

Review

The use of grapevine information for decision making and management in university libraries: A Kenyan perspective

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The need for sound decision making is a matter of necessity in any organization. Economic liberalization in Kenya is exposing organizations and institutions to fierce competition and hence calls for managers to improve their decision making. This study investigates the effectiveness of grapevine information in management of University Libraries. Grapevine being an informal communication network is like the cancer disease, there is no established cause and cure to it. At times, it is referred to as rumors. Like many other organizations worldwide, Grapevines are found in Institutions including universities. Grapevine does not always follow the same patterns as, nor do they necessarily coincide with formal channels of communication. The study therefore tries to establish the existence of Grapevine in University libraries, its cause, weakness and effectiveness in management and decision making. Finally the paper highlights the challenges and advantages faced in using Grapevine information in decision making and management.

Keywords: Grapevine, librarian, Management, library.

INTRODUCTION

Libraries play a central role in our day to day life. Their primary responsibility is to assist users in the process of transforming information to knowledge. The librarian on the other hand coordinates the evaluation and selection of information resources required by library users, organizes and maintains the collection of these resources, equally important is the role of managing the library to ensure smooth running of activities and operations. The importance of a Library in academic cannot be over emphasized, it's a necessity it's a key organ in all academic institutions. To crown the central role played by the University Library, we should recognize the world-wide acknowledgement of a University Library which states that "a university can effectively carry out its academic programmes without lecturers BUT it can hardly stagger without a well stocked and staffed library." Thus, the University Librarian must be considered chiefly and basically as a teaching agency and the Librarian as a teacher (lecturer) consequently, the Librarian is an academic staff of the University. Following this argument and analysis, university

professional Library Staff should no longer be described as equivalent to academic staff in the university, rather as academicians in their own right.

In a University, libraries are considered as University Faculty or School, the University Librarians taking the role of the Dean with the Senior Librarians taking the role of Head of Department or Chairperson of Department. As a result, there is the need of a well established chain of communication and hierarchy of duties and responsibilities for effective management and coordination of library operations.

Importance of Information

Nwalo (2009) asserts that information is at present believed to be a fifth factor of production, which is by no means inferior to land, labour, capital and the entrepreneur. The role of information in organizations cannot be overemphasized. Effective decision making demands accurate, timely and relevant information.

Aminu (1986) asserts that information resource is one of the major issues and indices of university planning. If the relevant information required for planning is not available at the appropriate time, there is bound to be poor planning, inappropriate decision making, poor priority of needs and defective programming or scheduling of activities. Hence, the university system will not be efficient and effective in its operation. The more complex an organization's structure is, the greater the need for coordination within and between sections and departments. However, central to the needed coordination is information. Murdick and Ross (1971) emphasize that information is absolutely essential to the survival of an organization. As organizations grow, the pressure of scale, complexity and an increased rate of change make adequate information processing capacity inevitable, if effective control, consequent upon coordination of individual activities is to be achieved. Thus, the information needed for effective decision making in universities cannot be provided from people's often-deficient memories. Furthermore, it is impossible to plan activities over a long period of time effectively without effective information. Information is supposed to be created through the discipline of enquiry and research with peer moderation to ensure validity and societal influence. The knowledge to be created or established must be stored to ensure continuity of reason, and adaptive academic pursuit.

Grapevine

Grapevine has got two meanings. One is the simple literal meaning. The second one is a technical meaning, which is used in informal network communication. Grapevine is purely informal. By saying grapevine is informal, means that the process of communication does not follow any pattern or rules. No stress on grammar or structure of sentence etc. The Grapevine is an informal communication network there is no established cause and cure to it. At times, it is referred to us rumors. Nicoll (1994) asserts that grapevine is a communication method arising out of direct social interaction and as "organizations are socially constructed realities". Richard (2008) on the other hand argues that grapevine is a common source of misinformation, particularly when an organization is facing threats or uncertainties. Like many other organizations worldwide, Grapevines are also found in university libraries, except the very smallest organizations, but they do not always follow the same patterns as, nor do they necessarily coincide with, formal channels of communication.

Types of Grapevine

There are two types of Grapevine: The Gossip Chain Grapevine and the Cluster Chain Grapevine. While during the Gossip Chain, it is one person who tells many people about "have you heard/? In the Cluster Chain, many people tell a few about "have you heard or do you know that?" Research conducted worldwide confirms that between 75 percent and 95 percent of information emanating from the Grapevine is accurate.

Characteristics of grapevine

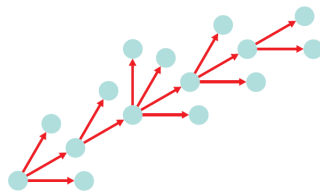
Several characteristics of grapevines can be identified easily. They are as follows.

a) Accurate

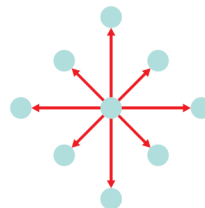
In most instances, information on a grapevine usually has high degree of accuracy. According to studies cited by CPA/Administrative Reports, the office grapevine is usually about 75 per cent to 95 per cent accurate and provides managers and staff with better information than formal communications (Hymowitz, 1988). The higher rate of accuracy is sometimes more than that found in the official communications in an organization. The terms "gossip" and "rumor", often are associated with a grapevine. However, these terms may be inappropriate in light of the high degree of accuracy achieved by the grapevine in most companies. Nevertheless, it is important to note that a grapevine is incorrect approximately 5 per cent to 25 per cent of the time and many serious consequences may result from these inaccuracies. It is also important to realize that the usual situation does not find the grapevine completely correct most of the time, and completely incorrect the remainder of the time. The usual situation is that each message carried by a grapevine is mainly correct, but it is partly incorrect or incomplete. This incorrect and incomplete information can be damaging to organization productivity.

b) Qualified Answers

A grapevine answers all unanswered questions employees may have, either correctly, incorrectly, or a combination of the two. This is one of the more outstanding characteristics of a grapevine, and the characteristic that holds the key to dealing successfully with grapevine problems. If there are unanswered



Cluster chain
(Many people tell a few)



Gossip Chain
(One person tells many)

Source: Management, 3rd.ed. R.W. Griffin

questions on the minds of employees, grapevines will quickly supply answers to those questions. These qualified answers may or may not be correct and complete. Usually, they are partly correct and complete, but they contain some incorrect and incomplete information.

c) Humanly Permanent

Grapevines exist in every organization. Many managers perceive grapevines as undesirable elements of their companies, and try to thwart them as much as possible. However, current thinking accepts the permanence of the grapevine. It is as permanent as humanity is (Davis 1990). Therefore, the astute manager learns to deal with it successfully and to take advantage of its positive elements to encourage quality productivity.

d) Usually Bad News

Inaccuracies on a grapevine are usually “bad news” rather than “good news”. This “bad news” well may be damaging to the organization. Human nature fears the unknown. For example, when you get over thirty missed calls in your mobile phone at 3 a.m. what thoughts enter your mind? Do you think that it may be a lottery win, of 10 million shilling? Most people think instead of a serious accident or illness that has struck a family member or a friend, or of another similar catastrophe. Similarly, when a grapevine is called upon to answer unanswered questions or to fill in gaps in official communication, the information provided is usually “bad news”, and this “bad news” is often damaging to a company’s productivity.

e) Fast

Information moves along a grapevine rapidly. Word “gets around” extremely fast. Seldom do employees receive an official communication that they have not heard beforehand something about the matter. What they have heard may not be complete, and may not be entirely

correct, but they have heard something about the matter before the official announcement arrives. If everything in an organization moved as fast as information moves on a grapevine, productivity in organizations would no doubt improve greatly.

Causes of grapevine in university libraries

A university library is an association of several persons. Decisions are made according to the view of the majority and laid down standards and guidelines. Various matters have to be discussed and decided upon. The management of University libraries is normally left to the discretion of the University librarian.

Grapevine exists in libraries just as in all other organizations, in fact with the expansive sections, departments and magnitude of library staff members’ grapevine is likely to be more prone in the library than in other sections/faculty in a University environment, this is because grapevine tends to be exercised more in a large organization compared to small organizations. There are many causes of grapevine existence in the library; however the main cause of Grapevine information is lack of frequent and constant official communication from top authorities. More specifically, however, Grapevine information is caused in university libraries by;

1. Lack of frequent library meetings

Meetings are ultimate forms of managed conversation; meetings are the avenue of gathering new information sorting disputes, getting clarifications etc. In any organization, meetings are vital part of the organization of work and flow of information. They act as a mechanism for gathering together resources from many sources and pooling them towards a common objective. Organizational meetings are normally held in order to facilitate smooth running of the internal activities also so that employees in the organization can have an idea as to what is going on in their department or organization. In short meeting assist organizations perform the following;

- They explain in depth theories, practices,

strategies and plans

- Mostly important meetings allow members of an organization take time and understand each other, creating avenue group cohesion and work bonded relationships.

However most librarians don't like organizing for meetings they disliked and mock them as futile, boring, time-wasting, dull and inconvenient. Lack of meetings in the libraries is likely to influence the existence of grapevine. If the librarians are not exposed to new developments in the library then they will try to figure it out. Thill John et al (2008) asserts that grapevine flourish when employees don't receive information they want or need. It is in fact serious if a few known guys have the information or are close to their bosses as they are the ones who will likely be the source of all the information.

2. Lack of communication from the offices of both the University Librarian and the Deputies

Communication is a fundamental part of any business or organization. When majority of the Library Staff know very little about what is happening in the university library, particularly when no reports or circulars are received regarding absence of the University Librarian or Heads of Departments or both.

3. Poor management tactics by the University librarian

Management as has been defined time and again is the process of planning, organizing, leading and controlling other people so that organizational objectives are achieved. A manager on the other hand is someone who is responsible for accomplishing an organizational units goals and who accomplishes those goals by planning, organizing. Leading and controlling the efforts of other people (Starke 2004).

University librarians ought to exercise good managerial practices in the library, they ought to be well vast with good leadership traits. Lack of good leadership/management practices can be a major hindrance in proper library management and also enhance grapevine in the library. It should be noted that appointment of library heads in Kenyan Universities is not only based on qualifications but also on the number of years one has served as a senior most individual in the library. The appointment is not pegged on an individual qualification in any managerial courses. As a result the library is likely to experience more poor or deficiency in proper management. Poor Management tactics can crop up in various ways e.g.

- when a University librarian does not interact with his/her staff members e.g. does not greet the staff

members, does not know all staff members by their name etc

- When the librarian is a dictator
- When the librarian exercises divide and rule tactics in his management
- When a librarian exercise favoritism amongst the staff members
- When a librarian has a sexual relationship With his/her staff members

4. lack of cooperation/Conflict among librarians

Conflict is unfortunately a constant in the world. From the largest affairs of international politics to the everyday matters of work and family life, disputes between individuals are a regular theme. Lack of unity within the library is likely to be a major factor in enhancing grapevine within the library. As individuals, we seek ways to resolve disputes to both make life easier and also to help us get our own way. If library staff are not united and do not work as a team they are likely to form camps which will be seeking ways to tarnish each other. A good example is when a University Librarian exercises favoritism amongst the staff. The staff in both in both camps will be forced to regroup against one another.

Dealing with grapevine in the libraries

A grapevine was once thought of as an enemy or adversary. In that context, dealing with it was thought of as finding ways to combat, thwart, and destroy it. Current thought, however, recognizes grapevines as permanent parts of organizations, and attempts to deal with them as such (Davis 1990). The key to dealing with any grapevine is to examine its characteristics and take advantage of them. Efficiently, effectively, and successfully dealing with a grapevine in ways that improve an organization's productivity involves at least the following.

a) An Existing, Proven Communication Network

You can utilize a grapevine as an existing, proven communication network. The fact that a grapevine exists, and will continue to exist, in all organizations already has been established. The fact that it carries information very rapidly and accurately has been established, also. Therefore, a communication network that has a proven record for speed and reliability already exists in a company and is available to communicate certain messages. Much official communication would *not* be appropriate for a grapevine, but much routine communication is appropriate, and can be handled inexpensively and rapidly by it.

b) **Inaccuracies on Your Grapevine**

You can eliminate inaccuracies on a grapevine. Most inaccuracies on a grapevine occur because of lack of official communication, gaps in official information, or unclear official communication. When official communication is missing, unclear, or incomplete, a grapevine supplies the missing information. Remember, a grapevine answers all unanswered questions. If the official communication of the company does *not* answer all questions in the minds of employees, the grapevine will supply those answers – correct or incorrect, complete or incomplete though they may be. However, if the official communication carried on official networks of the business is complete and clear, there will be few, if any, unanswered questions for which a grapevine can supply answers that may be damaging to a company's productivity.

c) **Complete, Accurate, Official Communication**

You can recognize the importance of complete, accurate, honest, official communication in a company. When there is a conflict between the official communication and the information carried on the grapevine, employees will believe the information from the source that has proved to be the most accurate in the past. If the grapevine in the company has a reputation for greater accuracy than the official communication, it will be believed whether it is correct or not. On the other hand, if the official communication has always been straightforward and honest in the past while the grapevine has often been wrong, employees will be more likely to believe the official communication of the company and to disbelieve the information carried by the grapevine.

d) **Secrecy**

You can eliminate as much secrecy in your company as possible. Sometimes, an effort is made to keep information secret when no real reason exists for doing so. Some things, of course, must be kept confidential, but most need not. A full, complete flow of accurate, honest information, that leaves as few unanswered questions as possible for a grapevine to answer incorrectly or incompletely, is the best way to deal with it. Also, the fewer answers supplied by a grapevine, the less "bad news" will be generated by it.

Utilizing the grapevine

University librarians can utilize the libraries grapevines in some of these ways which can make it act on their

advantage;

- **Routine Communication**

University Librarians can allow grapevine to handle routine communication. Messages of a personal nature, such as whose son received an award of some kind or whose daughter graduated from college can promote the feeling of the "library family" among librarians and serve valuable morale-building purposes. Such messages can be sent easily via a grapevine, requiring little or no time, effort, or expense of the company. Much routine communication can be relegated to a grapevine with reasonable assurance that it will reach everyone. Possibly the greatest disadvantage of allowing a grapevine to handle routine communication is that a message may not reach all employees, and those who were not informed may feel offended and left out.

- **Morale and Job Satisfaction**

University librarians can build morale and job satisfaction through a grapevine. Actually being a part of a grapevine can help develop strong personal relationships among employees of the business that in turn lead to higher morale, better job satisfaction, and higher levels of quality productivity. All these things are advantageous to the company. Communicating with fellow employees on a grapevine can develop feelings of being part of the "library family" that are so important in building morale and encouraging quality productivity.

- **Reliable Feedback**

Librarians can observe feedback on a grapevine. Feedback is used to "keep a finger on the pulse" of operations and the human element in a company. Much of this feedback can be observed by "tuning-in" to a grapevine. This feedback can serve as a highly reliable barometer of the general level of morale in a business, and also point out specific areas that need attention before more serious problems develop.

- **Tension Releaser**

Librarians can also allow a grapevine to help release tensions among employees. When employees keep frustrations and anger bottled up inside, those frustrations and anger tend to grow worse and may explode, causing many other problems. When, on the other hand, employees can talk to someone about those frustrations, someone who probably will be sympathetic, those frustrations usually are relieved, to some extent at least.

A grapevine provides an outlet for such feelings – a catharsis and a “letting off steam” – that can be healthy to the organizational climate, and therefore lead to higher levels of productivity.

- **Clarification and Homogeneity Qualities**

Grapevine can also be allowed to add clarification and homogeneity to official communication. A grapevine is often thought of as distorting messages; however, it sometimes serves just the opposite purpose. It can provide clarification for orders, instructions, and even policies without employees having to wait for official clarification. For better or for worse, a grapevine can cause more homogeneity of interpretation of orders, instructions, and policies by employees than would occur without it.

- **Trial Balloons**

University librarians can send “trial balloons” via a grapevine. If management of a company is contemplating the institution of a new policy, but is unsure about how its employees may react to it, word of the new policy can be placed on a grapevine and employee reactions observed. If there is little or no negative reaction to the contemplated policy, then an official announcement of its enactment can be made. On the other hand, if there is much resistance to the new policy, management can announce that such a policy is not going to be enacted. After all, management had never officially announced the policy in the first place. The use of such “trial balloons” is commonplace in government circles, and their use is found in other areas as well. The greatest problem with this use of the grapevine is that it may well be considered unethical. Care must be exercised in using a grapevine to release “trial balloons” to be sure that boundaries of ethics are not exceeded

CONCLUSION

Although grapevine may never be completely eradicated, management should take steps to reduce its influence by considering carefully ways in which information is communicated particularly in times of uncertainty within the organization. The confidence of an organization employee is virtually important and adequate and accurate information should always be available to the people concerned at the earliest possible opportunity through the correct channels.

Despite the causes the University Librarian cannot eliminate Grapevine information from spreading within the library. The only remedy to this is for the University Librarian to maintain open channels of communication and responding vigorously to inaccurate information. On the other hand, Grapevine information is an asset. For example, if the University Librarian can discover the key Grapevine carriers. She/he can under-cut or partially control the information they receive and instead use the Grapevine to sound out reactions of the Library Staff to new ideas such as the new vacancies available in the library or scholarships available to Staff for further training. The University Librarian can also get valuable information from the Grapevine which she/he can use to improve her/his decision making.

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