BRIDGING THE COMMUNICATION GAP: HOW CLARITY AND FEEDBACK SHAPE EMPLOYEE UNDERSTANDING AND PERFORMANCE

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Abstract*: It is important to practice an effective communication, in order to ensure employee's engagement, hence, promoting organizational performance. However, many institutions failed to maintain such an effective communication among employees, both upward and downwards. In addition, some staff never get adequate feedback on how they can improve their performance. These leads to poor understanding on their own job and responsibilities, on top of it leading to institution's poor performance. To detect if this problem occurs at Kolej Komuniti Sandakan, this study was conducted to identify the extent to which communication is effective in terms of information clarity, communication openness, feedback adequacy, and upward and downward communication among college staff. A survey was distributed among 26 Kolej Komuniti Sandakan staff members using a questionnaire adapted from Communication Satisfaction Questionnaire (CSQ). Findings indicated an interesting insight, which staff are receiving such a high clarity of information. However, staff reported low satisfaction on honesty and openness communication among colleagues, as well as low trust among colleague's interactions. They also reported ineffective communication was given from the top management. Other than that, staff get less information regarding key decisions made by top management. They also get limited guidance on what they should improve. Accordingly, this study suggests the top management to increase transparency, provide constructive feedback and build trust among all staff. A professional development training can be done among staff to enhance communication, such as how to respectfully give and receive feedback objectively. Supervisors need to demonstrate openness, manage sensitive issues confidentially and praise staff's contributions to motivate. Besides, using suitable platforms for different information especially downward communication is very important. On top of that, providing clear feedback and guidance for poor performance regardless employees' working experience are important to improve their accountability and engagement.*

Keywords*: communication, workplace, feedback*

Introduction

In today's working environment, effective communication is crucial for institution's achievement. It is the foundation that helps employees understand their scope of work, so that they can contribute to achieve institution's key performance index. Clear instruction, specific objectives, and well-defined job description will help employee to do daily tasks effectively. Previous studies had proven than communication is efficient, it increases employee's performance, commitment to the company, hence, ensuring higher achievement (Downs & Hazen, 1977; Twinamasiko, 2025).

An effective communication consists of openness, two-way and adequate feedback from both parties. Supervisors should easily be approached by staff, honest, yet discreet so that employees feel comfortable to share ideas and issues. They should also give gradual constructive feedback to build trust among team members. These positive communication practices will help in strengthening teamwork spirit in workplace.

Previous study indicates that workplaces that practice an open communication and proper feedback tend to have higher employee satisfaction, increased motivation, and better overall performance (Abdul Razak & Mustapha, 2023; Fadilah, Juliadi & Astagini, 2024). Many employees are having difficulty to understand their tasks. It happens when information given is unclear, lack of transparency, weak upward and downward information, as well as lack of feedback given. These consequently cause confusion, misunderstanding, and demotivation (Downs & Hazen, 1977; Abdul Razak & Mustapha, 2023). Previous study revealed that when instructions are vague, employees become hesitate to share ideas and the top management will get insufficient feedback. This later leads to repetition of mistake, financial loss and goals unachieved (Twinamasiko, 2025; Fadilah, Juliadi & Astagini, 2024). It is important to address all the communications gaps in an organization, in order to improve performance.

There is no doubt that issues of misunderstanding among staff often occur in any organization. This situation usually starts from trivial issues, which are then ignored and not addressed by the management, and eventually becomes stale, and harmony is lost in the workplace. At Kolej Komuniti Sandakan, management must always be aware of whether there are communication problems among staff. Therefore, as an initial step, this study was conducted to identify the extent to which communication is effective in terms of information clarity, communication openness, feedback adequacy, and upward and downward communication among staff. This study is important for management at the College to detect from the beginning if there is a communication gap among staff. If it can be detected early, it will be easy for management to devise effective strategies to deal with this issue. This study also may give insights to the top management, especially in educational institutions to improve communication methods and mediums in hoping both employer and employee understands their roles better, working in a good teamwork, as well as boosting overall performance.

Literature Review

Communication is generally important in every organization, as it is a foundation that determine performance, keeping employees to stay motivated and satisfied. When information is imparted effectively, employees will understand their tasks and become a role player within their profession. A specific and precise information can define organization's objectives, thus, explain what and how a person needs to do in order to accomplish those objectives. Otherwise, an unclear information leads to confusion and poor satisfaction, hence, causing demotivation among employees (Jaafari, Amin, Latif & Ajjaj, 2023; Zafirah & Salwa, 2022). Studies showed

that when an organization provide such an effective communication, employees will tend to put more commitment and engagement. This will lead to a smoother and sufficient process (Ismali, Muhammad, & Juhari, 2025). Nevertheless, the more layers of management in an organization, the more difficult it will be to practice an effective communication.

An effective communication process requires beyond a clear information. It also depends on openness communication, upward and downward communication and feedback given. When communication transparency is high, trust will eventually build. Employees feel safe to share ideas, raise concerns and participate more in decision-making without feeling afraid of being condemned (Jaafari et al., 2023; Nuzatul Shima Sulaiman & Inani Man, 2023). Besides, constructive feedback from supervisors is important to boost employees 'performance. Some employees need frequent feedback to make then stay in track, as it will increase working motivation and satisfaction (Zafirah & Salwa, 2022; Kadir Arifin et al., 2019).

Moreover, downward communication is also important. It can ensure the top management's aspiration reach to all employees clearly. It also assures all team members are working towards the same direction, thus, fosters better collaboration (Zuripal, Taufik Adi Putra, Heliyani, Almasdi, & Dona Amelia, 2023). These communication components are crucial to be practiced together for a better engagement and performance among employees.

A lot of studies have been done recently regarding communication, whereas it remains the biggest problem in some organizations. Studies often focusing on one or two dimensions, which are clarity of information and frequency of feedback. They often left behind the other dimensions, which are openness, upward and downward communication as well as the combinations (Jaafari et al., 2023; Nuzatul Shima Sulaiman & Inani Man, 2023). Furthermore, there is limited of study focusing on Malaysian educational institutions, especially *Kolej Komuniti*. This leads to poor understanding on how to strengthen communications process, following Higher Education Ministry's vision and missions. Finding the root cause is important, in order to come out with the best solutions for a better communication. This study, therefore, aims to examine four aspects of workplace communication, as well as to highlight areas that need improvement. It may provide a useful insights for institutional growth.

Research Methodology
The quantitative study used an online questionnaire and was distributed via *Google Form*. Questionnaires were adapted from the *Communication Satisfaction Questionnaire (CSQ)* by Downs and Hazen (1977). The population is staff of Kolej Komuniti Sandakan, including the management, lecturers, and administration (N = 26). It used convenience sampling, as this technique allowed the researcher to access readily available primary data sources. Descriptive analysis was then conducted to examine employees' perceptions of workplace communication, including clarity of information, openness of communication, effectiveness of upward and downward communication. It also identifies areas of communication and feedback requiring improvement. The analysis of this study used descriptive analysis to assess the level of student agreement with the study items based on the mean score. The mean interpretation level was based on the scale used by Ngadiman et al. (2019), namely: 1.00–1.99 (Weak), 2.00–2.99 (Low), 3.00–3.99 (Moderate), and 4.00–5.00 (High).

Reasearch Findings

Respondent Background

As shown in Table 1, the respondents consist of various demographic profiles. 61.54% (N=16) of the respondents are lecturers, while another 19.3% (N=5) are in management and administrative positions respectively. For the years of service, 65.38% (N=17) of the respondents have more than 10 years of working experience. This is followed by 19.23% (N=5) who have served for 4–6 years. Meanwhile, 11.54% (N=3) have served between 7–10 years, and 3.85% (N=1) have served between 0–3 years.

Table 1: Respondents' Background

Demographic Profile		Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Position	Management	5	19.23
	Lecturer	16	61.54
	Administration	5	19.23
	Total	26	100.0
Years of Service	0–3 years	1	3.85
	4–6 years	5	19.23
	7–10 years	3	11.54
	more than 10 years	17	65.38
	Total	26	100.0

Clarity of Information

Table 2 shows that the highest mean for Clarity of Information is *"I understand how my tasks contribute to the success of the organization,"* which is 4.50. This is followed by *"Instructions from my supervisor are clear and specific,"* with a mean of 4.35. Next is *"I know exactly what is expected of me at work,"* at 4.31, followed *by "I know exactly what is expected of me at work,"* at 4.31, and *"The goals and objectives of the organization are communicated clearly,"* at 4.27. Overall, the mean for Clarity of Information is 4.36, which indicates that it is at a good level.

Table 2: Clarity of Information

Item	Clarity of information	N	Mean
1.	I understand how my tasks contribute to the success of the organization.	26	4.50
2.	Instructions from my supervisor are clear and specific.	26	4.35
3.	I know exactly what is expected of me at work.	26	4.31
4.	The goals and objectives of the organization are communicated clearly.	26	4.27
	Overall Mean	**26**	**4.36**

Mean score indicator: 1 = Strongly disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly agree.

Openness of Communication

Table 3 refers to Openness of Communication. The data shows that the highest mean is *"I can share ideas with colleagues without obstacles,"* which is 4.04. This is followed by *"I feel comfortable expressing my opinions at work"* and *"My supervisor encourages open discussions,"* both with a mean of 3.96. Next is *"Members of my unit communicate honestly*

and openly," at 3.85, while *"There is an atmosphere of trust in workplace communication"* records a mean of 3.81. Overall, the mean for Openness of Communication is 3.92, which indicates that it is at a moderate level but still considered good.

Table 3: Openness of Communication

Item	Openness of Communication	N	Mean
1.	I can share ideas with colleagues without obstacles.	26	4.04
2.	I feel comfortable expressing my opinions at work.	26	3.96
3.	My supervisor encourages open discussions.	26	3.96
4.	Members of my unit communicate honestly and openly.	26	3.85
5.	There is an atmosphere of trust in workplace communication.	26	3.81
	Overall Mean	**26**	**3.92**

Mean score indicator: 1 = Strongly disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly agree.

Upward and Downward Communication

Table 4 refers to Upward and Downward Communication. The data shows that the highest mean is *"I can easily approach my supervisor to discuss work matters,"* which is 4.15. This is followed by *"My supervisor listens to my suggestions and feedback"* and *"Staff are given opportunities to voice their opinions to management,"* both at 4.08. Next is *"Information from upper management is effectively communicated to staff,"* with a mean of 3.92, while *"I am informed about important decisions made by management"* records a mean of 3.88. Overall, the mean for Upward and Downward Communication is 4.02, which indicates that it is at a good level.

Table 4: Upward and Downward Communication

Item	Upward and Downward Communication	N	Mean
1.	I can easily approach my supervisor to discuss work matters.	26	4.15
2.	My supervisor listens to my suggestions and feedback.	26	4.08
3.	Staff are given opportunities to voice their opinions to management.	26	4.08
4.	Information from upper management is effectively communicated to staff.	26	3.92
5.	I am informed about important decisions made by management.	26	3.88
	Overall Mean	**26**	**4.02**

Mean score indicator: 1 = Strongly disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly agree.

Adequecy of Feedback

Table 4 refers to the data on Adequacy of Feedback. The data shows that the highest mean is *"Feedback from my supervisor helps me improve my performance,"* which is 4.15. This is followed *by "I receive sufficient feedback on my job performance"* and *"The feedback I receive is timely and constructive,"* both at 4.12. Next is *"I am informed when I perform well,"* with a mean of 4.04, while *"I am told when my performance needs improvement"* records a mean of 3.96. Overall, the mean for Adequacy of Feedback is 4.08, which indicates that it is at a good level.

Table 5: Adequacy of Feedback

Item	Adequacy of Feedback	N	Mean
1.	Feedback from my supervisor helps me improve my performance.	26	4.15
2.	I receive sufficient feedback on my job performance.	26	4.12
3.	The feedback I receive is timely and constructive.	26	4.12
4.	I am informed when I perform well.	26	4.04
5.	I am told when my performance needs improvement.	26	3.96
	Overall Mean	**26**	**4.08**

Mean score indicator: 1 = Strongly disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly agree.

Discussion and Conclusion

Findings indicated that most staff members perceived they receive a very clear information. They understand their own task that leads to organizational target. This aligns with prior research that suggests clear information of tasks assuredly boosts employee engagement and performance. (Twinamasiko, 2025; Nurhanani & Anwar, 2024). The results also indicate that most staff get a straightforward, clear and specific instructions from their supervisor. It is supported by previous study that stated that a well-defined information helps to reduce confusion and boost work performance (Abdul Razak & Mustapha, 2023; Balakrishnan, Angusamy, Patil, & Razak, 2024). Overall, most staff perceived a good clarity of information in their institution, making them understand well on their roles.

The findings also revealed that most staff have a positive insight on the openness of communication in their institution. Most of them feel comfortable to share ideas, expressing opinions, as well as being encouraged by their supervisors to openly discuss. It is consistent with previous study stated that an open communication leads to contributes to higher job satisfaction (Nursyamsi & Siregar, 2024). On the other hand, most staff perceived almost moderate level of communication honesty and openly among members in their unit. They also moderately trust their team member while communicating, indicating the need of improvement.

Furthermore, findings showed that most staff practicing an effective upward and downward communication. Supervisors are easily approached to discuss about work and always listen to any suggestions and feedback. Most of them can voice their opinions whenever they need to. These results align with previous research stated that effective upward and downward communication significantly boosts job performance and effectiveness (Ocra, 2021; Idris, 2025). Yet, most staff perceived that information from upper management is moderately communicated. Most of them also agree that important decisions made by management were occasionally shared.

Furthermore, the findings indicated most staff agree that feedback from their supervisor helps them to improve. It is similar with much previous research stated timely, specific, and constructive feedback enhances employee performance, motivation, and job satisfaction (Abdul Razak & Mustapha, 2023; Balakrishnan, Angusamy, Patil, & Razak, 2024). Furthermore, staff also received sufficient feedback on their well performance, timely and constructively. Nonetheless, most staff perceived they didn't get feedback on what it is needed to improve, whenever they did less or wrong on their job.

From the findings, this study suggests several recommendations. To build honest and open communications among staff, supervisors should create a safe method while discussing, sucah

as regular meetings or open-door policies. In addition, both staff and supervisor should be given insights on how to give feedback in a respectful and solution-focused way, reducing gossips and badmouthing. Supervisor should be the first to model openness of communication by admitting mistakes and practicing accountability when it is necessary. This gives a good example to employees, hence, building trust especially when dealing with sensitive issues. To improve downward communication, the top management should use suitable different channels while sharing information, giving instructions and providing frequent updates. Whenever staff did not perform, supervisors need to privately meet them and respectfully explain their expectations, together with guidance for improvement.

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