Information Flow in the Eastern University, Sri Lanka

Viharnaa Raveendra[1] and Thivahary Geretharan[2]
[1] Department of Crop Science, Faculty of Agriculture, Eastern University, Sri Lanka
[2] Department of Agricultural Economics, Faculty of Agriculture, Eastern University, Sri Lanka
tgeretharan@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT

Organizational communication can aid in determining how communication system, flow and practices are contributing to the organizational performances. One should assess the information flows and their needs in order to facilitate managing the organizational process. In this regard, a study was designed to investigate the information flow in the Eastern University, Sri Lanka. Thirty academic and thirty non-academic staff were randomly selected for this study. Structured questionnaires were used to collect primary data. The study reveals that majority of the staff members (36.7%) perceived that internal telephone call act as the main source of information to carry out their daily activities within the University, followed by discussions (30%) with other staff members. 80% of respondent gained and shared information in both written and oral forms. 65% of staff used circulars as the information source to get work related information. 63.5% of staff reported telephone calls as more suitable information source for getting quick information. According to the respondents, the overall efficiency of information flow in the Eastern University is needed to be improved and nearly half of them (51.7%) rated it as fair. Therefore, actions need to be taken to regularize the information flow especially regarding efficient information flow within the University system.
Keywords: Information, information source, staff, University

INTRODUCTION

The efficient information flow and organizational communication are crucial parts of any organizations operational processes. According to Opara (2003) information is the life blood of modern organizations. Olowu (2004) says that information entails data, facts, imaginations, ideas, opinions, cultural values in a variety of media which includes print, audio-visual materials and electronic processes. Some of the organizations make all information available to everyone in the organization, so it creates extra burden for the user. In some cases they are not able to locate the desired information, so the relevant information should be available to the user with respect to content, context, location, time of use and accordingly to the role of the user in the organization. Improvement of information flow in an organization can save money by direct as well as indirect means. In today's organizations, the importance of horizontal and free flowing information flows are increasing. The free flowing communication flow encourages the staff of modern organizations to give feedback and suggest ideas to improve the existing processes (Miller, 2003). The management should be open to development ideas coming from staff and reward behavior that is beneficial for whole organization. Information affects every aspect of organizational process, and therefore it is crucial to have a well-designed communication system (Hearth, 2006). Taken the importance of information flow in an organization in to consideration a study was carried out in the Eastern University, Sri Lanka (EUSL) to find out the pattern of information flow existing within the EUSL system.

METHODOLOGY

Location of the study – Organization
The study was conducted in the EUSL, which is located in Vantharumoolai, 12 km North from Batticaloa. The University has two campuses – the main campus in Vantharumoolai and a second campus in Trincomalee. The University currently has seven Faculties (Agriculture, Applied Sciences, Arts and Culture, Commerce and Management, Communication and Business Studies, Healthcare Sciences and Science).

Data Collection
The techniques used for data collection were questionnaire survey, informal interviews and secondary data sources. The structured questionnaire was designed and it was distributed to randomly select thirty academic and thirty non-academic staff in the Eastern University. Informal interview was done among administrative staff to collect relevant data.

Analytical Procedure

The filled questionnaires were checked and data were analyzed using the SPSS software. The study was based largely on descriptive statistics..

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This survey was carried out to study the information flow existing in the Eastern University, Sri Lanka. Sixty staff members were randomly selected from the University.

Staff Profile
The results revealed that majority (78.3%) of the staff were permanent and 21.7% of staff were temporary in the sample population. Since the decisions of permanent staff will be highly welcomed by higher authority, they have to take the responsibility to develop an efficient communication flow within the University. Majority (58.3%) of the staff were female in the surveyed population. According to the analysis 45% of staff were fall under the age range of $22 - 31$ years, represents more number of younger staff. Only few percentages of staff (8.3%) come within the age range $52 - 60$ years. According to the survey, 26.7% of staff were permanent lecturers, followed by clerk and computer application assistants (25%) and temporary assistant lecturers, demonstrator (21.7%). Assistant librarian, library assistant and laboratory assistant were low in the sampled population. 61.7% of staff had lesser than 8 years of working experience within the University. Around 38% of staff had more than 9 years of working experience.

Information Sources
Common information sources used for getting work related information
A number of communication channels were identified with in the University. Among them, circulars being voted as the most effective information source by 65% of respondents. The second most important source was letters followed by telephone calls. Most of the staff prefers written sources than the electronic sources to get the information. Only few staff used notice board and news paper as their information sources. Traditionally, the written communication would be the most prevalent in the form of rules, regulations and instructions (Miller, 2003).

Table 1: Common information sources used to get work related information

Information sources	Frequency	Percentage*	
Circulars/Circular letters	39	65.0	
Letters	30	50.1	
News paper	01	1.7	
Notice board	06	10.2	
Internet	15	25.2	
E- mail	15	25.2	
Telephone calls	22	36.7	*Multiple
Discussions	12	20.1	column total is more
Total	140	234.2	

response-than 100%

More suitable information source for getting quick information
Table 2: More suitable information sources expressed by sampled population

Suitable information source	Frequency	Percentage*	
Email	23	38.4	
Telephone calls	38	63.5	
Discussions	05	8.4	*Multiple response- column
Letters	02	3.4	is more than 100%
Meetings	02	3.4	surveyed results revealed
Total	70	117.1	63.5% of staff chosen

total The that telephone calls as more suitable information source for getting quick information. The letters and meetings were also preferred by some staff members attached to the University.

Constraints related to information sources
Constraints in receiving/sending information
60% of staff perceived that there were no constraints in receiving/sending information and rest of them (40%) experienced constraints in information flow.

Common constraints

According to the table 3, 60% of staff reported that there were no constraints in information flow within the University. Time delay considered as the main constraint from surveyed results. 11.7% of staff were reluctant to express about constraints they have faced regarding information flow within the University system. Language problem and poor responsibility were identified by few percentages of staff (Table 3). Discovering these constraints are very much important to improve information flow in Eastern university.

Table 3: Common constraints related with information flow in the sampled population

Common constraints	Frequency	Percentage*	
No constraints	36	60.0	
Time delay	12	20.1	
Lack and Improper network facilities	04	6.7	
Language problem	01	1.7	
Information is sent through minor staff and isn't fully reached	02	3.4	*Multiple
Poor responsibility from the staff	01	1.7	response- column
No response	07	11.7	total is more than
Total	63	105.3	100%

Details Related With Information Failure
Information / communication failures
According to the results, 66.7% of staff did not face any information failures. Around one third of staff faced information failures. Lack of communication facilities was the main reason for the communication failures within the University.

Cases of information failures faced by staff
In surveyed population, more than fifty percentages of staff did not face any information failure. This percentage denotes that information flow of Eastern University is fair. 16.7% of staff were fail to attend meeting, workshop and seminars due to information failures.

Table 4: Cases of information failures faced by staff in the sampled population

	Cases of information failures	Frequency	Percentage	
	No failures	40	66.6	
	Fail to attend to meeting, workshop and seminars	10	16.7	
	Delay in sending of official documents through each channels	01	1.7	
Timely and	Delay in getting increment	01	1.7	Response
	Incorrect message transfer by the person who pass the message	01	1.7	
	No response	07	11.6	
	Total	60	100.0	

Acknowledgement from Higher Authority/Subordinates
More than 80% of staff got timely response from higher authority/subordinates in the sampled population. Rest of the population (15%) was not received timely response from their superiors/subordinates. The results also showed that 71.7% of staff got acknowledgement from higher authority/subordinates in the sampled population for the information communicated. 28.3 % of staff did not get acknowledgement from higher authority for the information communicated.

Table 5: Getting timely response and acknowledgement from higher authority/subordinates

	Yes	No	
Timely response	51 (85%)	09 (15%)	
Acknowledgement	43 (71.7%)	17 (28.3%)	Communication

Facilities
Communication facilities available to staff
Three quarter of sampled population experienced enough communication facilities in Eastern University and rest of them (25%) felt that communication facilities available to them in the working environment were not enough.

Reasons for non-satisfaction

Table 6: Reasons for non-satisfaction of communication facilities

Reasons	Frequency	Percentage
Satisfied with facilities	44	73.3
Failure of network access	03	5.0
Inadequate facilities of internet & intercom access	07	11.7
No response	06	10.0
Total	60	100.0

analysis, with According to data 73.3% of staff satisfied available communication facilities. 11.7% of staff experienced inadequate facilities of internet and intercom access in Eastern University. A few percentages of staff faced failure of network access (Table 6).

Common Mode of Information Flow

Common mode used for sending information to higher authority

Table 7: Common communication mode used for sending information to higher authority

Common modes	Frequency	Percentage
Letter	52	86.7
Emails	5	8.3
Meetings	1	1.7
Telephone calls	2	3.3
Total	60	100.0

More than 80% of staff used letters for sending information to higher authority in the sample population. Only 1.7% of staff used meetings to pass the information to higher authority. It may be due to low numbers of meetings held and poor attendance of staff to the meetings (Table 7).

Common mode of receiving information from higher authority

Table 8: Common communication mode used for receiving information to higher authority

Common modes	Frequency	Percentage
Letter	54	90.0
Emails	01	1.7
Meetings	01	1.7
Telephone calls	03	4.9
Others	01	1.7
Total	60	100.0

90% of letters According to the results, staff received information through from higher authority. 10% of staff received information through emails, meetings, telephone calls and some other way from higher authority. Miller (2003) reported that in case of top-down communication within the organizations, the communication is most likely to be formal and written.

Common mode used for sending information to colleagues

Regarding the information dissemination among the peers, the information was mainly sent to colleagues through telephone calls. Few percentages (3%) of staff directly meet and discussed with their colleagues for sharing information (Table 9).

Table 9: Common mode used for sending information to colleagues

Common modes	Frequency	Percentage
Letter	07	11.7
Emails	15	25.0
Telephone calls	35	58.3
Others (Direct talking)	03	5.0
Total	60	100.0

Common mode of receiving information from colleagues

It is about getting the information from information provider side. It can also be counted as perceiving and understanding the information coming from the provider side. More than half of staff received the information from colleagues through telephone calls (Table 10).

Table 10: Common mode used for receiving information from colleagues

Common modes	Frequency	Percentage
Letter	05	8.3
Emails	15	25.0
Telephone calls	37	61.7
Others	03	5.0
Total	60	100.0

Satisfied Getting Information Source for Information

The results revealed that around one third of the sampled population perceived telephone calls as the easiest and satisfied information source for communication. 23.3% and 18.3% of staff received satisfactory information from letter and email respectively. A few percentages of staff believed that the combinations of letter, email and telephone calls as satisfied information source for getting information from others (Table 11).

Table 11: Satisfied information source for getting information

Satisfied information source	Frequency	Percentage
Letter	14	23.3
Emails	11	18.3
Meetings	03	5.0
Telephone calls	20	33.3
Letter and email	04	6.7
Letter and telephone calls	03	5.0
Email and telephone calls	04	6.7
Letter, email and telephone calls	01	1.7
Total	60	100.0

Suitable Information Source for Getting Confidential Information

Among the sampled population more than fifty percentages of staff perceived letter as more confidential information source for receiving confidential information. 18.3% of staff believed email as the confidential information source. The combination of letter and email also identified as confidential information source by around 20% of the respondents (Table 12).

Table 12: Suitable information source for getting confidential information in EUSL

Information source	Frequency	Percentage
Letter	33	55.0
Emails	11	18.3
Meetings	01	1.7
Telephone calls	02	3.3
Others	01	1.6
Letter and emails	10	16.7
Emails and Telephone calls	01	1.7
Letter, email and telephone calls	01	1.7
Total	60	100.0

Browsing of Official Website

15% of staff had the habit of browsing 'esn' official website of the EUSL every day to get up-to-date information. 40% of staff browsed website once a week. Most of the minor staff never browse 'esn' website because they had no awareness about web information sources and to access those sources.

Table 13: Browsing official website of EUSL ('esn' website)

	Frequency	Percentage
Every day	09	15.0
Every other day	05	8.3
Once a week	24	40.0
Oftenly	18	30.0
Never	04	6.7
Total	60	100.0

Common Method of Information Transferred

Table 14: Common method of information transferred

Method of information transfer	Frequency	Percentage
Oral	04	6.7
Written	08	13.3
Both	48	80.0
Total	60	100.0

In the sampled population, 80% of respondent gained and shared information in the combination of written and oral forms. Only 4% of staff got information only in the oral form.

Quality of Information
Table 15: Quality of available information

	Yes	No
Receiving reliable information	59 (98.3%)	01 (1.7%)
Receiving up-to-date information	34 (56.7%)	26 (43.3%)
Information easily available	39 (65%)	21 (35%)
Information received without delay	25 (41.7%)	35 (58.3%)

Almost all received the staff members reliable information; accordingly, information quality is maintained in the EUSL. Only half of the respondents reported that the information received was up-to-date. Rest of the respondents reported that the information received was not up-to-date. 65% of the staff reported that information is easily available within EUSL. And 35% of staff faced difficulties to get the information. The most alarming fact was more than half of respondents felt that the information does not arrive on time. It is important to take actions to get the information without delay (Table 15).

Most Important Source of Information
Majority of the staff members (36.7%) working in the Eastern University, Sri Lanka reported that internal telephone call act as the main source of information to carry out their day to day activities within the University, followed by discussions with other staff members (30%).

Common Type of Information Flow
According to the Table 16, 45% of staff reported that downward information flow was common within the University in a particular day, followed by horizontal information flow.

Table 16: Common type of information flow among the sampled population

Types	Frequency	Percentage
Upward	9	15.0
Downward	27	45.0
Horizontal	18	30.0
Upward and downward	05	8.3
No response	01	1.7
Total	60	100.0

Overall

Efficiency of Information Flow
Table 17: Overall efficiency of information flow in the University

	Frequency	Percentage
Excellent	02	3.3
Good	27	45.0
Fair	31	51.7
Total	60	100.0

According to the respondents observation, the overall efficiency of information flow in the EUSL is needed to be improved, majority of them (51.7%) rated it as fair. Therefore, it is important to take necessary actions to improve the information flow within the University. Only a few percentages (3.3%) of staff rated it is excellent.

Suggestion to Improve the Information Utilization
Table 18: Suggestions by the staff to improve information flow within the EUSL

Additional thoughts	Frequency	Percentage
Categorize the information and send to the required staff on time	01	1.7

Development and upgrade of information sources and their accessibility	08	13.1
Regularize the online information transfer from higher authority to staff level	02	3.4
Giving information through mobile phones and Activation of free sms service (Twitter)	02	3.4
Conduct seminars and workshop on communication ethics and Increase the level of ICT facilities	02	3.4
No response	45	75.0
Total	60	100.0

According to the results, 75% of staff did not turned out with any additional thoughts for improving information flow. No suggestions were made on how he/she could make changes for better information flow. This reflects the lack of enthusiasm concerning taking responsibility of one's own work. It is important that each employee would understand the impact she/he has on the overall operations of EUSL.

CONCLUSION

The study concluded that majority of the staff in the Eastern University were female with the age of 22-31 years and had less than nine years of working experiences. 65% of staff used circulars as the information source to get work related information. 63.5% of staff voted telephone calls as more suitable information source for getting quick information. 60% of staff believed there were no constraints in receiving/sending information. Time delay is considered as ther main constraint by the staff members. 15% of staff browsed 'esn' official website every day and got up-to-date information. 40% of staff browsed the website once a week. Most of the minor staff never browse 'esn' website. More than 80% of staff used letters for sending/receiving information to higher authority. More than 80% of staff got timely response from higher authority/subordinates. According to the respondents the overall efficiency of information flow in the EUSL is needed to be improved and most respondents (51.7%) rated it as fair. 75% of staff did not come up with additional thoughts for improving information flow. This can be an indication of the lack of enthusiasm concerning taking responsibility to regularize the information flow. By taking necessary steps to improve the existing pattern of information flow by considering the suggestion made by the staff members, may possibly make an efficient information flow network within the Eastern University, Sri Lanka.

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