Assignment Letter/*Surat Tugas*

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Dr.Phil. Deborah N. Simorangkir, BA., MS.

Lecturing Assignment At SWISS GERMAN UNIVERSITY	*Penugasan Perkuliahan Pada SWISS GERMAN UNIVERSITY*
Head of Department of Global Strategic Communications	Ketua Program Studi Komunikasi Strategis Global

In consideration of:

Her appointment as the Dean of Faculty of Business Administration and Humanities under agreement no. SK/001/HR/II/2021

Mengingat:

Pengangkatannya sebagai Dekan Fakultas Administrasi Bisnis dan Humaniora dibawah perjanjian no. SK/001/HR/II/2021

And in deliberation of:

The learning teaching activity at SWISS GERMAN UNIVERSITY; and

The need for qualified lecturers for such learning teaching university.

Dan menimbang:

Kegiatan belajar mengajar di SWISS GERMAN UNIVERSITY; dan

Kebutuhan akan dosen-dosen yang memenuhi syarat untuk kegiatan belajar mengajar seperti itu.

DECREES

To assign:

Name: **Dr.Phil. Deborah N. Simorangkir, BA., MS.**

Position: Full Time Lecturer

To participate on the following activity:

MEMUTUSKAN

Untuk menugaskan:

Nama: **Dr.Phil. Deborah N. Simorangkir, BA., MS.**

Jabatan: *Dosen Tetap*

Untuk berpartisipasi dalam kegiatan berikut ini:

No	Activity	Organized	Period
1	Module for Subject Communication Audit	Dept. of Global Strategic Communications	Even Semester 2020-2021

The appointed shall accomplish the task in responsible ways in line with the related guidelines and other regulations given by SGU

Pihak yang bersangkutan harus melaksanakan tugas dan tanggung jawab sebaik-baiknya, sesuai dengan petunjuk dan peraturan dari SGU.

Assignor/Pemberi Tugas:

Dr. Nila K. Hidayat, SE, MM.
Head of Department of Global Strategic Communications
Ketua Program Studi Komunikasi Strategis Global

COMMUNICATION AUDIT

COURSE MODULE

PREPARED BY:

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Global Strategic Communications Study Program

Faculty of Business and Communication

2022

TOPIC 1
INTRODUCTION

HISTORY OF COMMUNICATION AUDIT

Communication audit as a term, first appeared in the early 1950s. This approach for measuring and evaluating organizational performance became popular in the 1970s with significant numbers of publications appearing in academic journals.

Academic interest declined during the following two decades when, among many reasons, the primary focus for organizational analysts shifted to theoretical frameworks rather than applied concerns (Mumby & Stohl, 1996).

However, throughout this period, practitioners continued to value and utilize audits for assessing communication effectiveness within organizations.

Higher education also continued to include communication audit projects in organizational communication courses (Scott et al., 1999; Shelby and Reinsch, 1996; Zorn, 2002) despite the lack of academic publications.

The contemporary communications audit examines an organization's entire communication environment.

This environment not only consists of communication between organizational members, it also includes the cultural, legal and economic conditions of the organization and the sense of security people feel within it.

A completed audit provides an organization with a realistic assessment of its strengths and weaknesses as well as valuable information that can be used to reach established goals or create new ones.

COMMUNICATION AUDIT

Communication audit is a complete analysis of an organization's communications -internal and/or external - designed to "take a picture" of communication needs, policies, practices and capabilities.

It is a thorough evaluation of an organization's ability to transfer information.

The audit is a systematic approach that forces an organization to look at what it is really doing as opposed to what it believes it is doing.

A communication audit analyzes an organization's practices to reveal how effective they are throughout a whole company or in specified parts of the organization.

It can pinpoint problem areas such as frequent misunderstandings, information blocks, information lacks, information duplication, misrepresentation.

WHAT IS ITS PURPOSE?

The purpose of a communication audit is to uncover the strengths and weaknesses within the various stages of the information transfer – whether occurring directly within the company itself, or with its clients or stakeholders.

Uncover necessary data to allow top management to make informed, economical decisions about future objectives of the organization's communication. An audit should also lead to a series of recommendations.

The audit is, thus, a valuable tool for enhancing internal motivation, loyalty and efficiency and for beefing up market position.

Organizational Communication: Organizations that treat their people well, and that communicate with them fully and forthrightly, do better in the marketplace.

Customer Communication: Communication with clients and customers is also a vital ingredient of overall success.

SCOPE OF THE COMMUNICATION AUDIT

The scope of an audit may be as broad and as deep as the size and complexity of the organization's demands.

> What does Communication Audit provide?

It provides meaningful information to members of management concerned with efficiency, credibility, and economy of their communications policies, practices, and programs.

It also provides valuable data for developing or restructuring communications functions, guidelines, and budgets, as well as recommendations for action tailored to an organization's particular situation as uncovered by an analysis of the collected data.

> When is it conducted?

An extensive audit should be conducted every five to seven years. In the interim, reliable feedback techniques should be obtained periodically through the organization's routine communication function.

An audit is especially helpful at a time of change: a merger or acquisition, launch of a new product or service, entry into new markets.

> What subjects are covered?

- Communication philosophy

- Objectives and goals

- Organization, staffing, and compensation

- Existing communication programs
- Existing vehicles and their uses

- Personal communications

- Meetings

AUDIT TOOLS

- Strategic Communication Audit:

- Staffing/Personnel

- Programs

- Technology/Equipment

- Social Media Accounts

Agency	Personnel/Staff	Programs	Technology/Equipment	Social Media
DA RFU	Writer Photographer Graphic Artist	Newsletter Radio Program Regular Media Briefing	DSLR Camera Printers Audio Recorder	YouTube Channel FB Page Twitter Account
Province A				
Province B				

AUDIT OF THE LEVEL OF PRACTICE

The Audit of the Level of Practice for the various Communication Activities were sought to be measured on the rating below from the standard questionnaire from the Communications Consortium Media Center* based on the following rating scale:

- Ad hoc

- Planned

- Institutionalized

- Evaluated

- Optimized

*www.ccmc.org

1. Ad hoc **(Rating: 1)** – the communication practice is unorganized; few if any staff and financial resources are dedicated to it.

2. Planned **(Rating: 2)** – the practice is planned and deliberate as opposed to reactive or "as needed basis"

3. Institutionalized **(Rating 3)** – the practice is routine and part of the organizations fabric. The practices are known and coordinated within and outside the organization.

- 4. Evaluated (**Rating: 4**) – The practice is measured and analyzed

- 5. Optimized (**Rating: 5**) – the practice is continually reflected and improvements incorporated.

Strategy		
Communication Activity	**Rating**	**Level of Practice**
a. Identify the Vision		
b. Identify goals and outcomes		
c. Select target Audiences		
d. Develop Message		
e. Identify credible messengers		
f. Choose communication mechanisms		
g. Scan context and completion		

Implementation

Communication Activity	Rating	Level of Practice
h. Develop effective material		
i. Build valuable partnership		
j. Train messengers		
k. Conduct Steady outreach		
l. Monitor and evaluate		

Support and Integration

Communication Activity	AVG	Level of Practice
m. Support communications at leadership level		
n. Earmark sufficient funds		
o. Intergrade communication throughout the organization		
p. Involve staff at all levels		

CONCLUSION

Having identified internal and external communication as vital ingredients of organizational success the issue arises: What should be done about it?

By auditing what currently happens, the ground is prepared for substantial improvements.

TOPIC 2
THE QUESTIONNAIRE APPROACH

BACKGROUND

The lure of a survey lies in the seeming simplicity of the methodology, the ostensive ease of administration and the apparent directness of interpretation.

However, these are only illusions based on how common surveys are, rather than their utility.

Administering a questionnaire and interpreting results will require scientific understanding tempered with an artful consideration of organizational politics.

DEVELOPING A QUESTIONNAIRE

A step-by-step procedure. But, auditors may have to go back and revisit a previous step:

1. Research the organizational background

2. Ascertain the purpose

3. Consider a variety of existing instruments

4. Determine the proper instrument – either existing or custom-designed

5. Make appropriate adaptations to the survey

Step 1: Research the organizational background

Having an understanding of the organization allows auditors to:

- Make reasonable judgments about the inevitable tradeoffs involved in the survey process.

- Ascertain the best ways to administer the survey.

The '100 facts' exercise is one way to gather this background information. Objective: develop a list of 100 facts about the organization.

Examples:

- Demographic information about employees

- Layers of management

- Communication tools frequently used

- Dates of previous surveys

- Locations of employees

- Departmental structure

Step 2: Ascertain the purpose

This step appears straightforward, but it may actually be the most difficult step.

Critical question: After the survey is completed, what does the organization want to happen?

Sometimes organizations only have a vague idea about how they will use the results.

Auditors should help them clarify their desires.

Some objectives include assessing:

- The communication competence of employees

- The conflict management style of employees

- The effectiveness of communication channels (newsletters, email, etc.)

- The adequacy of information dissemination

- The quality of organizational relationships

- Employee satisfaction with communication

- Employee understanding of major initiatives

- The effectiveness of top management communication

Step 3: Consider a variety of existing instruments

Organizational communication scholars have used hundreds of instruments. The most commonly used can be classified into 2 types:

- Process instruments: examine communication at a more micro-level, investigating issues such as conflict management, team building, communication competence, or uncertainty management.

- Comprehensive instruments: examine communication practices on a more macro-level, such as satisfaction with the communication climate.

COMMUNICATION SATISFACTION QUESTIONNAIRE (CSQ)

Downs and Hazen (1977) developed this instrument when investigating the relationship between communication and job satisfaction.

They isolated 8 key communication factors:

1. Communication climate;
2. relationship with supervisors;
3. organizational integration;
4. media quality;
5. horizontal communication;
6. organizational perspective;
7. relationship with subordinates; and,
8. personal feedback.

Relatively easy to administer and can be completed in less than 15 minutes.

The CSQ may not provide all the details necessary for specific action plans. But it provides an effective overview of potential problem areas that can be further investigated.

ICA AUDIT SURVEY

Gerald Goldhaber led a team of scholars from the International Communication Association in the development of a package of instruments designed to assess organization communication practices.

Many people refer to it as the 'ICA Audit'.

The questionnaire consists of 122 questions divided into 8 major sections:

1. Amount of information received about various topics versus amount desired.

2. Amount of information sent about various topics versus amount desired.

3. Amount of follow-up versus amount desired.

4. Amount of information received from various sources versus amount desired.

5. Amount of information received from various channels versus amount desired.

6. Timeliness of information.

7. Organizational relationships.

8. Satisfaction with organizational outcomes.

The first 5 sections use a similar scaling format – from 1 (very little) to 5 (very great) – employees are asked to rate the amount of information they 'now receive'.

In a parallel scale, respondents are asked about the amount of information the 'need to receive'.

Then a difference score can be generated that compares employees' information needs with the amount they actually received.

Some critique the validity of the instrument and the use of the difference scores. There have been some revisions to address these issues.

Overall, this instrument is one of the most comprehensive attempts to measure all aspects of an organization's communication system.

ORGANIZATIONAL COMMUNICATION DEVELOPMENT AUDIT QUESTIONNAIRE

Osmo Wiio and his Finnish colleagues developed the OCD audit questionnaire as part of an assessment package built around the Delphi technique.

Objective: to determine how well the communication system helps the organization to translate its goals into desired end-results.

One version contains 76 items grouped into 12 dimensions:

1. Overall communication satisfaction	7. Job satisfaction.
2. Amount of information received from different sources – now.	8. Availability of computer information systems.
3. Amount of information received from different sources – ideal.	9. Allocation of time in a working day.
4. Amount of information received about specific job items – now.	10. Respondent's general communication behavior.
5. Amount of information received about specific job items – ideal.	11. Organization-specific questions.
6. Areas of communication that need improvement.	12. Information-seeking patterns.

More recently refined versions have fewer dimensions and items. Yet, the OCD addresses several issues that are not covered by the other instruments.

ORGANIZATIONAL COMMUNICATION SCALE

Roberts O'Reilly (1973) originally developed the OCS while working on research for the US Office of Naval Research.

The OCS comprises of 35 questions, broken down to 16 dimensions.

Employees use 7-point Likert scales to respond to items about the following dimensions:

1. Trust for supervisor;
2. Influence of supervisor;
3. Importance of upward mobility;
4. Desire for interaction;
5. Accuracy;
6. Summarization;
7. Gatekeeping;
8. Overload;
9. Percentage of time they spend in upward communication, downward communication, and lateral or horizontal communication; Percentage of time using various modes of communication; and,
10. Employee's general level of communication satisfaction.

Unique content areas: "summarization" and "influence of supervisor" that other instruments do not have.

THE OBVIOUS QUESTION IS: WHICH INSTRUMENT IS BEST?

That depends on the purpose of the audit and constraints of the audit process (If time was limited, it would be difficult to use the ICA Audit Survey).

The best way is to carefully review all the alternatives.

COMPARISON OF INSTRUMENTS

	CSQ	ICA	OCD2	OCS
Developer	Downs & Hazen (1977)	Goldhaber & Krivonos (1977)	Wiio (1975)	Roberts and O'Reilly (1973)
No. of items	46	122	76	35
Dimensions	10	8	12	16
Scaling device	Satisfaction level	Likert-type	Satisfaction level	Likert-type
Open-ended questions	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Databank available	Yes	Yes	No	No
Average completion time	10-15 minutes	45-60 minutes	30-40 minutes	5-10 minutes

Step 4: Determine the proper instrument – either existing or custom-designed

Two basic options: a pre-existing instrument or develop one.

- Pre-existing instruments generally have been scientifically tested and developed by professionals. Therefore auditors can be fairly sure the survey is valid.

However: Auditors may need to ask for authors' permission to use the survey; Some questions may not be applicable to the organization; Some of the most frequently used questionnaires are too long to administer via the internet.

- Developing a custom-designed questionnaire have some challenges: Scientific issues of validity and reliability.

Step 5: Make appropriate adaptations to the survey

Two types of modifications need to be considered:

- What demographic data are needed?

- What departmental or unit breakdowns are needed?

Rule of thumb: the smallest group size should be limited to seven people. Demographic and unit breakdown items should be included at the end of the survey. This way, if employees feel uncomfortable answering these questions, at least they have answered substantive questions.

PLANNING THE ADMINISTRATIVE PROCESS

Sound administrative procedures are essential for an effective audit to improve the integrity of the administrative process.

1. Determine the sample size necessary to fulfill the objectives: include everyone? Or survey a sample of the population? If possible, include everyone. If not, the important thing is: randomization.

2. Develop an administrative protocol:

- How can employees be motivated to participate?

- How will the data be collected?

3. Test the administrative procedures and questionnaire: Especially when using a new instrument.

4. Decide how feedback will be provided:

- What format will be used to present the results?

- What will be the auditor's role in interpreting the results?

- What will be the auditor's role in interpreting the results?

- How will the survey results be communicated?

- How will you transition from the results to the next stop?

ANALYZING THE DATA

How quantitative and qualitative data are displayed has a big impact on the ultimate interpretations of the information.

Ineffective displays make it difficult to draw proper conclusions and can lead us into discussions of the trivial.

Therefore, auditors need to carefully think about the choices made in displaying the data.

QUANTITATIVE DATA

Rank-order method: Using means from each question, rank related items from high to low.

For example, using the ICA Audit Survey, items about timeliness of information could be ranked in one table. Another table would contain items regarding organizational relationships, etc.

For the Communication Satisfaction Survey, 40 items are usually ranked in one table.

Databank comparisons: This allows other auditors the option to compare their organization's results with those in the databank.

For example, the Communication Satisfaction Questionnaire databank, composed of the results of 26 audits (see www.imetacomm.com/CME3 - 'Research Database' tab).

Factor scores: Require more sophisticated statistical techniques like factor analysis, regression analysis, etc., to determine key relationships between variables.

QUALITATIVE DATA

Since many questionnaires contain at least a few open-ended questions, it is important to briefly consider how to scientifically analyze this data.

Some clients will insist on seeing the entire list of employee comments. This is fine, as long as the responses remain anonymous.

INTERPRETING THE RESULTS

- Erect a temporary firewall between the qualitative and the quantitative data: Numbers and words paint different pictures. It is important to see both images before attempting to synthesize them.

- Anticipate various interpretations of the questions.

- Discern the difference between more and less important items.

- Distinguish between macro- and micro-level concerns: Global results about the organization's communication system may not be applicable to all departments and levels.

- Synthesize the results of the qualitative and quantitative analyses.

- Contemplate actions that might be taken.

TOPIC 3
THE INTERVIEW APPROACH

BACKGROUND

Given the nature of many organizations, in terms of numerous employees at different levels, across various departments, perhaps on different sites, and with a wide range of clients and customers, the survey questionnaire is often the first method that comes to mind.

However, just like any other methodology, the secret of its success depends on giving thorough consideration to planning, development, analysis and interpretation.

INITIAL CONSIDERATIONS

1. Why is there an interview?

"A face-to-face dyadic interaction in which one individual plays the role of interviewer and the other takes on the role of interviewee, and both of these roles carry clear expectations concerning behavioral and attitudinal approach. The interview is requested by one of the participants for a specific purpose and both participants are willing contributors." (Millar et al., 1992, p. 3).

2. Why is the interview useful?
- It is more likely to elicit unanticipated information and to enable a greater depth and meaning of communication experiences to be explored and recorded.
- It enables auditors to get a better sense of the way in which organizational practices and issues are perceived and interpreted by staff, employees, and, where relevant, service users.
- It offers a human and social aspect with regard to the discovery of information.
- It has a flexible approach to gathering information, especially when responses are relatively unknown and the topic requires exploration, and it is important that all points of view are represented.

3. When is the interview useful?
- Initial uses include interviewing key personnel to clarify the nature and type of audit that will best meet their needs.
- Interviews may be used as the first step in developing an audit questionnaire to be administered to a large number of respondents.
- Using interviews to complement other methods in the audit process helps to provide a more comprehensive and insightful formulation of the communicative climate and process.
- Even when auditors use wholly quantitative methods, following data analysis, interviews with a selected sample can be a valuable way of helping them understand, explain, and interpret results.
- Interviews can be used at differing times during the process in order to serve a variety of purposes.

PLANNING

Most interviews take one of two forms:

1. Exploratory, where the purpose is to generate issues.

For example: if the auditor's aim is to gain a picture in some depth of the experiences of communication from the perspective of employees or service users.

2. Focused, where the purpose is to obtain specific information on pre-selected subject areas.

For example: if the aim of surveying the formal communication structures within an organization would be best achieved by conducting highly standardized focused interviews in which each communication structure and channel is covered in a systematic way.

Who will conduct interviews?

It is essential that all interviewers involved in audits have highly developed skills. Training enhances the validity and reliability of information gained through this method.

However, interpersonal skills and other personal factors can significantly impact an interview effectiveness, and even on the credibility.

Who will be interviewed?

In working with participants who are members of formal organizations, it is necessary to gain access through 'gatekeepers' who have responsibility for the operation of the site.

Those high up in the hierarchy should also provide a public endorsement of the audit, which in turn encourages those lower down to participate fully.

Participants need to be representative of the range of different roles. Likewise, in external audits, the entire client should be covered.

However, alternative techniques for acquiring samples have been employed in communication audits, such as snowballing.

Participant numbers vary widely from study to study. Two factors when considering the size of the sample:

1. The type of communication audit
2. The time and resources available

The decision on the number and type of participants is usually the result of balancing a number of competing demands for resources against the needs for sufficient reliability, validity and uthenticity.

How long should each interview last?

The length of time of scheduled is also dependent on the person being interviewed.

It is suggested that managers may require a greater length of time (e.g. around 2 hours) than non-managers (e.g. around 30 minutes).

However, where in-depth techniques of interviewing are employed, such as the Retrospective Interview Technique, considerably longer periods of time may be required.

Once a time frame has been decided, it is important to inform all potential participants of such a time commitment.

DEVELOPING THE INTERVIEW GUIDE

Interviewers must have some interview guide or plan in order to ensure that the purpose of the interview will be achieved.

The format and nature of the interview guide will differ significantly depending on the type of interview being planned.

- Exploratory interviews

Here, the interview is employed as a method of discovery. It is possible that the interview guide would not be used, in order to allow respondents to express their perceptions of important processes more spontaneously.

The main body of the interview guide for exploratory interviews should consist of a list of broad opening questions that can be followed up depending on the responses of the participants.

There is no suggestion that all questions need to be predetermined nor asked in any particular set sequence.

There is a general notion of subject areas to be covered, but ample opportunity for interviewees to take the lead, openly discuss these areas as comprehensively as they choose, and to raise any additional issues.

Examples of exploratory interview questions:

- Describe your job (duties, function). What decisions do you usually make in your job?
- What information do you need to make those decisions and from where should you get it?
- What information do you actually get to make those decisions and from whom?
- What are the major communication strengths of this organization? Be specific.
- What would you like to see done to improve information flow in this information?
- Why hasn't it been done yet?
- Describe the communication relationship you have with your immediate supervisor.
- How do you know when this organization has done a good or bad job toward accomplishing its goals?

- Focused interviews

When interviews are concerned with more factual type information, are time-constrained, or where meaningful quantification and comparability is sought, they may adopt a much more highly structured or standardized approach to their interviews.

Focused interviews are characterized by the use of mainly closed questions relating to very specific areas of enquiry.

They are typically less time consuming (not always), and can be very useful in checking out the generalizability of information obtained.

Responses can be more easily coded and analyzed than those derived from exploratory interviews.

CONDUCTING THE INTERVIEW

Both types of interviews require some form of structure in order to guide the interviewer from beginning to end.

All interviews should be planned in terms of 3 basic stages: The opening, the body, and the closing.

Each stage requires that interviewers make sure to achieve the goals of each stage, i.e., establishing trust, agreeing a mode of working ethically, gathering relevant information through effective use of questions, etc.

1. The opening
- First impressions count.
- An interview should be held in comfortable surroundings, which ensure privacy for the interaction.
- The interviewer should seem like someone who will conduct the interaction in a professional manner.
- The interviewee should be greeted by name, and the name and associated role of the interviewer should be stated.
- An explanation should be given as to how the respondent was selected.
- The task of establishing rapport and a trusting relationship is crucial, particularly if collection of sensitive and truthful information is required.
- It is at this point that issues relating to the welfare of participants should be comprehensively covered: confidentiality, anonymity, rights of withdrawal, request for tape recording, note-taking and the ultimate use of information.

2. The body

Given that participants are unlikely to have developed any significant relationship so early in the interview process, it is normally best for the interviewer to begin by asking for factual or descriptive information:

- "When did you join the company?"

- "Could you tell me exactly what your job entails?"
- "How many times a week would you come here?"
- "For how long has GoodFolks been your main supplier?"

This gives the interviewee time to settle into the interview, without feeling threatened or interrogated.

The implementation of the body of the interview, however, will differ according to the type of interview:

1. Exploratory Interviews

If the objectives of employing the exploratory interview are related to generating an understanding of phenomena that are not well known, or where understanding the experience of others is of paramount importance, open questions are recommended.

Examples:

- "Could you tell me about your job?"
- "What are the communication strengths of the organization?"
- "Could you describe a situation where a lack of information affected your job performance?"

In exploratory interviews, the sequence of questioning is an important characteristic of effective interactions.

The less structured interviews are, the more important it becomes to base questions on preceding material offered by participants.

Therefore, Interviewers must listen actively to the messages contained in participants' responses.

Probing questions:

- Seek further clarification: "Could you tell me exactly what you mean by that?"
- Ask for exemplification: "Could you give me an example of when you felt like this?"

2. Focused interviews

In focused interviews, where the purpose is to collect specific information, question types need to be extremely precise and are typically closed.

Examples:

- "Who is your immediate boss?"
- "How often do you use social media?"

Respondents are required to use the alternatives provided by the interviewer in giving an answer.

Example:

- "Do you think communications is (i) better, (ii) worse, or (iii) the same, as it was 6 months ago?"

However, the use of high degrees of structure can be disadvantageous because of the impositional potential of this approach.

This threat will be minimized if the content of the interview guide has been informed by the findings of the exploratory interview phase, and the phrasing of questions adheres to the same criteria as are relevant to the construction of the questionnaires.

3. The closing

The beginning of this closing phase should be marked with an indicator such as "I'm aware that we only have a few minutes left so could we begin to draw our meeting to a close".

There should also be no doubt when the interview has finally concluded: "Thanks again for your participation. I hope that things continue to go well for you."

In a highly focused interview, there may be little to do but thank participants for their assistance: social closure –courteous, respectful, fair, civilized.

At the end of exploratory interviews, it is important that the interviewer also draws the encounter to a close by creating some coherent sense of the interview: cognitive closure – offering some kind of summary.

A final aspect of effective closure: subsequent follow-up interviews.

ANALYZING INTERVIEW DATA

The interviews undertaken in the audit may produce a large volume of recorded material. The next step is transcription and analysis of the data.

- Computer software for handling qualitative data: CAQDAS (Computer-Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis), Nvivo 7 (N7).
- Become familiar with the interview data: The process of familiarity can be enhanced when interviews and transcriptions are facilitated by the same person.
- Search for categories in the interview data: 'nodes'
- Make thematic connections within and between categories: 'trees' – hierarchical families of categories and subcategories.

Towards the end of the first stage of coding, a number of important steps will have been undertaken and completed by the auditor:

- Transcripts will be coded into nodes that are representative of the themes or categories embedded in the interviews.
- The themes or categories that are supported with extracts from a large range of interviews will be apparent.
- The exact number of categories that emerge at this stage may depend on the amount of raw textual data that has been generated.

REPORTING THE FINDINGS

In general, the report of findings should include the following:

- A summary of the main and significant themes in the text.
- Inclusion of extracts from the interviews in the form of illustrative quotes that support the summary of themes.

- A clear and coherent 'story' easily followed by the reader and well evidenced at all points. It may be useful to include larger extracts from selected interviews in addition to smaller chunks alluded to above. The inclusion of such extracts guards against accusations of prejudice and bias, which are more likely when reports are presented solely as paraphrased auditor summaries.
- Data should be reported 'in descriptive, non-evaluative way'.
- It is important to address concerns experienced by interviewees relating to identification and potential vulnerability. Where their exact words are presented as findings there is the possibility of them being traced as the source. If assurances were provided at the commencement of the process, then it is incumbent on the auditor to act accordingly.
- In order to ensure anonymity, the auditor may be required to omit any details that could be used to trace the identity of an interviewee.

CONCLUSION

Auditors must have the ability to listen, to understand, analyze and report accurately and sensitively what they are told by the interviewees.

TOPIC 4
THE FOCUS GROUP APPROACH

BACKGROUND

The focus group can be thought as a type of group interview, but it should not be mistaken for merely conducting a sequence of one-to-one interviews involving a facilitator or moderator and each of the participant in turn.

Eliciting opinions and points of view through encouraging interaction among members is a unique dimension of the focus group.

In practice, a focus group involves a small number of participants who share certain characteristics of relevance to the research and meet with a facilitator to discuss in some depth a topic, or narrow range of topics, of interest to both parties.

CHARACTERISTICS OF FOCUS GROUPS

- Small group of people (usually 6-12 participants) who are similar on some demographic dimension (e.g. age, social role, etc.).

- Group is brought together for the purpose of investigating participants' views on a particular issue.

- Typically, a moderator guides the discussion by focusing participants' attention on various issues related to the topic.

- Participants respond to both the moderator's questions and other participants' responses.

Focus groups are therefore:

- A way of doing research to collect data.

- A lens for directing attention onto a narrow topic or issue.

- A method of generating research data through relatively informal group discussion.

CONDUCTING FOCUS GROUPS

Planning and preparation: It is important that a vision of the project in its entirety be framed from early on.

Points to consider at the outset:

- What are the questions that the project seeks to answer?

- Are focus groups the most suitable approach?

- Who should be included as participants?

- How can they be recruited?

- How many will be required?

- How can the group interviews be conducted with best effect?

- How should they be recorded?

- What is to be done with the recordings once they are made?

- How long will the audit take?

- How detailed does the final report have to be?

- What are the objectives of the research?

The first move should be 'to analyze your objectives and identify the organizational issues that you wish to understand more thoroughly'.

Who should be involved in the audit?

The 4 main stakeholders in the typical focus group are the commissioning organization, the research team, the moderator (who may or may not be an integral part of the team), and the participants.

Employees may be reluctant to speak their minds on company policy, practice or personnel if they know that what they say will be ascribable to them and brought to the attention of management).

Where should the sessions be conducted?

Typically, an appropriately sized room with good acoustics, furnished with a table and suitable chairs, together with adjoining observation room beyond a one-way mirror).

The observation room can be used by other members of the research team. CCTV equipment is acceptable replacement. A microphone suitable for large groups.

How should the focus be organized?

Anticipating analysis. Drawing up the moderator guide, specifying topics, framing possible questions, etc.

Identifying recruiting participants

Moderating and recording the group interview:

- Personal skills

- Specific moderating style tailored by the purpose of the group interview.

- Establishing ground rules and 'setting the scene', easing the members into free and easy
- interchange and once the discussion has run its course, negotiate closure.

Analyzing the data reporting outcomes

- Nvivo, CAQDAS, ATLAS.ti, ETHNOGRAPH, HyperSEARCH

CONCLUSION

Focus groups are a way of doing qualitative research, using group discussion.

Concerned not so much with establishing how extensive something is or how it happens. The function is rather on uncovering the meanings and interpretations that individuals, in their own terms, place on their experiences.

TOPIC 5
DATA COLLECTION LOG-SHEET METHODS

BACKGROUND

The DCL is a structured form on which specific items of detail have to be completed.

The information content being sought, and the method of entry (tick box, Yes/No, Likert scale, open comment, etc.) are carefully determined, and the DCL is thoroughly field-tested prior to the audit exercise.

In audits, DCLs can either be completed by the member of staff, or by an outside observer.

DIARIES AND LOGS

The diary method of data collection requires respondents to record information about their subjective experiences, behaviors, and social interactions linked to a temporal framework.

Analysis over time is therefore a key determinant in deciding to use this approach.

If a 'snapshot' is required, then other methods, such as questionnaires, are simpler and easier to apply.

Advantages of diaries

1. They are ubiquitous – familiar, user-friendly, fairly unproblematic.

2. They provide information about temporal sequence of events – structured diaries give the auditor specific detail about the source, recipient, nature, and perceived effectiveness of each individual communication.

3. Where repeat information is required from respondents over a period of time, it is a cost-effective approach – the auditor does not have to be on site to collect material. This is carried out at the end of the observational period.

4. Classification is made by the person doing the job.

Disadvantages of diaries

1. It relies on staff to conscientiously complete the logs – the auditor has no real control over how well this is done.

Goldhaber and Rogers (1979) described how they faced resistance to the diary method from individuals in organizations: time-consuming nature, lack of conviction about its validity.

2. The veracity of what is reported – it is difficult to know whether respondents are reporting truthfully.

3. 'Sample maintenance' is low – there is likely to be a high drop-out rate and hence a low level of returns.

4. The possibility of reactance – the process whereby a research intervention can affect the subject, influencing the respondent's thoughts, perceptions, feelings, and behavior.

Optimizing diaries

In order to gain the maximum benefits from this method, the following points should be kept in mind:

Planning is very important – the auditor has to decide who is to be included, what issues are to be investigated, and how data are to be recorded.

A consistent sampling frame must be devised – random vs. purposive (judgmental) sampling. Audits often present a conflict between what is ideal and what is possible.

The content of the diary DCL should clearly reflect, and directly measure the goals of the audit.

Choose the most appropriate recording system for the target group – simple, professional, and provide enough space for data to be entered in each row/column.

Staff should be given as much preparation and training as possible in how to complete the logs.

Accompanying instructions should be carefully designed and pilot tested.

It is useful to give respondents an example of a completed DCL to illustrate what exactly is required.

Entries should be made as soon as possible after each communication episode – retrospective diary accounts, requiring the respondents to imagine or reconstruct what they think occurred, may be a problem. Delays also result in a higher number of incompletions and increased drop-out rate.

Regular contact with respondents is useful – it helps improve 'sample maintenance'.

Incentives, in the form of payments or inclusion in a prize lottery, also facilitate sample retention.

If the objective is to obtain very detailed information on logs, it is best to use what is known as a 'foot-in-the-door' approach – the tactic is to begin with relatively brief details, and then increasing the amount required once respondents have been involved for a period.

Given the demands of this method, DCL audits should be time-limited – if respondents are asked to complete detailed forms for more than 1 week, the drop-out rate becomes unacceptable.
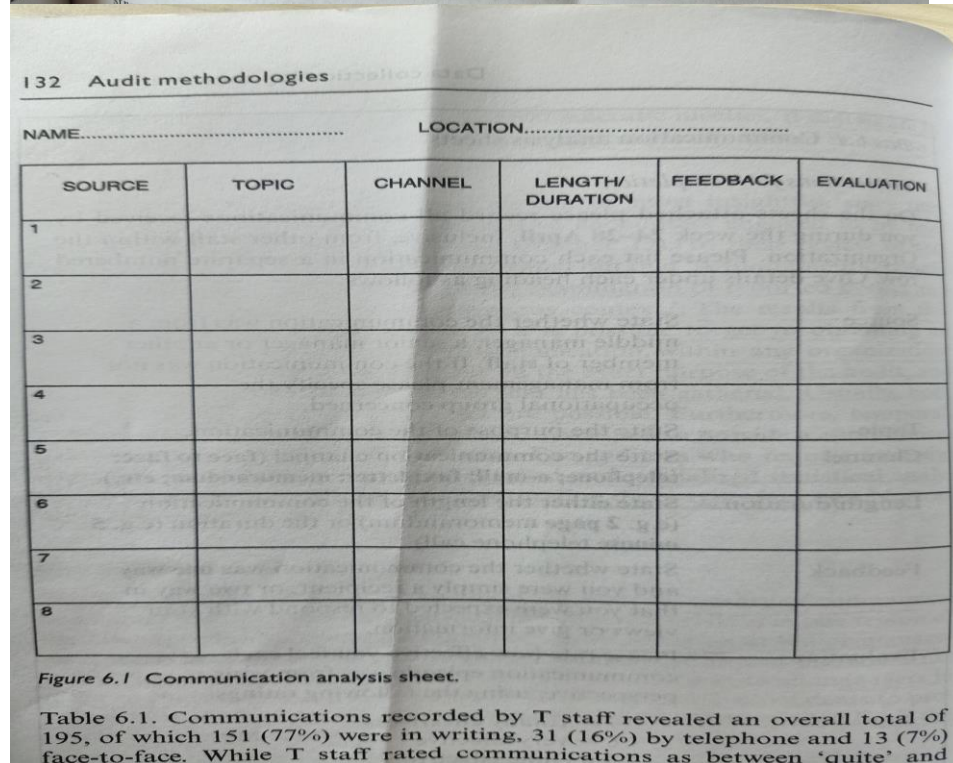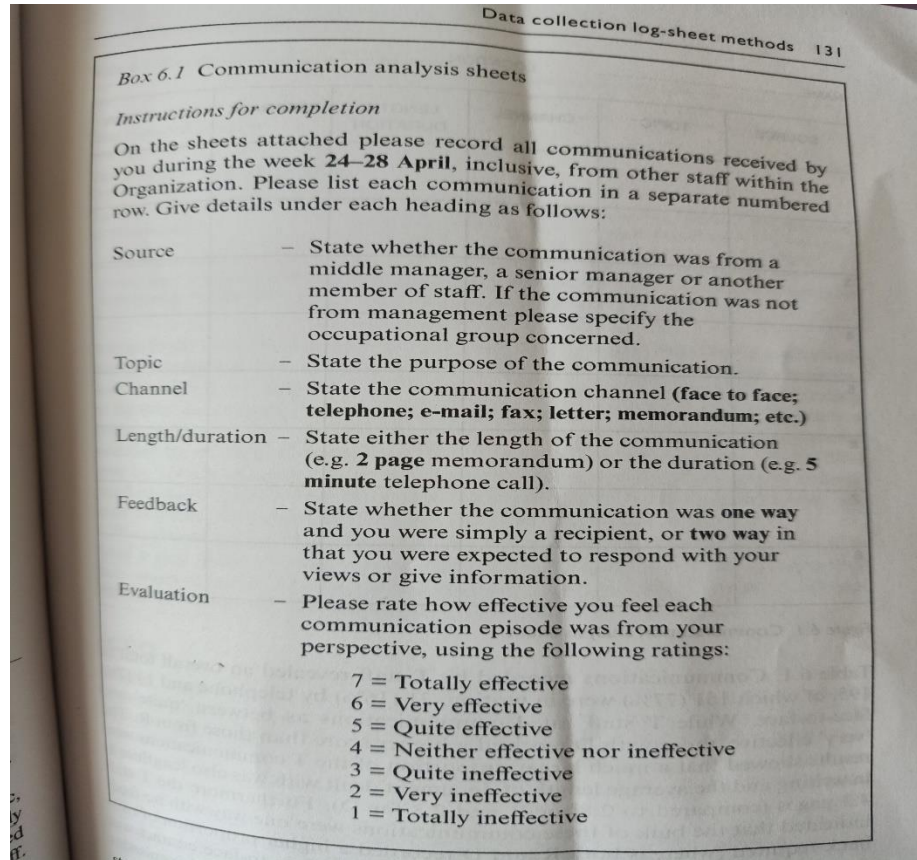
Diaries are more appropriate for use with the upper echelons of an organization – managers are used to form-filling and record-keeping and for them filling log sheets is more likely to become just another administrative task. However, if diaries are to be sued with lower echelons , the level of complexity should be kept to a minimum.

Example of a diary audit

- National Health Service (UK)

- The audit was concerned with the quality of communication across senior levels in one region of the UK.

- Specifically, the audit examined communication at senior management levels between staff in the Region (R), District (D), and the Trust (T) within the district.

- As part of the audit, DCLs were sent to all managers in order to chart communication patterns. These requested respondents to provide details of all communications received during a 1-week period from the other two relevant sources:

    o T staff completed DCLs regarding their communications with R and D

    o R staff completed DCLs regarding the communications with D and T

    o D staff completed DCLs regarding the communications with T and R

- Respondents were asked to list the source of the communication, the topic, the channel, the length of duration, whether it was one- or two-way, and to rate the effectiveness of the communication.

- This diary method unearthed some very interesting findings and provided rich data. The results allowed senior managers to appraise their existing patterns of communication, and indicated areas of serious concerns as well as existing strengths to be built on.

Box 6.1 Communication analysis sheets

Instructions for completion

On the sheets attached please record all communications received by you during the week **24–28 April**, inclusive, from other staff within the Organization. Please list each communication in a separate numbered row. Give details under each heading as follows:

Source	– State whether the communication was from a middle manager, a senior manager or another member of staff. If the communication was not from management please specify the occupational group concerned.
Topic	– State the purpose of the communication.
Channel	– State the communication channel **(face to face; telephone; e-mail; fax; letter; memorandum; etc.)**
Length/duration	– State either the length of the communication (e.g. **2 page** memorandum) or the duration (e.g. **5 minute** telephone call).
Feedback	– State whether the communication was **one way** and you were simply a recipient, or **two way** in that you were expected to respond with your views or give information.
Evaluation	– Please rate how effective you feel each communication episode was from your perspective, using the following ratings:

7 = Totally effective
6 = Very effective
5 = Quite effective
4 = Neither effective nor ineffective
3 = Quite ineffective
2 = Very ineffective
1 = Totally ineffective

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NAME..   LOCATION..

SOURCE	TOPIC	CHANNEL	LENGTH/ DURATION	FEEDBACK	EVALUATION
1					
2					
3					
4					
5					
6					
7					
8					

Figure 6.1 Communication analysis sheet.

Table 6.1. Communications recorded by T staff revealed an overall total of 195, of which 151 (77%) were in writing, 31 (16%) by telephone and 13 (7%) face-to-face. While T staff rated communications as between 'quite' and

Another example of a DCL method is the 'Episodic Communication Channels in Organization (ECCO) Analysis, initially developed by Davis (1953).

Used to monitor the progress of a specific piece of information through the organization.

The information to be tracked should be (1) true, (2) expected to be widely known by most if not all staff, (3) basic and straightforward, (4) recent, and (5) released through a specific channel.

An analysis of a completed ECCO DCLs provides a picture of whether or not communication is flowing well, how long it takes information to reach certain destinations, which media seem to be most effective in disseminating messages, and where there appear to be problems

Advantages of the ECCO technique

- It is cost-effective.

- It is a flexible method that can be tailored to investigate specific aspects of employee knowledge.

- It gauges the precise level and depth of existing employee knowledge and highlights deficits that should be remedied.

- The questionnaire facilitates benchmarking, in that the future ECCOs can be carried out to chart specific improvements, or decrements, in employee knowledge.

- It highlights recurring problems and pinpoints difficulties in communication, thereby facilitating change interventions.

- It can generate findings that are unexpected.

- On a wider scale, by carrying out parallel ECCO research studies across a range of organizations, it is possible to make broader conclusions about the general state of organizational knowledge in a particular realm.

Disadvantages of the ECCO technique

- It can be a time-consuming procedure for the auditor, involving considerable liaison with managers, and careful pilot-testing with employees, to ensure that the ECCO really measures what is intended to measure.

- There can be suspicion by employees of what they may see as a 'test' of their ability.

- Like all self-report methods, it relies on the accuracy of respondents and so can be subject to memory distortion and response biases.

- It can be difficult to persuade respondents to complete the questionnaire.

- As a quantitative method, it produces numerical data but does not provide any accompanying respondent interpretation or explanation.

Example of an ECCO DCL

Box 6.2 Example of an ECCO DCL
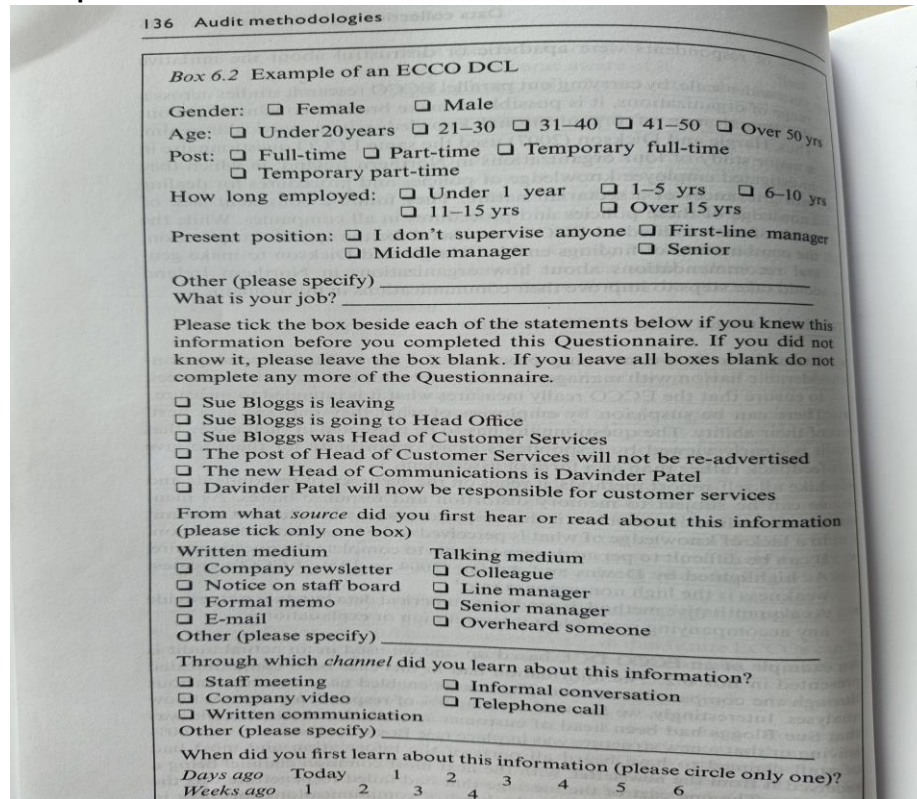
UNDERCOVER AUDITING

Mystery-customer research (MCR), a.k.a. 'mystery shopping', 'service shopping', 'secret shopping', 'phantom shopping', 'anonymous consumer shopping', and 'covert observation'.

The process wherein trained marketing research personnel go to establishments and evaluate their service standards and identify problem areas.

Also involves observers (or 'shoppers') visiting (or telephoning0 a location and 'acting' as consumers, while carefully noting the behavior of the service provider.

MCR is now ubiquitous, operating in a wide range of both private and public sectors including finance, automotive, food, hotel, leisure and tourism, retail, church, etc.

MCR is a major industry worldwide. One reason for this is that the bonuses of management and staff in many companies are increasingly being linked to MCR measures of customer satisfaction.

MCR has its roots in the field of cultural anthropology, where anthropologists lived as part of a tribe in order to gain an in-depth insight into their patterns of living.

The important dimension of MCR is that the person acts just like a 'real' consumer and plays out the entire scenario in this role. Only afterwards are detailed notes taken.

Usually, some form of data collection log-sheet (DCL) is used to structure the audit.

The exact nature of observation depends on the context. In a sales context it would include questions such as:

- How long was it before a salesperson approached you?

- Did the salesperson offer a greeting or other welcoming remarks?

- Did the salesperson engage in eye contact throughout the interaction?

- Did the salesperson close the encounter with a friendly comment?

Part of the inspection may involve a request being made (e.g. seeking assistance, asking a specific question about a product) followed by careful monitoring as to how it is dealt with.

- The main purposes of MCR (Cobb, 1997) are to:

- Identify the extent to which consumer needs are being met

- Chart precise strengths and weaknesses in current practice

- Assess whether new initiatives have been implemented on the ground

- Check for consistency of standards across outlets

- Inform performance incentive schemes and guide the payment of bonuses

- Evaluate the effectiveness of staff training programs

- Enable managers and staff to improve overall performance

The four main fundamentals of MCR (Cramp, 1994) are:

- Realism – It should mirror reality. Thus, if 80% of consumers are couples, then two evaluators should visit the location together.

- Unobtrusive – The shopper should not create a scene or pose unusual difficulties for the person being assessed.

- Objectivity – The main purpose of the evaluation should be to check measurable aspects of the service. While some subjectivity may be permissible, this should be kept to a minimum.

- Consistency – Shoppers should receive rigorous training to ensure consistency of evaluation across outlets. Everyone should be measuring the same things in the same way.

Essential steps to promote effective mystery shopping process:

1. Define clearly the specific goals of the process at the outset.

2. Design the program specifically to meet the set goals.

3. A DCL measurement system that is simple, yet robust, should be developed and fully pre-tested to ensure it is both reliable and valid.

4. Select the appropriate type of auditor for the location being assessed.

5. Tell staff that they will be 'shopped' (but not exactly when or by whom).

6. Thoroughly train the auditors.

7. Implement an ongoing program of evaluations.

8. Link the results of mystery shopping directly to incentive schemes to motivate and reward staff.

9. Provide detailed results in a concise, comprehensible, and actionable format, highlighting both strengths and weaknesses.

10. As part of the MCR process, it is important that supervisors as well as first-line staff receive briefings and training – including training in how to interpret findings and be aware of their implications.

MCR as espionage

- 'Competitor mystery shopping', where an assessor from one company visits rival outlets to note how well they handle consumers, and to learn from them if possible. In other words, this method is a form of industrial 'competitor espionage'.

Example: Before the hotel chain Marriott launched its subsidiary, the Fairfield Inn chain, they sent a team on a 6-month intelligence mission to gather information on existing hotels with whom they would be competing in the same price band. As a result, the design and service standards of the Fairfield Inn chain were based on solid research evidence.

- 'Matched pair' auditing, where two auditors, similar in most aspects, but with at least one vital difference, both visit the same location to investigate whether or not there is discrimination in the administration.

- 'Pseudo patient' method, used in the medical sphere, involving a person to pose as a patient with a specific complaint.

Ethical issues

There are several ethical dilemmas surrounding the MCR audit method:

- Staff time and effort are wasted in dealing with a fake client – in the hospital example, the valuable skills of health professionals are spent dealing with a phoney patient, when they could have been devoted to genuinely sick individuals.

- The 'dishonesty' aspect about the entire process.

- Questionable effects of the procedure on the evaluators.

- The consequences of MCR for those being assessed have to be considered. Several suggestions have been made to help reduce the ethical problems associated with MCR. Organizations such as ESOMAR, the world organization for market research, the Mystery Shopping Providers Association, and the UK Market Research Society have produced guidelines for those carrying mystery shopping.

Key recommendations for those using MCR

- Disciplinary action must NOT be taken on the basis of MCR.

- Staff must be informed in advance during exactly which period MCR will be occurring.

- The objectives of the exercise should be fully explicated.

- Staff should be clearly informed if reporting will be at an outlet or individual level.

- If staff are to be identified individually this should be part of their contracts.

- Clearance should also be sought from unions or other relevant staff associations.

- The results should not be used to discipline staff.

- Evaluators should be thoroughly trained.

- The assessor should spend no longer than a normal consumer in any outlet or any telephone call.

- Staff should be told inf visits or telephone calls are to be recorded, and if so, who will have access to the recordings and what will happen to them.

- An item should be purchased where possible.

- No follow-up action should be requested.

- Visits should not be made at busy periods.

- No more than one visit per quarter should be made.

These ethical guidelines, if fully implemented, help to offset the concerns about MCR. However, in practice they are often ignored.

CONCLUSION

Two separate types of audit method, both involve the completion of carefully designed log-sheets.

A major difference is that in one case the process is one of self-report by the individual involved, while the other involves a covert evaluation of a member of staff by a trained observer.

Both methods have strengths and weaknesses:

- Self-reports are prone to inaccuracy. Biases in diaries are therefore to be expected and anticipated. With proper pilot testing of the DCLs, coupled with preparation and training of respondents, such effects can be minimized.

- MCR has problems of intra and inter-observer reliability, but again these can be lessened by rigorous field testing and training of auditors.

TOPIC 6
COMMUNICATION NETWORK ANALYSIS

INTRODUCTION

Network analysis differ from most other audit methods, as its primary focus is on the relationships between employees rather than their personal experiences or judgments.

Network analysts try to evaluate the quality of organizational communication by assessing the structural patterns in the relationships among staff.

In audit context, two types of relationships predominate:

- Affective relationships (e.g. employees' feelings of friendship, trust, or appreciation).

- Various kinds of information exchange relationships.

NETWORK ANALYSIS AND COMMUNICATION AUDITS

Every organization can be seen as a complex combination of networks:

- Formal organization structure: the position that individuals and organizational units have in the organization.

- Formal communication structures: predefines who in the organization should interact with who on various matters.

- Informal communication system: employees may develop network relationships to optimally satisfy their own needs (or those of their departments).

Over time, the formal structures of organizations have become increasingly complex, e.g. when companies merge.

A network analysis is included in a communication audit to evaluate the functioning of the formal and informal networks in an organization.

Going beyond the individual perceptions of employees, a network analysis can shed light on the organization as a whole, on specific relationships, and on the position of individual employees, subgroups or departments.

It is important to distinguish between various types of networks. A communication audit focuses on at least three different types of communication:

- The strategic network: information exchange relationships regarding organizational policy and decision-making.

- The operational network: information exchange relationships regarding daily work routines.

- The personal network: friendships and personal interactions within the organization.

DATA COLLECTION FOR NETWORK ANALYSIS

a. **Sociometric questioning:** by far the most frequently used technique for studying communication networks.

Respondents are asked to indicate their frequency of contact with other members of the organization. Other types of exchange relationships may be studies, for example friendship relationships ("whom do you consider to be your friends within this organization?"), advice relationships ("To whom do you go for advice within this organization?"),etc.

Sociometric questions can take many forms. Data may be collected by means of questionnaires or during interview sessions. Respondents may be asked to freely recall all of their network contacts, or fill out a roster containing the names of all their colleagues (recognition).

Sociometric questions usually result in network configurations that represent the relatively stable patterns of communication within the organization.

Analysis of the data may reveal groups, and communication-related roles may be exposed: opinion leaders, liaisons, bridges, gatekeepers).

Reliability: they seem to reliably identify the communication links within the organization. However, more specific sociometric questions (e.g., "With whom do you communicate about problems regarding your work?") produce more reliable results than more general questions ("With whom do you communicate about work-related matters?").

Validity: Respondents may give socially-desirable answers when asked to name their network contacts. Respondents may also name more network contacts than they actually have in order to present themselves as important to the organization.

Feasibility: High efficiency. Sociometric questions are relatively easy to administer, so a large number of respondents can usually be incorporated in the study.

b. **Observation:** frequently used in the social sciences, mostly as a qualitative research technique for studying such things as small group behavior, the behavior of experts, or the process of work within an organization.

Since observation is labor-intensive and usually time-consuming, the technique is mostly used in small-scale organizational settings.

Can take many forms. Researchers may participate in the work process during the period of observation (participative observation), or they may watch employees from a distance as they perform their work duties. This permits the researcher to study such things as the tone of voice used during interactions or non-verbal communications employees use during information exchange. Researchers may take notes of these moments of interaction and compare and discuss their notes afterwards.

Drawbacks:

- The studies time frame is usually limited.
- Observation has a place restriction.
- Reliability issues regarding the researcher's interpretation.

Validity: Observation does not depend on self-reporting, which means that there is no problem of employees understanding questions or forgetting to name certain network members.

Reliability: When observation is used to study more qualitative aspects of communication interactions (e.g. communication style used), there are reliability issues regarding the researcher's interpretation. Inter- or intra-coder reliability is commonly calculated when such qualitative data are used, but it has proved to difficult to attain a sufficiently high level of reliability.

Feasibility: The major drawback of this method. Both training observers and collecting the data is very time consuming.

c. **Small world technique:** Originally by Milgram (1967). Essentially focuses on the nature of the communication lines between employees: is there an immediate relationship or are they connected to each other by one or more colleagues?

As such, the technique sheds light on the degrees of separation and on the path length between employees or departments.

While it has not been widely used in the context of a communication audit, it sees a useful approach for studying the flow of messages within an organization.

The small world technique seems mainly suitable for uncovering communication-related roles in an organization, such as sociometric stars (opinion leaders) or gatekeepers:
Employees who are frequently asked to forward the message to the target person may be seen as central to that communication network, or may even be a gatekeeper.

A unique feature of the small world technique is its ability to map bottom-up communication routes in the organization. E.g.: the number of links between production line employees and top management can be studies, indicating how effective internal communication lines are and how effective employees are in finding their way in the organization.

d. **Archival analysis:** Three types of archival data may serve as the input for a network analysis: Internal mail records, phone records, and email exchanges, all make it possible to identify the specific actors involved (in the case of mail and email, it is even possible to distinguish between sender and receiver), date and time of the messages exchanged and in some cases the topic of the messages.

The method is restricted to some specific types of mediated communication: communication in face-to-face situations is neglected.

Reliability: There are a few concerns. Since data can be gathered unobtrusively, many reliability threats can be ruled out. However, when the content of the message exchanged is taken into account, there may be problems regarding intercoder reliability.

Validity: Similar to the validity of observation. On the one hand, data do not depend on employees' self reports, on the other hand, when employees are informed about the goals of the study, there is a chance of reactivity due to social desirability.

Feasibility: The major concern is the issue of privacy. Also, when data is collected during long periods of time, the amount of data collected may become considerable and data management can be a problem. On the positive side, this type of data collection is not difficult on employees and is therefore very feasible in practice.

ANALYSIS OF NETWORK DATA

Network measures

There is usually not just one communication network within an organization, but several. A network analysis can thus result in a huge amount of data and entangled network configurations (especially when the company has many employees).

Three different types of measurements can be identified:

1. Measures that describe the relationships between actors of a network: e.g., frequency of contact between network members, the strength of relationship, its multiplexity.

2. Measures that describe individual employees' position in the network: e.g., employees' degree centrality (the number of colleagues they have a network with), employee's closeness centrality (the total distance, in terms of links, to all other colleagues), employee's betweenness centrality (the number of times an employee has an intermediary position between to colleagues in the network).

3. Measures that describe the entire network: e.g., inclusiveness (the extent to which all employees participate in the network), density (the extent to which network members are connected with each other), centralization (the extent to which the network members are dispersed).

Network visualization

Visualizing network data can help to confirm the findings based on network measures, and in turn the network measures can help to confirm results based on the visualization.

Various software packages are available for analyzing and visualizing network data.

UCINET is a relatively user-friendly program in which actor-by actor matrixes can be constructed that reflect employees' relationship with one another. This program calculates the most important network measures and visualizes the communication relationships that employees have with one another using NETDRAW (the network visualization package that comes with UCINET).
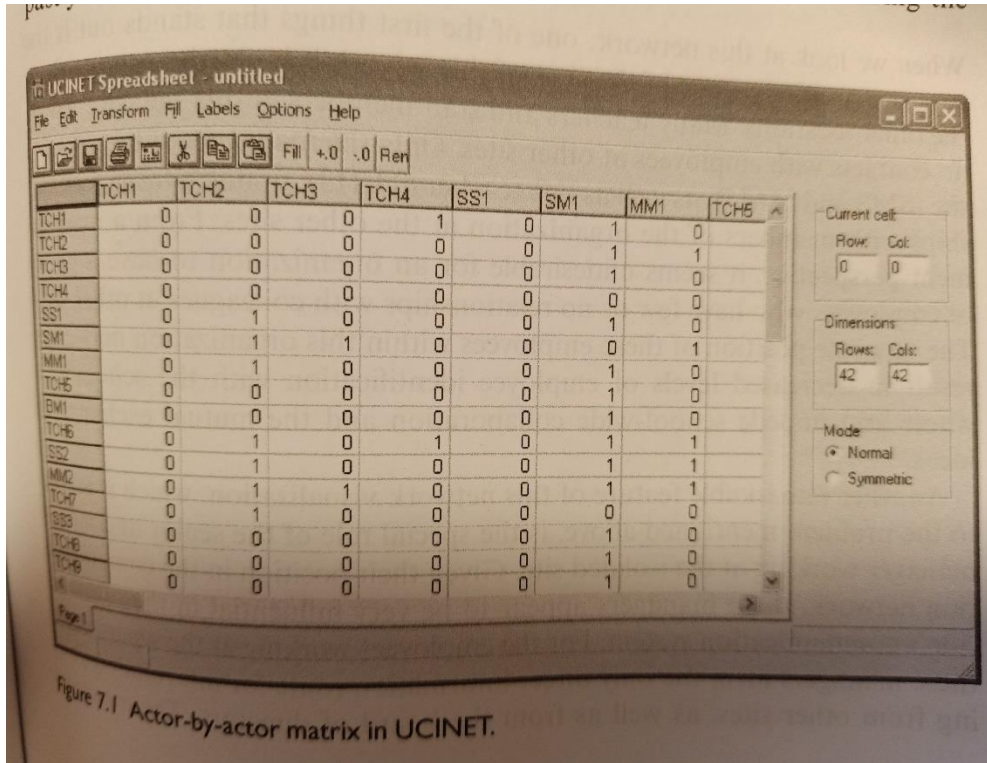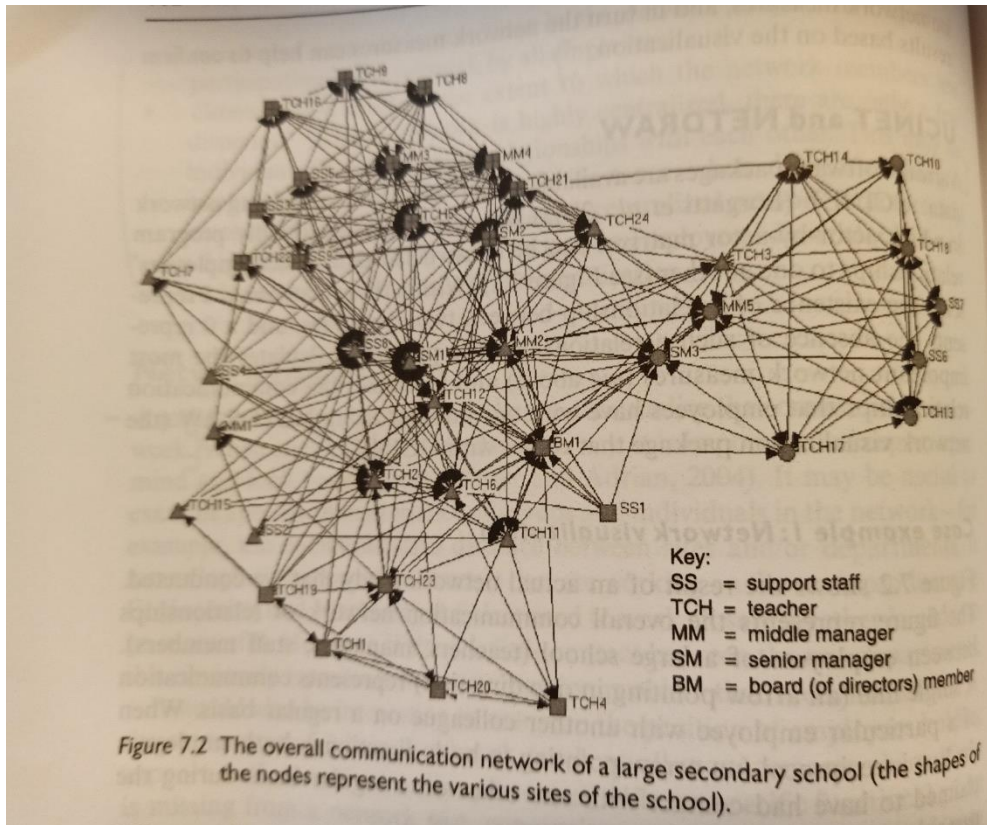
Figure 7.1 Actor-by-actor matrix in UCINET.

Key:
SS = support staff
TCH = teacher
MM = middle manager
SM = senior manager
BM = board (of directors) member

Figure 7.2 The overall communication network of a large secondary school (the shapes of the nodes represent the various sites of the school).

CONCLUSION

The contribution of network analysis lies primarily in its ability to map communication patterns in organizations and to uncover groups and communication-related roles of employees.

Compared to most other audit techniques, network analysis focuses relatively strongly on actual behaviors (instead of perceptions).

Furthermore, it gives a detailed image of the communicative behavior of individual employees and organizational units.

In all, network analysis provides a unique and important perspective on an organization's communication system; a perspective that only network analysis can bring to a communication audit.

TOPIC 7
AUDITING PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE

INTRODUCTION

The audit is now very familiar in all professions. Financial audit, medical audit, clinical audit, organizational audit, and so on, are all commonplace terms.

As the public demanded better service from professionals, methods had to be found to satisfy this demand.

Various audit methodologies have been employed in studies designed to monitor, evaluate and improve the communication performance of professionals across a broad spectrum.

Three further methods for examining professional practice: The critical technique, constitutive ethnography, and the Delphi technique.

CRITICAL INCIDENT TECHNIQUE

The CIT was pioneered by Col. John C. Flanagan, Director of Aviation Psychology, who used it to investigate the specific competencies of air pilots in WWII. He asked experienced pilots to reflect back on the last time they saw a trainee pilot do something that was effective or ineffective (i.e. the 'critical incident') and then answer 3 main questions:

1. What led up to this situation?

2. What exactly did the man do?

3. Why was it effective/ineffective?

Based on their responses, it was possible to identify actual instances of positive and negative behaviors, which in turn led to a compilation of key pilot competencies.

This is a specific methodology used to deduce concrete instances of effective and ineffective behavior in any context. It is an inductive approach in which all data come from the respondents.

The CIT is based on the view that internal feelings of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with a person, profession or organization are the result of actual experiences. In particular, the way in which events are 'out of the ordinary' are experienced is central to judgment formation, and leads to the eventual attribution of positive or negative attitudes towards the source. These attitudes then influence how future encounters are 'seen', categorized, and responded to.

Following the early pioneering work of Flanagan, thousands of investigations have been carried out using various forms of the CIT approach.

According to Mallak et al. (2003), 3 core aspects that need to be investigated in CIT:

- A description of the situation and events that led to the incident

- The actions of the central people involved

- The outcomes from the incident.

In the organizational sphere, Davis (2006) recommended a 4th issue:

- The possible future implications for the organization arising from the incident.

In essence, the CIT involves 3 main phases:

1. Defining the target population: The main issue here is how precise to be in setting the parameters for inclusion. Methods that measure a broad span are by their nature less precise than those that focus on a narrow area. The next issue is who to employ as the 'subject matter experts' (SMEs), who will identify and analyze the incidents.

2. Obtaining the description of incidents: How many incidents in total should be collected? In general, between 2 and 4 incidents seem to be the upper and lower limits of studies that used CIT. What method should be used for collecting them? Whatever approach is adopted, SMEs should be told to select an example that a) deviates significantly in either a positive or negative fashion from the norm, and b) can be described in detail.

3. Identifying the competencies: It involves careful content analysis to convert the data obtained into discrete and clearly distinguishable competencies. In practice, this task is almost always completed by the researchers, both because it is time-consuming nature and the data analysis skills required.

The exact purposes of research studies employing this methodology vary far and wide. In the professional sphere it has been used to, among others:

- Identify effective conflict handling and meditation skills used by healthcare managers to deal with disputes in a hospital setting (Kressel et al., 2002).

- Identify and assess the competence strengths and weaknesses of entrepreneurs (Mulder et al., 2007).

- Identify factors that affect the competence levels of nurse supervisors (Arvidsson and Fridlund, 2005).

The method can also be used to audit external publics. For example, the CIT method has been used to:

- Discover the impact of negative and positive shopping experiences on customers in the retail sector (Wong and Sohal, 2003).

- Distinguish situations in which the emotional needs of patients attending a cancer unit were not met by staff (Kent et al., 1996).

- Investigate the effects of service guarantees on service recovery in the hotel industry (Liden and Skalen, 2003).

Points for consideration

Face validity: Provides personal examples of communication.

Respondent-centered nature: It's free from 'designer bias', but it depends on the respondent's ability to remember and relate to incidents accurately. On the plus side, it produces a wealth of insight into the complexities and subtleties of the issue under analysis.

Methodological reservations: Does not allow statistical analyses. However, it provides an in-depth analysis of what respondents perceive to be the main issues, and allows them to describe these in detail.

Illumination of minority views: If recurring causes of deep dissatisfaction are found across even a small minority of respondents, then this can be very significant (in quantitative methods, this can be lost).

Inclusion of rating scores: While the CIT is primarily qualitative, it also allows for a certain degree of quantification. Ex.: counts can be made of the number of times specific incidents occur, or particular issues are mentioned.

Time and labor: As with most qualitative techniques, can be very demanding and time consuming. This is by no means an inexpensive audit methodology.

Positive models: Many managers and staff may initially see the audit as invasive. However, audits produce many good news stories that can serve as useful role models for the promotion of best practice.

CONSITUTIVE ETHNOGRAPHY

The term 'constitutive ethnography' was first coined by Mehan (1979), who developed this research approach as part of his investigations into teacher-pupil interactions in school classrooms.

Variations of this approach have been used in research studies. The form of CE relevant for audits involves obtaining video recordings of actual interactions between professionals and clients, and then subjecting these to detailed peer analysis. Videotape serves as an external memory that allows the researchers to examine materials extensively and repeatedly.

In the UK, the Market Research Society's code of ethics states that consumers should not be filmed unless they are in a location where they could reasonably expect to be seen or heard. Despite this, and especially in research studies, subjects should sign a consent form that:

- Communicates the purpose of the project and whether or not it is for research or other purposes.

- Gives the reason/need for recording the participant.

- Presents the steps that will be taken to ensure confidentiality.

- States the absolute right of the subject to withdraw at any time and for any reason.

- Describes what will happen to the tapes and when they will be erased.

CE in practice

Once recordings have been obtained, professionals then analyze these in depth, both individually and in groups, in order to identify and describe the constituents of effective and ineffective performance. A major investigation of community pharmacy practice using this methodology was carried out by Hargie et al. (2000). Fifteen pharmacists agreed to have their consultations with patients video recorded for later analysis. A total of 20 consultations were recorded for each pharmacist. These were then analyzed in 4 stages:

- Stage 1: Individual analysis - pharmacists were given an analysis form on which they had to judge whether each consultation (episode) was effective or ineffective, and give reasons for their choice.

- Stage 2: Triad sessions – pharmacists met in groups of three to share their expertise and evaluations and also to scrutinize the consultations of each other.

- Stage 3: Categorization of behaviors – Classifying all of the identified behaviors into categories and labelling them. This process led to further discussion and refinements, resulting in a final agreed classification.

- Stage 4: Individual ratings of essential behaviors – pharmacists individually viewed the 30 consultations again and rated on a 6-point Likert scale to extent to which each of the identified communication skills was essential for effective pharmacist-patient communication in the context.

Points for consideration

Logistics: Needs considerable commitment from the professionals. A range of materials and other resources are needed, including time, finance, and technology.

Face validity: Very high face validity. Identification of skills comes directly from members of the profession – they are neither imposed nor invented by others.

Generalizability: CE only represents the views of a small number of people, who may or may not be representative.

Expertise: Where possible, attempts should be made to identify 'expert' professionals, and also to consider specialized areas of sub-expertise, in recruiting the sample.

Analytical ability: Professionals may not have the requisite skills to carry out meaningful evaluations of the behavior of themselves and their colleagues.

Professional-centered nature: The client's perspective is not really taken into account here. This means, in order to gain a complete picture of professional-client communications, other audit approaches (client interviews, focus groups, questionnaire surveys, etc.) need to be used to supplement CE in terms of getting the client's perspective.

DELPHI TECHNIQUE

This method was developed in the USA in the early 1950s by Olaf Helmer and his colleagues. Their work at the Rand Corporation, on 'Project Delphi', concerned an analysis of the probable targets and outcomes of a possible Russian bombing campaign.

The technique is named after Apollo's Delphic Oracle, an ancient Greek myth that purported that a 'chosen one' living on an island of Delphi could predict the future with infallibility.

The approach is similar to CE in that it elicits the views of a panel of experts in a procedure that involves building from individual perspectives to reach an eventual overall group consensus.

The main difference from CE is that under the rubric of main Delphi technique, the participants never actually meet. In fact, the DT has 5 defining features:

> 1. A panel of 'experts' are recruited to conduct the analysis.
>
> 2. The experts never meet face to face.
>
> 3. The exercise is conducted in writing, with the project leader coordinating the whole process.
>
> 4. Two or more 'rounds' take place, in between which the project leader sends a summary of the results of the previous round to panel members.
>
> 5. An eventual identification of final areas of concordance and discordance is compiled at the end of the process.

The potential applications of DT include examinations of:

- How staff view the future of the organization.

- Role definition and clarification regarding exact responsibilities and duties.

- Goal setting and the determination of key organizational priorities.

- The resolution of conflicts and differences between staff.

- The identification of current information and communication concerns.

As summarized by Reid at al., (1990, p. 40):

"The Delphi Technique has been widely used by organizations as an aid to decision-making. Its features and several of the applications which have been reported in the management and planning literature…suggest…many potential use in activities which are essential to the work of organization development."

CONCLUSION

While all three methods have different procedures and formats, what they have in common is that they can all be employed to carry out an in-depth investigation of professional communication.

They are also all flexible enough to allow for some modifications to meet the demands of particular areas of specific resource limitations.

TOPIC 8
AUDITING ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION

INTRODUCTION

The abundance of communication devices generally, and in organizational life specifically, has led to the coining of the term 'multicommunication' (Turner & Reinsch, 2007). This term is derived from the concepts of multitasking, parallel processing and polychronicity, and describes the process of interacting with multiple persons through a variety of channels simultaneously.

Ten core issues relating to email communication need to be taken into consideration when auditing this medium:

1. Overload: More data than a person perceives he or she can deal with within a specific period of time, has been exacerbated through the everyday use of email and other e-communication tools. Some key reasons:

- Not optimizing the technology available to reduce spam and filter information.

- An organizational culture in which people are encouraged to communicate all information rather than using personal filtering judgment.

- The misuse of the email system for personal purposes.

2. Interruptions: The 'ping' sound that announces the arrival of new mail and the little envelope appearing in the bottom right-hand corner of our computer. The familiarity of this scenario is often the cause of loss in concentration, sometimes welcome, but often unwelcome and unproductive.

3. Misuse: At its basic level the function of email is to send and receive information between individuals and groups. However, the system can be abused by individuals pursuing personal goals: a) 'back-covering'; b) 'appearing diligent'; c) negating responsibility'.

4. Cyber harassment: Email, in particular, can be used as a method for harassing or bullying colleagues, either overtly or covertly.

5. Netiquette: Network Etiquette. Refers to the setting of guidelines with respect to the way in which email (along with other forms of e-communication) is used in both the workplace and social settings.

6. Working relationships: Some employees find that being able to initiate contact with colleagues via email (or other e-communication tools) is much simpler (and perhaps more importantly, less intimidating) than using the telephone or introducing themselves in person to someone in a different department or site.

7. Flaming: Flaming is defined as 'a tendency for people to communicate irate or negative emotions in emails, which would have been less likely to be expressed through other media. If not careful, this can lead to intentional and unintentional conflict.

8. Knowledge: The challenge for both the individual and the organization is to ensure that the information exchanged is useful.

9. Reputation: An email that emanates from a corporate address is seen as part of that organization and its content is thereby associated with the reputation of the company.

10. Contact: with the increase in online interactions, many companies provide only an email address through which external publics can contact them.

AUDITING E-COMMUNICATION

What to audit?

- Volume of emails sent and received

- Email appropriateness and relevance

- Internet and intranet surfing

- Load

- Whether emails frequently become flame mails

- How e-communication complements or substitutes for other channels of communication

- Return on investment

1. Volume of emails sent and received:

There are two key ways in which the volume of email communication sent by an employee can be monitored:

First, users can be asked to self-report their email usage. It's a quick method for ascertaining levels of email communication. However, it can be subjective and open to distortion.

Second, a software can be sued to record the level of email activity within a given timeframe. But, it does not allow the appropriateness of the communication to be measured. Also, such process poses important ethical and practical issues (it should be acknowledged, however, that significant surveillance of employees' use of e-communication technologies already takes place).

2. Email appropriateness and relevance:

What figures on email usage do not tell is how relevant the content of the emails is, if the information is useful, and whether it assists employees to do their job better. In order to obtain this level of detail the organization needs to employ a methodology that allows these items:

> **Box 9.2 Criteria for auditing email**
>
> - Is the email a form of SPAM?
> - Was the user able to identify the content from the 'header' information and subsequently make a quick decision about its relevance?
> - Was the receiver's email address in the 'copy to' (cc – to indicate for information only) or the 'to' (to indicate for action) line?
> - Was the information relevant to the employee?
> - Was the communication task-related, organization-wide or personal?
> - Was the email of high priority and did it include an appropriate priority status?
> - Did the content of the email strengthen or damage relationships?
> - Did the email assist in improving horizontal, vertical or diagonal communication?

3. Internet and intranet surfing:

One of the key problems associated with Internet usage is the potential for employees to surf for activities other than those that are strictly work-related.

There are ethical issues when it comes to email audits. Beyond that, however, corporations have an obligation to prevent damaging or illegal Internet activities, such as accessing child pornography websites and storing associated material on company computers. Thus, clear guidelines should be in place regarding the extent to which personal access is allowed.

4. Load:

One of the most common complaints relating to email is the overwhelming volume of information that can be contained in the inbox. It is important to understand whether the information included in an email or through an intranet site, could have been communicated through other means.

Dabbish and Kraut (2006) measured the impact of email load using seven items on a 5-point Likert scale:

- I can handle my email efficiently.

- I have trouble finding information in my email.

- I can easily deal with the amount of email I receive.

- I sometimes miss information or important messages.

- I reply quickly to the message I need to.

- Dealing with my email disrupts my ongoing work.

- I find dealing with email overwhelming.

- Each of these could be adapted and applied to other elements of e-communication.

5. Whether emails frequently become flame mails:

It may be necessary to train people to reflect on the messages they write before they send them, and consider whether other channels are more appropriate for dealing with particular problems. By investigating the content of emails through a diary analysis or critical incident technique, negative email patterns can be identified.

6. How e-communication complements or substitutes for other channels of communication:

It is vital that e-communication does not entirely replace F2F interaction between colleagues, or between managers and their staff. As a rule of thumb, if the audit shows that email has become the predominant channel of communication for dealing with important issues it is likely that too many 'human moments' are missing. This will weaken the prevailing organizational culture. It may therefore be time to revisit first principles. As part of this process, it might also be helpful to create special opportunities for F2F communication.

7. Return on investment:

Internet, intranet, and extranet applications should improve sales, productivity and competitiveness. En route, their effectiveness can be judged by whether they deliver improvements in areas such as:

- Order management

- Inter-departmental collaboration

- Customer service

- Database access inventory management

Each organization should select its own performance indicators and measure intranet effectiveness by these yardsticks.

How to audit?

The precise approach adopted often depends on the needs of the organization, the time allowed for the audit and the resources available.

- Questionnaires

- Interviews

- Diary analysis

- Mystery shopping

- CIT

- Social network analysis

- Software tools

1. Questionnaires:

Many questionnaires have been developed to measure different aspects of e-communication. Each of these can be employed or adapted to meet individual organizational needs.

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Table 9.1 Electronic communication questionnaires

Area	Scale	Author
Adaptation of existing communication scales	International Communication Association's Audit Survey Communication Satisfaction Questionnaire	Goldhaber and Rogers, 1979 Downs and Hazen, 1977
Technology scales (measures how comfortable users are with e-communication)	Usage Perceived Ease of Use (PEU) Perceived Usefulness (PU)	Davis, 1989; van Schaik and Ling, 2005
Computer scales	End User Computing Satisfaction Instrument (EUCSI)	Doll and Torkzadeh, 1988
	Computer Self-Efficacy Scale	Murphy et al., 1989; Barbeite and Weiss, 2004
	Computer Attitude Scales	Nickell and Pinto, 1986; Loyd and Loyd, 1985
	Computer Anxiety Scales	Marcoulides, 1989; Heinssen et al., 1987; Barbeite and Weiss, 2004
Overload	Email Overload	Dabbish and Kraut, 2006
Intranet/website scales	Intranet Effectiveness	Murgolo-Poore et al., 2003; Murgolo-Poore et al., 2002
	Intranet Self-Efficacy Scale	Torkzadeh and Van Dyke, 2002
	Website Scale	Bunz, 2001a
General e-communication	Computer–Email–Web (CEW) Fluency Scale/Computer-Mediated Communication Competency Scale	Bunz, 2001b, 2003

2. Interviews:

Interviews can also be employed to evaluate e-communications. For instance, O'Kane and Hargie (2004) used a combination of a specially designed questionnaire and deep-probe interviews to audit the email and intranet systems in a Norwegian manufacturing company. The two methods complemented one another, and together provided data that an individual method would not have produced.

3. Diary analysis:

Diary analysis can enable employees to reflect in depth about their daily email and Internet usage. This would facilitate an analysis of issues related to timeliness, overload, relevance and ease of finding information. In conjunction with this, participants can be asked to attach copies of key emails that are then content analyzed to identify how and in what ways email is being utilized.

4. Mystery shopping:

Mystery shopping can be adapted to the email context. Here, a mystery emailer sends a number of messages to an organization. Responses can then be measured along dimensions such as timeliness, informativeness, relevance and friendliness.

In the context of the Internet, mystery shoppers log on to discover specific information and report on site appeal, ease of usage, any broken links, or information that is inaccurate, out-of-date, or irrelevant.

5. CIT:

The Critical Incident Technique allows companies to assess examples of exceptionally good and bad email communications, and enables an analysis of these to form the basis of an acceptable policy.

6. Social network analysis:

Email and the Internet (specifically social networking sites and blogs) enable new informal relationships to develop. These can alter our daily patterns of interaction, and may play a role in determining the organizational structure.

In fact, specialized software can analyze the email communications of employees to identify where stronger and weaker relationships lie (e.g. www.trampolinesystems.com/).

7. Software tools:

In their study of email interruptions, Jackson et al. (2003) utilized remote recording of employee screens using Windows Virtual Network Computing (Win VNC), to obtain their reaction and response times. Specifically, they were able to use the information gleaned to assess how quickly employees reacted to email communication, the time they spent reading the email and how long it took them to resume their previous activities after dealing with the email. Example: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DyVMvCn6U_A

ELECTRONIC AUDITING

1. Online questionnaire:

Years ago, surveys were traditionally administered using either mail, telephone, or personal administration. Today, it is mostly computer-based administration, which can involve both email and web technologies.

2. Online focus group (forum):

Rather than conducting the traditional focus group in a F2F environment, an online focus group provides an alternative that can bring people together from geographically dispersed regions at different times, thereby removing some of the limitations of traditional focus groups.

Three core issues that need to be given careful consideration are: the design of the focus group; developing rapport; and, the selection of an appropriate virtual venue.

CONCLUSION

The field of e-communications has grown exponentially in recent decades. As with organizational communication scholars in general, communication auditors will be stretched to stay abreast of the opportunities and challenges that are posed.

But one thing is clear: communication audits must increasingly take such issues into account, in order to present anything like a rounded account of life in the virtual domain of the modern workplace.

TOPIC 9
CRAFTING THE AUDIT REPORT

INTRODUCTION

After the audit has been implemented, and the data collected and analyze, comes the key task of presenting the results in the form of a report.

This is a defining point in the whole exercise. Considerable care may have been devoted to the implementation of the audit, but if this is not reflected in the final written presentation, then everything else will be in vain.

STRUCTURING AN AUDIT REPORT

The defining traits of effective reports are widely agreed. Typically, excellent reports are assumed to be:

- Timely

- Well written

- Well organized

- Attractive

- Cost effective

- A report begins before the beginning

1. Timely:

This refers to both the production of the report and its contents. Ideally, it should arrive before it is due (but certainly no later), and contain the most up-to-date information available on the problem at hand.

2. Well written:

The report should be clear, concise, and interesting; it should grab the reader's attention and hold it throughout it; it should avoid errors in grammar, spelling, punctuation and factual content.

3. Well organized:

A good report is designed to be read selectively, so that the reader can pay attention only to its most necessary parts. Most reports have multiple audiences, and will have few readers interested in its entire content. For this reason, an executive summary (listing main findings and recommendations) is obligatory.

4. Attractive:

It should be clearly labelled, arrive in good condition, and be presented with an attractive typeface and layout.

Graphics, bar charts, pictures and diagrams present data in an accessible format, simplify the job of the reader and also enhance the attractiveness and impact of a report.

The following deficiencies are often found when data are presented in graphical form (Frownfelter-Lohrke & Fulkerson, 2001):

- Inadequate chart titles and labels

- Obtrusive backgrounds; no clearly defined borders

- Optical illusions and major design variations

- Inappropriate colors

- Trendy visual effects ('chart junk').

5. Cost effective:

The report's recommendations should be designed to solve real problems facing its readership, and should be clearly explained, possible to implement, and cost effective.

Although there are no guidelines on the maximum number of recommendations the report should contain, it is important to remember than an organization with 40 priorities in reality has none.

6. A report begins before the beginning:

With the terms of reference set for its production, these identify the problem(s) it will be expected to solve, set explicit limits on the range of issues to be addressed.

STANDARD FORMAT

- Title page

- Contents

- Acknowledgments

- Executive Summary

- Introduction

- Methodology

- Findings/Conclusions

- Recommendations

- Appendices

- References

1. Acknowledgments:

are an opportunity to identify important change agents within the organization who have participated in the most important aspects of the communication audit exercise. This, of course, suggests that such people will have been involved in designing the audit process, or collecting data, and that key findings will have been shared with them as they emerge.

By involving them, and sharing the credit in the eventual report, auditors will gain a valuable reputation as team players, and establish that the entire exercise has been rooted in the business needs of the organization.

Such an approach also spreads responsibility for awkward issues raised in difficult decisions proposed: it is harder for people to reject the audit conclusions outright, if the CEO has been identified as a key figure in drawing up the TOR, gathering the data, and devising the recommendations.

2. Summary:

Should outline both the main findings and recommendations.

Typically, a report will have multiple audiences, with different information needs. Therefore, most people will read on this section. Likewise, most readers tend to read only the abstracts that appear at the beginning of articles in academic journals. Given that the end purpose of the audit exercise is to promote action and change, this reinforces the need for a comprehensive summary.

3. Introduction:

Should explain who commissioned the communication audit, who was responsible for the overall conduct of the exercise, and the purpose of the report. It should briefly outline the method of inquiry that was adopted and the terms of reference that were set. It should also explain how the data have been assembled and arranged, how the report is structured, and whatever general background factors are considered to be most crucial.

4. Methodology:

Outlines, in detail, the steps taken to assemble the audit data. It is generally agreed that the key issues that must be explained include the following:

- What techniques were employed in the audit?

- Why were these techniques selected, in preference to any others?

- How, and by whom, was the data collection carried?

- How many staff, clients or customers were audited?

- How were they selected?

- If everyone was not included, what percentage was used?

5. Findings / Conclusions:

Details precisely what you have discovered. It should also analyze the importance of your findings.

6. Recommendations:

This is where you most clearly link data to action. The recommendations should relate directly to key problems that have been heavily flagged in its main body.

It is useful if the recommendations seek to build on positive behaviors that at least some sections of the organization are already displaying, rather than if they represent an entirely new set of values, behaviors and relationships that everyone will have to learn from scratch.

The cardinal question to be addressed is: What can the organization do differently to that which it already does, and how will this make a difference to the main problems that it currently faces?

7. Appendices:

Contain supporting material that is important to the overall case but does not belong logically in the main body of the report. These include examples of data collection instruments, tables, etc.

8. References:

A list of main sources cited in the text – books, reports, newspaper articles, journal articles, or official statement.

A small number of references (approx. 10) should be sufficient to enable anyone who wishes to explore a particular issue in more detail to do so.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF STATISTICS

Most of us tend to place more trust in stories and individual experiences that we can recall vividly, than we do in statistical averages.

Therefore, statistics require careful presentation. Above all, readers are more likely to make use of them in making decisions when they are presented simply and in ways that they can relate to through their real experiences.

It is therefore necessary to integrate statistical findings with the actual words of real people in the organization, who can explain in the language of individual experience what the facts and figure really mean. For example:

- If a score of 4.1 is achieved on a 5-point scale, what does it mean?

- If 80% of staff are moderately dissatisfied with communication, should this be a cause for panic? Or does it compare favorably with levels achieved by other competitors in this industry?

BREAKING BAD NEWS

A communication audit report should be an honest and accurate account of the communication climate found within the organization concerned.

However, people faced only or mostly with criticism also feel powerless to effect change, imagining that there are no instances of effective practice for them to build on. Consistent negative feedback, and the absence of positive reinforcement, promotes the conviction that things can only get worse, whatever people do. This syndrome is called 'learned helplessness' (Peterson et al., 1993).

Therefore, reports should draw attention to both the strengths and the weaknesses of communication. Otherwise, there is a possibility that the entire report may be rejected. Such resistance to uncomfortable findings can manifest itself in heated questions about the audit procedures employed. Employees may then be portrayed as trouble makers – as the audit findings are rejected.

A number of suggestions based on research literature:

- When positive and negative feedback have to be communicated about a person, object, process, or organization, the message recipient is more likely to believe the message when it begins with the positive comment (Jacobs et al., 1973).

- Indicate how the findings compare with surveys of this kind in other organizations, or how much further improvement could be realistically expected at this juncture of its history (Morris & LoVerde, 1993). Context is important.

- The report should be written in non-inflammatory and neutral language, offering solutions rather than a grievance list (Badaracco, 1988).

- Reinforcing the previous point, it is vital that critical feedback be constructed as non-judgmentally as possible (Murray, 1989).

- Managers will also be faced with a difficult decision if the report has uncovered a great deal of bad news. Should they circulate it, or try to keep it quiet? Thus feedback sessions should openly acknowledge the difficulties faced by the organization in terms of communication, as well as celebrate its strengths.

INFLUENCING AND PERSUADING TO EFFECT CHANGE

The ultimate purpose of an audit report is to persuade the organization concerned to implement the recommendations that the report outlines.

Wells and Spinks (1996) proposed that persuasive messages should seek to:

- Attract attention;

- Arouse psychological needs;

- Present persuasive information showing the receiver how to satisfy those
- psychological needs;

- Present evidence to support claims;

- Urge action.

Additional levers of persuasion that could be employed include:

1. Threat:

This tactic involves the use of fear-arousing messages and the threat of negative outcomes, in order to secure compliance with a desired course of action. The success of this strategy depends on 3 critical elements:

- The magnitude and severity of the negative outcome;

- Its probability of occurring if nothing is done to avoid it;

- The effectiveness of the recommended response to remove the threat.

Example: 'Successfully implementing these recommendations will transform the communication climate within this organization. Failure to do so will see a further deterioration, and the prospect of industrial action during the forthcoming pay round. We believe these proposals can avert such danger.'

2. Logical argument:

There are well established features of arguments, and of the way they are delivered, which increase their persuasive power:

- The message should be fully comprehensible - the meaning must be clear and unambiguous.

- The report should be shared with a few key people inside the organization before it is finally printed.

- The important aspects of the argument should be emphasized to underline them.

- The advantages of the recommended course of action, and the disadvantages of the alternatives, should be firmly stated and supporting evidence cited.

- Reports benefit from the use of vivid examples, which have been shown to be a powerful technique for effecting influence.

- Clear conclusions should be evident to the report's readers. Messages with explicit conclusions are more persuasive than those with implicit conclusions (O'Keefe, 2006).

DELIVERING THE REPORT ORALLY

Finally, the audit report will normally be presented orally to the top management team. This is frequently the most challenging, and decisive part of the whole exercise.

Many managers will have only skimmed the report. In particular, they will have been looking for issues that relate directly to their part of the organization's function. It is therefore essential that the presentation provides a summary of the audit's overall main findings.

In essence, how a message is delivered is often a crucial in determining its impact as the nature of the message itself. Confidence, clarity and a focus on essentials are vital.

The audit team should practice the presentation as much as possible. The objective is to ensure that no question will be asked that has not been thoroughly prepared in advance.

Above all, the presentation must show that the team appreciates the organization's strengths, has accurately diagnosed its weaknesses and has, in partnership with all those it has worked with, devised a clear program of action that will solve its problem.

CONCLUSION

Communication audits can make major contribution to organizational success. But the audit itself does none of this. In the final analysis, the audit report is the most visible product of the audit team's efforts.

It is vital that senior managers are on board throughout.

Attention must be paid to:

- Producing accurate data.

- Achieving a balance between negative and positive findings.

- Devising recommendations that address real problems, and that are 'doable'.

- Persuading the organization at large of the merits of the audit team's proposals.

TOPIC 10
STRATEGY, RESEARCH, AND PEDAGOGY: THE ROLE OF AUDITS

INTRODUCTION

This course has explored the contribution that audits can make to the evaluation, and then transformation, of both internal and external communication.

A great deal of evidence has been presented to show that high quality communication is a crucial indicator of organizational health.

Four substantive issues remain to be discussed:

1. The nature of a communication strategy, and how audits can fit into its development.

2. How auditors can choose between the different techniques that have been discussed.

3. The role of audits as a research tool.

4. The contribution of communication audits to the teaching of organizational communication.

AUDITS AND STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION

Audits are a vital ingredient of attempts to fashion a coherent communication strategy. However, there is no obvious consensus on what the term 'communication strategy' means.

Four main consequences from this:

1. Instead of attempting to force communication to the top of management's already crowded agenda, it should be linked to what is already dominating that agenda.

2. A communication strategy should be a means of transforming existing management practice, rather than an additional activity on top of everything else that managers already do.

3. Strategy is not an event, but a process.

4. Measurement should begin with results.

WHICH AUDIT TECHNIQUE IS MOST APPROPRIATE?

The following should be considered:

- Does the organization require benchmarks against which future progress can be measured?

- Is the audit one of internal or external communication?

- Is the organization already aware of its communication problems, and simply needs to know people's opinion in more depth?

- Has the massive crisis just occurred, requiring rapid analysis?

- Does the audit need to focus closely on a small sub-set of a wider organizational system?

- Is the audit being conducted as a part of an organizational development program, or as a pure research?

- Is the audit being conducted in house, or by external consultants?

Box 20.2 Evaluating audit tools

Tools	Time	Costs	Data collected	Disruption
Questionnaires	30–40 minutes	Main costs are respondents' time; those responding externally may need to be paid; cost of questionnaire analysis and analytical time of auditor	Standardized; quantitative data. Some questionnaires also contain open questions, yielding qualitative data (see Appendix)	Time spent completing questionnaires
Interviews	30–60 minutes	Interviewer time/ interviewee time (for external audits, interviewees may require fee)	Perceptions of employees/ customers/suppliers. Probing permits deep coverage of topics	Time interviewees spend away from their normal tasks
Focus groups	1–2 hours	Staff time; customers (or others) may require payment	Qualitative accounts/ summaries of respondents' opinions	Time participants spend away from their work
Communication diaries	Normally at least 1 day and no more than a week	Used internally; expensive in terms of employee time	Identifies sources of information, channels used and communication networks	High; most respondents find it intrusive; low completion rate
ECCO	5–10 minutes	Used internally; costs limited to employee time	Identifies amount of information known; sources and channels from which it is derived	Minimal
Mystery shopper	5–30 minutes (per transaction)	Employees diverted from 'real' customers; payment of 'shopper'	Quantitative and qualitative data	Minimal, although may change behaviour of staff

Video recording	Indeterminate	Costs of video equipment; some technical help may be needed	Quantitative and qualitative	Minimal, does not tend to disrupt interaction
Critical incidents/ experiences	Normally a standard part of questionnaires	No extra costs incurred; often part of data collection technique already being employed	Lively, positive and negative examples of communication processes	Minimal
Constitutive ethnography	4–20 hours of professionals' time	Expensive; professionals may require payment, or hiring of replacements while analysis occurs	Expert insights into dynamics of communication	High; professionals taken away from normal job
Delphi	1–3 hours of participants' time	Moderate: cost of participants' time	Evaluations of communication by experts	Moderate: small numbers suffice
Direct observation	No minimum/ maximum normally specified	Low. Time used is that of observer, rather than staff/customers	Data from group interaction, dyadic episodes	Minimal, providing observer succeeds in being unobtrusive
Archival analysis	Indeterminate	Researchers' time	Mail record, phone records, e-mail records, etc.	Moderate
Network visualization	Indeterminate	Researchers' time	Identifies gatekeepers, communication stars, patterns of communication	Moderate

RESEARCH VERSUS AUDIT

While audits can be used in research, not all audits are research. They are often simply used to evaluate the application of research findings in a given context.

Research is generally concerned with one or more of the following:

- Developing and testing hypotheses; generalizing from one or more studies, to set the standards for what constitutes good practice;

- Exploring new and novel ideas;

- Constructing grand narratives and stories that explain an underlying phenomenon; and,

- Contributing to the development and refinement of theories about wider social systems.

Audits can be used in longitudinal or cross-sectional studies. They are particularly useful in the forms of research below:

Action research: Data are collected about a system, results are fed back into the system, variables are manipulated in response, and the consequences are evaluated by the collection of more data.

Case studies: This is an umbrella term for approaches that look at a particular real-life event, organization or sub-system, and eventually seek to generalize the findings to more substantial populations.

Focus groups: Evidence is collected from specialized and carefully selected groups of individuals.

In-depth interviews: Typically, such approaches attempt to extract a great deal of evidence from a relatively small number of informants.

Large scale surveys: Audit questionnaires can be employed to evaluate practice across a significant number of organizations.

Participant observer approach: A researcher joins the group of individuals under discussion and engages in their activities, but maintains a primary role of observing how the group functions.

Box 20.3 Characteristics of audits and research

Audit	Research
Compares actual performance against standards	Identifies the best approach (e.g. what communication style most helps with customer retention), and so sets the standards
Sometimes conducted by those who work within the organization being studied	More often conducted by independent, outside researchers
Usually initiated and led by the needs of the organization	Usually initiated by researchers, to explore wider issues
Involves access to information (e.g. employee classification system) by those normally entitled to access it	Requires access to information and databases by people who are not normally entitled to such access
Results designed to be setting-specific	Results intended to be generalizable to other settings
Uses already validated and usually well-established approaches to conduct investigation	May be concerned with testing efficacy of given approach, and developing new ones
Uses already tested hypothesis to check standards, and set internal benchmarks	Develops testable hypotheses, based on audit data; and tests hypotheses based on audit data

COMMUNICATION AUDITS AS PEDAGOGY

Leipzig and More (1982) argued that communication audits bring both a theoretical and pragmatic perspective to the study or organizational communication. Three major pedagogic goals have been suggested as being served by the audit (Shelby & Reinsch, 1996):

1. It connects classroom theory to workplace practice. This connection enhances motivation, participation, and learning.

2. The audit requires students to practice communication skills in a real-life environment. They must:

- Form themselves into teams, agree ground rules, and manage interpersonal relationships.

- Seek contact with interested organizations.

- Negotiate access.

- Secure the cooperation of significant gatekeepers, employees and/or customers.

- Implement the audit, having selected the most appropriate technique.

- Draft reports.

- Make oral presentations.

3. Students are normally required to develop and then defend decision recommendations. Their diagnostic, diplomatic and rhetorical skills are sharpened.

*The learning opportunities from such a range of activities are enormous.

CONCLUSION

There are a number of main lessons that stand out:

- Transforming communication requires time and resources.

- People generally welcome the opportunity to discuss their own communicative performance.

- A communication strategy should focus overwhelmingly on changing the behaviors of key people.

- Feedback is key.

- Persistence and fresh vision are vital.

- Measurement is indispensable.

- Communication is increasingly recognized as a crucial variable in determining organizational success, and as a vital issue requiring further research.

The methods and tools discussed in this course will facilitate the work of researchers and practitioners prepared to explore the exciting world of human communication, in the still largely unfamiliar territory of organizational life.

REFERENCE

Hargie, O., Tourish, D. (2009). Auditing Organizational Communication: A handbook of research, theory, and practice. Routledge.

APPENDICES

1. Communication Audit Report rubric.

2. Rubrik Penilaian Audit Komunikasi oleh Perusahaan / Organisasi.

3. Communication audit report sample.

Communication Audit
Communication Audit Report Rubric

A. Written report

Performance Element	Criteria	Exceeds Expectations	Meets Expectations	Below Expectations

Report Content
• Purpose
  o Client description
  o Historical background
  o Limitations
• Procedures
  o Data collection techniques
• Raw Data
  o Separate sections fromeach kind of data
  o Descriptive, non-evaluative
  o Data problems explained
• Analysis
  o Analytic procedures
  o Results summarized
  o Tables with narrative descriptions
• Conclusions
• Recommendations
	☐ New, interesting to reader(s)
	☐ Valid
	☐ Objectively analyzed
	☐ Accurately present
	☐ Comprehensive – in-depth
	☐ No irrelevant or trivial details
	☐ Variety of research sources
	☐ Realistic, practical ideas
	☐ Relevant examples/details meaningful to client
	☐ Manageable, meaningful conclusions
	☐ Related to goals of organization
		20	15	10

Front Matter and Back Matter • Title Page • Executive Summary • Appendices o Copies of Instruments	☐ Comprehensive ☐ Accurate ☐ Complies with standard formats	5	3	1
Report Design • Font size, style • Spacing, pagination • Margins • Headings • Visual aids	☐ Easy to read ☐ Complies with standards for business document design ☐ Pleasing appearance ☐ Graphics are accurate, coherent ☐ Graphics are appropriate for content	10	7	5
Audience Adaptation • Language • Content • Anonymity	☐ Directly addresses reader(s) ☐ Motivates reader toward desired outcome ☐ Uses language familiar to reader(s) ☐ Maintains anonymity of participants	10	7	5

Report Organization • Title Page • Table of Contents • Executive Summary • Introduction • Procedures, Raw Data and Analysis • Conclusions • Recommendations • Appendices	☐ Clear main ideas ☐ Logical sequence of topics ☐ Balanced partition of topics ☐ Uses transitions, summaries	10	7	5
Writing Quality • Style and tone • Mechanics, spelling • Usage • Grammar • Language/diction		10	7	5
Source Citation Style (APA) • In-text • References list	Complete (source is discoverable	5	3	1

B. Oral Presentation

Performance Element	Exceeds Expectations	Meets Expectations	Below Expectations
Team Delivery	**(20 pts)** *Team member transitions organized and seamless.* *Logical sequencing and flow among team members.* *Team practice evident.* *Questions from audience handled smoothly and professionally as a team (plan was evident for responding to questions).* *Appearance and enthusiasm highly consistent among team.*	**(17 pts)** *Team member transitions fairly organized.* *Team member sequencing ok, but could have been smoother/more balanced.* *Team practice likely.* *Questions from audience handled fairly well, but some hesitation from team on who would answer the question.* *Appearance and enthusiasm consistent among team.*	**(15 pts)** *Team member transitions somewhat disorganized.* *Rough, illogical sequencing among team members. Very little flow.* *Team practice not evident.* *Team members clearly uncomfortable with questions from audience. Evident that team had not planned how to handle questions.* *Little consistency in appearance and enthusiasm among team.*
Individual Delivery *Physical Appearance*	**(10 pts)** *Men: dress shirt, tie, slacks, jacket, well groomed*	**(7 pts)** *Business professional appearance*	**(5 pts)** *Inappropriate grooming or dress for business presentation.*
Eye Contact	*Maintains eye contact; seldom refers to notes or visual aids*	*Tries to maintain eye contact, but sometimes looks at notes or visual aids*	*Limited eye contact; uses note cards; stares at ceiling or focuses on visual aids.*
Poise/Body Language	*Engaging. Uses gestures and expressions; looks comfortable, confident and natural. Body language reflects comfort interacting with audience.*	*Neutral; uses hand and body movements but appears stiff, uneasy. Body language reflects some discomfort interacting with audience.*	*Sways, paces or fidgets; hands in pockets, playing with pen, etc., Body language reveals reluctance to interact with audience.*

Voice	*Engaging. Uses conversational tone, modulates voice.*	*Easy to understand. Appropriate pace and volume; few verbal distractions.*	*Difficult to understand; mumbles; too loud or soft; too fast or slow; lots of "ums" and verbal distractions.*
Enthusiasm	*Projects enthusiasm and high energy.*	*Projects moderate enthusiasm and energy.*	*Delivery lacks enthusiasm and energy.*
Grammar/Diction	*Sentence complete and grammatical and flow together easily. Words chosen for their precise meaning.*	*For the most part, sentences complete and grammatical and flow together easily. With a few exceptions, words chosen for their precise meaning.*	*Listeners can follow presentation, but are distracted by some grammatical errors and use of slang. Some sentences incomplete/halting, and/or vocabulary somewhat limited or inappropriate.*
Verbal Interaction	*Consistently clarifies, restates and responds to questions. Summarizes when needed.*	*Generally responsive to audience comments, questions and needs. Misses some opportunities for interaction.*	*Responds to questions inadequately.*

Total: _____/100 pts

Reference

Hart, C., Vroman, M., & Stulz, K. (2015). Experiential, collaborative and team projects: Communication audits in the MBA communication course. *American Journal of Business Education (AJBE)*, *8*(4), 289-306.

Rubrik Penilaian Audit Komunikasi oleh Perusahaan / Organisasi

Nama penilai:

Nama organisasi:

		Baik sekali	Baik	Cukup	Kurang baik	Sangat buruk	Komentar (Mohon berikan alasan penilaian Anda)
1	**Kualitas presentasi laporan (termasuk tanya-jawab)**	20	15	10	5	1	
2	**Tingkat kesesuaian konten laporan dengan keadaan organisasi**	20	15	10	5	1	
3	**Profesionalitas pelaksanaan audit**	20	15	10	5	1	
4	**Kualitas hasil temuan**	20	15	10	5	1	
5	**Kualitas rekomendasi yang diberikan**	20	15	10	5	1	

Total: _____

<u>Communications Audit Report</u>

Prepared for the Great Valley School District
May 2016

Prepared by Communications Consultant Beth Trapani

Table of Contents

Introduction

Goal of the Communications Audit

The Great Valley School District is a high-performing, small, suburban, affluent school district that is sought after by families who want a high quality education for their children. As the Great Valley School District looks ahead to the next several years and strives for continual improvement, it has identified communications and engagement as an area of focus. Its Comprehensive Plan (submitted to the Pennsylvania Department of Education in July 2015), developed by community members, staff, and parents, lists this as one of its five goals.

One of the action steps under this goal is to conduct a communications assessment of the district's current communication methods and "explore communication frameworks and models that could be implemented to improve upon our current structures." The report also states the district should: "Develop and implement a plan to improve upon current communication structures and to increase engagement opportunities for stakeholders throughout the district."

Shortly after being appointed superintendent of the Great Valley School District in July, 2015, Dr. Regina Speaker-Palubinsky asked Communications Consultant Beth Trapani to submit a proposal to the Great Valley School Board to conduct a communications audit. Some initial planning of the audit occurred in fall, 2015. Focus groups with staff, community members, parents, and students were held early in 2016, and surveys were conducted with each of these groups in Spring, 2016. The audit also included a brief review of existing communication vehicles, including district and school newsletters, email announcements, and the website.

The goals of the audit were to seek data, opinions and perceptions from all major stakeholder groups, determine themes and attitudes with regards to communication, and propose recommendations for ways in which to improve the effectiveness and management of communications based on that data and information.

During this process, several themes emerged. There was a broad sense of dissatisfaction from staff with internal communications. Many said they routinely received conflicting answers from administrators in response to questions, and had no clear sense of districts goals or vision. Many reported that teachers and support staff aren't included in decisions and aren't adequately informed when decisions are made. Many said they felt as though they had no voice in the district and that morale was very low.

Parents seemed mostly pleased with communication, with the strong exception of frustration with the lack of consistency in the way teachers communicate with them about assignments, grades, and student progress. Some were also troubled by recent district-level communication about curriculum changes.

Community members felt somewhat disengaged from the school district, a theme that is common for school districts that often struggle to find ways to connect with people who aren'tdirectly affiliated with their schools.

Despite any communication challenges, support for the school district is strong, and all groups pointed to the excellent staff and students within the district and said they felt great pride in being a member of the school district community.

The National School Public Relations Association conducts extensive research nationwide, and finds a strong correlation between high-achieving school systems and those that intentionally focus on proactive, planned, inclusive communications. As communication in a school district increases, employees, parents and community members all feel more informed, involved, and invested.

At the same time, school districts are limited in their resources and must carefully choose how they will leverage their communication time, energy, and dollars. Simple changes and systems can be put in place that cost no money and little time, but reap huge payoffs in terms of the ability for audiences to feel informed and have a chance to dialogue with school administrators and school board members. The ensuing communications recommendations work to capitalize on these kinds of changes, focusing on simple/easy solutions and methods as well as more time- intensive and expensive ones.

The Great Valley School District is fortunate to have a Director of Communications and Outreach. The job description for this position at the time of the writing of this audit includes many of the recommendations in this audit. Many of these recommendations will only be successful if the responsibility for them is shared by the district's administrators and those appointed to assist in the implementation of them (e.g. staff who serve on committees, etc.)

Finally, it should be noted that when school systems undertake a communications audit, it's assumed they wish to view the system and its work through the perceptions of others. However, whenever opinions are solicited there can be a tendency to dwell on perceived problem areas. This is important because it guides improvement. However, it's also important to recognize the good work of employees, the positives of the system, and the support of the community. It is obvious from surveys and focus groups that there is a tremendous amount of pride in the Great Valley School District, its programs, staff, and students.

"People move here for our schools," said one focus group participant. "Academically, it's an excellent school district." It's important to recognize and reward the good things happening and the great work of the kind and caring educators who are making them happen.

Scope and nature of the study

<mark>This report presents the findings and recommendations from a review of district publications, 12 focus groups, and a total of 1,451 surveys:</mark>

- 786 parents out of a possible 1,891 families responded – 41% response rate;
- 476 staff members out of a possible 664 - 71% response rate;
- 189 community members out of a possible 4,500 postcards mailed (The district tried to target people who live/work in the community but who don't currently have children in the school district.) - .04% response rate

The focus groups were each an hour to an hour and a half long, conducted in January, 2016 at District Office and at Great Valley High School by Beth Trapani. Participants were identified by administrators (it was recommended they make an attempt to choose a diverse group instead of only selecting "the usual suspects" – people who are always quick to volunteer, lead initiatives, etc.) Groups varied in size from 3 to 24 participants, and they were instructed to speak freely without fear that their comments would be attributed to any one individual. Most participants were very forthcoming and quick to respond with praise, criticism, and suggestions for improvement. The same basic questions were put forth to the groups:

- What is your overall perception of Great Valley?
- What parts of communications are strong in Great Valley?
- What could be better?
- Where do you get information about the district and where/how would you like to get it?
- What changes do you think the district could make to better communicate?
- What are your priorities for areas of improvement?

From these questions sprang a lot of conversation as the group drilled down to specifics on some areas that were clearly important to them. *It was notable that staff said it was refreshing to have someone ask for and listen to their opinions. Moving forward, this audit will recommend the district seek to find ways to that in more frequent and meaningful ways.*

Other notes of interest:
- The response rate to the communication surveys was fairly low. It's recommended that the district re-survey next year to try to evaluate its communications efforts and improvements.
- High school students were interviewed in a focus group but the district did not run a student survey specifically on communications. Among all groups, the student focus group was most satisfied and complimentary of communications.

Guiding Principles for the Great Valley School District's Communications Efforts

1. ***All communication efforts must be tied to the district's goals and objectives.***
Communication efforts must be driven by the district' overall mission, goals and objectives, and be designed to support teaching and learning. Staff and parents must be given the utmost consideration since they are the keys to increased student achievement.

2. ***Strategic communication requires research and evaluation to be woven throughout the communication effort.***
This audit is a starting point, but the district will need to continue to ask its staff, parents, and community for their opinion of new publications, websites, meeting structures, etc. if it is to continue to improve. Additionally, major communication systems should be evaluated annually, and communication should be a component ofthe annual evaluations of district administrators and principals.

3. ***Internal communication must be a priority.***
No communication effort will be successful if employees feel disenfranchised, confused,or uninformed. Staff members have the ability to make or break the image of their school district. Many of them live in the community, and many have close relationships with the district's parents. Employees should be provided with the information, tools and training to become ambassadors for the district. While they might not agree with alldistrict-level or building-level decisions, if they're well informed and involved in the processes they are more likely to support them or at least not disparage administration and board members for making the decisions.

4. ***Any communication effort should be viewed from the lens of many different audiences, with an eye on engaging and involving, rather than disenfranchising.***
The district will enjoy greater support by collaborating with its many different audiencesand by thinking specifically about what kinds of information each audience needs and how they can be engaged and involved.

5. ***The district should work to ensure communication is an integral part of any plans for changes, improvements, etc.***
Each plan, development, change, etc. should have a "mini" communications plan builtinto it, and that plan should be shared with administrators to ensure that everyone is sharing consistent messages and information, and understand who is responsible for each part of the communication.

6. ***Technology should continue to be used to support an efficient, timely and effective system of communication.***

The district should continue to work to refine its use of email, social media, and other means of communicating through technology. Increasingly it is how students and parents communicate.

7. ***Communications must be two-way.***

When school districts work to improve communication they most often focus on getting information out to their audiences, but don't' have processes in place to gather information and feedback. While Great Valley's staff, parents and community members are seeking more information, they are also looking for ways to have their own opinions heard and valued. It will be important for the district to find ways to do this if it is to gain support and trust from its constituents.

Key Findings

Several common themes emerged from the focus group discussions and surveys.

Overall Perceptions of the Great Valley School District (not necessarily related to communications)

1. Most believed Great Valley is an excellent school district that especially offers opportunity for high-performing students. Numerous parents said they'd moved to the school district after researching several other districts in the region.
2. Many cited the size of Great Valley as a strength for the school district, appreciating its close community feel and accessibility.
3. Most groups – internal and external - said they weren't clear how or why most decisions were made, didn't feel as though they had a voice, and didn't have a clear sense of vision or direction for the school district.
4. There was clear frustration from both teachers and parents about communication between the groups: Parents felt that communication from teachers about student progress and expectations was very inconsistent and often insufficient; Teachers felt that parents' expectations were too high
5. Across all groups there was a sense of disconnection from the Great Valley School Board. Each group said it would like access to a brief summary of what is to be discussed at board meetings, decisions that have been made, etc., rather than having to read through lengthy meeting minutes or watch board meetings on TV.
6. Many feel that the district isn't doing enough to support its English as a Second Language population, and said it's concerned that the growing diversity in the school district is not something the district is prepared to handle.

Overall Communication Strengths

While this audit primarily contains information about areas in which the district can improve communications, it's important to also note there are several strengths from which work can begin and be used as a foundation for growth.

1. It is apparent that there is great pride in the Great Valley School District, and people are proud to say their children attend the schools here.

2. Most parents (83% district-wide and 90% in elementaries) said they feel informed about what's happening in their child's school and seem to value the district's teachers.

3. Most parents said they strongly prefer email and text messaging as a method of communication over other kinds of social media, which simplifies the district's mission (since email is easier to manage than many forms of social media.)

4. Parents and staff both said they were interested in hearing more from the Superintendent, so there's a great opportunity to capitalize on a captive, eager audience.

5. Snow delays/cancellations were frequently cited as things that the district communicates very effectively. Perhaps this is an example of how clearly-defined procedures and protocols have enhanced, improved, and streamlined communication in this instance. The same kind of efficacy might be achieved if standard processes can be put in place to communicate about other district issues, as well.

6. Parents overwhelmingly felt the front office staff at the district's elementaries and high school were very warm, welcoming, and helpful.

7. The "IN Great Valley" magazine that's mailed to residents four times a year is well read by community members and parents.

Overview of Communication Issues from Staff
(Survey and focus group summaries and data with more complete information are listed at the end of this report)

1. Staff strongly felt that they aren't informed or involved in decision-making, and feel they "often have no idea in what direction the district is moving." They cited many recent changes (some of which they were supportive), and the lack of information they received about these changes. When asked how they learned about changes, they said they most often heard about them "through the grapevine" and then were informed viaemail or in a staff meeting either at the last minute or after the changes had been instituted.

"There's too much word of mouth communication and too many rumors. No one knows what information to trust." – Elementary teacher
"We are starving for direction." – High school teacher

2. Staff would like a more collaborative work environment in which their viewpoint is sought and valued. Staff feel administrators don't take time to adequately gather data or reflect on the ramifications of their decisions. They also feel decisions aren't explained.

"There's a grieving process in the middle school where we no longer have a say. We no longer have a voice, and no one is leading us." – Middle school teacher

3. Staff feels there's a disconnect between district administrators and building administrators, and that each building operates as a silo with its own set of rules and climate.

4. Staff feel administrators are not informed and don't communicate well with employees.

5. Custodial and Support staff do not feel valued and feel they are not as informed as other members of the professional staff.

6. Support staff doesn't have access to computers throughout the day and therefore doesn't receive communication in a timely manner; They also feel they are rarely involved in decision-making.

7. Staff feel over-loaded by demands and feel they don't have enough time to communicate. They also feel there are no clear guidelines regarding communication.

8. Staff feel the district lacks consistent procedures and expectations.

9. Staff feel parents often know about decisions before they do.

10. Staff want a one-page summary of what happened at School Board meetings, and an organizational chart/chain of command.

Communication Issues from Parents/Community Members

1. Parents and community members felt they wanted more involvement and transparency regarding district decisions. There is no clear sense of how or why decisions are made, and there is not a clear line of communication about the change process.

2. Parents are very frustrated with inconsistency in communication from teachers about their children's academic progress. Many said teachers aren't responsive to emails and phone calls, and don't frequently enough update Skyward, the district's online grade and homework management system.

3. Both groups would like more detailed information about activities, events, and programs in the schools.

4. Parents felt that the transitions from elementary to middle school and middle to high school were very disjointed and not well supported.

5. Parents and community members want a brief summary of what happened at school board meetings, and both would like more information about the budget process.

6. Parents feel communication from athletic programs is often inconsistent and poor.

7. Parents and community members want to see more support for non-English-speaking families.

8. Both groups would appreciate a simple, district-wide email newsletter

9. Parents would like the website to be reorganized and updated more frequently

10. Parents would like more parity in culture and communications among schools

Recommendations

This report contains more recommendations than can be accomplished in a single year. It is recommended that the district identify target areas to address each year, and build them into a Strategic Communications Plan.

Recommendation 1: Improve and strengthen internal communication.

Employees who are informed and involved function more effectively and are more supportive of their district's efforts. The internal framework of communication is the infrastructure that supports all external communication efforts. When an issue emerges or when the district begins to communicate about a decision or issue, it's essential the communication process begins with staff. Staff members in the focus groups said they often feel "out of the loop" about decisions and are unclear about the direction and vision for the district.

Of the 476 staff members who responded to the survey:
- 51% feel the district clearly and effectively communicates information they should know to adequately do their jobs and be informed;
- 47% feel their opinion as am employee is valued;
- 53% feel supported by district office administrators;
- 55% feel confident and hopeful about the direction the Great Valley School District is heading.

The focus groups fully supported these numbers.

Increasing communication and involvement by staff should help to change this. Suggestions for

action include:

a. Involve staff in decisions that impact them.
Staff morale often hinges on whether they believe their concerns are heard and respected. When decisions are made, staff can be involved in the process from the beginning of discussion. Administrators can solicit their input via committees, surveys, focus groups, etc. It's important to explain to staff that sometimes decisions must be made without consulting staff. However, with
major decisions that will have a significant impact on staff, it's important to find ways to incorporate them in the process.

One staff focus group participant said, "We are the ones who have to live with these decisions and make it work, but we're never consulted or asked – or even told what's happening. We are treated like children."

When administrators are preparing to present changes and initiatives to the school board, it's important to prepare a plan to involve and communicate with staff about the decision, its timeline, etc. While gathering input may slightly extend decision-making timelines, it can pay big dividends in building morale and ultimately pride and performance.

It's important to note that most school administrators under-communicate. Because they are so intimately involved with their decisions and processes, there's the tendency to assume that if they've talked about an important change or initiative once or twice, or sent out a memo, that people have 'heard.' Research shows it takes multiple communications for someone to truly absorb a message. Many employees, including teachers, are so laser focused on their classroom work and the details of their own responsibilities (interfacing with students, parents, etc.) that they sometimes 'miss' some of the district-wide news.

It's recommended that any major decision that impacts staff should include a staff committee to provide input. Administrators must be willing to adjust course based on that feedback. One focus group member said, "Sometimes we have a voice, but we never have a vote." In order for any initiative to truly be successful, staff must be able to influence its implementation with regards to how it impacts them.

   b. **Administrators should plan to present key messages in multiple ways and multiple times, perhaps archiving information on the district's website and then referring to it in future communications.**

In multiple focus group sessions staff said that if they missed a meeting, they then =missed critical information and there was really no way to obtain it. They were concerned about the many different versions of information regarding changes and initiatives, and were eager for some official source of information. Several suggested that each meeting be followed up with a handout/email summarizing what was covered. This is particularly helpful for staff members who may miss the meeting for any number of reasons.

Other staff members said they are frustrated by the fact that timely information is only delivered in email, while their jobs keep them away from a computer during the day. Others said they are almost never included in staff meetings and feel 'out of the loop' because of it.

   c. **Increase face to face communication with staff**

Many employees in focus groups said they felt disconnected from administrators, and repeatedly said "lack of visibility" was an issue. Research by the National School Public Relations Association shows face-to-face communication is almost always preferable when it comes to effective staff or

parent communication, and employees in Great Valley reflected this in theircomments.

It is recommended that the district develop a schedule to get district office administrators including the Superintendent and cabinet-level administrators into the schools on a rotating basis. It's also recommended district office administrators regularly attend school staff meetings to stay connected with thetone of the buildings.

   d. **Work to improve the exchange and flow of information between school buildings.**

Consider trying to include more opportunities for staff from different schools tooccasionally meet and work together and for building principals and assistant principals to meet more frequently (or perhaps share more information about what's happening in their buildings.)

   e. **Implement a district-wide internal newsletter/memo (consider a biweekly or monthly simple format – simply bullets, etc.) that includes information about curricular changes, events, activities, issues, etc. in the schools as well as district-wide issues.**

   f. **Work with custodial, food service, and support staff to better strengthen communication and involvement in decision-making.** Increase efforts to include them in staff meetings. Administrators should meet with these groups on a regular basis to solicit their input and feedback and talk with them about how best to support them in their work and ensure they are receiving adequate information.

   g. **Establish a District Staff Communication Council/Superintendents Advisory Council**

Bring employees of each type (support staff, teaching staff, etc.) together for a minimum of four times a year to meet with the superintendent and other districtadministrators to discuss district initiatives, progress, positives, concerns, etc.

This would be an excellent opportunity to open the flow of communication between district office and the schools. Minutes from these meetings should beshared with the entire staff shortly after the meetings.

It's important that other administrators are included in this meeting since one ofthe main concerns from staff is that administrators aren't informed and don't communicate.

   h. **Post district goals in multiple places in each school.**

This is one way to begin to get all staff focusing on the same goals and understanding that the district is moving forward, together, toward common

goals. Just over half the staff said they feel hopeful about the district's goals and vision.

i. Establish an employee recognition program

Work with union membership and other staff leaders to identify and recognize employee accomplishments and achievements. Consider getting a local business to donate gift certificates, monetary donations, etc. for a recognition program
that would honor one or more employees in each building who go "above and beyond" each year.

j. Establish an employee feedback/suggestion program

Create ways – electronically or on paper – that employees can make suggestions for improvements at the building and district level. (Either a traditional suggestion box or an electronic mailbox; Consider options for anonymous suggestions/feedback.)

k. Annually repeat the communication survey used to develop this report, and work with the Superintendents Advisory Council or Communications Advisory Council to add or delete questions.

Recommendation 3: **Establish expectations for communication between teachers and parents**

At the elementary level, 83% of parents who responded to surveys said they were satisfied with the communication from their child's teacher (Charlestown Elementary:92%, General Wayne Elementary: 85%, K.D. Markley Elementary: 79%; Sugartown Elementary: 77%.)

At Great Valley Middle School just 54% said they were satisfied with communication with teachers, while only 39% said teachers let them know right away when their child was struggling.

At Great Valley High School, less than half of parents who responded (47%) said they were satisfied with communication from teachers, while only 32% said they were notified when right away when their child was struggling (33% said they were not.)

National research shows that the communication parents care about most is that direct communication from teachers, and that the information they want most is about their child's academic progress and how to help their child.

Great Valley's survey data clearly supports that: Parents said the two things they most was more information about is the academic progress of their child (84%) and

information about how to better help them academically (82%.) It should be noted that82% also said they want more information about happenings in their child's school.

Clearly in a school district that is sought after for its academic reputation, a focus on communication surrounding academics is paramount.

Suggestions for action include:

a. **Share this survey data with teachers.** It's recommended that the superintendent and other administrators join with building-level administrators to meet with teachers in each building to discuss this issue in small groups. *It's important for administrators to be cognizant of the demands placed on teachers and the additional time requirements for increasing communication.*

b. **Develop a parent/teacher advisory committee to discuss this issue so both sides can work collaboratively to develop solutions.**

c. **Work with the union leadership and staff members to establish reasonable communication guidelines that can be implemented (and shared) district-wide with parents.** Examples include: Teachers will respond to emails within 24 hours; Urgent matters should include a phone call to a teacher; Teachers will keep their websites and grading sites updated; Teachers will include a list of ways parents can help their children and how to proceed if they feel their child needs additional help.

d. **Administrators and a communication professional can work with teachers to promote more proactive communication with parents throughout the school year.** Perhaps guidelines can be established along with the teacher's union and templates can be provided to make classroom-to-home communication simple and standardized.

e. **Provide training for teachers and work with teachers on establishing best practices for parent/teacher conferences and back to school night** as these are often the key times teachers and parents get a chance to have face-to-face interaction and to establish a relationship and rapport.

f. **Share any changes/new guidelines with staff and parents in multiple ways – in person, written, website, email, etc.**

Recommendation 3: Redesign the district website to make it more useful, informational, and easier to navigate, and incorporate a common, searchablecalendar.

Many parents and staff members felt the website is not well organized and were eager for a redesign. Many school districts across the region and nation are going through this process. As our world has seen dramatic, technological advances in the last few years and as nearly all businesses have developed an online presence, parents, students, staff, and community members expect more from their school district's website.

Suggestions for action include:

a. **Conduct several brief focus groups to determine what each audience would like to see in a new website: Which features are most important, which information is missing, how best should information be organized, etc.**

Focus group participants and survey respondents cited a lack of information about school activities and sports (including schedules, practice times, etc.) Many parents were also frustrated that many teachers don't maintain updated web pages.

b. **Work with the district's website provider and use their resources to help develop a new design.**
c. **Review websites from other school districts around the nation for ideas as to how best to design and organize a new site.**
d. **Send a mock-up of the site to staff, parents, community, etc. for feedback before going live.**
e. **Determine who will maintain and update each section of the website**

Recommendation 4: Improve communication from and with the School Board of Directors

76% of parents, 79% of community respondents, and 59% of staff said they'd like more information about School Board decisions. Each of the 12 focus groups agreed they'd like a one-page summary of school board discussion/action items to be emailed to them. Suggestions for action include:

a. **Develop fact-sheets about initiatives and changes the Board is considering that include the description, reasoning, timeline, next steps, how to provide feedback, meeting dates, etc.**

b. **Post board agendas and minutes on the website in a timely manner**

c. **Develop a one-page summary of each board meeting to be emailed to staff/parents/community and post on the website**

d. **Provide opportunities for Board members to visit schools and classrooms and attend more school functions and events.**

e. **Host "Community Conversations" periodically with the Superintendent and other staff members, as well as a board member, to provide an opportunity for the community/parents to discuss issues outside of a School Board meeting.** When issues of importance to the community arise, many people become frustrated by the protocol a board meeting demands, including limits on speaking. This gives people a chance to have a voice and discussion in a more informal way.

Recommendation 5: Increase parent communication

Parents and community members agreed with staff: They want more involvement and transparency regarding district decisions. Many parents in focus groups said they don'thave a clear sense of how or why decisions are made, and there's no clear line of communication about the change process.

At the same time, parents were sometimes frustrated with a lack of detailedinformation about activities, events, and programs in the schools.

Suggestions for action include:

a. **Develop a district-wide e-newsletter and include information from the schools as well as district-level information –** This could be simple and include a few photos of students and be published on a monthly basis. Many districts in the region now offer this to parents and community members. It is emailed to all parents and staff, and community members are able to 'opt in' or sign up for the newsletter. It is archived on the district's website. Some districts send this out weekly or as-needed; It can beextremely simple and not require more than some bold headings and an occasionalphoto (view examples from Unionville-Chadds Ford, Downingtown, Radnor, West Chester, etc.)

b. **Keep the district website updated with useful information.** (e.g. as of May, 2016, summer camp information was still listed for 2015 and

c. **Develop a "State of the District" annual presentation and report**
This can be emailed to parents and shared online.

d. **Develop a "Key Communicator" Group** – This is a program used very successfully in school districts nationwide. A Key Communicator Group is a network of people who are well connected to both the school and community, and agree to meet a handful of times a year (even twice) to share information. The emphasis is on two-way information; The Group receives emails about issues/changes, etc. and agrees to report to administrators if they hear 'buzz' in the community about an issue.

    e. Bring principals together to share ideas of what has worked with regards to communication in their buildings.

Based on Focus Group discussions, some buildings are excelling with regards to parent communication and involvement while others are struggling. Many parents and staff members felt the 'inequity' of the culture differences and communicationprotocols from buildings to building.

<u>Recommendation 6</u>: **Develop a District-wide Communications Plan that includes acrisis communications component.**

This is one of the strategies under Goal #5 in the district's strategic plan (Ensure systemsare in place that engage families, business partners, and community members in the student learning process and communicate with stakeholders in ways that promote, enhance, and sustain a shared vision for building a positive school climate.)

Any plan should include timelines and staff members responsible for completion. This Communications Audit provides a foundation for developing a Communications Plan. Essentially the recommendations contained in this plan can become goals and action items in a plan. Also, developing a crisis communications plan as a part of this processgives administrators a chance to think through potential scenarios and establish and review protocol with staff.

<u>Recommendation 7:</u> **Create a standard practice to establish a communications planfor each significant district initiative or key issues as they arise.**

It's recommended the district develop a communications plan for key issues. Each planshould incorporate answers to the following:

       1. Who needs to know?
       2. What do they need to know?
       3. When do they need to know?
       4. How will we tell them?
       5. What do we want them to do with the information they receive?

<u>Recommendation 8:</u> **Strengthen school-to-school communication**

Suggestions for action include:

    a. **Provide more opportunities for principals to share information about what's happening in their buildings**, and to collaborate on events, projects, and communications. Sharing building newsletters and visiting each other's schools from

time to time would provide a broader perspective of what's happening across thedistrict.

> **b. Provide more opportunities for staff at different levels to collaborate and share information.**

Recommendation 9: **Provide more opportunities for administrators and school boardmembers to be more visible in the district's schools and at school functions**

Suggestions for action include:

> a. **Administrators should discuss as a team a plan that allows them to spend more time in the buildings;** Perhaps a rotating schedule of building visits.

> b. **Superintendent should consider hosting some 'coffee with the superintendent and/or school board' meetings (even if few people show up, it's important to make the gesture and provide accessibility) and createa schedule that allows more visibility at school functions, events, etc. as well as in classrooms.**

Recommendation 10: **Provide communications training to administrators and otherstaff members**

Communication training would help the administrative team (building and district-wide)to operate with the same guiding sense of communication guidelines, and would give them a chance to discuss emerging communication issues.

Staff at all levels should receive some basic level of training. For teachers, training couldfocus on home-to-school communications and parent relations. For administrators, overall communications training as well as help developing newsletters would be helpful.

Recommendation 11: **Establish communication guidelines and expectations foradministrators.**

It was apparent in the focus groups that there seems to be no clear process for internal communication, and information is often shared in an inconsistent and sometimes disorganized manner. Administrators should clearly understand their roles in communicating key information in a timely manner and be held accountable for the effectiveness of their communication efforts. A communications component can be
included in administrators' evaluation criteria.

Key Messages and Frequently Asked Questions should be developed for each issue. Bothcan be distributed to staff members so they fully understand the reasoning and timelinefor initiatives.

Recommendation 12: Strengthen communication with non-English-speaking familiesin the district.

Suggestions for action include:

a. **Explore best practices and communication outreach programs in other school districts with growing ESL populations.**

b. **Host a "Family Café" patterned after Kennett Area Consolidated School District's program. (**Spanish speaking families are invited to a monthly meeting to talk about a variety of issues concerning youth (social media, drug and alcohol prevention, etc.) and the district is able to share important information.)

c. **Create opportunities for non-English-speaking families to get additional help/support for their children who may be struggling.**

Recommendation 13: Explore ways to improve the transition from elementary tomiddle school and middle to high school

Suggestions for action include:

a. **Work with a team of parents, students, and administrators to determine where the gaps in the transition exist.**

b. **Develop ways to improve the gaps by providing better connection and communication between the levels**

Recommendation 14: Refine the use of GVTV

Analyze the current use of this powerful communications vehicle and consider the involvement of students and other staff members in documenting district events and providing meaningful programming. Consider evaluating the way other school districtsof similar size manage their television stations and programming.

Recommendation 15: Evaluate the district's use of social media

While only 14% of parents said they would like to receive information about the schooldistrict via social media, 33% said they would like to receive text messages with important announcements and information. *Perhaps text messaging is an area the school district can look at expanding.*

Most technologically-advanced school districts have at least a minimal social media presence. However, given the need to focus on parent/teacher communication and internal communication, it's recommended that Great Valley not make social media apriority at this time.

Recommendation 16: Strengthen outreach to the Great Valley community

Like most school districts, Great Valley struggles to find ways to reach its community members who no longer have children in the school district. The "IN Great Valley" magazine seems to be a powerful and well-read way to reach community members, but according to surveys, word of mouth is still the most powerful and effective way for thisgroup to receive information. This is difficult to harness and manage, but an active group of community members that meet regularly with the district can help disseminateinformation.

Community surveys also showed that this group is best reached with mailings to their home. Perhaps the district can find special ways to engage community members throughout the year by specifically inviting them to performances, concerts, etc. and offering discounted or free admission. Based on survey data, it also appears this group might attend a 'state of the district' presentation featuring students talking about theirwork.

In surveys,
- 79% of respondents said they would most like information about school board decisions
- 57% were interested in the the academic progress of students
- 51% were interested in school district goals
- 41% said they wanted to know about operations of the district (including staffing changes, etc.)
- 40% said they wanted to know more about projects and programs Great Valley students are completing.
- 29% wanted to know more about school sports schedules, dates for performances, etc.

- 18% were interested in ways to be involved in the schools

It appears this group would like information and access, rather than volunteer opportunities

Recommendation 17: **Continue to promote and grow the Education Foundation**

Most school districts rely on their education foundations to fund extra programs, materials, etc. Foundations provide a valuable source of funding at a time when publicschool districts are forced to fight for every dollar.

Recommendation 18: **Evaluate the Communication Office's goals and responsibilities**

Using the data gathered in this communications audit, it's recommended the Superintendent and Director of Communications and Outreach work collaboratively to develop goals and project timelines. It's important to note that the communications office is a very important part of the school district. The office should be able to facilitate and support the district and its staff in improving communications. However, many of the communications challenges outlined in this audit come from an internal lack of focus on clear communication rather than any lack of attention from the communications office. In order to improve communications district wide, all administrators and eventually all staff members must take responsibility for personal and even district-wide communications. Each staff member must own a piece of the communications puzzle and work collaboratively to develop a new culture that supportsand values proactive, clear, effective communication. That also must start with the Superintendent's office.

Appendix 1 - Summaries of Surveys

Staff Communication Survey

Staff Surveys – 476 staff members out of a possible 664 - *71% response rate*

- 98% know who to go to with questions or concerns in the district
- 81% would like to see an an internal newsletter for staff, summarizing district information, changes, updates, etc.
- 55% feel confident and hopeful about the direction in which the Great Valley School District is heading
- 53% feel supported by district office administrators
- About 51% of staff feel the district as a whole clearly and effectively communicates information they need to know to adequately do their job and be informed
- About 47% feel their opinion is valued
- 43% feel they have adequate and useful training for most new procedures

Staff say the ways they are most likely to receive information:
1. Email (59%)
2. Website (38%)
3. Other staff members (33%)

79% say email is the best way to reach them, followed by a staff meeting and paper in their inbox

Staff most want *more* information about:
1. Decisions about daily operations – including staffing changes, procedures, etc. (76%)
2. School Board decisions (59%)
3. Things happening in other buildings (53%)
4. District goals (33%)
5. Academic progress of students (28%)
6. Projects and programs our students are completing (27%)
7. District finances (21%)

Summary of Comments from Staff Survey

1. Administrators at building and district level should be more responsive and respond in a timelier manner.
2. Some information is communicated via meetings but not followed up with email; Others is only communicated via email. Both methods are necessary to ensure everyone gets the message.
3. Need more proactive information early in the change process, during, and after the change.
4. Building level and district level administrators should communicate more clearly to avoid confusion and mixed messages
5. Parents often know about things before staff does.
6. Overall climate/tone/morale needs to be improved
7. Need more consistency in all communication
8. Building-to-building communication is lacking
9. Administrators should seek more input from teachers and staff – need more collaborative decision-making
10. Administrators should explain decisions to staff so staff can better support them
11. Need more support for all ELL families – not just those who speak Spanish
12. Support staff should be able to meet with superintendent a few times a year
13. Departments need to share more information
14. Administrators need to do a better job communicating about the district goals and vision
15. Administrators don't seem to have any answers
16. There are many unclear expectations

Parent Communication Survey

Parent Surveys – 786 parents out of a possible 1,891 families responded – 41% response rate

- ❖ 87% say they read the "IN Great Valley" magazine
- ❖ 84% feel the district as a whole clearly and effectively communications information they should know
- ❖ 77% feel informed about what's happening in the school district
- ❖ 62% are hopeful and confident about the direction in which the district is heading
- ❖ 59% say they know who to go to with questions/concerns
- ❖ 57% feel their opinion as a parent is valued
- ❖ 56% feel the district embraces all families of different cultures and ethnic groups
- ❖ 51% are satisfied with the amount of positive news about Great Valley schools that appears in the local newspapers (43% neutral)

- ❖ At the elementary level, 83% of parents who responded to surveys said they were satisfied with the communication from their child's teacher
  - o Charlestown Elementary: 92%

- General Wayne Elementary: 85%
- K.D. Markley Elementary: 79%
- Sugartown Elementary: 77%

❖ At Great Valley Middle School just 54% said they were satisfied with communication with teachers, while only 39% said teachers let them know right away when their child was struggling.

❖ At Great Valley High School, less than half of parents who responded (47%) said they were satisfied with communication from teachers, while only 32% said they were notified when right away when their child was struggling (33% said they were not.)

Overwhelmingly, the front office staff at almost every school was identified as being warm and welcoming – some achieved very high ratings, particularly at the high school.

Parents want more information about:
1. Academic progress of their child (84%)
2. How to better help their child academically (82%)
3. Happenings in their child's school (82%)
4. School board decisions (76%)
5. District goals (74%)
6. Projects and programs students are completing (73%)
7. Ways to be involved as a parent at the school (60%)
8. Decisions about daily operations at the schools including staff, procedures, etc. (59%)
9. Sports schedules, results, etc. (58%)
10. Things happening in all of the schools, not just their child's (37%)
11. The Education Foundation (26%)
12. Other (20%)

Parents say the way they would most like to receive information from the district is:

1. Email (94%)
2. Website (68%)
3. Papers sent home with their child (39%)
4. Text messages (33%)
5. District newsletters (29%)
6. Phone calls (26%)

❖ *Only 14% listed Facebook and 1% listed Twitter*

Currently, the place parents are most likely to go to for information is:

1. Website (65%) – *likely includes Skyward*
2. Email (56%)

3. Their child (27%)
4. Phone calls (20%)
5. Other parents (12%)
6. GVSD employees (10%)
7. Facebook (8%)
8. GVTV (4%)
9. Twitter (4%)
10. Newspapers (3.5%)
11. Board meetings (3%)

Summary of Comments from Parents Survey

1. Parents are very frustrated that teachers don't consistently update their websites and Skyward, and that they are not always responsive to parent emails and phone calls
2. Parents overwhelmingly would like teachers to reach out more proactively when a student is struggling
3. Parents would like to receive text messages and not just emails/phone calls
4. Parents feel the transition to middle school is difficult and there isn't enough communication and support around it
5. Parents would like to hear more frequently from the superintendent
6. Parents would like a district-wide newsletter
7. Parents feel communication from athletic programs is often inconsistent and poor
8. Parents want more involvement and transparency regarding district decisions

Community/Resident Communication Survey

Summary of survey responses: 189 out of a possible 4,500 households contacted via postcard - .04% response rate

- 94% feel the quality of the school district directly impacts their property values
- 87% read the "IN Great Valley" magazine
- 60% feel the schools are clean, neat, and welcoming
- 49% are satisfied with the amount of positive news the district receives in local papers (39% neutral)
- 43% feel hopeful and confident about the direction in which the district is heading (46% neutral)
- 39% feel the district clearly and effectively communicates information they should know
- 34% feel informed about what's happening in the district

The information residents would most like:

1. School Board decisions (79%)
2. Academic progress of students (57%)
3. District goals (51%)
4. Decisions about daily operations including staffing, etc. (41%)
5. Projects and programs students are completing (40%)
6. Sports schedules, results, dates for performances, etc. (29%)
7. Ways to be involved in the schools (18%)
8. The Education Foundation (15%)
9. Alumni events (12%)

"Other" was listed at 13% and most comments included budgets/taxes/financial information (Some may have believed this was covered under School Board decisions, as was the intention of the survey)

The places residents are most likely to go to for information about the district:

1. Website (48%)
2. Other residents (18%)
3. Newspapers (18%)
4. School newsletters (14%)
5. School Board meetings (9%)
6. Emails/phone calls from the district (8%)
7. GVSD employees (7%)
8. Facebook (6%)
9. GVTV (4%)
10. Twitter (3%)

The places residents would most like to receive information:

1. Mailings to their home (41%)
2. Website (40%)
3. Email (35%)
4. Newspaper articles (28%)

Summary of Comments from Community Survey

1. Community members would like more information about:
   - How the district conducts business
   - Budget information
   - How the district saves money
   - How students are doing academically
   - What kinds of academic programs are available

- What kinds of projects the students are completing

2. Residents would like more invitations to school events, for school tours, etc.

3. Some residents suggested a monthly email to community members, possibly including a teacher spotlight

4. Some residents feel Great Valley should promote community service projects and give citizenship awards

5. Some residents were concerned about typographical errors in materials

Appendix 2 - Summaries of Focus Groups

Elementary Teachers Focus Group

Number in attendance: 22

Overall perception of the school district: This is a very pleasant place to work, but communication is not consistent across all the buildings. Teachers are most happy with communication at the buildings but feel very disconnected from district-level administrators.

Themes

1. Some principals do an excellent job asking for staff feedback and listening to it. (e.g. Principal at Sugartown Elementary solicits feedback at the end of every year on what has done well and what has not and what should be changed for the following year. As a result, dismissal procedures were changed to eliminate hallway bottlenecks.) (e.g. New principal at K.D. Markley is very approachable and will talk through problems with staff without judgement.)

2. Teachers who travel from one building to another miss important information that is only spoken verbally in meetings, etc. Teachers would like minutes or notes from meetings emailed to them. However, they understand the time constraints of adding yet another 'to do' to administrators' plates.

3. Teachers would like one consistent place to go to for information and expectations. *"Information delivery is very choppy and so different from administrator to administrator."* Teachers said SharePoint is confusing and has too many drives, folders,etc.

4. With regards to parent communications, teachers feel as though they are somewhat over-communicating. *"Parents are very demanding and we don't have the time or opportunity to give them everything they want. We don't have time to teach if we are constantly responding to them."* There is a strong sense that administrators support parents over teachers, and that parents automatically go to district office if they are dissatisfied.

5. Staff feel over-loaded by demands and don't feel they have enough planning time. They would like more clearly-defined expectations for what and how they are to communicate.

6. Staff has no sense of district goals or vision. They also don't feel they have any sense of what is happening across grade levels throughout the district, and sometimes within their own buildings. *"I don't even know what the teacher down the hall is doing."*

7. Staff would like more collaboration time.

8. Staff feel there are a lot of decisions being made and that they are confused about what is being decided and why.

9. Staff feel the district lacks procedures, and if one person leaves, there is no way for their replacement to understand what that person did or was responsible for. This is indicative of an un-collaborative culture in which people don't communicate about responsibilities.

10. Teachers would like more information about K-12 articulation. *"We guess at what the kids need to know for 6th grade."*

11. Teachers don't have enough support to implement 504 plans and IEP's.

Specific Suggestions:
- Increase communication between buildings and with district office
- Staff would like more emails detailing decisions, changes, procedures, and protocols
- Curriculum meetings should be more inclusive of all staff
- Staff would like board meeting summaries emailed to them
- Increase face to face meeting time
- Teachers would like to see Superintendents Advisory Council reinstated
- Improve the way in which staff is notified about being moved to a different buildings; Deliver that information in a kinder, gentler manner
- District office administrators should be more responsive and answer emails and phone calls in a timely manner

Secondary Staff Focus Group

Number in attendance: 18

Overall perception of the school district: Staff enjoys working in the district and feels it is full of talented, dedicate staff and wonderful students. There are plentiful resources and it's a nice place to be. The small size of the district is a positive attribute. The group immediately cited communication as one of the district's biggest challenges.

During this 1.5 hour session, the staff's strong feelings about the lack of communication surrounding curriculum changes heavily dominated the conversation. The group was irate that they felt they weren't consulted about the changes.

Themes

12. There is a general sense of lack of communication to staff.

(e.g. One teacher received an email in October about the communication focus group but then didn't hear anything until he put in for a sick day and found he was scheduled for the session in January.)

"There's too much word of mouth communication and too many rumors. No one knows what information to trust."

13. Staff feels the websites are strong but the district should start to use social media.

14. There's been a decline in morale over the last 10 years.
"Because things have been so difficult lately, I can honestly say I'm just not as happy to see my students as I used to be, and that is sad."

15. Staff does not have any kind of sense of the district's goals or vision.

(e.g. *"It's not nearly as collaborative a work environment as it was when I started 10 years ago. There's been too much turnover among the administration and things are getting lost. Decisions are made without consultation of staff and they don't take time to really gather data or reflect on the ramifications of their decisions."*)

16. There's a general sense that district office doesn't know what's going on in the buildings, and vice versa.
"The administration gives different information to different groups, and much of the information is 'whisper down the lane.'"

17. Staff feel decisions are made without regard to how they will impact other departments, staff, classrooms, etc.
"I feel like what I say to my principal falls on deaf ears."
"There's a grieving process in the middle school that we no longer have a say. But, we are also starving for direction. There are lots of tears among the staff. We no longer have a voice, and no one is leading us."

18. The pace of change is too fast. (Staff suggested administrators ask teachers: "How could we made this work?" instead of forcing it upon them without consultation.)

19. Staff wants more K – 12 communication and collaboration since what happens at one level impacts the next.

20. Staff would like more explanation about decisions and help understanding the data driving the decisions.

"We used to be given pounds of information and data, and now we have no idea why decisions are made or what's behind them."

"We have a voice, but not a vote. So we just hunker down in our classrooms and make itwork."
"I'll ask a question seven or eight times and still not get an answer. It's either avoided orjust ignored. It's very frustrating."

21. In-service days are extremely poorly organized and managed.
"They used to be phenomenal, but now they are a complete joke. If we ran ourclassrooms like they run in-service days, we'd be fired."

22. English as a Second Language students (and parents) need significantly more support.

Specific Suggestions:
- More staff meetings at the high school to discuss issues/changes
- Bring back middle school staff meetings
- More face time with the superintendent; Don't feel superintendent is listening to them
- Would like to see more administrators in their buildings; Feel administration is very disconnected
- Department chairs should have more time with district office administrators and then be given a chance to disseminate information to staff
- New superintendent should have spent more time observing rather than making major changes in year one
- Teachers need more time to complete their work. "We're given more requirements but there's never a discussion about how we're supposed to do it, or when."
- Would like a one-page email summary of School Board discussions/decisions
- High school administration should not make decisions regarding staff based on the performance of one or two staff members

Custodial/Food Service Focus Group

Number in attendance: 9

Overall perception of the school district: It's a great place to work, live, and educate your children. Great Valley is full of very friendly, civic-minded people and it's a very positive atmosphere. "There's lots of caring that goes on here."

Themes
1. Despite enjoying working in the district, the Support Staff does not feel "well informed" about what's happening.
"There are too many people telling you so many things that just aren't accurate."
2. There's a lack of consistency in information given to support staff.

3. Support staff are usually informed via email, which they say is the worst say to reach them because they are working in the buildings, without access to a computer. They'd prefer phone calls and face to face meetings.
4. Support staff is informed about decisions 'after the fact' and aren't ever asked to have input.
5. Administrators and teachers have no idea what demands Support Staff is facing.

"Our jobs are very stressful. There's two of us and 1,200 kids and 150 teachers, and theyall want something at once."

6. One of our primary roles is the create the atmosphere that allows them to teach; We are surrogate parents and not just custodians.
7. Would like more consistency in how support staff is informed about informational and 'big picture' items
8. We aren't deemed as important as teachers; We are stereotyped and some teachers don't respect us. (e.g. a teacher bumped a support staff member out of a parking spot, saying, 'Well I'm a teacher.')

Specific Suggestions:

- If teachers or administrators need something, put the request in the subject line of an email.
- "Issue Track" is not helpful because there are too many extra steps; It's very cumbersome
- The school board-designed 'temperature zones' often make things blatantly uncomfortable in the buildings since some buildings have warmer or colder wings; We'd like flexibility to adjust
- Mandate that fire drill instructions be posted in one consistent place in each elementary classroom
- Would like more autonomy to do their job
- Need more internet access in the buildings so that sites aren't blocked (Needed to look up schematic, nape of a pipe, etc. and wasn't able to get online to the proper site to do it.)

Support Staff Focus Group

Number in attendance: 14

Overall perception of the school district: Great Valley is a great place to work. Colleagues are very nice and competent, and there is a wonderful connection with the students. There is a great sense of pride in the school district.

<u>Themes</u>

9. Monthly staff meetings are extremely helpful and it's important to include support staff; Need a way to be informed about what happened in those meetings (email notes to support staff, etc.)
10. Staff needs a better sense of how their school/program fits into the larger district picture
11. At District office level, there's a breakdown in communication – and administrators don't think about how their decisions impact us.
12. Support staff doesn't have access to a computer all day, and would like notices delivered in paper via their mailbox (Currently word of mouth is the way they most often receive urgent information.)
13. Support staff gets information about changes too late; Communication always comes 'after the fact' and they aren't involved in decision-making. Often the word is out in the community before support staff is formally communicated with about it. *"We need to know everything to make things work well, but we are often the last to know."*
14. Support staff doesn't have a clear sense of the district's vision or goals
"We aren't allowed to attend the opening day presentation so we never get to see the superintendent lay out the plans for the year."
15. Would like to see a one-page summary of School Board discussions/decisions each month
16. When there are big changes we never get an explanation as to why these things are happening
17. Were not aware there is a district-wide newsletter
18. Don't have any sense of district goals or vision

<u>Specific Suggestions:</u>

- Bring back the Superintendent's Advisory Council - should be a mixture of support staff, teachers, other staff, etc.
- Make iPads, etc. more accessible for support staff to log in and check email to get notifications on urgent items (e.g. school is having indoor recess today)
- "Issue Track" system is too cumbersome
- Would like monthly staff meetings
- There should be a greater focus on multiculturalism in the schools

Administrators Focus Group

Number in attendance: 8

Overall perception of the school district: There are a lot of dedicated staff members and there's great pride in working in Great Valley. We are very student-centered and focused on student achievement. We are in a time of transition and change. Sometimes communication between non-instructional and instructional staff is lacking.

Themes
1. Change takes a lot of time in Great Valley. We have a culture of complacency because we have scored well.
2. We need to better define how we communicate – the standards are scattershot.
3. We do have a clear sense of district goals this year.
4. Information is primarily shared via email, but email isn't used enough after meetings to follow-up – so if you miss the meeting you miss the information.
5. There is a lot of 'whisper down the lane' in finding out what is happening (e.g. At the end of last year there was discussion of whether or not there would be a half day, and the students knew before we did.)
6. Staff will hear about initiatives that we're not quite ready to roll out (e.g. 1:1 technology)
7. There is much confusion about whether we are operating in a hierarchy or a collaborative culture.
8. Would like a summary of monthly board meetings.
9. Need to do a better job communicating with Hispanic population
10. District needs to do a better job gathering feedback then using it.
11. Teachers want more facetime with superintendent
12. Would like to see more positive news stories about the district in the newspaper

Specific Suggestions:

- Create and define protocols and expectations for communication for parents and staff (e.g. if you're having an issue with a teacher, what's the chain of command for parents so that they don't go straight to the superintendent.)
- Make the site that athletic programs use to post schedules easier to use
- Create clear and consistent expectations for teacher websites
- Bring back monthly elementary principal meetings and memorialize what happens in them and share that with other administrators
- Use the phone instead of all the email
- District needs to embrace technology and social media

Elementary Parents Focus Group

Number in attendance: 15

Overall perception of the school district: Good school district with great test scores. "Scores matter in how we select where we want to live." Several parents said they moved into the district (from the region as well as from out of state) based on the quality of the GV School District. One parent who moved from New York said that even though scores are excellent, kids don't seemed as stressed out about tests as they did in her former school district.

How do parents find out information about the school district?
- Primarily through email from administrators (they appreciate proactive letters about things that happen in the district, and feel good about the handling of crisis situations)
- Would like the option to get text messages about important items
- Think the website is good, and use the online calendar and Skyward

Parents said email is the best way to reach them with detailed information; Would like text messages with reference to email for quick updates/reminders

Themes
1. There was a strong sense that the culture is distinctly different in each elementary school and that parents want more parity in communication and culture.
    a. Some schools have a weekly newsletter while others do not.
    b. At Charlestown, teachers have to work through a parent coordinator to get info out to parents and don't have the option to email the entire class.
    c. Charlestown culture is also much stricter/rigid (e.g. they don't offer a Pajama Day while other schools do – translates to a lack of 'fun')
    d. Schools vary in their policies regarding volunteering – some allow parents to bring younger siblings, some don't, etc.
2. Parents also wanted more consistency in communication from teachers (some heavily communicate while others do not.) "Some years I know everything going on in the classroom while other years I feel like I don't have a clue."
3. One parent noted that she would like to be able to give her children advanced notice about things like fire drills, testing, etc.
4. Parents want more information about the curriculum.
5. Parents want more opportunities to volunteer (spots fill up quickly.)
6. Overall parents are very happy with the office staff and feel warmly welcomed.
7. Parents would like more time at Back to School night.
8. Parents would like a one-page summary emailed to them about what the School Board is discussing.
9. Would appreciate more work on making all information accessible to English as a second language families.

10. Would like the district to err on the side of providing too much information (would like more details – e.g. more explanation of MAPP testing, a detailed testing schedule, etc.)
11. Feel new superintendent is very proactive, involved and approachable
12. Parents were not aware the district has a newsletter and would like to have the link emailed to them.

Specific Suggestions:

- Would like Skyward to send a notice out to parents letting them know an assignment is missing
- Would like PTA to rotate morning and evening meetings to provide more access to parents
- Would like a "Second cup of coffee" program to allow parents to meet other parents after morning drop-off
- Would like nurse to fill out a form that goes home with a child when they visit the nurse
- Would like more information about middle and high school – "I'd like a better sense of K-12 continuity and to have a sense of where our kids are headed."

Secondary Parents Focus Group

Number in attendance: 14

Overall perception of the school district: A high performing school district with hard-working, dedicated teachers. There are lots of opportunities for students to do many different things. Overall the students are very police. Special education is not strong, however.

Themes
1. Special education is an area of weakness. Students aren't identified early enough and parents have to aggressively fight to get them help and support.

2. Students are counseled toward college and not much else.

3. Overall parents prefer email communication but still like paper, as well. They feel social media is used best for communications about sports but not academics.

4. Athletic communication is greatly lacking. The Digital Sports page is inadequate and parents aren't notified when there are changes in practice schedules and locations.

5. The school district does a good job communicating proactively in situations such as a suspicious car driving around the schools, etc.

6. Use of Skyward by teachers is extremely inconsistent, and teachers don't always notify parents when a student is struggling.

7. Communication from the high school and middle school is insufficient; Parents don't feel informed.

8. Parents feel the administration may be top-heavy

9. Information "dribbles out" about changes, initiatives, etc.

Specific Suggestions:

- Teachers should more consistently use Skyward
- Secretaries should be more aware of all after-school activities
- High school should have a monthly newsletter
- Parents want new superintendent to be more visible
- Back to School night at high school was poorly organized and lacked detail; Parents didn't have enough time and lost time looking for rooms (no map)
- Parents would like regular updates from school board about what they're considering

English as Second Language Parents Focus Group

Number in attendance: 3 (Parents from Asia, Iraq, and India)

Conversation in this focus group was slow and challenging because of the language barrier.

Overall, parents feel the district is very strong academically and is a warm, welcoming place. However, they struggle with the language barriers – for both themselves and their children.

How do parents find out information about the school district?
- Primarily through email and also from friends

Themes
1. ESL parents don't know where to go to get more information or more thorough explanations; They need a liaison they can call for help.
2. The schools are very warm and friendly
3. ESL parents want more information from the school district about how long it will take for their child to assimilate, as well as how long ESL support will be available.

4. ESL parents would like the school to do a better job fostering social connections between their children and English-speaking children.
5. Social media is not the best way to reach them with specific information.

<u>Special Education Parents Focus Group</u>

Number in attendance: 6

Overall perception of the school district: Mixed feelings – the district prides itself in being high performing and therefore children with learning differences aren't included in the broader school community and aren't necessarily valued.

<u>Themes</u>
13. Communication is very inconsistent and doesn't seem to have an overall strategy.
14. Crisis situations are handled well and communicated about in a thorough, proactive manner (outbreak of illness, lockdown, etc.)
15. Need more consistency in communication from teachers and parents – some teachers communicate well while others do not. (*"Last year my child was struggling the entire year and no one proactively communicated to help us, but this year has been great."*)
16. The district has had five years of incompetence with special education. New director of seems really good.
17. Elementary is generally helpful with special ed, then things fall apart in the middle school because teachers don't read IEP's, there are other issues, etc.
18. Special education students aren't always able to listen to the announcements and remember to sign up for things mentioned; There needs to be more thorough communication with parents to help them.
19. There is so much emphasis on honors and Advanced Placement, and 'average' or special education students are left behind. *"You should be able to get through school as a B student with your self-esteem intact."*
20. Case managers have too many students.
21. The transition from buildings (elementary to middle and middle to high school) is not positive or supportive.

Specific Suggestions:

- Special Education parents would like to meet regularly with Superintendent and Special Education Director – would like a regular parent group to meet about issues.
- Hold staff accountable
- Would like a one-page summary of what's happening at School Board meetings

- Would like to form a Community Advocacy Group to give parents more resources and to help them advocate for other special education parents and students.

High School Students Focus Group

Number in attendance: 14

Overall perception of the school district: Great Valley is an academically rigorous, good school district with a strong sense of pride, community, and positivity. Sports teams are strong, and there is very little negative energy.

Themes
23. The student body supports collective as well as individual accomplishments of its students (e.g. students support other student athletes.)
24. Guidance counselors are excellent and provide tremendous support to students with issues such as schedule changes and college planning.
25. Students have a strong voice (e.g. Students lobbied for a change in cafeteria cookies and felt as though their opinion was heard and valued.)
26. Students would like to get the same emails that their parents receive (e.g. info about practice SAT test was only sent to parents, and many students missed the information.)
27. High school website should be updated more regularly.
28. The district should better utilize social media, specifically Twitter.
29. The group discussed different apps/platforms for communication including "Remind Me" that would provide written access to morning announcements, etc. They would like to see some kind of written weekly update.
30. The transition from middle to high school is difficult and it's clear that middle and high school teachers don't communicate.
"One of my ninth grade teachers said, 'Forget about everything they taught you in the middle school, because they didn't teach it right."

Specific Suggestions:

- Bring back and 'old school' bulletin board to post written announcements, flyers, etc. in the school lobby so that all students could have access to it and wouldn't have to worry about missing the morning announcements.
- One English as a Second Language student said he sometimes feels isolated because of the language and cultural barriers and wishes there was a way to build more bridges with English-speaking students.
- High school could improve scheduling to avoid conflicts between things such as a drama production and a football game.

- Provide more information about Great Valley alumni who have gone on to do great things; Connect GV students with GV alumni for internship opportunities.
- Website should include an updated list of GVHS clubs and activities.

__Community Member Focus Group__

Number in attendance: 6

Overall perception of the school district: Great Valley is a fantastic school district with a community that cares about others.

This focus group was comprised of community members who do not currently have children in the school district, and who do not work for the school district.

__Themes__
1. Most information about the district is disseminated by word of mouth. Community members do watch the TV station but feel it should be better utilized.
2. Community members like the district newsletter (feel it is well written and interesting) but would also like email updates about things happening in the school district. They'd like information about:
   a. Taxes
   b. The District's plans
   c. Current events (sports, activities, concerts, etc.)
3. Feel there is too much of an emphasis on testing and comparing the district to others
4. Would like a monthly summary of School Board discussions and decisions emailed to them
5. Feel the website is comprehensive and very good; Some felt the district should better utilize social media
6. Would like to see the district pursue more positive publicity in the Daily Local and Inquirer (believe it builds pride and emphasizes property values

Specific Suggestions:

- Find ways to better promote the district's science fairs, grandparents' days, concerts, plays, etc.
- Form stronger partnerships with the district's municipalities
- Develop a community list-serv that community members can opt into

School Board Focus Group

Number in attendance:

Overall perception of the school district: The district is comprised of two types of people: Those who are new to the district and view it as quickly rising, and those who grew up here and don't want to see change. The small size of the district (large geographical footprint but small population) is a real asset, along with the dynamic community. The school district is very strong, and the reputation attracts many move-ins.

Themes
1. We have done a complete turn-around with communication: We used to talk about everything but didn't say much. Now our communication has become more proactiveand meaningful.

19. We need to be more consistent in what we say, and we need to be more responsive and get back to people in a timelier manner. Teacher and principal communication is "scattershot" and messages are inconsistent.
"You can talk to five different people and get five different versions of what ishappening."

20. There is a lack of protocol and business etiquette – principals need training. We need to be more consumer-driven and place more value on each and every interaction. We need to focus more on 'customer service.'

21. "Word of mouth" is still a primary form of communication and there is a lot of "whisper down the lane" and turning to the rumor mill.

22. There is a need to better communicate with community members who don't have children in the district.

23. We should be doing more to use social media.

24. We should get back to people in a timelier manner.

25. Board members don't feel a one-page summary of board meetings/discussions would be well read or is worth investing time in compiling. The board believes many watch the board meetings on TV or online.

Beth Trapani – Communications Consulting

Beth Trapani is a school communications consultant who works with districts and schools around the region, helping them to better reach and interact with their many audiences. Her focus is on helping school districts build support, internally and externally, to strengthen their systems and provide moreand better opportunities for students to succeed.

For years Beth was one of the Delaware Valley's most familiar voices and faces in her role as a morning anchor and reporter for KYW radio and for KYW and UPN-57 TV News in Philadelphia. She spent the firstpart of her career as a print and broadcast journalist, working at newspaper and radio stations across
Pennsylvania, including Pittsburgh's KDKA and the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette. In Pittsburgh she wrote abook about local ghost stories and graduated with honors from Carnegie Mellon University.

After leaving news, Beth transitioned to work in a Philadelphia public relations firm, using her media skills to help corporations such as Temple University Health System, the Kimmel Center, and Comcast,focusing primarily on crisis communications. She's been working with schools for the last 10 years.

Beth provides support to numerous school districts around the Greater Philadelphia region, and workswith the Chester and Delaware County Intermediate Units to offer training and support for school administrators. She also provides training for Penn's Graduate School of Education's School Study Councils.

Her services include:
1. Support and guidance during crisis situations: developing communication strategies, shaping messages, communicating internally with staff and externally with parents and the community,and dealing with the media. Beth is available 24/7 and can respond quickly to help school districts address difficult situations and prevent them from becoming even larger problems.
2. Working with and teaching administrators and school boards to manage change, implementnew initiatives, engage the community, and communicate both good and bad news
3. Training and mentoring administrators and other staff on a variety of communications topics
4. Communications audits and needs assessments to determine communication strengths,weaknesses, and areas for growth
5. Writing/editing key documents and speeches for websites, newsletters, etc.
6. Help explaining and disseminating complex issues such as test scores and budget data
7. Media coaching and training to help staff deal with the press
8. Development of communications plans that align with the district's strategic plan
9. Website editing and support services
10. Development of transition plans for incoming superintendents

A client list and more information is available at: www.TrapaniCommunications.com