1.00 WHAT IS COMMUNICATION?

This is a word which pervades all human activities. It is the nerve centre of all organizational functions, a major problem and indeed a nightmare to many managers. There are many definitions of communication but in simple and general terms, the communication process consists of the movement of a message through a channel from the source to the receiver. The word communication derives from the Latin word communis which means common. Thus, for any meaningful communication to occur there has to be a meeting on common ground between the impater and the receiver of a message. The aim is to establish a commonness or a sharing of information, attitudes, ideas, and whatever it is that is being communicated.

2.00 FEATURES

The above definition includes situations in which messages are deliberately transmitted in order to invoke a response as when asking a question, giving instructions or telling a story to make the receiver laugh or cry. Sometimes we communicate unintentionally either non-verbally or by our choice of words which carry meanings other than those intended - e.g. the compliment "I have never seen you write such constructive minutes" could mean the listener's usual writing needs some improvement. Communication has many aspects - verbal, non-verbal, formal and informal, up, down, lateral, speaking, writing, listening, reading, methods, media, modes, channels, networks, flows, interpersonal, inter-organizational.
Thus organizational communication is the exchange and flow of information, ideas, perceptions, understandings and conflicts between the various parts and members of an organization.

3.00 COMMUNICATION AND THE ORGANIZATION

No organization can operate without communication. Indeed, management without information is impossible and it is the professional duty of every manager/administrator to develop his skills as a communicator. Communication is the very basis of all organized human activity. The success of any human organization depends largely on how effectively its members are able to communicate with one another.

4.00 UNIVERSITY AS AN ORGANIZATION

Prof. S. K. SINGH, in one of his lectures, described a university as "the most complex man-made organizational entity". This is especially so when compared with enterprises (business organization) or service agencies (social organization) which have well defined goals even if in some cases their structures are not well defined. The university used to be just an institution claiming loyalty and efforts from those involved with it and defending its autonomy in the society and the right to choose its members, settle its aims and operate in its own way. Now it has become a mixture of institution, enterprise and service agency. The universities are now being asked to justify their existence. The problems of identifying and measuring the components of such complex organization or of analysing and evaluating their performances are enormous. The situation is made even more difficult by the assembling, due to its present nature, of a large and confusing range of persons, activities and operations.
Management is often defined as "the attainment of end-results" or organizational objectives. These objectives are achieved by the allocation of resources - human, physical and fiscal - through a facilitating process that involves planning, organising, staffing, directing, coordinating and controlling operations in a beneficial way. The manager or administrator is a human being who has the prerogative of allocating the resources to tasks, endeavours and conditions and he/she judges the what, why and how of the allocation. In a university setup the major parties at interest always view it in different ways. The academics and students see it as an institution; the trustees and some administrators, as an enterprise and the governmental sponsors as a service agency. Thus conflicts of purpose, law, motivation and style could arise from these different perspectives. Such conflicts can best be resolved through effective communication whose mainstay is exchange and adequate flow of information to create understanding and consequently possible acceptance of each other's point of view.

5.00 MANAGEMENT INFORMATION (MI)

This is defined very broadly as information made available to improve the quality of decision-making. Administrators are daily faced with situations where they have either too little useful information or too much information of doubtful relevance for decision-making. In the absence of timely and relevant information the quality of decision-making deteriorates, thus reducing the effectiveness of the organization.
Three identifiable components exist in the Information Management process:

(i) Information collection
(ii) Information analysis, processing and storage; and
(iii) Information dissemination

It is never possible to get 100% information. However, 70% is definitely better than 20%. Adequate relevant information helps produce rational decisions. It is very important that information which is constantly being generated both within and outside the university be monitored, gathered, processed, stored and disseminated to the managers/administrators who have responsibility for making decisions relating to the different aspects of the university activity. Communication of information may be either regular (routine continuous) or occasional (for specific, ad-hoc purposes). Although decision-making requires a bit of information of numerical nature, there is more need for the less quantifiable kinds including attitudes and opinions of people involved.

6.00 SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Perhaps I should start this section by quoting Samuel Johnson who said, "Knowledge is of two kinds, we know a subject ourselves, or we know where we can find information upon it."

Information could come from a number of sources

1. Retrieval of information stored e.g. letters come in, are filed, then called for when needed.
2. Books, especially reference books like the Dictionary, which every administrator should have by his/her desk or other reference materials that could be got from the Library.
3. Resource person - In its widest sense, the resource person is somebody who is knowledgeable in an area, who's often in possession of an information we cannot find easily e.g. Brainwash who could
give to a committee, specifications of Intercom. Such people abound in the University and should be used by administrators to save time and resources.

7. **Barriers to Effective Communication**

In general terms the following factors are likely to hamper effective communication in any organization:

(a) **Use of unfamiliar terminology**

Complex or specialized language e.g. software, hardware to a non-computer staff

(b) **Gap in the communication chain/link**

The absence of an employee be it a messenger or a clerical officer may cause a breakdown in communication if the duty schedule is not covered by another who could supply part of the information required. Withholding of information is another lapse that could disrupt the internal communication chain.

(c) **By-passing people**

In other words, this could be described as skipping some points in the line of communication network. For avoidance of doubt, there should always be an organizational chart clearly showing different levels of authority. It is of crucial importance that members of an organization understand its structure and their place in it, and adhere to those.

(d) **Slowness**

At times transmission of information from one department to another especially in large organizations is so slow that by the time the message gets from the source to the receiver the action required would have been overtaken by events. For instance, a copy of a circular or

[rest of text cut off]
Catering Officer for supply of snacks at the meeting may only get to him a day after the meeting has taken place.

(e) Inflexibility

When the information communication system is not responsive to the needs of the employees, there is a breakdown especially in situations of crisis.

8.00 INFORMAL CHANNEL OF COMMUNICATION

Genuine organizational communication involves a complex network of formal and informal channels conveying information (in the widest sense) between people at all levels in an organization. Formal lines follow the hierarchy up, down or lateral. The informal channel which is usually based on personal relationships bypasses people in the hierarchy but helps to sustain links between different sections and parts of the organization. It is often described as the "bush telegraph", the "grapevine", the "old-boy network" or "rumour". There are several patterns and highly developed forms of the informal channel which function effectively along official channels. For example, a telephone operator, typist, driver, messenger, filing clerk, etc, may pick up interesting or confidential information which he/she freely shares with colleagues or a liked boss. The greater the importance attached to such information, the faster it will travel along the grapevine. The grapevine - a highly informal means by which both facts and rumour travel around organizations - can be dangerous but has its uses. Apprehensiveness, anxiety or job changes encourage the grapevine. It is always there - in the Head of Unit's Office, Sectional offices and in the General offices.
Anyone involved in organizational communication (every staff should be!) needs to ask questions such as the following:

**WHO**  - (everyone, selected groups, individuals): needs to know?

**WHAT**  - Everything, selected facts, a summary?

**WHEN**  - Always, regularly, the most appropriate time

**HOW**  - What form and means e.g. memo, telephone, face-to-face, at a meeting.

**WHERE**  - (in what situation)

**WHY**  - (Very fundamental) For what reason. How necessary is the communication; and will it waste time, paper, etc.?

It may be necessary to categorize some of the questions thus:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WHO</th>
<th>WHEN</th>
<th>ON OCCASIONS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>ALL STAFF</strong></td>
<td>Rules, Regulations e.g. safety.</td>
<td>Special events</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Conditions of Service</td>
<td>Visitors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>State of the organization</td>
<td>News of people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MANAGERS</td>
<td>Detailed information about Policy, Finance, Etc.</td>
<td>Records of Personnel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACCORDING TO NEED</td>
<td></td>
<td>Crisis Information</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

One can see the difficulties in trying to set it out. We can argue about each of these, especially "what". It is a matter for each organization to decide according to its particular needs and each administrator to make him/herself personally responsible for the information he/she needs. Also left to the personal
When is the best time to put the proposal to the Head of Unit, Chairman of Committee (perhaps not first thing on Wednesday morning, to the Director of Administration!)?

How to tell a subordinate who is a personal friend that he has not been recommended for promotion?

Who should know about possible vacancies, dates of interview or dates for shortlisting for a particular grade of staff?

Why send so much paper around or have so many meeting, etc.

9.00 CONCLUSION

In conclusion and at the risk of repetition, please note that the informal channel by which both facts and rumour travel around organizations can be dangerous. The general rule is: try to beat the grapevine on important critical issues by circulating as many of the facts as permissible.