

# SUPERVISORY COMMUNICATION AND ITS EFFECT ON EMPLOYEE SATISFACTION AT THE CUT, WELKOM CAMPUS

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## Abstract

Many large organisations tend to focus on their external communication in order to project a positive image to potential clients. However the role of internal communication with employees has often been overlooked, although it remains one of the most important areas of organisational communication. This article focuses on specific findings of the Master's dissertation, Supervisory Communication and its Effect on Employee Satisfaction at the Central University of Technology, Welkom Campus. The research results that employees' views about their own organisation impact on how external clients view that particular organisation. The research found that in order for employees to become advocates of their own organisation, supervisors of different operational units should develop and manage their internal communication activities in a way that motivates and stimulates employee enthusiasm for meeting organisational goals. Once employees are satisfied with the state of supervisory communication in their respective units, they should be able to identify with their organisation and endeavour to attain organisational goals.

**Keywords:** supervisory communication; employee satisfaction; communication satisfaction, climate.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In this study internal communication refers to all communication activities within the organisation. These communication activities are aimed at advancing the goals of the organisation and are therefore fundamental to organisation success. The role of supervisors is to manage different units of the organisation in a way that ensures attainment of the designated operational goals. It is important that supervisors communicate with employees in a manner that motivates and stimulates enthusiasm for meeting organisational goals. To achieve these goals, supervisors should realign their internal communication activities with organisational values to ensure that the employee behaviour is consistent with shared values. Employees who feel alienated are neither able to identify with the organisation nor derive any pleasure from their work.

Kinnick and Paton indicate that numerous studies have compared leaders with non-leaders to determine distinguishing characteristics of leaders (2005:43).

They confirm that analyses of these studies indicate that many of the distinguishing characteristics of leaders involve social and interpersonal skills, which include social nearness, cohesion, teamwork, emotional balance, control, nurturing behaviour and verbal fluency (ibid.). They contend that leadership, at its core, is a communication process because it seeks to strengthen human relationships by increasing trust and understanding (ibid.).

Asif and Sargeant define communication as a process by which individuals share meaning, which offers the means of creating and implementing behavioural changes both within and outside the organisation (2000:299).

Fournier believes that when employees' communication needs are satisfied, they develop better working relationships and their work environment improves (2006:10). Therefore, supervisors, as managers of different organisational units, have to provide distinguishable qualities of leadership. Such qualities should be aimed at motivating and satisfying employees' needs of pleasure and inclusion, with the result that employees shall identify with the institution and work towards the attainment of its goals. Barkar and Mohamad (2004:17) assert that supervisor-subordinate communication is a social system that works within the larger system of work group and is a form of dyadic (two-way) communication. This type of communication focuses on how supervisors communicate with their subordinates in order to maintain their relationship.

## **2. PROBLEM STATEMENT**

Many organisations tend to ignore the importance of internal communication with their own employees in building a positive image with their external clients. Whilst supervisors within the operational units are more concerned with performance-based operations, it is also imperative that they should realign their daily supervisory communication with employees to the strategic goals of the organisation in a manner that it seeks to achieve a positive image with clients. This will ensure that employees become advocates of their own organisation. Moreover, it will motivate employees to work towards the achievement of the values and goals of the organisation. When communication within the organisation is effective, employees feel a sense of inclusion and, as a result, are able to identify with the organisation, and assume organisation ownership and citizenship.

Delpont asserts that in order to operate effectively and successfully within an organisational setting, employees do not only need technical knowledge on how the communication process is unfolding and established within the organisation, but also need to enhance their communication skills in order to contribute effectively to the internal communication efforts of the organisation (2008:6).

Meintjies and Steyn believe that excellent communication makes people feel that they are relevant in their organisation and consequently they take pride in their work (2006:153).

The aim of the study is to determine the state of supervisory communication and its effect on employee satisfaction at the Central University of Technology, Welkom (CUT, W).

### **3. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES**

*The objectives of the study are:*

- to conduct an internal communication investigation (audit) in order to determine the state of supervisory communication at the Central University of Technology, Welkom (CUT, W);
- to determine the extent to which supervisory communication at the CUT, W affects the achievement of core institutional values and goals at the CUT, W as an institution;
- to determine communication satisfaction of employees regarding the effectiveness of their supervisors' internal organisational communication.

### **4. RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

*The following research questions were asked:*

- What is the state of supervisory communication on organisational effectiveness at the CUT, W?
- How does supervisory communication affect the achievement of values and goals of the CUT, W?
- How does supervisory communication affect employee satisfaction?

### **5. RESEARCH HYPOTHESES**

*The following research hypotheses were tested:*

- H1a: There is a relationship between supervisory communication and organisational effectiveness.
- H1b: Supervisory communication has an effect on the achievement of values and goals at the CUT, W.
- H1c: There is a relationship between supervisory involvement of employees in all internal communication activities and employee satisfaction.

## **6. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **6.1 Communication Satisfaction**

Fournier defines satisfaction as an affective response to the expectation-type standards (2008:42). Fournier further states that the investigation of communication satisfaction as an outcome can assist people in understanding the expectations and emotional responses to both sent and received communication (ibid).

Similarly Nuus defines communication satisfaction as employee's positive feelings about the techniques, methods and the media used by their organisation to disseminate information (1991:21). Nuus further elucidates communication satisfaction as employee satisfaction with multiple dimensions of communication within the organisation (1991:23).

Bajpai and Sharma assert that effective leaders understand punishment can be a tool of behaviour correction to a limited extent only (2010:76). Punishment tends to increase employee dissatisfaction after a limit of one has been exceeded. They further indicate that positive leader reward behaviour serves as a source of causation for subordinate performance and work satisfaction (ibid.).

According to Gray and Laidlaw, evaluation of employee satisfaction has been an important component of organisational communication audits to assess communication satisfaction as a socio-emotional outcome resulting from communication interactions (2004:426). They also believe that employees seek communication interactions with co-workers and superiors to satisfy interpersonal needs of pleasure as well as inclusion (ibid.). They point out that when employee needs are met through satisfactory communication, employees are more likely to build relationships (ibid.). Thus, employee communication satisfaction is important because it highlights a core issue for employees who play a central role in determining organisational success.

The importance of communication satisfaction is articulated the most effectively by Bottazo, who states that the satisfaction of employees gradually becomes a category, which is equal to satisfaction of customers and shareholders; similarly, satisfaction is an important element of the strategic mission of the organisation (2005:78).

### **6.2 The theoretical foundation of the study**

The theoretical foundation of the study links abstract concepts to empirical data. Theories and conceptual framework are developed to account for or desirable abstract phenomena that occur under similar conditions (Leshen and Trafford, 2007:96). In this study, the Systems Theory has been used. The Systems Theory views the organisation as the overall patterns of interrelationships and interlocking behaviour of members of the organisation.

It looks into the interrelatedness of its parts and subsystems and the interaction with its environment. The researcher's investigation is based on the Systems Theory. Neher postulates that the approach that is now called the Systems Theory began with a biologist, Ludwig van Bertalanffy, whose intent was to develop a general systems theory (1997:105). According to Neher, Beratanfly preferred the term general theory because he hoped that the general principles concerning the nature of all kinds of systems could be discovered and then applied to the analysis of any system (Neher, 1997:105).

*The Systems Theory views the organisation:*

- as the overall patterns of interrelationships and interlocking behaviour covering all members and units.
- The Systems Theory stresses two aspects of any organisation: the interrelatedness of its parts or subsystems and the interaction with its environment;
- The systems view acknowledges conflict of purposes, and function in communication and it tries to identify patterns such as operational and informal communication networks existing in organisations;
- The theory concentrates on the dynamic process of patterned activities rather than on the static object or supposed unchanging attributes of individuals.
- Organisations are defined by the patterned activities of a fairly constant set of people (Neher, 1997:111).

From the aforementioned, the researcher deduces that supervisory communication, as a constituent part of the system, has the potential to affect the functioning of the whole campus CUT, W as a system.

## **7. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **7.1 The study was conducted through a combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods.**

#### **7.1.1 Quantitative Research Method**

A self-administered questionnaire based on the CSQ of Downs and Hazen (1977) consisting of closed-ended questions was distributed to individual employees of the CUT, W. About 60 potential respondents were given the questionnaire and only 40 responses were returned. Employees rated their levels of satisfaction on a 5-point Likert Scale of the adapted version of the CSQ.

#### **7.1.3 Qualitative Research Method**

The researcher interviewed five individual employees of the CUT, W, who did have matric or any post-matric qualifications by using a semi-structured interview schedule.

## 8. SAMPLING

### 8.1 Type of Sampling

The researcher used non-probability sampling, because he wanted to distinguish between employees with post-matric qualifications and those who did not have matric or post-matric qualifications. This type of sampling was selected because respondents with post-matric qualifications are literate.

## 9. RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY

The Cronbach Alpha Coefficient was used to evaluate the internal consistency of the items measuring the constructs. The Cronbach Alpha of all the 32 items revealed a reliability value of .0974, which indicates a high level of internal consistency of the Scale (CSQ). The table below shows the reliability values of each dimension of the Scale:

### 9.1 Validity

The researcher adapted the CSQ to investigate the current research problem. The researcher also refined some of the founding conceptual and technical terms of the CSQ so that respondents interpreted meanings of questions in the same manner as anticipated by the researcher. The researcher pre-tested the study with a few selected respondents to determine whether the exercise elicited relevant and valid results.

**Table 1: Results of the Cronbach alpha Coefficient**

Construct	Cronbach Alpha Coefficient / Reliability value
Supervisory Communication	.972
Divisional Information	.9358
Communication Climate	.9792
Co-Worker Communication	.977
Personal Feedback	.9258

## 10. ANALYSIS OF DATA

### 10.1 Quantitative data analysis

Quantitative data was analysed through statistical techniques called descriptive statistics. Descriptive statistics provide statistical summaries of data. The purpose of these summaries is to provide an overall, coherent and straightforward picture of large amounts of information. In this study typical statistics such as frequency and percentage distributions were presented in tables to show the findings.

### 10.1.1 Recoding

In this study, the researcher recoded the 5-point Likert Scale to a 2-point Likert Scale. The initial codes of “never” (1), “rarely” (2), “sometimes” (3) were grouped together and recoded “rarely”, whilst the initial coding of “often” (4) and “always” (5) were recoded to “often” (2). The new code of “rarely” (never, rarely and sometimes) were interpreted as an expression of dissatisfaction by the respondents, whereas “often” (often and always) were interpreted as an expression of satisfaction.

### 10.1.2 Mode

In this study, data was analysed to determine the most frequently rated value by the respondents on the Likert Scale (mode) of each item on the CSQ. The rating of such a value was interpreted as an expression of the respondents' level of either satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the state of supervisory communication regarding a particular item on the CSQ.

### 10.1.3 Percentage threshold (50%)

For the purpose of data analysis, a 50% threshold was adopted as benchmark for communication efficiency within the Schools. If the respondent's rating of an item was above 50% on a scale of 100%, it was regarded as area of supervisory communication efficiency. Conversely, any item that was rated below 50% on a scale of 100% was regarded as problematic regarding supervisory communication efficiency.

### 10.1.4 Chi-square ( $\chi^2$ ) Test

Chi-Square tests were performed on the three identified null hypotheses of the study. The null hypotheses were:

- H01:* There is no significant relationship between supervisory communication and organisational effectiveness.
- H02:* Supervisory communication has no effect on the achievement of the values and goals of the CUT, W.
- H03:* There is no significant relationship between supervisory communication and employee satisfaction.

If the statistical levels of significance of the three identified null hypotheses were less than 5% or 0.5, then the null hypothesis would be rejected and the significant relationships between the two variables would be confirmed.

## 11. QUALITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS

The researcher analysed data that consisted of transcripts of audio interviews to identify patterns and themes, as well as categories of meaning related to theory and the focus of the research. Phrases, words and sentences were analysed and assigned appropriate themes and categories. New emerging themes and categories were formulated to address the research problem. In some cases, phrases, words and sentences were quoted verbatim.

## 12. DATA PRESENTATION AND FINDINGS

**Table 2: Frequency of supervisory communication**

Statement	1 (never)		2 (rarely)		3 (sometimes)		4 (often)		5 (always)		Mode	Total	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%		Count	%
2.1.	3	7.5	3	7.5	10	25	10	25	14	35	5	40	100
2.2	1	2.5	4	10	6	15	13	32.5	16	40	5	40	100
2.3			8	20	2	4	11	27.5	19	47.5	5	40	100
2.4	3	7.5	2	5	7	17.5	9	22.5	19	47.5	5	40	100
2.5	3	7.5	2	5	3	7.5	14	35	18	45	5	40	100
2.6	2	5	2	5	5	12.5	10	25	21	52.5	5	40	100
<b>Summary</b>	2.0	5.0	3.5	8.8	5.5	13.8	11.2	27.9	18	44.6	5	40	100

above table demonstrates overall satisfaction by subordinates on all items of supervisory communication. It is therefore justified to conclude on the positive note that supervisory communication takes place at the CUT, W and that most of the respondents are satisfied with the way in which it takes place.

**Table 3: Divisional information**

Statement	1 (never)		2 (rarely)		3 (sometimes)		4 (often)		5 (always)		Mode	Total	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%		N	%
3.1	2	5	5	12.5	9	22.5	6	15	18	45	5	40	100
3.2	4	10	6	15	8	20	9	22.5	13	32.5	5	40	100
3.3	3	7.5	3	7.5	11	27.5	11	27.5	12	30	5	40	100
3.4	2	5	4	10	8	20	14	35	12	30	4	40	100
3.5	4	10	4	10	6	15	14	35	12	30	4	40	100
3.6	2	5	1	2.5	7	17.5	14	35	16	40	5	40	100
<b>Summary</b>	3	7.1	4	9.6	8	20.4	11	28.3	14	34.6	5	40	100.0

This section of the study reveals that the majority of respondents show overall satisfaction regarding divisional information. The researcher concludes that supervisory communication with regard to divisional information at the CUT, W takes place.

**Table 4: Frequency of communication climate**

Statement	1 (never)		2 (rarely)		3 (sometimes)		4 (often)		5 (always)		Mode	Total	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%		N	%
4.1	1	2.5	1	2.5	6	15	10	25	22	55	5	40	100
4.2	2	5	3	7.5	6	15	11	27.5	18	45	5	40	200
4.3	1	2.5	4	10	7	17.5	10	25	18	45	5	40	100
4.4	1	2.5	3	7.5	7	17.5	10	25	19	47.5	5	40	100
4.5	4	10	6	15	10	25	4	10	16	40	5	40	100
4.6	4	10	3	7.5	7	17.5	10	25	16	40	5	40	100
4.7	3	7.5	2	5	8	20	11	27.5	16	40	5	40	100
4.8	2	5	1	2.5	6	15	9	22.5	22	55	5	40	100
4.9	3	7.5	2	5	8	20	9	22.5	18	45	5	40	100
4.10	3	7.5	2	5	8	20	12	30	15	37.5	5	40	100
4.11	3	7.5	3	7.5	14	35	10	25	10	25	5	40	100
4.12	3	7.5	4	10	11	27.5	12	30	10	25	5	40	100
Summary		6.3	3	7.1	8	20.4	10	24.6	17	41.7	5	40	100

The fact that the majority of respondents show overall satisfaction with almost all items of the communication climate except 2.3.5 (50%) and 2.3.11 (50%) is sufficient to justify the researcher's overall conclusion that the communication climate at the CUT, W to a large degree is positive and productive.

**Table 5: Frequency of co-worker communication**

Statement	1 (never)		2 (rarely)		3 (sometimes)		4 (often)		5 (always)		Mode	Total	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%		N	%
5.1	2	5	4	10	16	40	12	30	6	15	3	40	100
5.2	2	5	10	25	13	32.5	10	25	5	12.5	3	40	100
5.3	4	10	4	10	11	27.5	10	25	11	27.5	3	40	100
Summary	3	6.7	6	15.0	13	33.3	11	26.7	7	18.4	3	40	100

Overall, respondents are satisfied that supervisors communicate information to subordinates in their respective units. The researcher concludes that co-worker communication is not a substitute for supervisory communication. However, it is evident from the study that information-sharing amongst staff members on the same level takes place, which is indicative of organisational efficiency within the respective units.

**Table 6: Frequency of personal feedback**

Items	1 (never)		2 (rarely)		3 (sometimes)		4 (often)		5 (always)		Mode	Total	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%		Count	%
6.1	5	12.5	6	15	9	22.5	11	27.5	9	22.5	4	40	100
6.2	4	10	10	25	9	22.5	7	17.5	10	25	2 & 5	40	100
6.3	7	17.5	10	25	8	20	9	22.5	6	15	2	40	100
6.4	12	30	14	35	5	12.5	3	7.5	6	15	1 & 2	40	100
6.5	10	25	9	22.5	6	15	9	22.5	6	15	1	40	100
Summary	8	19	10	24.5	7	18.5	8	19.5	7	18.5	2 & 5	40	100

This section of the study indicates that respondents are dissatisfied with all areas of personal feedback, except in items 2.5.1 where 50% of the respondents are satisfied with the feedback of supervisors regarding performance objectives. The researcher concludes that supervisors do not provide adequate personal feedback to subordinates on a significant range of areas such as job-related problems, job performance, performance comparisons and continuous support.

## HYPOTHESES TESTING

What is the state of supervisory communication at the CUT, W campus?

In order to answer this research question, the following null hypothesis H0a was tested: There is no significant relationship between supervisory communication and organisational effectiveness.

Chi-square tests were performed on items of supervisory communication as independent variables and items of divisional information as dependent variables. These tests revealed significance levels of 0.05 or 5%. In this context, the perceived efficiency of communication of divisional information to subordinates implies organisational effectiveness.

**Table 7: Chi-square test to investigate the relationship between divisional information and supervisory communication (H1a)**

	Test-statistic	Value	df	p-value
Divisional Information and Supervisory Communication	Pearson Chi-square	17.72894	1	0.0000255

The p-value of the Chi-square test for the relationship between divisional information and supervisory communication is 0.0000255, which is less than the level of significance of 0.05. It can therefore be concluded that there is a significant relationship between Supervisory communication and organisational effectiveness. In other words the efficiency of divisional information, which in this study is interpreted as organisational effectiveness, depends on supervisory communication.

**Conclusion:** Based on the above evidence, the null hypothesis H0a (there is no significant relationship between supervisory communication and organisational effectiveness) is confirmed.

How does Supervisory Communication affect the achievement of values and goals of the CUT, W?

In order to answer the above research question, the null hypothesis (H2b): The manner in which supervisors conduct their internal communication activities does not seek to achieve the values and goals of the CUT, W was tested. Chi-Square tests were performed on items of supervisory communication as independent variables and items of personal feedback as dependent variables, owing to an anticipated relationship between these variables. Similarly, these tests were performed at a 5% or 0.05 level of significance.

**Table 8: Chi-square test results to investigate the relationship between personal feedback and supervisory communication (H1b)**

	Test-statistic	Value	df	p-value
Personal feedback and supervisory communication	Pearson Chi-square	8	1	0.004678

The p-values of the Chi-Square test statistics to determine the relationship between personal feedback and supervisory communication is 0.004678, which is less than the alpha level of significance of 0.05. It can therefore be concluded that supervisory communication has an effect on achievement of the values and goals of the CUT, W as an organisation. In other words, the efficiency of subordinates who receive personal feedback depends on supervisory communication.

**Conclusion:** Based on the above evidence, the null hypotheses (H0b) is rejected and the alternative H1B (Supervisory communication has an effect on the achievement of the values and goals of the CUT, W) is confirmed.

How does supervisory communication affect employee Satisfaction ?

In order to answer the above research question, the null hypothesis (H0c There is no relationship between supervisory communication and employee satisfaction) had to be tested.

Chi-square tests on items of supervisory communication as the independent variables and items of communication climate as dependent variables, were performed at 5% or 0.05 level of significance, as illustrated in the table below.

**Table 9: Chi-square test to investigate the relationship between Communication Climate and Supervisory Communication (H1c)**

	<b>Test-statistic</b>	<b>Value</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>p-value</b>
Communication Climate and Supervisory Communication	Pearson Chi-square	13.7132	1	0.000213

The p-values of the Chi-Square test statistics for the relationship between communication climate and supervisory communication is 0.000213, which is less than the alpha level of significance of 0.05. These results suggest that there is a significant relationship between supervisory communication and employee satisfaction. In other words, employee satisfaction is dependent on the efficiency with which supervisors conduct their internal communication.

**Conclusion:** Based on the above evidence, the null hypothesis (H0c) is rejected and the alternate H1c “There is a relationship between supervisory communication and employee satisfaction” is confirmed.

The qualitative findings of the study revealed communication deficiencies in four categorical themes, namely, lack of:

- Communication and commitment to institutional values by supervisors.
- Consultation and openness to ideas.
- Performance standards and career-pathing
- Co-Worker communication.
- Downward flow of communication.

### **13. CONCLUSION**

The researcher recommends that the Schools of Government Management and Human Resources as well as Accounting put more effort into improving the Schools' communication climate and giving personal feedback to their subordinates. The CUT, W should develop a Performance Management Plan to appraise their staff. The researcher further recommends that meetings should be held regularly to provide the necessary platform for the employees to raise concerns related to their specific jobs. The researcher also recommends that supervisors should consult with employees in their specific units before making any important decisions.

Based on the Systems Theory, the researcher believes that poor performance on Personal Feedback and Communication Climate in the Schools of Accounting, Government Management and HR, Maintenance and Service Work, have all had an impact on the poor performance (19%) by the CUT, W, particularly regarding personal feedback.

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