

Communication in a More Diverse Social Club: Organizational Analysis

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Introduction and Methodology

This paper is an organizational analysis of a non-profit social club in a suburban area of northern Indiana. The author attended events and board meetings at the club and conducted interviews with members of stakeholder groups (including board members, general members, employees and neighbors) over three months in 2012 to understand the organization's current issues and problems from the viewpoint of those involved. Please see Tables One and Two.

Literature Review

A literature review explored published research on organizational communication that would pertain to interactions between board members and general members of a community social club with a volunteer board. Castor (2007) conducted an analysis of language used by a school board having disagreements while seeking to implement a new communications policy and found that organizations were prone to misunderstandings and miscommunication. She emphasized understanding the assumptions different people use when communicating. Multiple studies stressed the importance of electronic communication, including interactive websites, email, discussion groups, and social media. Macnamara and Zerfass (2012) stated that social media (e.g., Facebook) can be an effective tool to resolve tensions and improve public relations. Ducheneaut (2002) and Bolisani & Scarso (2000) described how email communication can affect organizational structure and power and facilitate the transfer of information within an organization. Carty (2010) described successes using information technology and social networking to effect change in institutional politics. Giri (2008) found a significant positive effect on organizational effectiveness when leaders used electronic communication. Hargie and Dickson (2007) proposed that communication efforts were important in promoting the level of understanding of new policies relating to discrimination.

Demographic Diversity

Interviewed informants (n=8) were primarily female (62.5%) and Caucasian (87.5%), between 40-80 years of age. Changing demographics of current members (n=340) were analyzed as a factor affecting the stakeholder-identified issues. The membership has become more diverse in age, race, gender and gender identity over the last 15 years. The club was founded over 80 years ago, and club members were traditionally older white men from the same suburban neighborhood around the club. Women were Auxiliary members (only if married to a member) until 1995, and the club was reportedly "whites only" until around 1997. Please see Table Three.

Table One: Stakeholder Groups Identified and Key Informants Interviewed

Stakeholder Group	Key Informant's Title
Board Member	1 st Vice President 10 year member
Board Member	Treasurer 7 year member
General Member & Community Member	Committee Chair Former Ladies Auxiliary Local UMC Member 24 year member
General Member	17 year member
General Member	Former Board member 50 year member
General Member	Secretary Nominee 10 year member
Employee	Bartender Former Board Member 15 year member
Neighbor	Neighbor for 14 years (Non-member)

Table Two: Issues Identified by Stakeholders

Increase member compliance with rules
Decrease burden on current officers
Increase member participation in board meetings
Increase participation in conservation activities
Increase appropriate youth involvement
Increase revenue

Table Three: Changes in Demographic Diversity

More female members since 1995
More non-white members since 1997
More geographical diversity among members
More young adult members
More LGBTQ members and guests
Fewer youth activities

Communication methods in this social club which is undergoing rapid diversification were selected as the key factor for a proposed intervention. See Table Four.

Table Four: Current and Proposed Organizational Communication Methods

Communication Methods	
Current	Proposed
Oral reports read at membership meetings	Monthly emails to members
Bulletin board postings	Printed newsletter members could pick-up
Word of mouth	Printed newsletter posted in club
Newsletter – discontinued	Website updated monthly
Website – content out of date	Facebook site updated monthly

Working Hypothesis

Although many volunteer organizations allege that all their issues stem from lack of time and money (Netting, et al, 2012), the present analysis reveals that most of the key informants acknowledge problems in organizational communication. Improved communication is therefore identified as the most practical factor for intervention. Some informants suggested that a transition to electronic communication is needed, while others prefer printed information or attending meetings in person. It is hypothesized that improvements in communication could alleviate the problems identified by stakeholders. Improved communication could leverage improvements in effectiveness of the board, knowledge and enforcement of the rules, openness to diversity, participation, membership, conservation and youth activities, and financial management. It seems that the best channels for improved communication would be printed (posting and distributing printed information in the club) and electronic (sending out regular emails, social media updates and web postings) along with the current method of oral reports given at membership meetings.

Selected References

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