

TOWARD EXCELLENCE IN COMMUNICATIONS: UNDERSTANDING THE LIFE-BLOOD OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN ETHIOPIA

*GetnetWorkuDemeke

*Lecturer, Department of Management, College of Business and Economics
Bahir Dar University, Bahir Dar, Ethiopia
Email- wgetme@yahoo.com, getsmom@gmail.com

“What you don’t know can hurt you”

Abstract—This study was conducted with the principal objective of gaining information on the current state of organizational communication in higher education institutions in Ethiopia with special focus on Bahir Dar University. Understanding the overall communication process and its effectiveness would help to take appropriate measures toward enhancing organizational communication in the University. The study targeted both academic and administrative staff of the university (n=332). Though the main instrument of data collection was survey questionnaire, personal experiences and focus group discussions were also employed to complement with qualitative data. To produce a fairly accurate picture of this extraordinarily complex phenomenon, emphasis was given to the study of meanings and subjective aspects of organizational life as we experience them in our daily lives. It has to be stressed that healthy communication is an enabler for organizational learning. The findings, however, indicated that there were problems of internal communications in Bahir Dar University. Therefore, it is decisively important to continuously invest in gearing towards excellence in communications. Based on the findings and the resulting recommendations, the University can make appropriate interventions for improvement.

Keywords—Communication Effectiveness, Life-blood, Organizational Communication, Systems Concept, University.

I. Introduction

Communication is a very important process in every organization. It is essential to effective team performance; and communication for any organization is like blood-flow in the human body [1]. Coates [2] reads that communication is the interpersonal equivalent of breathing. For Coates, as the physical life of any individual depends on breathing, the interactive life of any number of people - from a couple to a country - depends on communication. Consequently, communication is said to be the life-blood of an organization [3]. It ensures coordination of factors of production and most importantly material and human elements of organization as an efficient network of change and advancement [4]. People at work spend a great deal of time communicating with each other in meetings, over the phone, via e-mail, etc. Administrators communicate with and through other people while performing planning and organizing or leading and monitoring functions in their organizations. It stands to

reason that every person’s communication skills affect both personal and organizational effectiveness [5] [6]. Therefore, effective communication is the key determinant of the efficiency with which an organization performs as a whole [7]. Effective workplace communication creates job satisfaction, lesser conflicts, increases productivity, leads to the formation of better personal and professional relationships, and ensures proper utilization of resources [8].

Communication can be defined as the process of transmitting information and common understanding from one person to another [9]. Unless a common understanding results from the exchange of information, there is no communication. Effective communication underlies the effectiveness of every process, system, and managerial action designed to enhance performance in organizations. It simplifies motivation, reward systems, decision-making, strategic and operational planning, and simple day-to-day work related interaction among employees. Thus, the art of communicating effectively has to be given much emphasis and it must be practiced effectively at workplace for better output and successful achievement of goals of an organization.

A University administrator or other organization member may choose from written media like minutes, memos, letters, reports, bulletin boards, handbooks, newsletters, etc. On the other hand, choices for verbal media include face-to-face conversations, telephone, public address systems, closed-circuit television, tape-recorded messages, sound/slide shows, e-mail, and so on. Nonverbal gestures, facial expressions, body position, and even clothing can also transmit messages. As stated in Keyton [10], individuals are more likely to perceive information favorably when it conforms to their own beliefs, values and needs. It stands to reason that people decode information selectively. Thus, two-way communication is more desirable as it occurs with feedback.

Building a relationship between University administrators and other University stakeholders requires effective communication. Communicating effectively means being able to send a message across the organization that is easy to understand and accurate. According to Lunenburg [11], the key for being successful in the contemporary school is the ability of the

school administrator to work with other school stakeholders (faculty, support staff, community members, parents, central office). In addition, the management should develop a shared sense of what the institution is attempting to accomplish i.e., where it wants to go, a shared sense of commitments that people have to make in order to advance the institution toward a shared vision and clarity of goals. When communication flows accurately and effectively, the organization will run smoothly.

If there is a breakdown in the flow of communication, or the information is not accurate, the organization is likely to encounter performance problems. According to Shaw [12], 'the greatest problem with communication is the illusion that it has been accomplished'. However, it has to be noted that errors can be instituted during any stage of the communication process. Misunderstandings can crop up when the sender does not have an apparent idea of the message he or she is attempting to communicate, or has a clear idea but is unable to articulate it perfectly. Errors can also take place when the receiver does not take note warily, deduces a sense other than what was meant by the sender, or does not provide feedback. Eventually, blurred, imprecise, or thoughtless business communication can squander precious time, estrange employees or customers, and obliterate goodwill toward management or the business on the whole [13].

A lot of studies in the field of organizational communication have appeared recently. But we can hardly find such studies from the very perspective of the context in Ethiopia. Nowadays, the number of multinational companies that have subsidiaries in Ethiopia is increasing and the impact of information technology on communication is powerful. Communication has specific features that do not allow its research in the same way as in the case of other managerial or organizational issues [14]. Firstly, communication is omnipresent in all company's activities. So its study must be made in an organizational context with direct involvement in the managerial functions. Further, the degree of generalization in researching organizational communication is lower than in the case of other fields. It rests to reason that communication is specific to each and every organization depending on their field, size and culture.

Even though subsidiaries of large multinational companies from abroad may benefit from the expertise of the mother company adapted to the local needs, many organizations in Ethiopia don't have much experience in this field. Until they are in the midst of a crisis, many organizations take communication for granted and ignore its importance. As a result, communication remains the most poorly understood concept and the least priority is given for it in our affairs. Currently, Ethiopian higher education institutions are trying to set up their own communication systems. Bahir Dar University, which is

one of the oldest public Universities in Ethiopia, is not an exception. According to Henderson [15], communication audits are used to reveal gaps in the communication process. Apart from providing suggestions for improvements, the communication assessment result can also be used to benefit strategic planning of the organization [16]. It encourages managers to think more strategically about communication activities by uncovering valuable information about barriers, bottlenecks or misunderstandings.

Thus, this internal communication survey has the goal of assessing the effectiveness of different methods of internal communication and to solicit suggestions on how employees in Bahir Dar University can communicate most effectively. In addition, the survey was designed to review how frequently employees used different modes of communication and to gain a better understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of existing communication channels. In line with this, the study seeks to gain better understanding of employee satisfaction with current communication processes and tools in the University. In a nutshell, the study aspires to better comprehend employees' communication needs and to identify opportunities to improve internal communications practices through harnessing and exploring the perspectives of academic personnel and administrative processes owners in the University.

Moreover, the study proposed to test the following hypotheses.

H1: Some methods of communication considered more effective by some employee groups than others.

H2: Some methods of communication are used more frequently by some employee groups than others.

H3: The current communication practices of Bahir Dar University satisfy some employee groups than others.

II. Organizational Communication

Different writers have given different definitions of organizational communication. According to Deetz [17], one way to enlighten our understanding of organization communication is to compare different approaches. It has to be noted that organizational communication is the sending and receiving of messages among interrelated individuals within a particular environment or setting to achieve individual and common goals. It is highly contextual and culturally dependent, and is not an isolated phenomenon. Individuals in organizations transmit messages through face-to face, written and mediated channels. Organizational communication largely focuses on building relationships, or repeated interpersonal interactions, with internal organizational members and interested external publics. As stated in [18], organizational communication occurs within a complex open system. Apart from messages and their flow, purpose, direction and media, communication involves people and their attitudes, feelings, relationships and skills. Further, Goldhaber stated that organizational

communication helps us to accomplish tasks and develop relationships where “human messages are directed at people within the organization-their attitudes, morale, satisfaction, and fulfillment”; and coordinate, plan, and control the operations of the organization through management [19-21].

Different perspectives are developed for understanding organizational communication since the start of the industrial revolution. The initial perspective is the classical management perspective (founded on scientific principles) which focused on specialization, standardization and predictability in organizations [22]. The human relations and human resources perspectives further tried to incorporate human satisfaction, needs, and participation [23] as a means for creating effective organizations and productive employees. Then, the systems perspective was evolved emphasizing the interactions of the people who form organizations. At the heart of this perspective is synergy; with the basic assumption that all people in the organization impact organizational outcomes [19] [20] [24] [25]. Finally, the cultural perspective views organizations as unique cultures with their own sets of artifacts, values and basic assumptions [26] [27]. Overall, organizational communication is how organizations make up their organizational climate and culture—the attitudes, values and goals that characterize the organization and its members. Various organizational communication studies (e.g. [28]-[32]) show that organizations rely on effective communication and efficient communication skills from their members.

Today, we are living in an ‘information intensive’ age where everything is changing in a fast pace. So we need to be prepared for a perpetually evolving, increasingly diverse and unpredictable global work force. One of the greatest challenges facing organizations is the practice of communication ethics (a basic code of conduct). Ethics are the moral principles that guide our judgments about the good and bad, right and wrong, of communication, not just communication effectiveness or efficiency [27]. Organizations have fallen short in developing an understanding of what role truth plays in determining ethical standards [33]. Do you always make ethical personal and professional decisions? What do you think will happen in organizations that practice a climate of ‘survival of the fittest’ as individuals scramble their way up the ladder of success at any cost? The increasing competition and the greater demands placed on organizations and individuals coupled with the rapid advances in technology and globalization, ethics is becoming an essential focus of examination for organizational communication and behavior. This organizational communication survey examines employee opinions about the effectiveness of internal communication, communication flow, coordination/knowledge sharing, barriers to effective

communication and preferences concerning communication media. The survey results can be used to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the University’s communication network.

III. Methods

This study employed descriptive cross-sectional research design. The study targeted both academic and administrative staff of Bahir Dar University aimed at having a fairly clear picture of the current communication practice in the University. Currently, the University has 1965 academic staff and 4044 administrative staff that constitute a target population of 6009 employees (Bahir Dar University’s website). A total sample size of 375 was obtained using sample size determination formula with an error of 5% ($n = N/1 + N(e)^2$; Where n is the sample size, N is the total population size, and e is the desired level of precision.). Proportionate random sampling technique was used to obtain 123 academic and 252 administrative staff or participants making a total sample size of 375. Finally, the number of valid applied questionnaires was 332; 112 academic and 220 administrative staff with a response rate of 85.53%.

Apart from survey questionnaires, focus group discussions were used to complement the study by providing qualitative data about the strengths and weaknesses of the communication within the University. Wilkinson [34] stated that focus group method is a group interview where a group of people are gathered to discuss a specified topic. Here, the essential information is the contents of the discussions during the working. The survey questionnaire contained a mix of close-ended and open-ended items. The first part of the survey contained six items to assess respondent characteristics (employee type, gender, age, experience, highest level of education and current position/academic rank in the University). The second part of the survey contained 35 questions on eight basic dimensions of communication. Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with the given statements in the survey, using a 5-point scale where 1 = Strongly Disagree, 3 = Undecided, and 5 = Strongly Agree. On the same part, respondents were asked to indicate how frequently they used each form of communication, using a 5-point scale where 1 = Never, 3 = Sometimes, and 5 = Always. Further, respondents were asked to indicate how effective they found each of the 5 forms of communication, using a 5-point scale where 1 = Not at all Effective and 5 = Very Effective. Respondents were also asked to indicate their level of satisfactions with the University’s internal communications, using a 5-point scale where 1 = Least Satisfied, 3 = Moderately Satisfied, and 5 = Highly Satisfied. These were followed by two open-ended items that asked respondents to do the following: (1) Discuss drawbacks associated with current communication modes in the University, (2) Suggest ways Bahir Dar University can most effectively communicate its internal information.

SPSS statistical software was employed to analyze data from the questionnaires. Descriptive analysis and frequency calculations were computed to report the distribution of the respondent demographics. In order to address the hypotheses, Analyses of Variance (ANOVA) models were calculated to determine group differences on all six methods of communication (Table IV and Table VI). When the **F-value** associated with the ANOVA model was significant for a particular item, post-hoc tests were conducted to determine whether significant differences exist between the four respondent groups (Academics and Administrators Vs. Managerial and Non-Managerial). Further, responses to the open-ended questions and informal conversations were analyzed for themes to better understand the qualitative data's significance in the study.

IV. Results and Discussions

Table I. Respondents by Gender, Level of Education, Employment Type and Current Position in the University

Description		Gender		Total
		Male	Female	
Employment Type	Academic	90	22	112
	Administrative	120	100	220
Current Position	Managerial	55	32	87
	Non-managerial	155	90	245
Highest Level of Education	Certificate	4	6	10
	Diploma	19	20	39
	BA/MSc	117	71	188
	MA/MSc	49	25	74
	PhD	21	0	21

Source: Survey (2017)

In this increasingly fast-paced and global world, employees at Bahir Dar University have likely experienced many of the communicative challenges organizations face. Therefore, it is not a choice to be prepared for an everlastingly evolving, increasingly

diverse, and unpredictable global workplace if they are about to emerge successful in their endeavors. The table below showcased patterns of the main communication dimensions in the University.

Table II. Descriptive Statistics of the Basic Communication Dimensions in Bahir Dar University

Communication Dimensions	N	Min	Max	Mean	Rank	Std. Deviation
Communication Flow	332	1.75	5.00	3.3276	2	.63523
Coordination/Knowledge Sharing	332	1.75	5.00	3.5761	1	.60839
Barriers to Effective Communication	332	1.25	4.50	3.1920	6	.71681
Accuracy	332	1.00	5.00	3.2282	5	.87712
Reliability	332	1.00	8.00	3.2560	4	.88328
Timeliness	332	1.00	5.00	3.3122	3	.91309

Source: Survey (2017)

Table II presented the average ratings of the six basic dimensions of organizational communication. Coordination or knowledge sharing ranked the highest (3.5761) followed by communication flow (3.3276), timeliness (3.3122) and reliability (3.2560). The survey items pertaining to the dimensions were designed to show employees' level of agreement with the overall communication climate in Bahir Dar University. Statistically speaking, the results showed that there were problems/weaknesses of internal communications in the University. On the other hand, a relatively lowest mean was scored for barriers to effective communication (3.1920) followed by accuracy (3.2282). However, it has to be stressed that any number of distractions can

interfere with the effectiveness of communication. As stated in [7], every step in the communication process is necessary for effective and good communication. Therefore, it has to be emphasized that breakdowns anywhere in the cycle can block the transfer of understanding.

In a nutshell, we need to understand the fact that communication is a complex give-and-take process. That is why it is called as the life-blood of organizations [3]. Therefore, the healthiness of the formal and informal flow of communication in the University has to be ensured. Consequently, it would be easy for employees in various units of the University to be coordinated as a cohesive whole and utilize scarce resources in the most efficient way possible.

Table III. Media Effectiveness in Bahir Dar University

Communication Dimensions	N	Min	Max	Mean	Rank	Std. Deviation
Face-to-face interaction	332	1	5	3.71	3	1.245
Electronic communication (e-mail, website, face book, etc)	332	1	5	3.83	2	.929
Publications/newsletters	332	1	5	3.38	5	1.069
Company-wide "town-hall" meetings	332	1	5	3.06	6	1.188
Written communication (reports, minutes, memos, bulletin boards, etc)	332	1	5	3.52	4	1.084
Telephone calls	332	1	5	3.96	1	1.074

Source: Survey (2017)

The average effectiveness rating for each of the six different forms of communication in Bahir Dar University is indicated in Table III. Here, an average rating of 4.0 or higher indicates that respondents find the method of communication either "quite a bit" or "very" effective. On the other hand, a rating of 2.0 or below indicates that employees feel the type of communication is only "a little bit" effective or is "not at all" effective.

The highest means were obtained for telephone calls (3.96), followed by Electronic communication (e-mail, website, face book, etc.) (3.83), and Face-to-face interaction (3.71). The lowest means were obtained for Company-wide "town-hall" meetings (3.06), followed by Publications/newsletters (3.38). In order to encourage employees for desired change, the University must address valuable information using its formal and informal channels in a timely fashion.

Table IV. Average Effectiveness ratings of six different forms of communication by employee group: Academic and Administrative Managerial and Non-Managerial

Method of Communication	All Respondents	Academic	Administrative	Managerial	Non-Managerial
Face-to-face interaction	3.71*	3.96	3.58	3.63	3.73
Electronic communication (e-mail, website, face book, etc.)	3.83	3.70	3.89	3.90	3.80
Publications/newsletters	3.38*	3.19	3.47	3.31	3.40
Company-wide "town-hall" meetings	3.06	2.96	3.11	2.89	3.12
Written communication (reports, minutes, memos, bulletin boards, etc.)	3.52*	3.33	3.62	3.76*	3.44
Telephone calls	3.96**	3.75	4.07	4.05	3.93

Participants Responded Using a 5-Point Scale where 1 = Not at all Effective and 5 = Very Effective. Higher average ratings indicate greater effectiveness of method of communication.

ANOVAs were performed to identify any significant differences between the respondent groups.

*F-value is significant at the .05 level; **F-value is significant at the .01 level.

Table IV indicates the level of significance for the overall model or *F-value* as well as an indication of which groups differed significantly from each other. Significant *F-values* were obtained on 4 of the 6 items (three in the first group and one in the second group), suggesting possible group differences in the effectiveness of particular forms of communication in Bahir Dar University. Academic staff found face-to-face interaction significantly more effective for communicating internal information than administrators did. On the other hand, administrators rated publications/newsletters, written communication (reports, minutes, memos, bulletin boards, etc.) and telephone calls significantly more

effective than academic staff members did. Compared to the non-managerial groups, employees in managerial roles consider written communication (reports, minutes, memos, bulletin boards, etc.) a more effective tool for communicating internal information. Unlike the first groups (Academic and Administrative), no significant differences were found among these groups in the other methods of communication. Participants in all groups rated company-wide "town-hall" meetings lower than other dimensions of communication in the University. This is largely because decisions on agendas are already made before inputs are taken from the vast majority of employees using scientific discussions.

Table V. Interaction Frequencies of Selected Media in Bahir Dar University

Communication Dimensions/Methods	N	Min	Max	Mean	Rank	Std. Deviation
Face-to-face interaction	332	1	5	3.69	2	1.243
Electronic communication (e-mail, website, face book, etc.)	332	1	5	3.62	3	1.116
Publications/newsletters	332	1	5	3.03	5	1.048
Company-wide "town-hall" meetings	332	1	4	2.55	6	.981
Written communication (reports, minutes, memos, bulletin boards, etc.)	332	1	5	3.47	4	1.021
Telephone calls	332	1	5	4.08	1	.964

Source: Survey (2017)

Table V above presents the mean or average frequency ratings for each of the 6 different forms of communication. Higher numbers indicate greater frequency of use of a particular method of communication in Bahir Dar University. More specifically, an average rating of 4.0 or higher indicates that respondents "often" or "always" use that form of

communication. A rating of 2.0 or below indicates that employees "rarely" or "never" use that particular method of communicating internal information.

As indicated in Table V, the highest means were obtained for Telephone calls (4.08), followed by Face-to-face interaction (3.69) and Electronic communication (e-mail, website, face book, etc.) (3.62). The lowest means

were obtained for Company-wide "town-hall" meetings

(2.55), followed by Publications/newsletters (3.03).

Table VI. Average frequency of use ratings for six different forms of communication by employee group: Academic and Administrative vs. Managerial and Non-Managerial

Method of Communication	All Respondents	Academic	Administrative	Managerial	Non-Managerial
Face-to-face interaction	3.69	3.75	3.65	3.59	3.72
Electronic communication (e-mail, website, face book, etc.)	3.62**	3.78	3.55	3.54	3.65
Publications/newsletters	3.03	3.05	3.02	3.05	3.02
Company-wide "town-hall" meetings	2.55	2.55	2.55	2.22*	2.67
Written communication (reports, minutes, memos, bulletin boards, etc.)	3.47*	3.26	3.58	3.66	3.41
Telephone calls	4.08	4.00	4.13	4.14	4.07

Participants Responded Using a 5-Point Scale where 1 = Never and 5 = Always. Higher numbers indicate greater frequency of use. ANOVAs were performed to identify any significant differences between the respondent groups.

*F-value is significant at the .05 level; **F-value is significant at the .01 level.

Table VI indicates the level of significance for the overall model or *F-value* as well as an indication of which groups differed significantly from each other. Significant *F-values* were obtained on 3 of the 6 items (two in the first group and one in the second group), suggesting possible differences in the frequency with which certain groups of employees use particular forms of communication. As compared to the academic staff, administrators were significantly more likely to use written communication (reports, minutes, memos, bulletin boards, etc.) for internal communications in the

University. As might be expected, academics were significantly more likely than administrators to use electronic communications (e-mail, website, face book, etc.) to communicate internal information. All groups were less likely to use company-wide "town-hall" meetings compared to the other methods of communication in the University. However, non-managerial employees were significantly more likely to use company-wide "town-hall" meetings compared to employees in managerial roles.

Table VII. Average satisfaction ratings for internal communications by employee group: Academic and Administrative Vs Managerial and Non-Managerial

Description	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	
Overall	332	2.70	.991		
Employee Type	Academic	112	2.6607	1.07848	.10191
	Administrative	220	2.7273	.94515	.06372
Current Position	Managerial	87	2.5747	1.00732	.10800
	Non-managerial	245	2.7510	.98308	.06281

Source: Survey (2017)

As it is elicited in Table VII, the average satisfaction rating for all participants was (2.70). Perhaps it is worth pointing out that the mean is below the conceptual midpoint of three, indicating that employees were only "Somewhat Satisfied" with the overall communication climate in Bahir Dar University. Compared to academic staff, however, employees from the administrative wing were more satisfied by the existing organizational communications in the University (2.7273). Similarly, employees in non-managerial roles tend to be more satisfied by the current internal communications of the University than managerial employees that obtained a mean score of (2.7510). Other demographic variables do not appear to indicate variations in employees' level of communication satisfaction.

V. Impressions from Open-Ended Comments and Focus Group Discussions

Respondents were asked to provide their views regarding some of the drawbacks associated with current forms of communication in Bahir Dar University and to suggest ways the University can most effectively communicate its internal information. As a result, many of the respondents from the academic staff stressed that there was a tendency of holding back important information especially at the top. They stressed that top management communicates according to their own needs

hence highly management-oriented. Quite a few respondents took the opportunity to place emphasis on the established culture in the University that informal communication dominated the formal communication systems. More specifically, one of the respondents stated:

"Information is held by few individuals at the top and they rarely release important information to all concerned. In addition, neither the formal communication channel is used effectively nor informal channel is given the chance to disseminate important regular information in the University."

Consistent with the previous results (Table II), several noted that information is not disseminated on time. Even if it did, it did not follow the formal structure of the University. A few respondents from the academic staff felt strongly that important information that requires the receivers' prompt actions is released at the last time or after the deadline. Long chain of communication, problem of brevity/clarity of messages (less detailed communications), late/delayed information, no face-to-face interaction, lack of transparency and incomplete messages were mentioned by participants as common problems in the University.

Some respondents feel that academic and administrative staff should function smoothly to achieve the set goals of the University through the proper

involvement of management. A few comments illustrate this important concept: "Huge gap between academic staff and administrative staff." "There is disagreement among employees." "No clear communication from top to bottom level." "No experience to communicate professionally." "There must be a healthy relationship among various levels of management in the university." "There is no smooth and/direct relation among academic and administrative staffs in the University." "There is poor coordination among employees." "There is no clear flow of communication at all. All the information is kept as secret and there is no transparency."

Respondents also put many comments about the University's communication infrastructures. Many said that there was limited infrastructure for electronic communications which hinders the smooth and timely flow of information. While the University is thriving to systematize many of its operations technologically, there still is a serious problem of internet connection in the University. Participants appear to provide the following comments: "Because of electric power interruptions, there is no permanent internet service in the University." "Internet accessibility is not good because of improper capacity. There is no well-built network system which can be used to access current information in Bahir Dar University." One of them aptly put:

"The media of communication that we are mostly using is an e-mail. Even if it has an advantage of delivering information for many people at a time, but sometimes there is a problem in checking whether the information is delivered for all concerned or not. It stands to reason that the receiver of the information may or may not be in the condition of receiving/accessing the information."

Today's technologically advanced employees are continually bombarded with information from internal and external audiences through email messages, faxes, internal memos, work-related phone calls, personal phone calls, instant messaging, face-to-face interactions, etc. Thus, managers have to work harder than ever to ensure employees receive, understand and prioritize the messages they are sending to them [35]. It rests to mention the challenge for employees to go through the volume and variety of communication stimuli they receive on a daily basis. On the other hand, the choice of a language to use in disseminating information via available media considered a hampering factor especially by expatriates in the University. A respondent said that: "Most of the time important things are sent through mail in Amharic language which is difficult for expatriate staffs to understand and take timely actions accordingly. Thus, newsletters, bulletin boards, notices, etc. should be communicated both in Amharic and English languages."

Furthermore, strong discussions were made on the University's house organ (The Nile/ጊጊጊጊ)-a newsletter which is published once in two months and distributed freely for employees of the University. The qualities

and/depth of its content, the freshness of the news as well as its entertaining capacity were the main areas of criticism. Consequently, the discussants reflected that they were not satisfied by the internal communications of the University. One of the respondents noted that; "The problem is not in the form of communication rather it is in the content of information communicated to employees." In line with this, the following comments were given: "Communication problems of top managers with workers especially who are active workers." "No effective training is given for new staff." "Top management does not treat all workers equally." "Most of the time higher officials are dependent on unreliable informal grievances."

Finally, a few suggestions for improvement were forwarded. One of the participants wrote; *"I guess taking responsibility on messages, addressing them on time and providing complete information can help to alleviate most of the challenges of internal communications in Bahir Dar University."* Another respondent revealed that "internal audit should be conducted so that we can detect the weaknesses and strengths of communication in the university." The following comments were also given: "Revealing important senate decisions (minutes, reports, etc.) to all concerned units and employees". "Timeliness of the information must be improved." "We need open, accurate and formal information to work as per the standard in the University." "Change/replace inefficient personnel." A respondent also spoke the following: "Organizational communication is a very critical issue. Therefore, appropriate measures should be taken by the concerned bodies to gear it towards excellence in Bahir Dar University." That is why many employees appear to recommend the use of modern electronic communication systems. In line with this, one of the respondents said that: "Telephone and electronic communications should be the 'nucleus of communications for Bahir Dar University in order for it to be competent enough and to be productive by saving time and money through coordination." In a nutshell, an overwhelming majority of employees stressed the necessity of continuous discussions with top management in order to make improvement in the internal communications of Bahir Dar University by making appropriate interventions.

VI. Conclusions

This study was conducted with the principal objective of gaining information on the current state of organizational communication in higher education institutions in Ethiopia with special focus on Bahir Dar University. To present a review of internal communications of Bahir Dar University, the study employed both quantitative and qualitative methods. A survey of both academic and administrative staff was conducted. The data were collected through questionnaires, personal experiences, informal conversations, and focus group discussions. The findings of this empirical study

have demonstrated the strengths and weaknesses of internal communications of Bahir Dar University and forwarded the following possible recommendations.

The study stands to suggest that gaining a comprehensive understanding of the current situation in an organization (communication audit) is important to take appropriate interventions and improve internal communication systems. According to Downs & Adrian [3], regular communication assessments provide information on how the organization is progressing in relation to communication. Thus, the University has to work on improving the dimensions of communication especially the accuracy and reliability of information transmitted via its formal and informal channels. In addition, timely dissemination of information should be given great emphasis so that the information received would count. It has to be noted that communication is critical to establishing and maintaining quality working relationships in organizations. In order to improve the effectiveness of communications, management must develop an awareness of the importance of sender's and receiver's responsibilities. Management need to examine the true purpose of each communication considering the total physical and human setting within the organization. Therefore, the University administrators should create an environment wherein problems, plans, opinions, thoughts, and ideas pertaining to work are discussed and handled in a professional manner through positive and effective communication.

The limitation of this study include that the sample was taken from Bahir Dar University only. Despite the limitations, the study should provide leaders with a baseline to measure communication practices and to develop a communication plan considering a range of factors using the systems concept to help their institutions gear towards excellence in communications. Thus, future research should include applying the presented process in different higher education institutions in Ethiopia. The findings that emerge from replications with larger, more varied data will allow conclusions regarding the current state of communications in different contexts of organizations. This, in turn, may be used as a basis for developing a communication plan aimed at bringing a radical improvement of communication in the organizations. Moreover, an extension of this kind will result in an assortment of empirically based models that provide a more accurate representation of the complexities inherent to communication within particular situations.

VII. References

- [1] E. McKinney, J. R. Barker, K. Davis, & D. Smith, "The role of communication values in swift starting action teams: IT insights from flight crew experience," *Information & Management*, 41, 1043-1056, 2004.
- [2] G. T. Coates, *Notes on Communication: A few thoughts about the way we interact with the people we meet*, Free e book from www.wanterfall.com, 2009.
- [3] C. W. Downs & A. D. Adrian, *Assessing organizational communication: Strategic communication audits*. New York: The Guilford Press, 2004.
- [4] C. S. Nebo, P. S. Nwankwo, & R. I. Okonkwo, "The Role of Effective Communication on Organizational Performance: A Study of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka," *Review of Public Administration and Management [Online]*. 4(8), pp.131-148, 2015.
- [5] J. P. Brun, *Missing pieces: 7 ways to improve employee well-being and organizational effectiveness*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010.
- [6] D. C. Summers, *Quality management: Creating and sustaining organizational effectiveness*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2010.
- [7] D. Sethi and M. Seth, "Interpersonal Communication: Life-blood of an Organization," *The IUP Journal of Soft Skills*, vol.3, no. (3 & 4), pp.31-40, 2009.
- [8] A. A. Adu-Oppong, & E. Agyin-Birikorang, "Communication in the Workplace: Guidelines for Improving Effectiveness," *Global Journal Commerce & Management Perspective*, vol.3 (5):208-213, 2014.
- [9] J. Keyton, *Communication and organizational culture: A key to understanding work experience*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2011.
- [10] J. Keyton, *Case studies for organizational communication: Understanding communication processes*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2010.
- [11] F.C. Lunenburg, "Communication: The Process, Barriers, and Improving Effectiveness," *Schooling*, vol. 1(1), pp. 1-11, 2010.
- [12] G. B. Shaw, *The wit and wisdom of George Bernard Shaw*. Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2011.
- [13] Z. Christine-Diana, "Organizational Communication – A Premise for organizational Efficiency and Effectiveness," PhD Thesis Abstract, (Ed).
- [14] J. K. Henderson, "Evaluating public relations effectiveness in a health care setting. The identification of communication assets and liabilities via a communication audit," *J Health Hum Serv Adm*, vol. 28(2): 282-322, 2005.
- [15] O. Hargie & D. Tourish, *Auditing organizational communication. A handbook of research, theory and practice*. New York, Routledge, 2009.
- [16] S. Deetz, *Conceptual foundations*. In F. M. Jablin & L. L. Putnam (Eds.), *The new handbook of organizational communication: Advances in theory, research, and methods* (pp. 3-46). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2001.
- [17] G. M. Goldhaber, *Organizational communication* (5th Ed.). Dubuque, IO: Wm. C. Brown, 1990.
- [18] D. Katz & R. L. Kahn, *The social psychology of organizations*, New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1996.
- [19] W. C. Redding, *Communication within the organization*. New York: Industrial Communication Council and Lafayette, IN: Purdue Research Foundation, 1972.
- [20] L. Thayer, *Communication and communication systems*, Homewood, IL: Irwin, 1968.
- [21] K. Miller, *Organizational Communication: Approaches and Processes*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Cengage learning, 2001.
- [22] G. F. Brady, *Management by involvement: An action guide*, New York: Insight Books, 1989.
- [23] C. Barnard, *The function of the executive*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1938.
- [24] L. Von Bertalanffy, *General Systems Theory: Foundations, Development, Applications*. New York: George Braziller, 1968.
- [25] L. L. Putnam, "Emerging directions in organizational communication," *Australian Journal of Communication*, vol.17 (3), 1-10, 1990.
- [26] P. Shockley-Zalabak, *Fundamentals of organizational communication: Knowledge, sensitivity, skills, values* (5th Ed.). Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon, 2002.
- [27] B. D. Davis & T. R. Miller, "Job preparation for the 21st century: a group project learning model to teach basic workplace skills," *Journal of Education for Business*, vol.72, 69-73, 1996.
- [28] N. C. Holter, & D. J. Kopka, "Developing a workplace skills course: Lessons learned," *Journal of Education for Business*, 76 (3), 138-143, 2001.

- [29] J. D. Maes, T. G. Weldy, & M. L. Icenogle, "A managerial perspective: Oral communication competency is most important for business students in the workplace," *Journal of Business Education*, 34, 67-80, 1997.
- [30] M. A. Verespej, "Formal training: "Secondary" education"? *Industry Week*, 247, 42, 1998.
- [31] E. M. Perrigo & D. R. Gaut, "Is academia "in sync" with the business world"? *Journal of Career Planning & Employment*, vol. 54 (3), 58-60, 1994.
- [32] F. M. Jablin & P. M. Sias, *Communication competence*. In F. M. Jablin & L. L. Putnam (Eds.), *The new handbook of organizational*

communication: Advances in theory, research, and methods (pp. 819-864). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2001.

- [33] E. M. Eisenberg, *Organizational communication: Balancing creativity and constraint*. New York, NY: Saint Martin's, 2010.
- [34] S. Wilkinson, *Focus group research*. Sage Publications Ltd, 2004, 177p.
- [35] C. T. Jones, "In Search of Communication Satisfaction at the State Bar of Georgia," MA Thesis, Department of Communication, Georgia State University, 2006.



Author Profile

Mr. Getnet Worku Demeke is a lecturer in the Department of Management, College of Business and Economics, Bahir Dar University, Bahir Dar, Ethiopia. He got his education from University of Gondar (BA) and Mekelle University (MBA). He has published a research

paper in an international journal and prepared different teaching and training materials. His area of teaching is Change, Entrepreneurship, Strategy, and Managerial/Leadership Skill Development. He served as Head of the Department of Management. He also served as a member of different academic bodies like Department Council (as Chairman), Academic Council, etc.