the workplace and the highly competitive environment put greater pressure to both the management and employees; thus there is a need to put more significance and focus on the company's internal communications. This research aimed to identify the current internal communication tools used by AG&P employees in disseminating the company's organizational goals and other internal information. Descriptive type of research was utilized in the study. Based on the result, majority of AG&P employees who participated in this study belong to the young-aged group, college graduates and employed as office workers. The top two internal communication tools are electronic and oral communication tools. Also, results proved that the higher the educational attainment, the more they used various internal communication tools. Employees rarely experience and encounter problems in using various internal communication tools.

Keywords: Communication tool, Internal Communication, AG&P, Horizontal Communication

1. Introduction

Anywhere in the world, having and employing excellent communication management stands out as a competitive advantage in the corporate realm. Communication glues all management processes – planning, organizing, staffing, directing and controlling – together. It can be said that indeed, a successful organization is rooted from having an effective communication, which is further rooted from proper implementation of communication management. As Pradhan and Chopra (2008) stated, "organizations cannot exist without communication, as it is one of the significant aspects allowing organizations to be what it is." Communication is a vital part of life. There is a need to interact with people every day, and communication makes it possible. Pradhan and Chopra (2008) define communication as the transfer of information from one person to another person. In communication, the ultimate objective is to have the receiver understand the message as it was intended. It is what the receiver had understood and not what the sender had said. Carroll (2010) defines communication as a process which is both interactive and purposeful, "a constant social interaction between an individual and the society for the mutual satisfaction of needs."

Since communication is inevitable in the workplace, it must be managed properly in order to achieve its purpose. Communication management is a fundamental part of any organization dealing with the planning, implementing and monitoring of all channels of communication within the organization or outside of it (Chan, 2003). It is the creation of innovative forms for identification and resolving communication problems in organizations. This new approach to analyze communication competence of organizations has become a fundamental part of any business in order to be effective and successful in the long run.

Internal communication involves effective communication between management and its employees. Dolphin (2005) defines internal communication as transactions between individuals and groups at various levels and in different areas of specialization and those transactions which are intended to design and redesign organizations and coordinate everyday activities. More than the tools, methods, publications and

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broadcasts that comprise it, internal communication is about building a corporate culture and "having the potential to drive organizational change" (Argenti, 2007).

Moreover, internal communication is a complex, imperative process through which employees coordinate the work process essential to the functioning of any organization (Dolphin, 2005). It is a vital tool to construct a clear and precise company image inside the organization and for the employees to know the company, its mission, vision and goals.

In the corporate setting, the communication activities are usually targeted to the company's internal and external audiences, employing various methods of communication appropriate for each. Companies form specialized departments to manage their communication. However, it has been observed that most companies focus more on producing communication plans for external use, like the development of marketing strategies. Oftentimes, internal communication is not addressed in the same way.

Some communication specialists claim that internal communication is more significant than external communication. Larry Smith of the Institute of Crisis Management said that "Companies tend to spend million dollars on an external PR campaign and ignore the external audience. One unhappy or misinformed employee can undermine or destroy a million dollar campaign pretty easily" (Grensing-Pophal, 2006).

According to Adler and Elmhorst (2002), a study at General Electric (GE) revealed that a clear communication between the superior and subordinate or manager and employee was the most important factor in job satisfaction for most people. It is therefore significant to maintain an active downward communication so the employees would feel valued then eventually, satisfied.

Furthermore, horizontal or lateral communication occurs when there is message flow between members of an organization with equal power. Usually, horizontal communication involves the exchange of information between co-workers with different areas of responsibility (Griffin and Moorhead, 2010). This communication flow is significant to coordinate tasks, solve problems, share information, resolve conflicts and build rapport. Good horizontal communication may result in increased cooperation among employees with different duties and greater understanding of the company's mission and vision. As stated in the study of Forssberg and Malm (2001), the lack of a formal structure for how internal communication is to be carried out sometimes leads to confusion in the horizontal communication.

Bratton and Gold (1994) describe verbal communication as ranging from casual conversation between two employees to a formal speech by the managing director. In face to face meetings, there are messages conveyed aside from the spoken ones, and these are through gestures or facial expressions, also called as non-verbal cues.

Listeners tend to forget much of what they hear, especially if the topic does not interest them. Another problem with oral communication is that it can be a time-consuming tool. Employees might not be honest because they cannot be anonymous as they deliver the message orally and face to face. Another common problem is the lack of clarity in delivering information due to usage of jargons or poor speaking skills (Blundel, 2004).

For a company to be successful in the long run, it must develop good internal communications to contribute to a positive organizational culture. For the company's managers and staff, it is more pleasant to work in an organization exuding a positive culture. For customers or investors, it is more satisfying to do business with such environment of happy and motivated employees.

AG&P utilizes various internal communication tools to transmit relevant company information among its employees. In order to communicate with each other, the employees use the following tools: small group and general assembly meetings, publications such as newsletter, magazine, brochures, memo and reports, bulletin or notice boards, employee handbook, telephone or mobile phone, video conferencing, intranet and inter-office electronic mail.

In this very competitive industry, it is significant for AG&P to identify if it practices and implements proper internal communications strategies to fulfill its communication objectives. The complexity of the

workplace and the highly competitive environment put greater pressure to both the management and employees; thus there is a need to put more significance and focus on the company's internal communications.

The results of this research may contribute to the development of the company's internal communication practices using various communication tools and to the formation of a sole communication department which shall focus on the planning, management, and implementation of communication activities of AG&P.

Objectives of the Study

This research aimed to identify the current internal communication tools used by AG&P employees in disseminating the company's organizational goals and other internal information. Specifically, it aims to answer the following objectives: to describe the profile of AG&P employees in terms of age, educational attainment and employment type; to identify AG&P employees' frequency of usage of various internal communication tools; and to test significant relationship between respondents' profile and their usage of various internal communication tools. In addition, this study aims to determine problems encountered in using internal communication tools.

Ho: There is no significant relationship between the employees' demographic profile and their usage of various internal communication tools.

2. Method

Research Design

Descriptive correlational design was used in this research. The main goal of this type of research design is to describe the data and characteristics about what is being studied. The design was employed to determine the internal communication tools utilized by AG&P employees and the problems associated in using these communication tools. It is deemed appropriate to utilize this design to the present study since this involved the assessment of the current conditions.

Participants

The respondents of this study were one hundred employees of AG&P chosen through purposive sampling. Target sample is 10 percent of the total population of AG&P at the time of the study, which is 1,000. The respondents vary from skilled to office workers including supervisors and managers.

Instrument

The researcher used a self-formulated or researcher-made questionnaire about internal communication tools and the challenges associated with using these communication tools. The respondents were asked to rate a series of statements using a modified four-point Likert type scale. The questionnaire is divided into three parts.

The first part comprised of questions that would identify the profile of the respondents: their age, highest educational attainment and employment.

The second part included ten commonly-utilized internal communication tools where respondents were asked to rate the frequency of their usage of these tools. The researcher used a four-point scale for this part: Always- 4, Often- 3, Sometimes- 2, Never- 1.

The third part, moreover, contained fifteen statements on common problems in using the commonly-utilized internal communication tools where respondents were asked to rate the frequency of their experiences with the problems associated with these internal communication tools. The researcher also used a four-point scale for the third part: Always- 4, Often- 3, Sometimes- 2, Never- 1.

Procedures

The researcher searched for books, journals, and the Internet to gain reliable and related information that was used in constructing the questionnaire and to support the information and data needed.

Prior to conducting the research and disseminating the questionnaires, the researchers sought the permission and approval of the management of AG&P to conduct this research and endorsed a letter of request to the Organizational Development Manager under Human Resources Department to allow the researcher to gather data from the respondents through the questionnaire.

To determine reliability of the instrument, pilot testing to 15 randomly selected employees was conducted. Cronbach alpha result of 0.820 meant that the instrument formulated is reliable, thus indicating good internal consistency of the items in the scale.

The researcher distributed the three-part questionnaire through the company messenger who delivered the questionnaire per departments convenient to the researcher. Retrieval of the answered questionnaires was done one week after the distribution.

3. Data Analysis

The collected data were tallied, encoded and presented in tabular form for easier analysis and comprehension. The data were also supported using SPSS version 18 to further analyze the results.

This research employed the following statistical tools to analyze the data: frequency distribution, mean and eta value. Frequency distribution was used to identify the profile of the respondents according to age, highest educational attainment and employment type. Mean was used to know the internal communication tools employed by AG&P employees and the frequency of their usage as well as the problems encountered in using these communication tools.

Results and Discussion

Table 1: Percentage Distribution of the Respondents' Profile (N = 100)

Profile Variables	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Age		
18 – 30 years old	43	43.00
31 – 40 years old	27	27.00
41 – 50 years old	17	17.00
51 years old and above	13	13.00
Highest Educational Attainment		
High School or Vocational Graduate	4	4.00
College Graduate	94	94.00
Masteral	2	2.00
Doctorate	-	-
Employment Type		
Skilled worker	2	2.00
Foreman	3	3.00
Office worker	64	64.00
Supervisor (Field)	5	5.00
Supervisor (Office)	15	15.00
Manager	11	11.00

Table 1 shows the frequency distribution of one hundred respondents in terms of age, highest educational attainment and employment type. From the table, it can be observed that majority of the respondents belong to the age bracket eighteen to thirty with forty three respondents equivalent to forty three

percent. On the other hand, the age bracket with the least number of respondents is fifty one years old and above accounting for thirteen percent of the respondents.

The results show that AG&P employs more young professionals who are at the beginning of their careers. This further proves the company's belief in young talent that can add to the company's productivity to make it globally competitive.

Majority of the respondents or ninety four percent of them are college graduates. Only four percent of the respondents are high school or vocational graduates and two percent are with masteral degrees. No one of the respondents finished doctorate degree.

The results prove that AG&P regards the value of education, employing individuals with college degrees who can contribute to the success of AG&P with the formal education they have gained.

Meanwhile, majority of the respondents are employed as office workers representing sixty four percent. The least number of respondents are skilled workers, representing only two percent.   The results show that though AG&P is known for its muscles – the skilled workers, it has also employed office workers – the support and the brains of the company.

Table 2: Internal Communication Tools Used by AG&P Employees (N = 100)

Internal Communication and Tools	WM	VI	Rank
1. Small group meetings with immediate superiors	2.95	Often	4
2. Toolbox or General Assembly Meetings	3.44	Often	2.5
3. Publications (Newsletters, Magazines, Brochures)	2.09	Rarely	9
4. Memo and Reports	3.00	Often	8
5. Bulletin/Notice Boards	2.62	Often	6
6. Employee Handbook	2.69	Often	5
7. Telephone/Mobile Phone/Voice Mail	3.46	Often	1
8. Video Conferencing	1.61	Rarely	10
9. Intranet	2.54	Often	7
10. Inter-Office electronic mail (Emails)	3.44	Often	2.5
Composite Mean	2.78	Often	

Legend: 3.50 – 4.00 Always; 2.50 – 3.49 Often; 1.50 – 2.49 Rarely; 1.00 – 1.49 Never

Table 2 shows the internal communication tools utilized by AG&P employees and the frequency of their usage of these tools. This table reflects that these internal communication tools are used often. The top three tools used oftentimes include telephone/mobile phone/voice mail, inter-office electronic mails and tool box or general assembly meetings. The least used tools are publications which include newsletters, magazines and brochures as well as video conferencing.

The top internal communication tool used by most of the AG&P employees is telephone, with a high mean of 3.46. This finding contradicts the study of Denisova (2007) entitled "Internal Communication Problems in a Multinational Company: Lamor Group" stating that email is the most commonly-used internal communication tool.   It can therefore be said that the telephone and/or mobile phone proves to be an effective tool to transfer and exchange messages because of its accessibility to all the workers of AG&P from any location.

The Company maintains local telephone lines in all departments where all employees from management down to the craftsmen have access to contact other employees whom they cannot reach in person to transfer or seek information. Feedback is also fast when talking over the phone which makes the receiver understand thoroughly what the sender wants to impart.

Employees using this tool for communicating can get immediate response for work instructions or clarifications.   Immediate feedback via this tool can fasten work operations and even increase productivity of the workers because instructions and other information are well-communicated.

Next to telephone and mobile phone as the most frequently used internal communication tool among AG&P employees are the inter-office electronic mail or email and toolbox or general assembly meetings, both with a mean of 3.44 interpreted as often.

This only proves that indeed, email can be an alternative to telephones or personal contact, especially for those with access to a computer, office email accounts and connected network. Oftentimes, AG&P employees choose email as a channel of transmitting and getting messages across.

As long as there is the presence of these three requirements: computer, email accounts and network or internet connection, employees even bounded by great distances and different time zones can communicate. The advantage of this tool is that it can contain significant documents through its attachment feature, allowing employees to share relevant information. Also, the use of email supports AG&P's goal of paperless and automated business operations.

This result of having email as the second most used among the internal communication tools can also be connected to the profile of the majority of the respondents who are office workers, supervisors and managers who have access to a computer, network and an email account.

Meanwhile, in AG&P where quality and safety serve as the ultimate goal, its management has imbibed a quality and safety culture through the conduct of regular weekly toolbox meetings and general assembly meetings. The Company's Health, Safety, Environment and Security (HSES) Department required weekly toolbox meetings on safety usually held Tuesdays. All safety reminders, health and medical updates and other significant messages are announced through this tool.

This tool belongs to group of tools mostly used by employees because of the advantages of using such. For one, toolbox and general assembly meetings involve face-to-face communication where both verbal and non-verbal messages can be conveyed.

This tool allows easier flow of messages between the management and the employees as there is no time lag between the transmission of message and its reception. Toolbox and general assembly meetings serve as channels to deliver information personally to a large group of audience in a relatively short period of time.

AG&P employees commonly use this tool because of its speed in delivering information and the quality of the message conveyed. It can be an avenue to review company policies, rules and regulations or commend exemplary employees.

The Company strictly requires all employees to attend the toolbox or general assembly meetings, monitoring attendance through attendance sheets distributed on every meeting and giving corresponding penalties to those who fail to attend.

This strict implementation of the Company made its employees choose toolbox and general assembly meetings as one of the most commonly used internal communication tool. This also proves the management's effort to reach out to its workforce to discuss issues relating to work and give recognition to workers' exemplary performance.

Their usage of face-to-face communication in the form of general assembly meetings as a tool is reflective of the Company's bias towards action, where the focus is about getting things done. In a face-to-face communication, it is easier to influence workers to fulfill actions and get things done.

Meanwhile, the respondents of this study regarded video conferencing as rarely used when communicating internally, with a mean of 1.61. It can be interpreted that majority of the respondents, who belong to the office worker group, do not utilize video conferencing when communicating with other employees in other AG&P offices.

This study disproves Adler and Elmhorst's (2002) stating that video conferencing is the next best thing to meeting in person. It is because the company has limited video conferencing equipment since it is costly in nature.

Usually, the management employees, either the managers or the officers of the Company, use video conferencing when communicating with other employees usually of their level based outside the country. Office workers rarely use this tool and choose to use other internal communication tools more accessible to them and easy to operate.

Another internal communication tool rarely used is the publication tools which include newsletters, magazines and brochures, with a mean of 2.09. Though this tool is essential to cover the inability of the management to reach all employees and speak to each of them, the respondents proved that it is hardly used.

For one, not all employees have access to these publications because of limited printed copies, as publication materials are often too expensive and time consuming to produce. Newsletters and magazines are released quarterly with limited number of copies. Printing of copies is limited also because AG&P is adhering to making operations and communications paperless.

Table 3: Relationship Between the Profile of the Respondents' and Their Usage of Various Internal Communication Tools

Profile Variables	Eta	p-value	Decision	Interpretation
Age	0.221	0.183	Fail to Reject	Not Significant
Highest Educational Attainment	0.327	0.004	Rejected	Significant
Employment Type	0.288	0.142	Fail to Reject	Not Significant

Legend: Significant at p-value < 0.05

Based from the result, it was found out that the computed eta values 0.221, 0.327 and 0.288 indicate weak and negligible positive correlation. There is no significant relationship between the profile variables age and employment type and the internal communication tools usage based from the computed p-values which are greater than 0.05, the level of significance.

However, the p-value result of the profile variable which is highest educational attainment is less than 0.05 level of significance, thus the hypothesis of no significant relationship between the profile variable which is highest educational attainment and the usage of internal communication tools is rejected.

This result means that there is a relationship existing between educational attainment and usage of various internal communication tools. This implies that the higher the educational attainment, the more they used various internal communication tools.

Respondents who are college graduates and up use more and varied internal communication tools than those who are high school or vocational graduates primarily because those with higher educational attainment have the capability to access and use these various tools, most especially the electronic ones.

These college and master's degree graduates have learnt from their schooling the technical know-hows of operating electronic communication tools which high school or vocational graduates may have less exposure at all.

College and master's degree graduates may also understand the content of oral and print internal communication tools better than those with lower educational attainment, especially if the content uses the English language which those with higher educational attainment have higher skills and comprehension.

Since AG&P is going global with offices placed strategically in various countries, the Company's communications utilize automated and digital tools with content in the English language, of which those employees who have attained higher education have more exposure which makes them use these tools more often than the others.

Table four on the next page shows the frequency of the employees encountering the problems accompanied when using the internal communication tools stated in the earlier part of this paper.

Generally, the result showed that the respondents rarely experience the problems in using the internal communication tools, with a composite mean of 1.64.

This shows that in general, internal communication tools of AG&P help the respondents in transmitting and exchanging information among co-employees, with infrequent lapses when using these tools.

The problem or difficulty of sending emails and browse the intranet because the network crashes or the internet connection is poor proves to be the top predicament that the respondents experience when using internal communication tool which is email, with a mean of 2.07 interpreted as rarely.

Though there are various advantages of using email in communicating internally in a company, there are also drawbacks associated in using it. Sending emails requires a computer, a connected network and an email account. Missing one of these three would defeat the purpose of communicating electronically via email.

The result shows that there are intermittent network problems occurring within the Company which affects the employees' usage of email and intranet, as both require a good network connection in order to be fully-utilized. Most of the respondents recognized this problem in using these electronic internal communication tools.

Table 4: Internal Communication Problems Encountered (N = 100)

Challenges Encountered	WM	VI	Rank
1. I find it difficult to remember some information and announcements especially if the topic does not interest me.	1.88	Rarely	3
2. Small group or general assembly meetings are often time consuming.	1.94	Rarely	2
3. I find it hard to participate in meetings because the physical location or meeting room is not conducive for communication.	1.48	Never	11
4. I find it hard to understand very technical topics being discussed at work.	1.63	Rarely	9
5. I find it hard to understand superiors and co-workers when they speak too quickly or too slowly.	1.70	Rarely	7
6. I am not aware of or late to know of some company information, announcements or news because I have limited access to written messages like memo, reports, employee handbooks or company publications.	1.67	Rarely	8
7. I experience "information overload" especially when viewing difficult and long reports.	1.71	Rarely	6
8. I find it difficult to understand the contents of the bulletin board because they are out of date and cluttered.	1.62	Rarely	10
9. I find it difficult to understand messages over the telephone or mobile phone because I do not see them face-to-face.	1.35	Never	14
10. I find it hard to talk to people because the telephone or mobile lines usually crash, or are out-of-order/no signal.	1.73	Rarely	5
11. I find it hard to send emails and browse the intranet because the network crashes or the internet connection is poor.	2.07	Rarely	1
12. I find it hard to know significant company information contained in the intranet because I do not have access to it.	1.75	Rarely	4
13. I find it hard to know significant company information contained in the intranet because I do not know how to navigate it.	1.39	Never	13
14. Because sending emails is easy, I tend to send spontaneous messages without reviewing its content or assessing its importance.	1.29	Never	15
15. There are too many emails I receive in a day that I find it hard to identify which among them demands immediate attention.	1.46	Never	12
Composite Mean	**1.64**	**Rarely**	

Legend: 3.50 – 4.00 Always; 2.50 – 3.49 Often; 1.50 – 2.49 Rarely; 1.00 – 1.49 Never

Despite the speed and convenience of these electronic tools, users experience drawbacks especially if the network which makes these tools function crashes. It is therefore imperative to immediately fix the network problems and develop a sound networking system so as not to disrupt the communication processes within the company.

The Company must dedicate the needed resources to put up a strong internet infrastructure to include a reliable network, which is the foundation block of sending emails and accessing the internet in general. This supports the study of Bertelsen and Nerman (2001) entitled "Internal Communication in Organizations undergoing change", stating that "the main idea with utilizing such channels is that it makes information easily accessible to everybody regardless time and location.

This it can do through doing a continuous research and implement high-end infrastructures which are at par with those used internationally. Should the company invest in these infrastructures, transmitting emails would flow smoothly, and business would operate in the desired way. It would be better to invest in these than to lose billions of pesos for a missed project opportunity just because the email was sent late or was not sent at all due to network failure.

This problem being the top predicament in the usage of internal communication tools by the respondents can further strengthen the result shown earlier on the frequency of usage of various internal communication tools, with email placing second only to telephone as the most frequently used tool. This problem encountered may have hindered the respondents from using email more frequently than expected, as other studies have shown.

Meanwhile, respondents viewed the statement "Small group or general assembly meetings are often time consuming" as another problem usually encountered when communicating, ranking second with a mean of 1.94 interpreted as rarely.

Given the benefits of using verbal communication tools in communicating internally, there are also downsides to using such tools, like small groups and general assembly meetings. The Company sees these small and general meetings as an avenue to discuss significant subjects which most respondents rarely thought to be time-consuming. In face-to-face meetings, since feedback is immediate and participants take advantage of this tool to present their views, there are seldom instances that the employees considered these meetings to be arduous and inefficient.

AG&P employs at least one thousand workers who gather at least once a month for safety general assembly which consumes at least thirty minutes to an hour of the Company's working time. For some, this period allotted for general assembly meetings may be lengthy as such time can be spent to do other more productive tasks.

Furthermore, the statement "I find it difficult to remember some information and announcements especially if the topic does not interest me" ranked third among the problems encountered in using internal communication tool, with a mean of 1.88. Though rarely encountered, this is another problem when using face-to-face communication tool among AG&P employees.

This result further proves the weakness of the face-to-face communication tools, in connection with it being a time consuming tool. AG&P being a modular construction and engineering company usually incorporates in its discussions and meetings some technical and engineering subjects which may not be of interest to non-technical employees.

Meanwhile, out of fifteen problems commonly encountered using internal communication tools, the statement "I find it difficult to understand messages over the telephone or mobile phone because I do not see them face to face" ranked second to the last with a mean of 1.35 interpreted as never. The respondents never felt difficulty in understanding telephone and mobile phone messages, thus proving that telephone is an effective internal communication tool among AG&P employees.

This result reflects consistency in the responses of the respondents. On the earlier part of this study, result shows that telephone is the most widely used internal communication tool among AG&P employees.

This is because they never found talking over the phone a challenge despite not being able to see the person being talked to. Talking with workmates and to management over the telephone is easy for the respondents – they can properly communicate using such tool, messages are easily understood even though they do not talk to them face-to-face.

The statement "Because sending emails is easy, I tend to send spontaneous messages without reviewing its content or assessing its importance" ranked last with a mean of 1.29 interpreted as never.

Email is easy to use and very convenient in getting messages across. The ease of usage increases the risk of sending spontaneous, unimportant messages. However, result shows that AG&P employees are responsible in using email as a communication tool. This is because the Company's Management Information Technology Center trains and sends constant reminders of email etiquettes to all email users to avoid sending unnecessary messages that may cause network congestion.

4. Conclusions

Majority of AG&P employees who participated in this study belong to the young-aged group, college graduates and employed as office workers. The top two internal communication tools are electronic and oral communication tools. The higher the educational attainment, the more they used various internal communication tools. Employees rarely experience and encounter problems in using various internal communication tools.

5. Recommendations

The management may sponsor scholarships to encourage employees to pursue higher studies. AG&P Management Information and Technology Center needs to improve the MIS infrastructure of the company. AG&P employees especially the management must be given effective communications training with emphasis on videoconferencing, power point presentations and preparing understandable technical reports. AG&P departments must formulate an effective internal communication matrix and an internal communications team whose members are responsible for ensuring that the internal communication tools are properly utilized to support the communication flow within the company. It is also recommended to conduct further research on internal communication especially using other variables not included in this study.

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