

**MEASURING EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION:
COMMUNICATIONS AUDIT AT THE PRINCE GEORGE FAMILY YMCA**

by

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PROJECT SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION

UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN BRITISH COLUMBIA

April 2011

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ABSTRACT

The Family YMCA of Prince George (PGYMCA) had gone through several changes in recent years. A new CEO had been installed; the current strategic plan was ending and a new one was being written; a number of new staff had been added; the organizational chart had been redesigned; and the physical facilities had been revamped. As a result of all this change, there were some retention issues within key departments. A communications audit was conducted to see if employees were receiving the information they needed to do their jobs and were satisfied with that communication to the point that they were able to conduct the business of the organization effectively. The results showed that the PGYMCA survey participants were satisfied with the communication, but that there were still areas for improvement. Recommendations were made on improving the quality of the communications and, as a result, the level of employee satisfaction with the internal communications.

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INTRODUCTION

A MBA alumni and board member of the Prince George Family YMCA (PGYMCA) approached the MBA program with a proposal. The PGYMCA wanted to conduct a communications audit to see if the employees were receiving the information that they needed to do their jobs and to grow the PGYMCA's programs and services while still meeting the growing community's needs. As a result of receiving the right information delivered through the right medium, the management at The Y believed that the employees would be satisfied with that communication to the point that the staff was able to conduct the business of the organization effectively.

The PGYMCA had experienced substantial growth and expansion in recent years. A new CEO had been installed and the current strategic plan was coming to an end. Several changes were made in preparation for the new three-year plan, including adding a number of new management employees, redesigning the organizational chart and revamping the physical facilities. As a result of all this change, the Prince George YMCA was also experiencing some retention issues within key departments. It was an opportune time to conduct a communications audit to take a snapshot of how effective the communications within The Y were with all the cultural changes taking place. The audit would also provide options for addressing any resulting concerns.

The premise is that each employee needs certain information in order to carry out the strategic goals and initiatives put forward by upper management. The required information may include regulations governing their work, the strategic plan for the PGYMCA, details of the latest initiatives and information about changes happening within other departments. This data needs to be delivered via a vehicle that is usable to the employees. If the intelligence is delivered via a suitable vehicle, then the management of The PGYMCA believed that they would be able to create a positive environment in which there would be two-way communication and respect. In turn, this environment would enable the organization to improve its current situation and, ultimately, its organizational goals and objectives.

Prior to creating the communications audit, what communication is and what makes it effective needs to be researched and understood. What the tools of communication are and which ones to use in a given situation also need to be identified so that when the goals of the audit are developed, they are clear and focused. In the Information Age of the 21st century, communication is king. Effective communication throughout all levels of an organization results in employees who want to be at work and who are passionate about that work. Informed organizations and their communication personnel have realized that effective communication relates directly to the employees' ability, motivation, and commitment on the job (Nakra, 2006; Gallup, 2010). Various studies have highlighted the importance that communication has for the success of an organization and have shown that the quality of communication in organizations is associated with employees' job

satisfaction and motivation. The Watson Wyatt Survey, conducted between 2003-2004, studied the relationship between an organization's communication strategy and practices and its shareholders' returns. Enterprises with the highest levels of effective communication had a 26% total return to shareholder from 1998 to 2002 compared to a -15% return for firms that communicated less effectively. "Simply stated, effective communication is good business" (Nakra, 2006).

When an employee is satisfied with the effective communication they receive, they are more likely to be actively involved in the organization. Thayer (1968) defined communication satisfaction as "the personal satisfaction inherent in successfully communicating to someone or in successfully being communicated with", while Crino and White (1981) viewed it as "an individual's satisfaction with various aspects of the communication occurring in his organization." "It can thus be described as "summing up" a person's satisfaction with information flow and relationship variables within an organization and provides an operational means of determining managers' and employees' comprehensive perceptions of communication in their organizational context" (Nakra, 2006). Employees that are satisfied that they are receiving the information and feedback that they need to do their jobs will have a closer identification with their membership in the organization. This closer identity with the organization will prompt the individual to think, act and have feelings that are in line with the group's values and goals (Nakra, 2006). The purpose of this paper is to conduct a communication audit and then analyze the results to see if the employees of the PGYMCA are receiving the necessary

information to do their jobs effectively and are happy with the communication within The Y.

THE IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNICATION IN ORGANIZATIONS

Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary (2008) defines communicate as a way to convey knowledge or information. For business purposes, communication is the process of transferring information between a sender and a receiver and the perception of the meaning of that information between the individuals involved. The basic components in this universal model include an information source, a message, a receiver and an interpretation of the message (Bowditch, 2008). The process starts with a sender who has information that they want to transmit. The message itself may be encoded in the form of symbols such as verbal words, writing or drawings and/or in the form of behaviours such as body language, gestures or eye contact. It is sent to the receiver who then decodes the message to obtain its meaning. The key is in sending the message as undistorted as possible. If noise is encountered during the transmission process, such as the perceptions that a receiver has about a symbol or behaviour, the message can become distorted. The communication will then not be received in such a way that is consistent with the intentions of the sender. If the message is not heard, then no communication has taken place. Figure 1 depicts this process.

The act of putting their thoughts or experiences into words, whether written or spoken, is what most people have in mind when they talk about communication. The act of using written or spoken words etches meaning into their neural circuits, resulting in just “knowing” the meaning of certain words and phrases. The meaning is not questioned as it is internalized through experience. However, because each person’s experience is different, it is useful to clarify what the experience or event is that is associated with the definition of the word (Bassett, 1974).

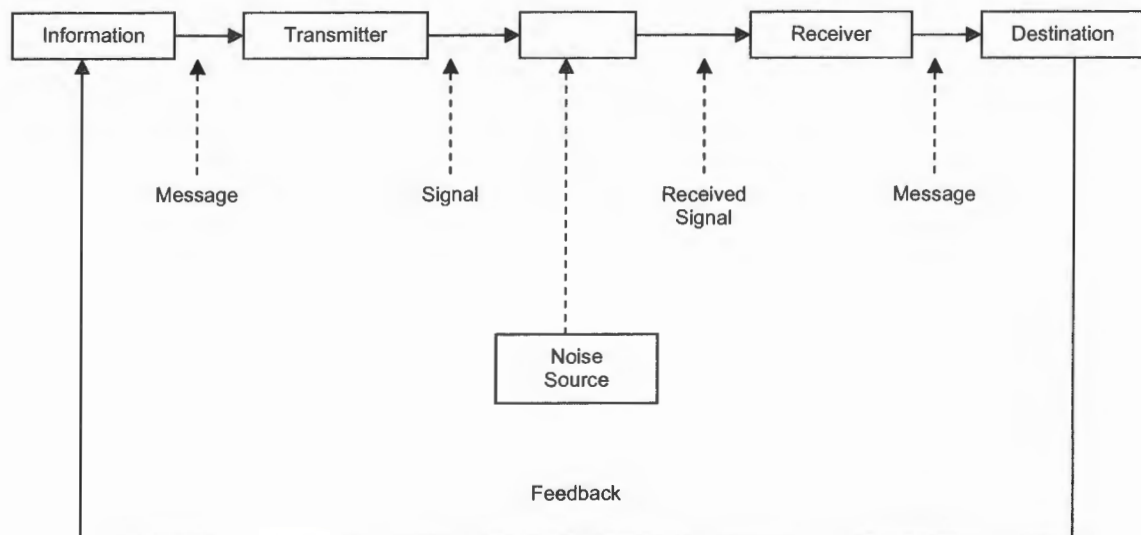


Figure 1: Adapted from The Shannon-Weaver Communication Model

“There are five basic functions of interpersonal communication:

1. Control: Clarifying duties, setting standards, and establishing authority and responsibility
2. Informational: Providing the basis for making decisions and carrying out orders and instructions

3. Motivational: Influencing others and eliciting cooperation and commitment to various goals and objectives
4. Emotional: Expressing feelings and emotions
5. Developmental: Sharing and learning that can provide a basis for revising beliefs, attitudes and behaviours.

Thus, interpersonal communication has a number of different purposes and information is often exchanged for a variety of reasons, not all of which are focused on a specific task” (Bowditch, 2008).

When a message is successfully received, it can also be considered effective communication as it would have been understood in the way it was intended by the sender. The receiver will be able to carry out the instructions that they were given or understand the organizational goals that were set forward. In turn, the receiver can now become the sender when initiating further discussion about the message, such as making suggestions of how they, in particular, can implement the organizational goals. Through the use of effective communication, frontline managers are able to establish a positive rapport with their staff and are able to cultivate an environment of mutual respect and high productivity. This environment, in turn, enables the enterprise to achieve its organizational goals and objectives (Wilbert et al, 2010).

Two-way communication can aid employees in identifying strongly with their organization and showing a supportive attitude towards it (Ashforth and Mael, 1989). Collaborative communication can facilitate the identification process for staff as it

involves disclosing and discussing the goals, values and achievements of the organization. This collaboration then provides an opportunity to create and share their subjective perceptions of the enterprise's norms, standards and culture (Cheney, 1983a; Huff et al, 1989). Providing workers with the opportunity to be involved in the creation of the meaning of these items strengthens their identification with the association as they end up with a feeling of ownership in the shared meaning because they helped develop it. Enhanced organizational commitment leads to frequent communication within an organization as the individual employees feel that they are active participants in that organization (Huff et al, 1989). Identifying strongly with the business may induce staff to behave according to the company's identity, reputation and strategy (Ashforth and Mael, 1996). This is particularly important in service organizations as employees in these types of enterprises are key in delivering quality and achieving customer satisfaction (Zeithaml and Bitner, 1996).

Both the openness of top management and involvement in organization decision-making increases trust in management. Trust and support is built between the organization and key stakeholders through the quality of the communication. To encourage this trust and support, managers should pay close attention to internal communications by presenting each staff member with sufficient information, the opportunity to speak out, be listened to, get involved and actively participate (Nakra, 2006). Other reports suggest that it is important for managers to also send messages that let the employees know how important their contributions are to the

success of the organization; that they are supported in their job and their career; that clearly communicates the vision for the organization as delivered by senior management; and the individual job/employee fit (Alfes et al, 2010).

One of the initiatives suggested for building an engaging environment is to focus on strategies which allow the employee to feel that the organization values them and their contributions. In order for the employee to feel valued, it is critical that the employee clearly knows what is expected of them and what their role is within the organization. The key to this alignment of employee and employer expectations is two-fold. The first is clear communication of the corporation's goals, vision, and mission and what each employee's role is within the organization. Clearly defined roles and purposes help create meaning for employees. The second critical aspect is comprehensive feedback from management about employee performance, both positive and in areas where improvement is needed (Hayward, 2010). All this is achieved through using the tools of communication effectively.

The importance of employees being satisfied with organizational communication that can result in effectively and collaboratively carrying out their tasks is underlined by statistics gathered by various researchers. In their pamphlet entitled, "Employee Engagement – What's your engagement ratio?", Gallup points out the following statistics as benefits to an engaged workforce:

- 27% reduction in employee absenteeism,
- 31% to 51% reduction in staff turnover,

- 51% reduction in theft by staff, and
- 62% reduction in accidents.

Gallup also suggests that the above measurable improvements lead to increased overall organizational performance, including 18% in productivity improvements and an average 12% increase in business profitability (Gallup Consulting, 2008).

Other research comes from researchers in the Faculty of Business and Law at Kingston University, London who conducted a two-year long project into employee engagement. They looked at a diverse range of sectors, including the national Health Service, local governments, environment services and consultants. As part of their research report entitled Creating an Engaged Workforce, the authors present a number of outcomes from engagement. The report, based on 5,291 questionnaires and 180 interviews, identifies a number of positive attributes of engagement, which include:

- Engaged employees performed better than non-engaged employees.
- Engaged employees are less likely to want to leave the organization.
- Engaged employees are more innovative.
- Higher levels of well being among engaged employees.
- A perception that the workload is sustainable. (Alfes, Truss, Soane, Rees & Gatenby, 2010)

All this data seems to suggest that knowing what communication is and how to make it effective can have the outcome of staff members that are satisfied with the communication and able to conduct their work effectively. It also suggests that staff

turnover and other issues being experienced by the PGYMCA can be addressed by improving the organizational communication. The next step, then, is to look at the tools of communication, what they are and when to utilize each one.

TOOLS OF COMMUNICATION

A manager will spend a large part of their day utilizing the various tools of communication, such as making phone calls, sending e-mails or having in person meetings. Often, a supervisor will take it for granted that the messages they are communicating through these tools have the same meaning for the recipient(s). This understanding can be complicated further in today's diverse workplace in which a number of communication tools can be employed:

- Verbal Communication
- Nonverbal Communication
- Symbolic Communication
- Electronic Communication
- Organizational Symbols and Rituals
- In-house Publications

Each instrument noted above has its own level of data-carrying capacity, or media richness, which a savvy manager should be aware of in order to have their communication be effective as possible. One other communication tool that needs to be considered is active listening. In every exchange, there is a sender (often the "talker") and a recipient (often the "listener"). The sender can be adept at exploiting the media richness of the various communication tools. However, if the recipient is

not focused on listening for the meaning of the sender's message and involved in understanding, interpreting and evaluating that message, then the communiqué may not be successfully sent and received.

Verbal Communication

The verbal communication channel is the one most often used and most familiar. This mode can take the form of giving instructions to a co-worker, interviewing a job candidate or negotiating with a supplier as well as in the written form such as letters, memos, written reports and policies and PowerPoint presentations (Wilbert et al, 2010). Communicating with the use of words is not as straightforward as one would expect as words can mean different things to different people. An analysis of The Oxford Dictionary indicates that each of the 500 most commonly used words in the English language has an average of 28 different meanings (Bowditch, 2008). Further complicating this mode is the use of jargon, which can be the technical language of a particular occupational group, such as the medical or legal professions, or words with specialized meanings that make it easier for insiders to understand each other (McShane, 1998). However, if a person involved in a communiqué is not familiar with the jargon, it can create confusion for them and may result in the message not being understood. Verbal communication is better for transmitting emotions and persuading the receiver whereas written communication is better for presenting and recording technical details (McShane, 1998).

Non-Verbal Communication

The nonverbal communication tools refer to the spatial cues, body language, gestures, facial expressions and tone of voice that often accompany face-to-face and verbal interactions. The spatial distance that is between two people can signal familiarity if they are standing close or mere associates if they are standing with some distance in between them. However, two people who are familiar with each other, but who are standing with some space between them could signify that there is some tension between the two. Facial expressions and paralinguistics, or the tone of voice used, can also add meaning to a communication. Sarcasm, pacing of words, frowns, smiles and even fillers, such as “uhhh” or “ummm”, can add more information about the intent of the message being sent (McShane, 1998; Bassett, 1974; Porter, 1969).

Body language is another area where different meanings can be applied to the same gesture. The motions of the body and eye contact are all significant forms of this communication tool, but care needs to be taken in using and interpreting body language (Bassett, 1974; Porter, 1969). A person with their arms crossed may transmit as someone who is not open to the conversation currently taking place. However, for someone else, it could mean that they are concentrating and are actively engaged in the discussion as that is their personal conversational style. The connotation of these various physical cues can also mean different things in different cultures. Sitting with your feet extended, soles exposed, ankles crossed in North America can signify that the person is relaxed. This same posture, with the soles of

the shoes exposed, would be taken as an offence in parts of the Middle East (Axtell, 1991).

Non-verbal communication is said to be as much as 67% of total communication (McShane, 1998). When only using verbal communication, such as in a phone call, much of the meaning of someone's message can be lost. By the same token, a manager who wants to have effective communication with his staff needs to be aware that he or she could be transmitting a different message through their actions from the meaning of their words. For example, employees will choose their words based on whether the boss is leaning forward in their chair or leaning back, away from them. Whether the manager is aware of it or not, he or she could be training their staff what to say or not to say by constantly transmitting a different body language message from the verbal one that they are delivering (Bassett, 1974).

Symbolic Communication

The symbolic communication channel refers to the symbols that are used to communicate meaning. The clothes that are worn, the cars that are driven and the type of office decorations used all transmit a lot of unspoken information to other people. Even the use of physical space and the arrangement of office furniture can say a lot (Porter, 1969). For example, a manager who has meetings where chairs are close together transmits that they want to deal with the other person on a more equal footing. A manager who takes meetings with the other participant in a chair across the desk from them is indicating that they are the superior in that

conversation. Whose office is used also transmits certain messages as well. If a supervisor is to have a difficult conversation with a report or wants to give instructions, they may hold the meeting in their office as this would emphasize authority. On the other hand, if a supervisor wants to have a conversation with a report that is to be more equally interactive, they may want to go to that person's workspace as this would emphasize a more equal conversation.

Electronic Communication

The electronic communication channel is a mode that is in ever increasing use in the Information Age. E-mails, instant messaging (IM), text/SMS messaging, listservs, electronic bulletin boards, net phones, voice mail and desktop conferencing are all computer-mediated communications that can be sent via the Internet, intranets and extranets to co-workers, superiors and company suppliers (Ngwenyama and Lee, 1997; McShane, 1998). Unlike other written communication, e-mail and IM can combine the convenience and recordability of the written word with the immediacy of the spoken word (Bowditch, 2008).

Although e-mail and IM are often treated as if they were similar to a phone call in which people are able to respond quickly, they still lack a lot of the nonverbal cues available over the phone or in face-to-face meetings. This lack of nonverbal cues has been known to cause misunderstandings and overreactions which can make a situation worse and more difficult to explain, especially after the "SEND" button is pressed (Ngwenyama and Lee, 1997; McShane, 1998). One way of

dealing with this issue is the use of emoticons, a playful combination of punctuation marks that, when viewed sideways, resemble facial expressions. Four of the more common emoticons are shown below (Bowditch, 2008):

Smile	Wink	Frown	Amazement
☺	;-)	☹	:-0

The ubiquitousness and equalization of e-mail has also created a business culture that can include more people in an exchange with the expectation of instant replies. This, in turn, makes it a challenge for employees in managing all of the information being delivered to them while juggling their responsibilities and can result in information overload (Schade, 2004; McShane, 1998).

Organizational Symbols and Rituals

Another form of nonverbal communication in organizations is the organizational symbols and rituals that are established and recognized by all members. These forms of communication include rituals, customs, ceremonies, stories, metaphors, folklore, heroes, logos, and other symbolic modes of expression (Bowditch, 2008; Porter, 1969). These items can help to reinforce the positive messages that management wants to send about the organization and can help to build a feeling of engagement among the staff. Management still has to be careful that the implicit meaning of these symbols and rituals matches the explicit meaning in the announcements, memos and policies that are distributed within the organization. A disconnect between these two may end up sending negative

messages that transmit to the staff a totally different meaning and that what management says cannot be trusted (Porter, 1969).

In-House Publications

Internally developed company newsletters, magazines, shop papers or other publications are another communication tool that is useful in establishing relationships between the organization and its employees. They are also referred to as house organs. They have traditionally been in the form of a printed hardcopy that is distributed among the staff. In the Information Age, many are now being sent out in e-mail formats and are becoming part of websites and intranets. House organs are a channel of communication between management and staff that tell about the news, events and activities of the organization, including the accomplishments of the staff. They can also be used during times of change or transition to ensure that truthful information about the circumstances is broadcast and rumours and concerns are directly addressed and answered. In-house publications that are effective promote the company's values and create the image of the enterprise as a good place to work. The underlying message of house organs is that the contributions of the staff are valued and that the company cares about their well-being. This message enhances the image of the organization in the eyes of its members, which furthers a sense of membership and belonging to the organization (Bowditch, 2008).

Active Listening

Active listening addresses the other half of the communication model and can be harder than it appears. Listeners process information three times faster than the average rate of speech. Therefore, active listening involves focussing on what the speaker is saying and not allowing other thoughts, such as thinking about other things or what they are going to say next, or distractions, such as daydreaming or an e-mail popping up on the screen, get in the way of the message. They need to be watching for the nonverbal cues and body language that will enable them to understand the message fully and regularly organizing the information into key points. Avoiding interrupting the speaker and providing feedback through eye contact and back-channel signals such as “Oh, really!” or “I see” lets the speaker know that the listener is engaged. The listener needs to appropriately respond to the content, feelings and emotion of the message (McShane, 1998; Women in Business, 1994).

Listeners also need to be aware that they could be triggered into defensive listening by words the speaker is using that were not intended to be perceived as an attack on them. If such an instance was to arise, requesting clarification through phrases such as “So you’re saying that...?” can help dissipate the defensive listening mode. For managers, it is important to create situations that help people state what they really mean without putting them on the defensive. Managers can increase the accuracy of their communication by accepting the other person’s

feelings as legitimate and make an effort to understand the message in the context of those feelings (Bowditch, 2008; Women in Business, 1994).

Media Richness

Another component of effective communication is selecting the right medium or combination as the delivery vehicle in a given situation. Communication tools can be organized into a hierarchy based on their media richness. This refers to their data-carrying capacity; that is, the volume and variety of information that can be transmitted (McShane, 1998). A rich media is one in which both nonverbal and verbal signals can be transmitted, feedback can be provided immediately and the information exchange is customizable to the situation. Rich media would be utilized by managers in situations that are ambiguous, when communications are difficult and when implementing organizational strategy. This level of media richness is essential to utilize when complex activities need to be carried out in an integrated fashion by multiple, independent parties, such as in partnerships and alliances or in completing projects (Bowditch, 2008). A lean media is one in which only one form of data can be transmitted (usually written), feedback is not immediate and the information exchange is the same for everyone. This level of media richness would be used for more routine and simple communications such as memos and financial reports. Figure 2 shows various mediums placed on the continuum of media richness.

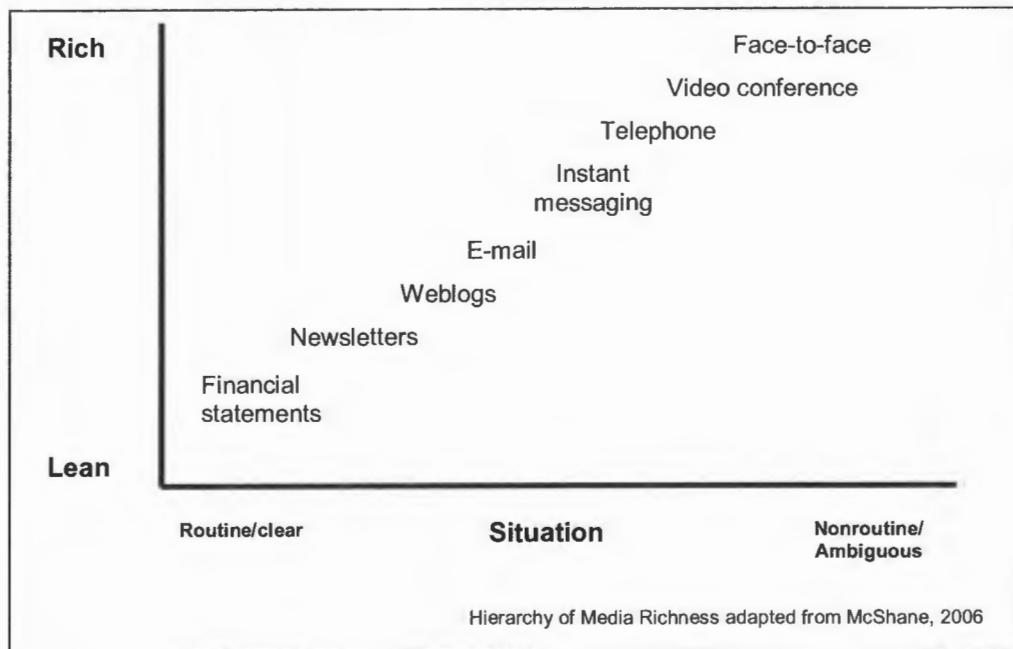


Figure 2: Hierarchy of Media Richness (McShane, 2006)

Effective managers tend to be more “media sensitive” than low-performance managers in terms of their ability to match appropriate media richness with the ambiguity involved in the communication (Bowditch, 2008). They are also aware of the symbolism that can be transmitted with each level of media richness. Sending a memo can imply a more formal tone whereas person-to-person contact has a more informal tone. A face-to-face meeting may also imply a more serious nature to the communication whereas an e-mail may imply that the content is of a less important nature. Effective managers are also attentive to the fact that the medium used may have different meanings for different people. One person may see an e-mail as professional whereas another may see it as simply being efficient. As a retail sales rep once explained in a communications audit interview, “Things change rapidly in our world and communication is the only way to better your business. You have to

react quickly or you can lose your shirt. All I'm asking for is the information I need to do my best" (Schade, 2004).

One other issue that managers need to be aware of is the meaning that employees might give to the content of the message being delivered. It is human nature to automatically draw away when anything repellent is said or done. If an organizational issue is seen as a threat, then employees will actively distance themselves in attitudes and actions from that issue. Conversely, if an organizational matter is perceived as an opportunity, then staff will become more actively engaged in attitudes and actions. Therefore, managers who want to increase the probability of enhanced organizational performance need to utilize the communications tools and their media richness in such a way as to frame enterprise matters as opportunities rather than threats (Bowditch, 2008; Bassett, 1974).

COMMUNICATIONS AUDIT DEFINED

Once the connection is made between effective communications in an organization and organizational effectiveness and success, the next step is to measure the quality of the internal communications. A communications audit does this. It is a method of research that helps to determine if the communication is effective and if the communication tools being used are successful in delivering the message. This will be evident by how the audience perceives the message and if they are moved to the correct action expected by the sender of the message. The audit will also help to define the relationship between an organization's objectives

and the communication methods used to promote those objectives as well as establish a benchmark (Fogelman-Beyer, 1999).

Research on communications audits indicates that the communications audit has become an increasingly important and recognized business development tool. It is a snapshot of an organization's strategies, activities and programs. Audits can be small and targeted (like the audit of an enterprise's website) or they can be comprehensive, covering the breadth of communication activities and audiences of an organization. They can be focused on internal or external audiences or both. Communications audits do not have a set of specific questions to ask, but, rather, a set of questions to consider and answer before moving forward to developing the actual questions. Often, the literature on communications audits also covers how to determine which method is best for gathering the data during the audit. Depending on the information sought, the questions might be delivered via a survey, through interviews, during focus groups or various combinations of the three. The sample may also be the organization's employees, management and/or customers. The articles on communications audits also cover how to then take the information gathered and develop recommendations from it. However, it is important to stay focused on the specific question(s) being researched. A communications audit's flexibility can also be its downfall if focus on the audit's goals is not maintained. (Smith, 2010; Gayeski, 2000; Keiser and Stein, 2006; Fogelman-Beyer, 1999; Vahouny, 2009)

WHY CONSIDER A COMMUNICATIONS AUDIT

The benefits of a communications audit are:

- It helps build support for your communication, HR or organizational change initiative.
- It demonstrates your commitment to improving communication throughout the organization.
- It demonstrates your willingness to listen and to respond to employees and other stakeholders' views – a key step in building positive relationship, creating credibility and fostering mutual trust.
- An audit will find out what major segments of employees/stakeholders think about the organization's communication and initiatives.
- An audit will deliver practical recommendations for improving communication in the organization.
- An audit can save money and effort as you will be able to minimize or eliminate the programs that do not yield benefits and strengths or add those that do (communicationideas.com, 2010).

The price of overcommunication and undercommunication is high, both in terms of employee productivity and efficiency as well as material costs to create communication vehicles such as corporate magazines, newsletters and websites (Schade, 2004).

WHAT SHOULD A COMMUNICATIONS AUDIT COVER

As a communications audit looks at the communication processes and policies and whether they are effective or not, all aspects of the communication process needs to be analyzed. Areas for consideration to become part of the audit are noted below. Depending on the focus of the audit, such as internal or external communications, some areas may apply and others can be left out of the audit:

- Goals, objectives and strategies of the current communication plan
- Strengths and weaknesses of current communication strategies
- Clarity, credibility, consistency and effectiveness of messages
- Stakeholder/constituent opinions, perceptions and understanding
- Communications' support of overarching strategic plan
- Coordination of graphic identity
- Improvement of future communications
- Missed and/or untapped opportunities (ehow.com, 2010)

METHODOLOGY: HOW A COMMUNICATIONS AUDIT IS CONDUCTED

There are four basic steps in conducting a communications audit. They are discussed in detail below.

1. Determine Key Concerns

A communications audit can seem like a huge, long term task. In large organizations, this can be the case considering the large number of policies, publications, vehicles and audiences that would need to be investigated and analyzed. Often, in an effort to complete this audit in a timely manner, an outside

consultant is hired. Smaller organizations may not necessarily have the time and resources for this. However, if they focus on one area at a time, say the internal communications within an enterprise, they can conduct their own audit in an effective and economical manner. By considering the areas noted in the “What Should a Communications Audit Cover” section, they will be able to come up with results that can be implemented to make their operations more efficient (ehow.com, 2010; communicationideas.com, 2010; Smith, 2010; fullcirc. com, 2010; Gayeski, 2000; Fogelman-Beyer, 1999; Schade, 2008).

The recent changes and issues that the PGYMCA had experienced, listed below, were used to determine the four key concerns and their related key components:

- Renovations of the physical facilities as part of a new marketing strategy to target families and youth.
- Resulting backlash from these renovations.
- New “We’re all Y champions!” campaign.
- New thrust to raise awareness that the PGYMCA is also a philanthropic organization.
- Installation of a new CEO.
- Ending of a vague three-year strategic plan and the imminent implementation of the new three-year plan.
- Addition of a number of new management employees.
- Redesign of the organizational chart.

- Retention issues within key departments due to all the change.

As these changes and issues touched on several areas of effective communication, the key areas that arose were:

- Methods of communication, which would address the communication tools utilized and how effective their were in delivering their messages,
- What should be communicated, that certain items were communicated internally to all audiences, such as the strategic plan, job descriptions, events and initiatives,
- The nature of communication, whether it was respectful and two-way, and
- Communication between supervisors and subordinates as this is a service based organization that depends heavily on the staff being effective at their jobs.

2. Determine Key Components to be Assessed

After determining the goals and questions that need to be answered through the audit, the next step is to decide what key components need to be analyzed that relate to these goals and questions. The components may be:

- Internal or external communications such as flyers, memos, e-mails, product circulars, advertisements and meeting minutes and agendas
- Graphic identity designs such as letterhead, business cards and logos
- Website, electronic communications and Internet outreach
- Commercial and/or social marketing materials
- Media and/or public relations coverage

- Strategic plans, departmental goals, organizational charts and job descriptions
- Any other communication tool that is being used to communicate a message out to an audience of the organization, whether internal or external.

By including key components and communication channels in the audit, the message, the delivery vehicle and its success or failure in being comprehended can all be assessed (ehow.com, 2010; communicationideas.com, 2010; Smith, 2010; fullcirc. com, 2010; Gayeski, 2000; Fogelman-Beyer, 1999; Schade, 2008).

3. Interviews, Focus Groups and Surveys

Any one of these three research methodologies or a combination thereof should be used to gather both quantitative statistical data and qualitative responses. Depending on the goals and questions of the communications audit, the targets of these methodologies could be staff, management, stakeholders, board members, suppliers, customers, competitors, affiliates, key community partners or any other recipient of messages and communiqués from the organization. One-on-one interviews, such as with upper management, and focus groups, such as with staff members, can provide anecdotal evidence of how well the communication plan has served the overarching strategic plan and goals. Interviews and focus groups would allow further in depth research to happen should a particular point come up again and again. They would also allow more detailed questioning about the reception, perception, understanding, assimilation and application of the messages that are

being sent through the various communication tools being utilized. The surveys, with a limited number of questions, would provide the statistical data that may or may not support the anecdotal opinions received. It should also include some demographic questions as this may unearth another possibly untapped market for the enterprise. One other analysis tool that could be incorporated into the three methodologies is the performance of a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) analysis. This could be done through the interviews, focus groups or even as one of the survey methods (ehow.com, 2010; communicationideas.com, 2010; Smith, 2010; fullcirc. com, 2010; Gayeski, 2000; Fogelman-Beyer, 1999; Schade, 2008).

4. Develop Recommendations

Once all the statistical and subjective data has been gathered through the chosen research methodology or methodologies, it is important to look at the results and to develop recommendations based on these results. Depending on the outcomes, the recommendations may be to improve communication components, strategies and/or policies. An implementation plan needs to be developed for the recommendations so that the audit does not become an exercise in futility and perceived by the audiences involved as a wasted amount of time and resources. What is often helpful to this process and the buy-in of the recommendations is to put together a representative team from the key target audiences involved in the process as well as those that will benefit from the results. Together, they can assess the results and strategize on the implementation plan (ehow.com, 2010;

communicationideas.com, 2010; Smith, 2010; fullcirc. com, 2010; Gayeski, 2000; Fogelman-Beyer, 1999; Schade, 2008). “Team members will determine a specific action plan for capitalizing on communication strengths, eliminating weaknesses, maximizing opportunities and defending against threats” (ehow.com, 2010).

THE FAMILY YMCA IN PRINCE GEORGE

The Family YMCA in Prince George (PGYMCA) is part of the World Alliance of YMCAs. For more than 40 years, the PGYMCA has been providing community programs and services that promote health and well-being in Northern British Columbia. The PGYMCA mission states that it is dedicated to the growth of all persons in spirit, mind and body and in a sense of responsibility to each other and the global community. The Y values are stated as being committed to practicing and demonstrating the core values of caring, honesty, respect and responsibility in all aspects of the organization (pgymca.com, 2010).

The Family YMCA of Prince George provides several services to its community. One of its services is to provide a comprehensive fitness facility with a variety of classes and programs that are targeted towards all ages, but primarily families. Some of the classes and programs include weight training, cardiovascular fitness, aerobics and recreational activities. Physiotherapy, massage therapy and health improvement programs such as stress management are also provided (pgymca.com, 2010).

The physical facilities were just recently re-vamped by taking out the squash and racquetball courts, expanding the weight room, adding in spinning rooms and adding in a Youth Room complete with climbing walls and giant Wii screen. This renovation was carried out as the courts were not being used and there were similar courts at the University of Northern British Columbia. Additionally, The Y wanted to re-focus back on family and youth and felt that the additions fulfilled this vision. There was backlash from the community which the PGYMCA tracked and addressed with each individual. They did lose some members, but have found that these same members are now coming back.

Another well known service is its child care program. It includes a licensed preschool, licensed child care for 0-12 years of age and Camp Kanannaq, a summer camp that also includes Borealis Counsellor-in-Training Program for youth 15-17 years of age. They also have a Child Care Resource and Referral (CCRR) program that provides services to child care providers and parents in Prince George and the surrounding region. The objective of the program is to enhance the availability and quality of child care services by providing information, support and resources as well as referral services to families and child care providers across the region (pgymca.com, 2010).

Their youth and adult programs are quite extensive as well. In addition to the counsellor-in training program and the Youth Room, they also offer development programs; drop-in programs including the gymnasium and skating programs in

winter sessions; Youth Around Prince (YAP), a drop-in center with a range of alternative activities for youth at risk; and Youth Leader Corps, a program that provides youth with opportunities to take part in a collective work group and practice cooperative management in order to learn leadership and gain confidence. The adult program offers quite a range of learning and health opportunities. Some of the programs that are offered in this category are dance lessons; language lessons; self defence courses; climbing programs; recreational sports leagues and fitness programs (pgymca.com, 2010).

The PGYMA has a board with one chair and 15 directors and a staff of 93, including the CEO, who are set-up in four departments: Childcare; Fitness, Health and Recreation; Finance and Administration; and Community and Partnerships. The Y is able to provide all the services and programs it does as it has a contingent of 535 volunteers who contributed 16,000 hours to the YMCA programs in 2009, some of who are also board members. It also has 5,000 members who stay active through the Y's health, fitness and recreation programs and activities. The PGYMCA is currently celebrating its members, staff and volunteers through the "We're all Y champions!" campaign that has the following set advertisement.

"What is a Y Champion?

A person who gives his/her time to enrich their own life as well as the lives of others:

- A teen who volunteers time to help youth with homework
- A child care worker that wants to provide the best care possible

- A cancer survivor coaching martial arts to friends
- An older brother playing hoops with his siblings
- A camp counsellor that teaches archery and gives a child a life-long memory
- A maintenance worker who keeps the grass green and the sidewalk clean
- A donor who gives to the YMCA Strong Kids Campaign.” (pgymca.com, 2010)

This campaign is also being used to begin to raise awareness that the PGYMCA is also a philanthropic organization.

The PGYMCA had experienced substantial growth and expansion in recent years. A new CEO had been installed and the current strategic plan was coming to an end. The previous CEO had a different vision that was not clearly stated in the current strategic plan that was ending. Several changes were made in preparation for the new three-year strategic plan including adding a number of new management employees, redesigning the organizational chart and revamping the physical facilities. As a result of all this change, the Prince George YMCA is also experiencing some retention issues within key departments. It was an opportune time to conduct a communications audit to take a snapshot of where the internal communication stood with all the cultural changes taking place and to generate options for improving this situation.

CONDUCTING THE COMMUNICATIONS AUDIT AT THE PGYMCA

The communications audit was developed by looking at what the Family YMCA in Prince George had been going through and what the key areas of concern were. The focus was to be on the internal audience of the staff, management and the board. Volunteers were not included in this survey. As the sample size was small (a total of 108), all staff, management and board members were included in the survey.

A confidential pen and paper survey was created as a means of capturing the quality of the communications within the PGYMCA as well as the satisfaction with that communication. The Likert scale that was applied ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The survey had five sections. The first section was for demographic purposes to simply ascertain whether the respondent was a board or staff member and how long they had been with The Y. The next section was strictly for board members so that any issues with keeping the board informed and effective could be addressed. The next section was for managers who had staff reporting to them. Again, this was designed so that any issues with managers keeping staff informed and involved and vice versa could be specifically attended to. The fourth section was to be filled in by all participants. Some questions were matched up to previous ones in order to get a view from both sides. For example, managers were given the statement "I believe my method of communicating with staff is effective" and all survey participants were given "I believe that the method of communication my supervisor uses to communicate to the staff is effective." The last section was for open-ended questions for comments to be added so that

qualitative data could also be gathered. Appendix 1 has the complete survey that was distributed. The survey was distributed to all 108 participants with self-addressed, stamped envelopes so that once it was completed, the survey was mailed back to the author confidentially. The survey was conducted during the month of November 2010 over a two week period.

Survey Question Development

The questions had originally been developed by the Family YMCA in Prince George by the Manager, Marketing and Communications and presented as part of the proposal to the MBA program. The writer took the questions and improved them so that the questions would clearly address the issue being researched by each question. For example, the original question about knowing what the departments were in the YMCA was changed from "I am aware and understand the different departments of the YMCA" to "I know what the 4 departments of the YMCA are". A section was added below the question with the added instruction to "Please list them below". Another example of making a question clearer was taking the original "I understand the strategic goals and objectives of the organization" and splitting it into two questions. The first stated "I know that the YMCA has a strategic plan that informs decision making" and the new one that was added to accompany this question stated "I know how my position assists in accomplishing the strategic goals and objectives of the organization".

Taking into the consideration all the changes that the PGYMCA had gone through as well as the issues they were dealing with, such as staff retention, the questions were also finalized according the four key concerns and their related key components:

- Methods of communication,
- What should be communicated,
- The nature of communication, and
- Communication between supervisors and subordinates.

The questions that related to each of these areas are as follows:

- Methods of communication:
 - “My preferred method of communication with staff is: Internal memos, Meetings, E-mail.”
 - “I know what communication tools are available to me. (Please list below.)”
 - “I make regular use of the communication tools available to me.”
 - “I receive information on YMCA news, programs and initiatives from (Circle all that apply): Word of Mouth; Internal Memos; Community Boards; Media; Web; Publications”.
 - “The MOST effective communication tool to reach me is (Circle only one): Word of Mouth; Internal Memos; Community Boards; Media; Web; Publications”.

- “The LEAST effective communication tool to reach me is (Circle only one): Word of Mouth; Internal Memos; Community Boards; Media; Web; Publications”.

- What should be communicated:
 - “Organizational information is relayed to me regularly and efficiently.”
 - “I am frequently updated on organizational activities.”
 - “I feel that staff know what the current YMCA initiatives are.”
 - “I know that the YMCA has a strategic plan that informs decision making.”
 - “I know how my position assists in accomplishing the strategic goals and objectives of the organization”.
 - “I know how my department fits in with accomplishing the strategic goals and objectives of the organization.”
 - “I know what the 4 departments of the YMCA are. (Please list them below.)”
 - “I feel informed about the YMCA’s initiatives and activities.”
 - “I am comfortable speaking to others about YMCA programs and initiatives.”
 - “I understand the roles and responsibilities of my position.”
 - “I believe other YMCA employees understand my roles and responsibilities.”

- "I have a general understanding of the roles and responsibilities of other YMCA employees."
- "Public perception of the YMCA is important to me."
- Nature of communication:
 - "I feel connected to the organization and organizational activities."
 - "I believe the staff are committed to and carrying out the current YMCA initiatives."
 - "Overall, I am happy with the communication within my department."
 - "Overall, I am happy with the communication within the YMCA."
 - "I know who to go to with questions which arise in my daily work activities."
 - "I have the information I need to do my job effectively and efficiently."
 - "I am happy with the current roles and responsibilities of my position."
- Communication between supervisors and subordinates:
 - "Additional communication tools would benefit me in managing staff."
 - "Additional communication training would benefit me in managing staff."
 - "I believe my method of communicating with staff is effective."
 - "I know and am comfortable communicating with my supervisor."
 - "I believe that the method of communication that my supervisor uses to communicate to the staff is effective."

- “I believe my opinion matters to my supervisor.”
- “I believe my opinion makes a difference to the YMCA.”
- “I feel respected and valued at work.”

The three open-ended questions designed to add more information and depth to the statistical questions being asked were:

- “What information do you need to do your job effectively and efficiently?”
- “What communication is needed to facilitate receiving this information?”
- “Additional comments (on improving communications):”

RESULTS OF THE COMMUNICATIONS AUDIT

A total of 44 respondents returned the pen and paper survey, rendering a 41% participation rate. Of this number, 20 were board members and 19 were management as per the number of respondents noted in the descriptive statistics in Appendix 2. The vast majority of respondents also filled in the comments section, providing more insight into the way questions were answered. A factor analysis was done on the results as a technique for combining variables that have been answered in a similar pattern. In addition to the means, standard deviation and correlations being determined for the questions, a reliability analysis and regression analysis were also completed. The descriptive statistics can be found in Appendix 2 and the rotated component matrix can be found in Appendix 3. Overall, respondents were satisfied with the communication within their department (as per result of 3.7273 for Question 1) and throughout the YMCA (as per result of 2.9773 for Question 2).

Coupling the mean of 2.9773 for Question 2: "Overall, I am happy with the communication within the YMCA", the second lowest score, with scores of three or higher for the rest of the survey, there is still room for improvement in the four areas surveyed. The regression analysis indicates that it is likely the right questions were not asked; however, there is something out there that needs to be addressed.

According to their means, the top five strengths were:

- Question 17: "I know and am comfortable communicating with my supervisor." (Mean of 4.4186)
- Question 5: "I know who to go to with questions which arise in my daily work activities." (Mean of 4.3182)
- Question 22: "Public perception of the YMCA is important to me." (Mean of 4.2955)
- Question 13: "I understand my roles and responsibilities." (Mean of 4.2727)
- Question 19: "I believe my opinion matters to my supervisor." (Mean of 4.2143)

According to their means, the top five weaknesses were:

- Question 9A: "I know what the 4 departments of the YMCA are." (Mean of 2.8857)
- Question 2: "Overall, I am happy with the communication within the YMCA." (Mean of 2.9773)

- Question 10: "I feel informed about the YMCA's initiatives and activities."
(Mean of 3.2727)
- Question 15: "I believe other YMCA employees understand my roles and responsibilities." (Mean of 3.3182)
- Question 20: "I believe my opinion makes a difference to the YMCA."
(Mean of 3.3864)

For the questions that were not included in the standard deviation and mean calculation due to the fact that they either followed a different Likert scale or were written answers, the results were as follows. Question 3B was the written response to Question 3A: "I know what communication tools are available to me. (Please list below.)". There were 37 respondents to this question giving the following answers:

Communication Tool	Number of Responses Received
E-mail	33
Phone	19
Meetings with more than two people in attendance	14
One-on-one meetings	14
Internal memos	13
YMCA Website	10
Communication books	7
Memo boards	5
YMCA's page on Facebook	4
YMCA on Twitter	2
Fax	3
Texting	2
Notes	2
Newsletter	2
Workshops	1
Cellphone	1
Other staff members	1
Messaging	1
Walky-talky	1
TV at the front	1
Scanner/copier	1
Minutes	1
Shared folders and calendars	1

Table 1: The Communication Tools that the YMCA Respondents Know are Available

For Questions 23, 24 and 25, the Likert scale was based on six communication tools: Word of Mouth; Internal Memos; Communication Boards; Media; Web; and Publications. For Question 23: "I receive information on YMCA news, programs and initiatives from:" the respondents were to choose as many of the six tools that applied to them. There were 42 respondents rendering 128 answers. The results were as follows:

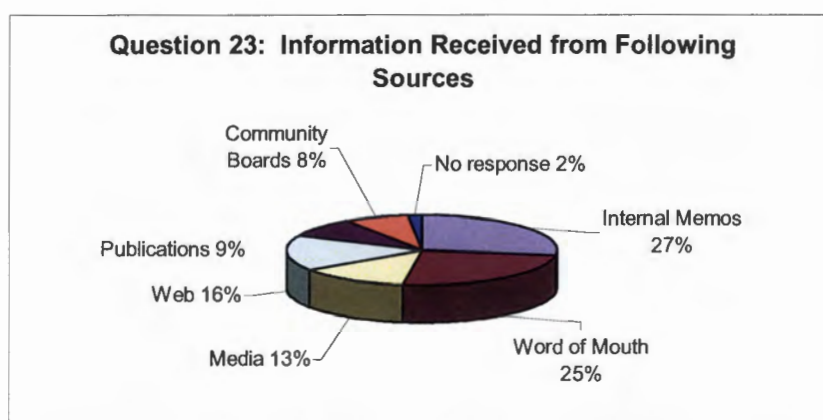


Figure 3: How the YMCA Respondents Receive Their Information

For Question 24: "The MOST effective communication tool to reach me is:" the respondents were to select only one tool. There were 44 respondents rendering 61 answers as 8 respondents selected more than one tool. The results were as follows:

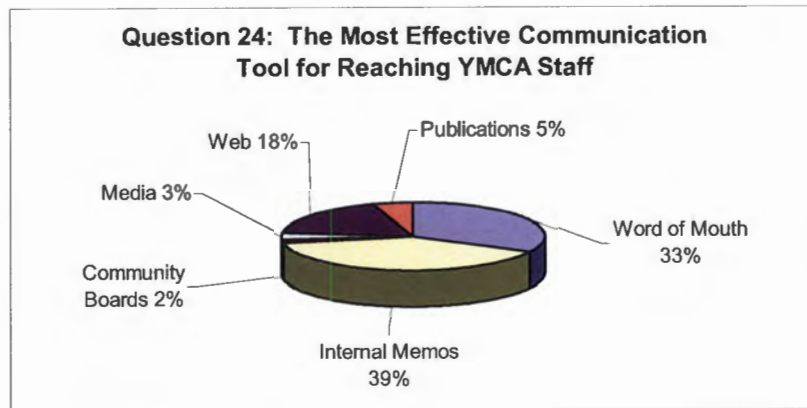


Figure 4: The Most Effective Communication Tools for Reaching YMCA Respondents

For Question 25: "The LEAST effective communication tool to reach me is:" the respondents were to select only one tool. There were 44 respondents rendering 53 answers as 6 respondents selected more than one tool. The results were as follows:

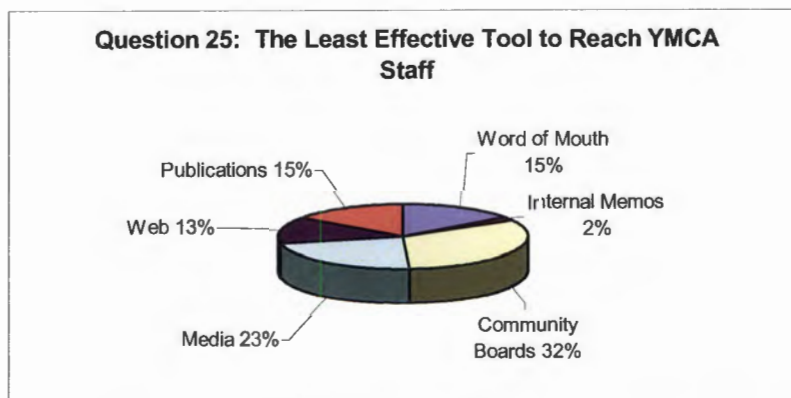


Figure 5: The Least Effective Communication Tools for Reaching YMCA Respondents

For the final question that did not have a mean or standard deviation, Question 9B was the written response to Question 9A: "I know what the 4 departments of the YMCA are." Of the 44 that responded, only nine respondents, or 20%, were able to name all four departments accurately. Thirteen, or 30%, were

not able to answer anything at all with one participant commenting that “We do not have departments anymore.” The remaining 22, or 50%, were able to name half of the departments with Community and Partnerships and Finance and Administration often being missed. Additionally, the survey participants were confusing programs under a department with the department name.

As noted earlier, there were 20 board members responding and 19 managers with staff reporting to them. However, including the chair, there are only 16 board members in total, indicating the possibility that there were non-board members responding to the board only questions. Additionally, the 19 management respondents would indicate that 20% of the 93 staff were managers with reports. There are only 5 managers with reports known to the writer, indicating again the possibility that non-managers or managers with the title but no reports answered these related questions. As a result, these questions were not utilized in the various analyses as it would be impossible to rely on the responses. It is also important to note that due to the small sample size and even smaller number of respondents to the overall survey and individual questions, no individual statistics were run based on the individual groups of board, managers, part time and full time staff.

Only Questions 1 through 21, with the exception of those already noted, were used for the factor analysis. Question 1: “Overall, I am happy with the communication within my department” and Question 2: “Overall, I am happy with the

communication within the YMCA” were used as the dependent variables. Four factors resulted from this analysis:

- Factor 1 called Good Communications (goodcomm);
- Factor 2 called Strategy;
- Factor 3 called Informed; and
- Factor 4 called Role.

Of these factors, Good Communications has the strongest relationship with Question 1 and Informed has the strongest relationship with Question 2. Good Communications has the following grouping of questions:

- Question 18: “I believe that the method of communication that my supervisor uses to communicate to the staff is effective.”
- Question 17: “I know and am comfortable communicating with my supervisor.”
- Question 19: “I believe my opinion matters to my supervisor.”
- Question 12: “I have the information I need to do my job effectively and efficiently.”
- Question 21: “I feel respected and valued at work.”
- Question 5: “I know who to go to with questions which arise in my daily work activities.”
- Question 13: “I understand the roles and responsibilities of my position.”
- Question 14: “I am happy with the current roles and responsibilities of my position.”
- Question 4: “I make regular use of the communication tools available to me.”

- Question 3A: "I know what communication tools are available to me. (Please list below.)"

Informed has the following grouping of questions:

- Question 10: "I feel informed about the YMCA's initiatives and activities."
- Question 20: "I believe my opinion makes a difference to the YMCA."
- Question 11: "I am comfortable speaking to others about YMCA programs and initiatives."

Cronbach's Alpha for the Factor 1/Question 1 combination is 0.952 and 0.837 for the Factor 3/Question 2 combination.

The R^2 for the Factor 1/Question 1 combination is 0.484, which is very good as it indicates that Good Communications explains approximately 48% of the variance in Question 1. The F statistic (22.548), significance level (0.000) and Beta (0.696) also confirm that this combination is strongly correlated. Refer to the ANOVA table below.

ANOVA ^b						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	13.723	1	13.723	22.548	.000 ^a
	Residual	14.607	24	.609		
	Total	28.330	25			

a. Predictors: (Constant), goodcomm

b. Dependent Variable: Q1

Table 2: The ANOVA Table for the Factor 1 (Goodcomm)/Question 1 Combination

The R^2 for the Factor 3/Question 2 combination is 0.425, which is very good as it indicates that Informed explains approximately 43% of the variance in Question 2. The F statistic (5.298), significance level (0.030) and Beta (0.425) also confirm that this combination is strongly correlated. Refer to the ANOVA table below.

ANOVA ^b						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	6.201	1	6.201	5.298	.030 ^a
	Residual	28.088	24	1.170		
	Total	34.289	25			

a. Predictors: (Constant), informed

b. Dependent Variable: Q2

Table 3: The ANOVA table for the Factor 3 (Informed)/Question 2 Combination

DISCUSSION ON THE RESULTS OF THE COMMUNICATIONS AUDIT

The factor analysis of the audit proves the literature review as the components that constitute the Good Communications factor are what make up effective communication: a good rapport between supervisor and subordinates; that communication needs to be two-way; and knowing what the tools of communication are and how to use them. The Informed grouping proves that if communication is effective, such as is shown in Good Communications, then employees will be satisfied with that communication and will be effective in conducting their duties. Averaging 3.0 for most of the questions, the communication at the PGYMCA is satisfactory, but there are areas for improvement.

When a simple average is performed on the means grouped in each of the key areas of concern, Communication Between Supervisors and Subordinates comes out on top at 3.9375. This is further supported by the fact that two of the top five strengths directly relate to employees communicating with their supervisors. The anecdotal evidence gathered also supports the fact that communication within each department is more than satisfactory and that employees are happy with that communication. Staff have a good rapport with their supervisor and believe that their supervisor's method of communicating to the staff is effective. The supervisor also believes that they have effective communication with their reports. A simple average of 3.7471 for the next highest area, The Nature of Communication, further supports that the intra-departmental communication is good.

The communiqué challenge seems to be more with the communication between departments and the board. The simple average performed on the means of the Methods of Communication resulted in the lowest score of 3.3355, followed by the next lowest score of 3.6484 for What Should be Communicated. Four of the top five weaknesses spoke to this fact:

- Question 9A: "I know what the 4 departments of the YMCA are. (Please list below.)"
- Question 2: "Overall, I am happy with the communication within the YMCA."
- Question 10: "I feel informed about the YMCA's initiatives and activities."

- Question 15: “I believe other YMCA employees understand my roles and responsibilities.”

As noted in the “Results of the Communications Audit” section, only 20% of the respondents were able to name four departments of the YMCA. Evidently, the changes to the organizational chart were not clearly transmitted to the staff.

As evidenced by the comments, this inter-departmental communication challenge resonated with all participants: the board, management and staff. Board members wanted direct communication with the other board members and clear communication with the Finance Director and CEO. The board also wanted the managers to receive mentoring about working with the board and being able to separate operational from strategic information. Many participants had requests for the financial statements, annual report and the strategic plan. One person commented, “I believe strongly that Managers or Co-ordinators of programs should come together monthly to share the YMCA vision, strategic plan or changes so we can relay this back to our staff, share about their programs and the CEO be involved in this.” Respondents also wanted to know why certain decisions were made and why something was being done or not being done. Staff also want to be involved in these decisions. The front desk also wants this information so that they are better able to answer members’ inquiries.

Other issues with inter-departmental communication centered on being informed about changes regarding people and programs. The front desk was often not told about new initiatives until the day of the initiative's launch. This same information was not transmitted to other departments so that when members and others made inquiries, they were not able to answer the questions or know who to direct them to for further information. Statements were also made about wanting this same information to be posted on the website in a timely manner. Respondents also often commented on wanting to know about new staff and those who were leaving. They were also interested in wanting job descriptions and knowing what training opportunities were available. They also wanted to hear success stories about staff, clients and external supporters of the PGYMCA.

One final area of inter-departmental communiqués involved being informed about events. Getting information about upcoming events such as when, where, who was the intended audience and the process for registration was also often requested. As one of the main information areas, the front desk often did not have this information in a timely manner or with enough explanation to be able to effectively disseminate it out to the members. Many survey participants stated that the way they did receive this information when it was made available was, in order of rank, through internal memos (27%), word of mouth (25%) and the website (16%). These methods were also deemed the most effective way of getting this information to the board and staff. The least effective method was through the community boards (with 32% of the respondents agreeing), the media (23%) and publications (15%).

Conducting this survey is a first step towards developing the communication plan for disseminating information on the strategic plan, financials and decisions that are made. As per media richness, some messages are best delivered in person to enable the receiver to hear the personality behind the message and to ask questions (Schade, 2004). As part of the dissemination of the plan, a meeting should be set-up to which all staff and board members are invited. The CEO should introduce the new strategic plan for 2011 to 2013 to the staff and be prepared to answer any questions, opinions and comments honestly. A dashboard for the goals can be created and updated quarterly as to the status of each goal which is then distributed to the staff. There should also be items in the plan that come out of the communications audit. These items should be pointed out as being a result of the survey and getting feedback from the internal stakeholders. Both openness of top management and involvement in organizational decision-making increases trust in management and builds support with the key stakeholders. As one respondent stated, "Email can be time efficient but not always as effective as person to person face to face dialogue and communication so everyone gains the same message."

Although publications came in third as the least effective tool of communication, it is recommended that the PGYMCA investigate further as to what exactly is not effective. Publications covered everything from the annual report to program brochures to newsletters. It is possible that items intended for the public are being used by the staff to gain information about what is happening in The Y and

that in-house newsletters are fine to use as communication instruments. As previously noted, house organs are an excellent way of keeping staff informed of changes such as staff coming or leaving and new initiatives and events. The newsletter can also be used to assist in introducing each department by highlighting a program or department per newsletter. The newsletter's media richness can be raised by placing it on the intranet.

The lack of understanding of what each department is and what it does can also be corrected by creating an orientation program. One or two key members in each department can make presentations to other departments about what their department does. They can further enhance this communication by making the presentation using PowerPoint and by distributing departmental brochures. Whenever a new employee starts, these same individuals can make this presentation to them as well.

Although each individual knew their roles and responsibilities (with ratings of 4.0909 and higher), there was a significant drop (to 3.4318 for Question 16 and 3.3182 for Question 15) when it came to other departments understanding the individual's role. One way to improve this understanding is to ensure that a job description for each position exists. These job descriptions can be then be made public by being placed in a central location, such as the intranet, that would be accessible by all staff.

The staff and management would benefit from training in organizational communication as well as having a protocol set-up about what communication mediums should be used for what purposes and how these mediums would distribute the information to the staff. Knowing when to send an e-mail or letter and when to place a phone call aids in making communication more effectual as voice mail and e-mail are appropriate for different kinds of communication. Voice mail is most effective for urgent, brief updates (60-90 seconds). E-mail is ideal for important, but not urgent, information and for providing detailed information such as directions and meeting agendas (Schade, 2004).

This training recommendation is backed-up by the 3.7778 scored for both Management Question 5 (M5): "Additional communication tools would benefit me in managing my staff." and Management Question 6 (M6): "Additional communication training would benefit me in managing my staff." It is beneficial for the managers with reports to receive this training as it was noted that employees/supervisor communications were always among the most effective methods for sharing information when the consulting firm JRS Consulting Inc. conducted communications audits. They determined that an employee's supervisor is particularly credible and the preferred way to deliver news, especially about restructuring or updates on an employee's business unit or department (Schade, 2004).

One last area to address was the desire of the respondents to be more involved in the business of the PGYMCA. One way to make this happen is by

implementing a suggestion system that allows employees to make propositions about improvements in The Y. Providing the ability to add their name is optional. However, whether or not a name is attached to the suggestion, it would be important to address these suggestions in public, whether through regular staff meetings, in-house newsletters or the intranet. This will increase the trust of the staff that they are being heard. Further to this would be an annual award to recognize staff and board members who go “above and beyond” for the organization. These awards could be called the “Above and Beyond Awards” or “The Y Champion Award.”

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE RESULTS OF THE COMMUNICATIONS AUDIT

Internal customer satisfaction drives external customer satisfaction.

Therefore, based on the survey results and comments, the following recommendations are being made:

- An orientation program should be set-up both for current and new staff that includes spending time with one or two key staff from each department who can explain what programs that department covers, what current events are based within this department and contacts for any future questions about the department. An orientation to the departments should also be set-up for the current staff. One or two key people from one department can make presentations about their programs, events and contacts to staff in other departments. A program from each department can also be highlighted in the newsletter and/or on the intranet on a regular, ongoing basis.

- Ensure that a job description for each position exists. Create any that might be missing or are incomplete. All these job descriptions should be placed in one central location that is accessible by any staff or board member at anytime.
- All staff and board members should be given training in organizational communications, interpersonal communications, effective communication and mentorship. There are courses available that cover e-mail communications and etiquette. It should include when it is appropriate to use e-mail, voice mail and face-to-face meetings. A protocol document for communications should also be developed and included in this training. A checklist should be created that lists where new information about programs and events should be distributed to as well as how they should be distributed.
- As they are requesting it, managers and executive should be given additional training in coaching, leadership, group dynamics, facilitating teams and applying improvement tools. They also should become proficient in hard and soft team leadership skills. A coaching system should also be set-up for the managers to assist them in putting into practice all the new skills that they will be acquiring.

- A process needs to be put into place that allows employees to make suggestions for improvements whether through the intranet or via a paper and pen system. It should have the option to put their name to their suggestion so that the suggestion can be responded to regardless of whether it is implemented or not. When a suggestion is implemented, the employee who made the suggestion, should they be known, should be publicly acknowledged for this contribution. This action will increase trust that the staff is being listened to and responded to.
- An annual award should be established that recognizes staff and board members who go “above and beyond”. These awards could be called the “Above and Beyond Awards” or “The Y Champion Award”. Staff, volunteers and board members would nominate someone for the various categories of this award. A committee made up of a cross-section of staff, management and board members would then select the final recipients who would be presented with their awards in a public ceremony.
- The current Annual Report should be placed on the website as one of the key documents that staff needs to have access to on a regular basis.
- After determining that house organs are beneficial as a communication tool for the staff and board members, the in-house newsletter should be regularly distributed and should include information about staff members

who were joining The Y and those who were leaving. Training opportunities, upcoming events, highlighting a program or department per newsletter and success stories about staff, clients and external supporters of the PGYMCA should all be regular items. The newsletter should be posted on the intranet.

- In order to meet the request to be more involved in the decision-making process, a task force should be formed to assess the results and to develop an implementation plan. A notice should be sent to all staff asking all those who are interested in being on the task force to e-mail or pass in an application form. The application deadline should be set for 48 hours after the release of the invitation so as to ensure that only individuals who are interested in making a difference at the YMCA would respond. The two questions on the application would be: "Why are you interested in becoming a part of the internal communications audit (100 word limit)?" and "What will you bring to the task force (100 word limit)?" The task force member would be limited to between four and six individuals and be selected from a cross section of YMCA departments (Daniel, 2010).
- Finally, the management and CEO need to ensure that the new strategic plan has SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Timely) goals with measurable metrics. The goals need to be clear and able to be

connected with the departments that need to carry out each goal. A communications plan needs to be developed for delivering the strategic plan and financials to the staff. Prior to this meeting, the management and CEO need to consider the following questions:

- Their view of the role/purpose of employee communication in the organization.
- How they visualize ideal communications.
- What they expect each team member to know about the company
- Communication strengths and weaknesses (including subjects being communicated and the media currently employed).
- Major company goals that are communications sensitive.
- What they think team members want to know about.

One part of the plan needs to include an organization-wide meeting that all staff, management and board members need to attend. It should happen during office hours as time should be built into the job for these kinds of meetings. If logistics prevents this from happening due to the fact that The Y is open 7 days a week from 6:30 am to 11:00 pm daily, then the meeting should be set at a time that the majority can attend. At this meeting, the CEO should deliver the strategic plan, financials and re-issue the organizational chart. Each manager would present what goals their department is responsible for or contributing to and how. This tactic aids

in the orientation of the staff to other departments as well as delivers a consistent message from the top down.

If the voice mail system has broadcast capabilities, updates can be recorded by the CEO on the progress of the strategic plan. The CEO can place the same message on the intranet. Quarterly organization-wide staff meetings should take place regularly to keep the staff up-to-date on the goals and to provide a forum for question, answers, comments and suggestions. This would also be the opportune time to publicly acknowledge suggestions.

Improving communications will have to be an ongoing initiative, not just for this year.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CONDUCTING THE COMMUNICATIONS AUDIT IN THE FUTURE

Now that a benchmark has been established for the internal communications at the Family YMCA in Prince George, a communications audit should be conducted annually to ensure that current areas of concern are being taken care of and that new ones are identified and addressed. More participation by the staff below management should be encouraged. The survey was announced via e-mail a month in advance, with a reminder sent out a week before it began and then another reminder to complete the survey one week before the survey period ended. The number of respondents and the possible lack of representation of staff below management clearly indicate that this was not enough. Utilizing the principles of media richness and the results of the survey, further enhancements to this process

would be to make in-person announcements to each department as well as circulating a memo about the survey. The survey could also be put online to make it easier for the participants to complete it.

As the volunteers represent a significant contribution to the labour hours in the organization (16,000 hours in 2009), it is recommended that they be included as well. If necessary, the survey could be customized for them and according to their contributions. Customizing the survey for the board members only and managers with staff reporting to them and distributing to the members in these groups directly may also want to be done. This way the results will be cleaner and more reliable. If the number of respondents is not too small, this would also enable statistics to be run specifically about the opinions of the board members and managers.

CONCLUSION

Communication allows organizations to function in the 21st Century Information Age. Effective communication is essential if an organization wants to be successful. An understanding of how communication works and its many different forms provides a basis to achieving effective communication. Savvy managers are sensitive to media richness and how it can be utilized to facilitate the acceptance of the messages sent. Effective communication can be tied directly to job effectiveness and the success an organization experiences in the marketplace. Communication that is effectual leads to communication satisfaction.

One way to measure the quality of communications in an organization is to conduct a communications audit. Communications audits can be broad and all encompassing or can focus on one particular area within a company. They can involve external audiences, internal audiences or both. The Family YMCA of Prince George was ready for a communications audit due to all the changes that it had recently experienced. A new CEO had been installed at a time when the current strategic plan was coming to an end. The former CEO had developed this strategic plan, but it was not concrete or set-up as SMART goals. Many departments were unsure of what the goals were or how to go about realizing them. Additionally, the physical facilities had been re-vamped, a number of new staff had been added and the organizational chart had been redesigned. As a result of all this change, there were some retention issues within key departments.

The communications audit was created to address the effectiveness of the communication during all these changes and to determine the level of satisfaction with those communiqués. The audit was conducted through the use of a three page, pen and paper survey. The questions covered the Methods and Tools of Communication; What Should Be Communicated; the Nature of Communications and the Communication Between Supervisors and Subordinates. The results showed an organization that was satisfied overall, but had room for improvement. Recommendations were made to improve and make the communication at The Y more effective. These recommendations capitalize on the fact that the culture within the YMCA organization throughout Canada is generally very strong and employees

are hired not for the money, but, rather, the passion of the work that the YMCA does.

Improved and more effective communication is possible with the implementation of the recommendations.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Copy of Survey Sent out to PGYMCA Participants (see next page)

NOTE: The red alpha-numerical combinations are a cross-reference to the question numbers noted in the charts in Appendix 2 and Appendix 3. They were not on the version that went out to the PGYMCA staff, management and board members.

COMMUNICATIONS AUDIT SURVEY FOR THE FAMILY YMCA OF PRINCE GEORGE

I am	Board	Part time Staff	Full time Staff
I have worked with the PGYMCA for	0-1 yr.	1-5 yrs.	5-10 yrs. 10+ yrs.

1 = Strongly disagree 2 = Disagree 3 = Neutral 4 = Agree 5 = Strongly agree

BOARD ONLY

- | | | | | | |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| B1 Organizational information is relayed to me regularly and efficiently. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| B2 I am frequently updated on organizational activities. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| B3 I feel connected to the organization and organizational activities. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

IF STAFF REPORT TO YOU, PLEASE ANSWER THE FOLLOWING.

- | | | | |
|--|----------------|----------|--------|
| M1 My preferred method of communication with staff is: | Internal memos | Meetings | E-mail |
| M2 I believe my method of communicating with staff is effective. | 1 | 2 | 3 4 5 |
| M3 I feel that staff know what the current YMCA initiatives are. | 1 | 2 | 3 4 5 |
| M4 I believe that staff are committed to and carrying out the current YMCA initiatives. | 1 | 2 | 3 4 5 |
| M5 Additional communication tools would benefit me in managing staff. | 1 | 2 | 3 4 5 |
| M6 Additional communication training would benefit me in managing staff. | 1 | 2 | 3 4 5 |

ALL SURVEY PARTICIPANTS

- | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Q1 Overall, I am happy with the communication within my department. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Q2 Overall, I am happy with the communication within the YMCA. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Q3A I know what communication tools are available to me. (Please list below.) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Q3B _____ | | | | | |
| _____ | | | | | |
| _____ | | | | | |
| Q4 I make regular use of the communication tools available to me. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Q5 I know who to go to with questions which arise in my daily work activities. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Q6 I know that the YMCA has a strategic plan that informs decision making. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Q7 I know how my position assists in accomplishing the strategic goals and objectives of the organization. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Q8 I know how my department fits in with accomplishing the strategic goals and objectives of the organization. 1 2 3 4 5

Q9A I know what the 4 departments of the YMCA are. (Please list them below.) 1 2 3 4 5

Q9B _____

Q10 I feel informed about the YMCA's initiatives and activities. 1 2 3 4 5

Q11 I am comfortable speaking to others about YMCA programs and initiatives. 1 2 3 4 5

Q12 I have the information I need to do my job effectively and efficiently. 1 2 3 4 5

Q13 I understand the roles and responsibilities of my position. 1 2 3 4 5

Q14 I am happy with the current roles and responsibilities of my position. 1 2 3 4 5

Q15 I believe other YMCA employees understand my roles and responsibilities. 1 2 3 4 5

Q16 I have a general understanding of the roles and responsibilities of other YMCA employees. 1 2 3 4 5

Q17 I know and am comfortable communicating with my supervisor. 1 2 3 4 5

Q18 I believe that the method of communication that my supervisor uses to communicate to the staff is effective. 1 2 3 4 5

Q19 I believe my opinion matters to my supervisor. 1 2 3 4 5

Q20 I believe my opinion makes a difference to the YMCA. 1 2 3 4 5

Q21 I feel respected and valued at work. 1 2 3 4 5

Q22 Public perception of the YMCA is important to me. 1 2 3 4 5

Q23 I receive information on YMCA news, programs and initiatives from: Word of Mouth Media
(Circle all that apply.) Internal Memos Web
Community Boards Publications

Q24 The MOST effective communication tool to reach me is: Word of Mouth Media
(Circle only one.) Internal Memos Web
Community Boards Publications

Q25 The LEAST effective communication tool to reach me is: Word of Mouth Media
(Circle only one.) Internal Memos Web
Community Boards Publications

What information do you need to do your job effectively and efficiently?

What communication is needed to facilitate receiving this information?

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS (on improving communications):

Appendix 2: Descriptive Statistics for the Majority of the Audit Questions

Descriptive Statistics

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Length_of_Service	2.0000	.69843	42
B1	3.5500	1.19097	20
B2	3.6000	1.04630	20
B3	3.7500	.91047	20
M1	2.4444	.70479	18
M2	3.9474	.77986	19
M3	3.5789	1.01739	19
M4	3.6842	1.00292	19
M5	3.7778	.94281	18
M6	3.7778	.87820	18
Q1	3.7273	1.06452	44
Q2	2.9773	1.17114	44
Q3A	3.6552	.76885	29
Q4	3.9070	.78115	43
Q5	4.3182	.85651	44
Q6	3.8864	.99337	44
Q7	3.8864	.96968	44
Q8	3.9286	.94721	42
Q9A	2.8857	1.32335	35
Q10	3.2727	.94902	44
Q11	3.5227	1.10997	44
Q12	3.6818	1.00632	44
Q13	4.2727	.78839	44
Q14	4.0909	1.00737	44
Q15	3.3182	1.09487	44
Q16	3.4318	.99762	44
Q17	4.4186	.87919	43
Q18	4.0233	1.01156	43
Q19	4.2143	1.02495	42
Q20	3.3864	1.26152	44
Q21	3.9545	1.05554	44
Q22	4.2955	.87815	44

Appendix 3: Rotated Component Matrix of the Audit Questions

Rotated Component Matrix ^a				
	Component			
	1	2	3	4
Q18	.837		.312	.114
Q17	.821	.262	.207	
Q19	.816		.509	
Q12	.757			.420
Q21	.753	.104	.439	.228
Q5	.713	.245	.359	
Q13	.711	.406		.254
Q14	.706	.242		.193
Q4	.698	.428	.152	-.173
Q3A	.604	.501	.347	.165
Q9A	.102	.797		.134
Q22	.382	.719	.309	
Q6		.691	.492	.314
Q7	.222	.651	.429	.347
Q8	.306	.577	.368	.156
Q10	.317		.764	.187
Q20	.209	.328	.753	
Q11	.208	.353	.738	.245
Q15	.242	.130	.113	.886
Q16		.386	.352	.741

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.