A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF ORGANIZATIONAL COMMUNICATION IN SOUTH AFRICAN PORT OPERATIONS, PORT ELIZABETH DIVISION

BY

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ABSTRACT

The study is set out to analyze organizational communication at South African Port Operations (SAPO), Port Elizabeth. The analysis was based on the four formal flows of communication in an organization, which are upward communication, downward communication, horizontal communication and diagonal communication. The study was also meant to provide suggestions on how to improve communication at SAPO, Port Elizabeth especially with regard to the above mentioned flows.

The literature review looked at the four different flows of communication which occurs in the organization. From the review, one can conclude that in order for an organization to function properly communication is needed to co-ordinate all the activities towards an organization’s goals.

The empirical research was carried out using mainly qualitative methods of data collection. Focus group interviews were used as a method of gathering information. The sample was drawn from employees who are working for SAPO, the sample was drawn from various levels of authority within the company.

The findings have revealed that there are various flows of communication at SAPO, but there needs to be improvement particularly with upward, horizontal and diagonal communication. The research also revealed that downward communication has more formal channels.

KEY WORDS
Organizational communication, upward communication, downward communication, horizontal communication, diagonal communication, levels of authority, formal communication, employees, management communication, communication channels.
CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION AND RESEARCH DESIGN

1. INTRODUCTION

In the 1960’s organizational communication shifted its primary focus from the applied aspect of communication in the organization, which involved mainly writing, speaking and persuasion to the broader role of communication in areas such as organizational behaviours and organizational theories (Barker and Angelopulo, 2006:14).

Since the inception of organizational communication in the 60’s, work has been done to develop it which then resulted in books being specifically written about organizational communication. As the organizational environment changes, there are more dynamic ways to deal with the challenges to ensure that the goal of the organization is achieved. For example, if an organization such as the South African Port Operations (SAPO), Port Elizabeth division is faced with productivity challenges, downward communication is used to communicate the goals and the consequences for not achieving the goals.

The success of an organization is dependent on how well, it designs its communication strategies to effectively communicate with internal and external stakeholders. The importance of information flow within an organization can result in high productivity and customer satisfaction. For example, if SAPO enters to a productivity agreement of 30 containers per hour with a client, employees must be informed about that agreement.

This study aims to critically analyze organizational communication at SAPO Port Elizabeth division. The focal areas of the study will be on effectiveness of the different flows of communication at South African Port Operations.
Communication in an organization is initiated at various levels which results in design of the message according to various audience needs, bearing in mind the channels through which the message travels and feedback to the sender. The different categories of employee levels will be taken into consideration, i.e. management, supervisors, full time union representatives and operational staff.

Organizations are structured such that power and authority is delegated according to seniority which enforces the acceptable behaviour within the organization. Each function in an organization is dependent on other functions which is why an organization is seen as a system. For example, the operations department at SAPO is dependent on the planning department for planning of the cargo vessels and human resources department to provide human resources. In an organization there are various functions which need to be carried out. Consequently, communication becomes central in the delivery of those functions.

Furthermore, communication is used to coordinate various activities and information must flow in various directions. It is the function of management to transfer to the subordinates instructions and information about the vision and mission of the organization. Subordinates are expected to provide feedback about their performance and offer suggestions to improve their performance. Employees at the same level need to share information which might have taken time to reach them due to the hierarchical levels.

1.1 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

SAPO is one of the core business divisions of Transnet which is a state corporation. The core business of SAPO is to handle imported and exported cargo as well as washing and de-waxing of fully built vehicles which is part of its value adding services. The cargo is handled through four specialized terminals, that is, Container terminal, Car terminal, Break Bulk and Bulk terminal. The following are the most frequent handled products: vehicles,
agricultural products and manganese ore. SAPO’s main clients are automotive manufacturers, for example, Volkswagen South Africa (VWSA), General Motors (GM), Ford and Continental Tyres. Since the afore-mentioned clients compete in the global arena, effective and efficient service is crucial to all stakeholders.

According to SAPO Human Resources communication update (June 2006), SAPO employs 500 employees, most of whom are mature and have been with the organization for up to 40 years. As the company serves international clients it is required to keep up with the changing business challenges. These changes include mergers within the shipping companies, bigger cargo vessels calling which requires faster turn around times. As a result of the Transnet four point turn around strategy which is aimed amongst other things the achievement of a healthy balance sheet and process re-engineering. Employees have low morale which results in low productivity due to changes in processes and structures as well as pressure to achieve objectives in a limited timeframe. One of SAPO’s reputation drivers is its cargo operation because, it is the core business. Its services are measured by how quickly and safely it can load and offload a vessel.

The newly built Port of Ngqura, 10 kilometres outside Port Elizabeth, has put pressure on productivity levels and competitiveness in the Port Elizabeth port. The high accident rate of client’s cargo damages the image of SAPO. Declining cargo, change of trade routes and the decreasing demand in the market creates challenges for SAPO in terms of being over staffed at Break bulk terminal as per the Business Unit Monthly report in July 2006 (2006:2). This then calls for change management which is premised on effective management communication with SAPO to change attitudes and deliver excellent service.
1.2 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of the study is to critically analyze organizational communication within SAPO, Port Elizabeth. The study will focus on the content of information to the various levels of the organization. Although the general purpose of the study is to research SAPO’s communication strengths and weaknesses in various levels, the focus will be on the directional flow of information. Downs & Adrian (2004:62) believes that in a healthy organization, information flows upward, downward, horizontal and diagonal. Therefore, it is imperative that SAPO use the different flows effectively. Should the flows not be utilized effectively corrective measures must be put in place.

Different structures and levels of authority in an organization result in different flows of communication. For example, communication between senior clerks is horizontal flow of communication whilst information from the manager to the senior clerk is downward communication.

SAPO Port Elizabeth has been selected for this study because it is the gateway to Eastern Cape economy and should therefore be able to withstand the expected competitive challenges brought by the new port of Ngqura. Since the researcher is employed by SAPO, it will be easier to gain access to information. It is going to be of utmost importance to have knowledgeable, skilled and trained employees who will be able to deliver the expectations of all stakeholders and shareholders.

1.3 ORIENTATION

The brief discussion about communication in an organization and its function forms the basis of the study at SAPO. It provides the conceptual background for the study. The discussion will cover the functions, characteristics of communication and the various flows of communication to lay grounds for the literature review and the study itself.
One of the solutions to business re-engineering at SAPO will be to change the operational processes. Communication will serve as an agent of change. Communication, as advised by Robbins (1998:310) serves four functions, whilst Downs & Adrian (2004:60) identify five functions. The four functions by Robbins are: control, motivation, emotional expression and information. Adrian & Downs identify the following functions of communication: task/work, social/maintenance, motivation, integration, and innovation. Although they differ in topics some are similar in discussion, except the innovation function. These communication functions are discussed briefly below.

**Control function**
The flow of communication in an organization is controlled by the value and procedures of the organization. The types of messages which are sent, the source, and the channel are controlled by the authority or management. The study will attempt to discuss the effectiveness of the control function at SAPO. Management communication which is referred to as the formal communication is controlled by the management of the organization. Although Downs & Adrian (2004: 60) refer to task or work function their argument supports Robbins in that supervisors inform, instruct, command, identify goals and announce controls. The policies contain the controls on how the tasks need to be carried out.

**Motivation function**
Motivation is fostered upon employees by clarifying what is to be done, how well they are doing and what can be done to improve performance. The formation of specific goals, feedback on progress towards the goals and re-enforcement of desired behaviour all stimulate motivation. The communication that takes place within the group is a fundamental mechanism by which members show their frustration and feelings of satisfaction. Downs & Adrian (2004:60) on the subject of motivation, argue that employees cannot always be ordered or commanded. They can, however, be persuaded to do their jobs. Employees are motivated by both their managers and their colleagues.
**Emotional expression function**

Communication, therefore, provides a release of emotional expression of feelings and fulfillment of social needs. Employees spend approximately eight hours at work every day so their work environment is seen as a place where they can socialize. Downs & Adrian (2004:61) discuss this function under social or maintenance function where they argue that the immediate goal of maintenance communication enhance the individual’s feeling of self-worth and to place high value on co-operation.

**Information function**

Communication also provides information which enables individuals and groups to make decisions by transmitting data to identify and evaluate alternative choices. An enormous amount of information is needed by the employees to operate effectively and efficiently. The informative function is important because managers need accurate, timely and well-organized information to reach decisions or to resolve conflict. Without a constant flow of information, managers cannot take informed decisions. Consequently, success may be the result of chance than an informed decision. Downs & Adrian (2004:61) further argue this point through the function of integration. They are of the opinion that the information provided links to inform the employees about the organization.

**Innovation function**

Downs & Adrian (2004:61) argue over and above the four functions by Robins that for modern organizations to adapt to the environment, they turn to the employees for suggestions. In addition to the suggestion system, problem solving meetings quality circles and goal setting are means of being innovative.

In the discussion that follows, cognisance will be taken of the characteristics and the flows of communication in an organization. The discussion of functions and characteristics will lay a foundation for the study in terms of understanding organizational communication.
Communication characteristics

Mersham & Skinner (2004:68) identify a number of communication characteristics viz.:

Communication is a fundamental component of management. Communication within an organization should be viewed as a contributing partner with other key staff functions in influencing employee understanding of both business goals and public relation issues.

Commitment by top management. There should be support for the communication process at all levels of authority in an organization. An overall company policy on organizational communication and guidelines for managers and supervisors are important.

A communication strategy is essential. Communication must be a planned process and it should include all stakeholders’ issues and desires. The plan should be revised each year and aligned to business strategy.

Managers are key to success. Managers are key catalysts for effective communication and the communication system must recognize their need for information, training and rewards for effective communication performance. Top executives should set the example by being accessible, share important information and ideas even if they are negative. Most importantly, all managers need to ensure that ideas and criticism are acted upon or transmitted to the appropriate persons for appropriate action.

Priority issues should form the content. The latter mentioned should be the core content of the management communication programme and should be discussed in an open understandable manner through various channels of communication.
Regular evaluation will ensure effectiveness. The communication process should undergo regular evaluation to prove its worth in terms of employee management relations as well as employee performance and awareness of key public issues. It is essential that the communication function be tested periodically to determine its effectiveness and to give direction for improvement.

The discussion on the role of communication and characteristics is followed by the discussion of the main flows of communication in an organization.

Organizational communication and various flows
The structure of an organization forms the basis for the division of labour and function, delegation of decision making authority and horizontal and vertical coordination. The study focuses on the four flows of information in an organization which are; downward, upward, horizontal and diagonal. These will be discussed briefly and dealt with in detail in the literature review.

Downward communication flow
Downward communication flow refers to communication directed to lower levels of the hierarchy by higher levels. According to Verwey & Du Plooy-Cilliers (2002:164), hierarchical structures lead to re-enforced control which is linked to the control function as discussed earlier. The organizational structure has a major impact on downward communication. The purpose of downward communication flow is to give instructions, provide information about procedures and practices and communicate goals and strategic objectives of the organization.

Upward communication
Upward communication refers to messages that flow from subordinates to superiors. Verwey & Du Plooy-Cilliers (2002:165) believe that effective communication in an organization is possible only if management not only speaks, but also listens. The purpose of upward communication include, amongst other, the giving of feedback on performance, seeking clarity on the task allowing
worker participation and providing information necessary for effective decision making.

**Horizontal communication**

Horizontal communication flow refers to communication amongst people who are at the same organizational level of authority. Messages at this level tend to be functional and usually task orientated. Fielding (2006:53) describes this as sideways communication. The purpose hereof is information sharing, problem solving, conflict resolution and co-ordination.

**Diagonal communication**

Diagonal communication flow refers to communication across the organizational levels. Diagonal communication occurs amongst people at different levels of the organizational hierarchy and in different departments. Pace & Faules (1994:126) refer to this as cross channel communication. The purpose hereof is to create relationships related to tasks.

The following discussion will focus on the background and the methods which will be utilized to analyze SAPO communication flows.

1.4 RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

The aim of this research is to: Assess the effectiveness of information flows at SAPO and how they can be improved. This will also assist in identifying the gaps which can be addressed through an internal communication strategy which will support the company’s business strategy.
1.5 RESEARCH PROBLEM

The principle questions are:

(i) Are the employees of SAPO receiving adequate information for them to carry out their duties successfully and what type of information do they need to carry their duties successfully?

(ii) Are the channels of communication open and effective for delivery of messages at SAPO?

(iii) How can organizational communication at SAPO be improved in order to meet the expectations?

(iv) Do the different flows of communication in an organization take away the democratic powers of employees?

1.6 METHODOLOGY

In critically analyzing organizational communication at SAPO, various techniques will be employed. A literature review will assist in enhancing the understanding of organizational communication and organizational structure and their impact with reference to the flow of messages.

An understanding of the current organizational communication system at SAPO will be analyzed through interviews. Data regarding organizational communication will be collected through focus group interviews.

The sample will comprise of four different levels which will represent management, supervisors, full time union representatives and operational staff. Different categories will be selected because they might have a different view of organizational communication with specific reference to the various flows.
Organizational communication will be analysed based on the literature review and empirical search. Recommendations will be drawn from the employees suggestions on how to improve the different flows of communication.

1.6.1 METHOD AND TECHNIQUES

Krueger (1994:6) states that a focus group is a special type of group in terms of purpose, size, composition and procedures. It is composed of seven to ten participants who are selected because they have certain characteristics in common that relate to the topic.

A focus group was selected from employees of SAPO who share the same environment, rules and procedures. They all in one way or the other experience some form of communication relating to the organization and their jobs.

The focus group interview approach will be used for this study because they are cost effective and participants perceive the group as a social unit which shares the same experiences. The groups will be made up of employees with the same characteristics i.e. full time union representatives. Krueger (1994:10) also believes that focus group interviews work because they tap into human tendencies. As a product of an environment, people are influenced by others around them. Other people’s opinions can be listened to and shared in a focus group setting than in an individual setting. The format allows the facilitator to probe for more information and seek clarity. It has high face validity because the technique is easily understood and the results seem believable to those using the information.

1.6.2 TARGET POPULATION AND SAMPLING

The target populations are employees at SAPO. A stratified sample will be used. The sample will be drawn from the different levels of the organization in order to understand what the employees feel about the flow of communication at SAPO and what they receive through the different flows. According to Du Plooy (2002:15), “Stratified sample is drawn when we not only want to draw a
representative sample, but include subgroups in the population. The population can be divided into different strata based on characteristics or variables”. The different strata include the management team, full time union representatives, supervisors and operational staff. The different categories or levels will be chosen for the study because each category varies from the other regarding the access of information. Each group has their own needs when it comes to communication and they can also propose improvement based on their levels. Each group will be made up of 6-10 people depending on availability of employees.

1.6.3 FIELD OPERATION

The research objectives and schedules will be presented to the Executive Committee of SAPO and thereafter, to a wider selection of middle managers, supervisors and full time labour representatives. Prior permission and support by all stakeholders will be requested.

1.6.4 DATA PROCESSING AND ANALYSIS

The data will be confidential. Selecting a representative sample of employees from different strata will ensure validity. The data analysis process will be designed to draw logical references from the text or image data collected. Creswell (2003:191) believes that there are various generic steps involved in data analysis which involves, organizing and preparing the data for analysis, reading through all the data and coding the information into categories. The coding process generates description of the setting or themes/ categories of people for analysis. The final step involves drawing inferences or interpretation of data where it captures the lessons learnt. The afore-mentioned steps will be utilized in analyzing the data.
1.6.5 LIMITATIONS

The research will be limited to Port Elizabeth terminals namely the Bulk terminal, Car terminal, Container terminal and Break Bulk terminal. These areas represent the Port Elizabeth division at SAPO. Since the above-mentioned areas are managed by different managers, it can be inferred that each communication experience may differ from employee to employee.

The limitation is that employees are working different shifts and it is difficult to release them from work. By working closely with managers and supervisors the problem will be alleviated.

1.7 CONCLUSION

As modern organizations are faced with various challenges, there is an increase in the need for dynamic problem solving techniques and strategic direction. With the changes brought about by globalization and changes in marketing trends, there is a constant need for reviewing organizations strategies. SAPO is not immune from the negative impacts brought about by changing markets. Effective communication in the changing environment is therefore crucial. As people are the most important assets of the organization, employees demand to be kept abreast of the organization’s strategy through the various functions of communication. The interrelated functions of communication enable the organization to achieve its goals.

The functions and the characteristics of communication also indicate the health status of an organization. Characteristics are accompanied by functions of communication which are later implemented through the various flows of information.
Based on the background, SAPO, Port Elizabeth division, is faced with some challenges which need to be managed through change management. It is therefore, important that an effective internal communication strategy is put in place. The study is expected to assist SAPO in identifying the gaps and putting in place corrective measures.

In critically analysing organizational communication at SAPO, it is imperative to follow the correct methods in selecting the sample, formulating questions and critical analysis thereof.

1.8 OUTLINE OF THE TREATISE

Chapter two focuses on literature review of organizational communication, the different flows of communication in an organization and the purposes of the flow. A critical analysis will be drawn from the literature review and the positioning of the organizational communication analysis at SAPO, P.E.

Chapter three will cover the methodology used in conducting the study. How will the sample be selected from the population? The techniques used in collecting and analysing the data will also be discussed.

Chapter four will present the data collected through the four focus groups i.e. managers, supervisors, full time union representatives and operational staff. The four group’s views will be centred around various information that they receive through the different communication flows.

Chapter five will provide the conclusion of the study and present the findings and offer recommendations.
CHAPTER TWO

ORGANIZATIONAL COMMUNICATION

2. INTRODUCTION

In this chapter a literature overview will be provided to clarify the concept of organizational communication and related theories. This review of the literature will provide the basis for evaluation of organizational communication at SAPO. Complexities of organizational communication will also be discussed. The critical analysis of organizational communication in SAPO will examine whether information flow in SAPO is rapid, relevant and enabling employees to execute their daily functions effectively and efficiently.

Organizations are entrusted with different roles. In order for them to fulfil these roles they need various resources such as money, equipment, technology and human resources to produce the service or product. The most valuable resource of any organization is its people. According to Pradeep Maharaj, “a healthy balance sheet and new equipment won’t bring the new Transnet, changes will be mainly realized once the company invests in its human capital” (SAPO management conference, June 2006). It is therefore, important for employees to understand their roles and responsibilities. In some organizations the cost of labour is a fixed expense which contributes almost 60% of its expenditure. This puts pressure on the level of productivity and performance as organizations want a return on investment. Organizational communication is imperative because communication co-ordinates all the different activities of an organization to achieve its goals.

Akkirman & Harris (2005:397) argue that today’s business challenges focus on reducing and controlling costs, competing globally, improving quality, improving customer services and accelerating the product development cycle. SAPO is impacted on by the challenges of reducing and controlling costs, global
competition and improving customer services. The action plans are translated to goals which should be communicated clearly.

The emphasis on performance is as a result of local organizations competing in the global arena to ensure effective and efficient utilization of resources. Every organization wants to continuously improve its processes in order to save costs. Verwey and Du Plooy-Cilliers (2003:4) confirm that the complexity of organizational life makes strategic communication management challenging because these standards need to be explained to employees. Organizations continue to change to suit the needs of society dominated by immediacy, instant solutions and just-in time approaches. Increasingly flexible working conditions require new structures which in turn require management to adopt more dynamic processes.

Organizational communication occurs in the context of an organization it is therefore imperative to define an organization and discuss its characteristics and its roles. The different views will be discussed below for the purpose of the critical analysis of organizational communication at SAPO.

2.1 DEFINITIONS OF AN ORGANIZATION

Seeger (1997:9) defines an organization as a rational, goal directed entity characterised by a structure of hierarchy, division of labour, policy procedures and rules. Communication holds the characteristics together, by consistently sharing the organization’s goals.

Mersham & Skinner (2001:4) perceive an organization as having two elements, which are people working together towards a common goal. People in an organization fulfil different roles which are assigned to different levels. They are motivated by various aspects such as salaries, achievements, promotions and teamwork. SAPO employees work together to sustain SAPO’s business in order
to protect their employment. It is of mutual benefit for both parties, that is, the organization makes money and the employees have employment.

2.2 CHARACTERISTICS OF ORGANIZATIONS

An organization is seen as a group of people working together towards a certain goal. An organization, like any other object has specific characteristics. Fielding (2006:34) identifies six characteristics which makes it different from other groupings, viz.:

- People in an organization fulfil different jobs and responsibilities.
- There will be one or more places where the power is held.
- Each post in an organization may be filled by different people.
- Different sections of the organization depend on each other.
- They meet on a regular basis to co-ordinate their activities.

Pace & Faules (1994:7) identify the difference between a formal and an informal organization. For the purpose of the study the focus will be on the formal organization. The characteristics above are linked to a formal organization which is popularly known as bureaucratic. Max Weber’s analysis of bureaucratic organization exhibits the following characteristics: efficiency is related to hierarchy pattern of authority which can be true or untrue in some organizations.

The formal organizations are seen as:

- Having stipulated relationship amongst positions. For example, in SAPO, these will include managers, supervisors and staff. Communication at SAPO is directed according to the hierarchical levels in order for it to have authority and power. These levels become extremely important when instructions have to be given.
• The purpose of the organization is sub-divided into tasks. Organizational tasks are distributed amongst various positions in accordance of official duties. Consequently each employee will have a specific role to play. For example, the engineering department is expected to carry out duties which are related to engineering thus the separation of tasks. The relationships amongst the departments are structured.

• Authority to perform the duty is vested in the position. An employee is expected to do what is captured in the job description and the delegation of authority. The power is limited to the level or position a person occupies in the organization. Visually authority lies with the person who is at the top of the organizational hierarchy.

• The lines of authority and the position are arranged in a hierarchical order. Officials are responsible to their subordinates and the lines of communication go upward and downward.

• There are formal rules and regulations which regulate the activities of the different functions. Administration of the procedures is central in the functioning of the departments in an organization. Emotional detachment is seen as important when dealing with employees and clients.

2.3 STRUCTURE OF AN ORGANIZATION

Organizations are managed through various types of structures of which the most popular ones are the tall and flat structures. Communication flows according to the structure of the organization.

Mersham & Skinner (2001: 32) view structures as an arrangement of components and subsystems within an organization. They further believe that it refers to the patterns of relationships among the units in a social organization and relationships that might be expressed in terms of power status or other variables. Sometimes organizations are structured such that the units in the organization are differentiated from each other.
Van Staden, Marx & Erasmus – Kritzinger (2002:22) maintain that organizational structures help to make the flow of information more effective and ensure that there are formal communication channels to be followed whenever information needs to be exchanged. However the same structures can impede communication.

People in an organization work together and take instructions from those who are in authority. The structure of the organization is implemented through an organogram or organizational chart. The organogram expresses the expected patterns of formal communication. Hence the upward and downward flow of information. This then links to the bureaucratic organization where behaviours of employees are regulated by job descriptions or formal rules. Mersham and Skinner (2001: 32) cite that the purpose of the structure is to provide stability, regularity and predictability to the organization.

An organization has many forms of structures. The two extreme ones, according to Pace & Faules (1994:7), are the tall or vertical and the flat or horizontal structures. Tall structures have many levels of authority, with managers exercising a narrow span of control. These structures are characterised by close supervision and personal relationships. Flat organization has only a modest amount of direct supervision and fewer rules and regulations.

According to Fielding (2006:40), tall structures are designed such that they allow control of messages up and down a hierarchy of managers and departments. In tall structures managers have tight control over their juniors. The tall structure does not encourage horizontal communication unless a special arrangement has been made. Vertical communication is the favoured channel of communication. Messages pass different levels which sometimes result in message distortion.

SAPO as an organization also subscribes to organizational structures, the research will show the impact of the structure towards communication.
The diagramme below show SAPO management structure, which then indicates that, SAPO is a tall structured organizations.

Figure 1. Management structure of SAPO P.E.
2.4 DEFINING ORGANIZATIONAL COMMUNICATION

This section will begin by providing various definitions of organizational communication after which these definitions will be evaluated.

Gibson and Hodgetts (1991:12) believe that organizational communication is the transfer of information and knowledge among organizational members for the purpose of achieving organizational efficiency and effectiveness. Consequently, managers and employees should share the goals. Furthermore, it is imperative to inform all the role players about the same goals of the organization.

For example, if the norm of handling containers at SAPO is 20 containers per hour, then all employees for this function must be informed to ensure that the task is executed effectively and efficiently.

Schonfelder (1998:52) also believes that organizational communication should take a holistic approach of communication within an organization. Organizational communication assumes that everyone is responsible for communication. The focus is on behaviour and processes to create an effective communication culture in an organization.

Jones, Watson & Gardner (2004:722) perceive communication as the core process of organizing. Organizations are continually called upon to change the economic pressure by changing their internal structures and relationships to their market which is done through communicating the strategy and implementation of those plans.

Fielding (2006:13) sees organizational communication as particularly concerned with the flow of information upward, downward and sideways as well as concerned with the effects of managerial styles, leadership and motivation on communication.
Pace and Faules (1994:21) see organizational communication as the display and interpretation of messages among communication units that are part of a particular organization. An organization is comprised of communication units in a hierarchical relation to each other and function in an environment.

Byers (1997:4) defines communication in an organization as a process through which people act together, create, sustain and manage meanings through the use of verbal and non-verbal signs and symbols within a particular context. Byers believes that organizational communication can be interpreted from both behaviour and symbols, they can be intentional and un-intentional. Organizational communication allows one to explain what individuals in an organization do, how they perform organizational tasks and what effect it may have on the receiver.

Lastly, Barker & Angelopulo (2006:74) see organizational communication as involving an understanding of the influence of the context of an organization on communication process and the manner in which the symbolic nature of communication distinguishes it from other forms of organizational behaviour.

The definition of organizational communication is evaluated below.

The complexity of organizational communication has been shown through the lack of consensus in the various definitions. Although theorists see it as having a co-ordination function some look at organizational communication from the receiver and sender perspective whilst others look at the content of communication. None of the definitions reveal that when communication occurs, there should be ethical considerations, nor are the complexities mentioned. Conrad & Scott Pool (1999:34) state that communication is a complex process and organizational communication is exceptionally complex. For the purpose of critically analyzing organizational communication, Fielding’s view of organization communication will be adopted. His view is particularly concerned
with the flow of information upward, downward and sideways as well as concerned with the effects of managerial styles, leadership and motivation on communication.

Hereafter three categories of communication in an organization are identified. The three categories will enhance the understanding of SAPO holistically as well as lay a basis for the evaluation of communication at SAPO.

2.5 THREE CATEGORIES OF COMMUNICATION

Byer (1997:5) identifies three categories of communication specific to the organization context viz.: internal-operational communication, external operational communication and personal communication.

2.5.1 INTERNAL OPERATIONAL COMMUNICATION

Internal operational communication consists of structured communication within the organization directly related to achieving the organization’s goals. Structures imply that the communication process is part of the operation of the organization. For example, at SAPO, there are various structures such as management, supervisors, operational staff and clerical staff. Communication flows within these structures to ensure that organizational objectives are met.

2.5.2 EXTERNAL OPERATIONAL COMMUNICATION

External operational communication refers to the communication that an organization engages in with regulatory and governmental agencies and with the public. The influence by the environmental and economic department is seen as external operational communication by SAPO.
External operational communication is communication structured and concerned with achieving the organization’s goal. It is conducted with entities which exist outside the organization.

2.5.3 PERSONAL COMMUNICATION

Byers (1997:4) defines personal communication as that incidental exchange of information and feeling which human beings engage in whenever they come together. The conversation might be related to the job or organization, or might be a social engagement.

Byers three categories of communication in an organization confirms the control and restrictions of communication in an organization. Personal communication is an incident whereas communication in an organization surrounds tasks and organizational goals.

Whilst Byers (1997:4) identifies three categories of communication in an organization, Fielding (2006:46) identifies four major types of messages used in an organization, viz.:

- Messages describing tasks.
- Messages giving instructions.
- Messages to maintain good relationships.
- Messages about goals and philosophy and ethics of the organization.

The abovementioned messages, according to Byers, travel in various flows of communication within the organization. The source of these messages is determined by the nature of the message. If the message is an instruction related one, it comes from higher authority.
Organizational communication in an organization serves various functions. A close examination of the functions will assist in pinpointing functions which are not served at SAPO.

Fielding (2006:46) believes that messages in an organization has three major functions, viz.:

- Ensuring that products and services are of the best quality.
- Helping staff generate new ideas and adapt to changes.
- Ensuring staff work well together, understand the organizations objectives and work to achieve those objectives.

2.6 ORGANIZATIONAL THEORIES

Fielding, White and Chapman (1996:2) maintain that the above-mentioned messages are premised on the organizational theories which impact on the flow of messages in an organization. The theories are as follows; Bureaucratic theory, Human relations theory and System's theory. Communication is determined by the type of theory the organization subscribes to. For example, in a bureaucratic organization, the messages will mainly be top down.

It is important for the study to understand the context within which organizational communication takes place. The flow of information in an organization is influenced by the organizational style. The three organizational theories are discussed hereunder.

2.6.1 BUREAUCRATIC THEORY

Bureaucratic theory is about control based on rational rules that regulate the entire organization, written documents, organizational charts, corporate manuals, operating instructions, job descriptions and the establishment of guidelines for
virtually all organizational activities. There is a distinct orderly system of hierarchy. Fields of responsibility are clearly defined for employees in the organization and there is limited room for flexibility. Authority is vested in the position. Subordinates follow orders originating from the office superior to their own. The communication is mostly downward and upward and the lower levels typically respond with reports. There is almost no concern for horizontal communication in the bureaucratic theory. Pace and Faules (1994:38) also confirm that within organizations, there are those who still use bureaucracy. Ironically, certain managers prefer clear lines of communication, clear specification of authority and responsibility and clear on whom they were responsible to. Mersham & Skinner (2001:35) who embrace Max Weber’s thinking of bureaucracy imply that bureaucracy is a form of organization which is seen as superior to all others which then minimizes the chances of changing it. In this type of an organization the most common communication flow is downward communication. Although SAPO operates through rules and regulations, power is vested at the top. There is, however some flexibility and an element of democracy.

2.6.2 HUMAN RELATIONS THEORY

Organizational communication is based on the concept that an organization not only has a function of producing a product or service but also needs to fulfill the employee’s needs, for example, job satisfaction. Mersham & Skinner (2001:35) believe that one of management’s functions is to keep workers happy thus the phrase that a happy employee is a productive employee. The theory is about people who are more responsive to other members of their organization than they are to the controls and incentives of management. There are written documents to guide activities of the organization, but they do not cover complexity or uncertainty of human relations. Barker & Angelopulo (2006:75) perceive these as informal communication where employees informally exchange information which might be work related, social or personal.
The human relations theory emphasizes that organizational communication is largely oral, either impersonal or interpersonal. There is less emphasis on written directives and memorandum. Communication is seen as less formal and managers talk to employees face to face or over e-mail to inform them of a new procedure. This is in contrast to formal communication where managers might present instructions at structured meetings to their employees. Communication is horizontal and the discussions are more casual than the organized deliberation of downward communication. For example, operational staff at SAPO will not restrict communication to the transfer of work-related information up and down the formal lines of hierarchy and also assist in maintaining the social environment.

2.6.3 AN ORGANIZATION SYSTEM’S THEORY

The systems theory is based on the view that an organization is a system of behaviour composed of subsystems that has definite limits within the system. The subsystems interact with other subsystems and individual behaviours are dependent on their relationship to various subsystems. The systems theory maintains that there is no best way to structure or to communicate within an organization. Instead, the structure and communication clearly depends on such contingencies as the personalities needs of the people in the organization and the goals and tasks of the organization. Mershaw & Skinner (2001:25) also view a system as a set of units that has some degree of structure and that is differentiated from the environment boundary. The system boundary is determined by the communication flow.

According to the systems theory, communication generally flows downward when managers issue commands. Occasionally employees suggest cost saving initiatives which is seen as upward communication.
White and Chapman (1996:8) see two general functions of communication which are directly related to organizations. The command and relational function in this case do not necessarily mean an order but rather an instruction. The communication function is seen as a tool to issue, receive, interpret and act on commands as well as to create and maintain productive business and personal relationships.

The three organizational theories underpinning organizational communication reflect the commonality of the flow of communication. The following discussion will focus on the communication flows in an organization. The focus of this study is on the effectiveness of the flows of organizational communication at SAPO.

2.7 DIFFERENT FLOWS OF MESSAGES

Fielding (2006:51) maintains that organizational communication occurs in different directions that is, downward which is communication from management to lower levels of the organization hierarchy, upward which is communication from the lower levels up to management and horizontal communication which is amongst personnel working on the same level.

Downs & Adrian (2004:54) share the same sentiments with Fielding that in developed organizations, communication flows down, up and across from the boardroom to the shop floor and back between departmental managers or between sales assistants. They also move diagonally between the different levels of different departments.

Downs & Adrian (2004:54) further believe that vertical communication describes the principal channel for routing directives, instructions and policies from top decision makers down through the organization to the people who at various levels, will implement them. At the same time, the term also describes those upward channels through which ideas, suggestions, criticism and queries emanate.
from middle management or the shop floor. This study will attempt to identify the weaknesses and strengths of these flows of information within SAPO.

2.7.1 LATERAL /HORIZONTAL COMMUNICATION

Mersham & Skinner (2005:42) refer to lateral communication as the communication of messages between equals. For example, communication from managers to managers, supervisors to supervisors.

According to Downs & Adrian (1990:28), lateral communication is the most frequent and routine communication which occurs between people who operate at the same or similar level. Lateral communication occurs at all levels of an organization and is generally marked by increased frankness and ease with which groups at a similar level communicate. For example, the management group will communicate to each other at SAPO for various reasons.

Barker & Angelopulo (2006:75) see lateral communication as more relevant across the lower levels of the organization, where it is meant to focus on problem solving and co-ordination of work flow and relates to task co-ordination, problem solving, information sharing and conflict resolution.

Amongst the benefits of horizontal communication is that it builds the social support system of the organization and it gives a sense of belonging. Tukiainen (2001:49) agrees that good relationships are the pre-condition of the functionality of communication in a working environment. By avoiding the time consuming vertical channels, horizontal communication allows peers to share information on a regular basis. It facilitates problem solving, it allows employees and units to learn from each other and how to avoid re-inventing the wheel each time new employees encounter an old problem. Horizontal communication also presents interdepartmental conflict resulting from misconceptions, communication distortion and lack of understanding.
In connection with lateral communication, this study will focus on whether the employees at the same level do communicate with each other, how that impacts on their work and if it is lacking how it can be improved.

### 2.7.2 DIAGONAL COMMUNICATION

According to Gibson and Hodgetts (1991:225), diagonal communication occurs between people at different levels of the organizational hierarchy and in different departments. For example, if a communication staff member requires a cheque from the finance department, staff at the communication department will form relations with the staff at the finance department irrespective of the level and the grade of the job.

The purpose of diagonal communication is to strengthen the philosophy of open communication and participative management. It also re-enforces the concept of authority of knowledge rather than authority of position. Diagonal communication in an organization facilitates the smooth operation of interdepartmental coordination and saves the organization time and money by not sending messages up and down successive layers of the organizational hierarchy.

There are instances where there may be no obvious line of authority through which a service is required. Consequently, diagonal communication relies heavily on cooperation and goodwill which the proficient communicator will have been careful to nurture by way of friendly greeting or brief conversation. For example, in SAPO, an employee working for the finance department will communicate with someone in the customer service department to get first hand information on client claims. There is no need to phone the supervisor or the manager in this instance and the two employees communicate without considering their positions. Pace & Faules (1994: 126) refer to this as cross-channel communication.
Van Staden, Marx & Erasmus-Kritzinger (2002:22) believe that diagonal communication does not take place along the normal lines of authority but across the different levels of authority. The challenges facing diagonal communication is the bypassing of other levels of authority. For example, at SAPO, a clerk can bypass a manager who is supposed to be the head of the department. The managers who follow strict lines of authority, might feel offended by the bypassing of authority.

2.7.3 DOWNWARD COMMUNICATION

Downward communication serves five important functions according to Fielding (2006: 51) viz.:

- To provide specific instructions about the duties of the job and how to perform them.
- To provide employees with the rationale for doing a particular job and an understanding about how that job relates to other jobs.
- To provide necessary data regarding the procedures, policies and practices of the organization.
- To provide performance feedback to employees regarding how they are doing.
- To provide information that will convey a sense of mission and an understanding of corporate goals.

Pace & Faules (1994:127) believe that downward communication in an organization means that information flows from a position of higher authority to those of lower authority. Management communication should also be considered and not just management communication to employees.

Fielding (2006:51) cites examples where the purpose of downward communication manifests itself viz.:
**Job instruction** - communication provides the employee with necessary data to do the job. It gives the employee precisely what is expected. What authority and responsibility does the person have? What constitutes a good job? In this process, time schedules are included and penalties issued in cases of non-compliance.

**Job rationale** - information on job rationale enables the employee to understand his/her role in the organization and how the job relates to those of others. Without such understanding, most employees would question the necessity of many job instructions they receive and would become de-motivated by the seemingly unnecessary and unimportant tasks they are given. At SAPO, when an employee is appointed, he/she given the job rationale so that the employee can deliver on the expectations of the job.

**Procedures, Policies and Practices** are fundamental elements orientating the employee regarding the corporate climate. These processes begin during the individual’s orientation program when general policies and procedures are explained. On-the-job practices are most often communicated by the direct supervisor and informal group in the department. SAPO is controlled mainly by policies and procedures, thus these procedures are communicated to each employee by the person they report to.

**The performance feedback** information is critical in the career progress of an employee. How the employee is measuring up to expected standards? What are the person’s weaknesses? What are the career opportunities? What training program should the person participate in? For example, at SAPO, performance of managers are measured once a quarter. Feedback is supplied to each manager on areas of improvement and areas where the manager has done well.

**Mission and goals** - often employees do not know what the mission of the organization is and they do not know how to contribute towards achieving it. The mission of the organization needs to be communicated as well as how the
organization intends achieving it. For example, if the mission of SAPO is to halve vessels turn around time by using cutting edge technology, employees must embrace it.

**Challenges of upward communication** - According to Fielding (2006:52), employees who do not receive sufficient information in the above areas often feel alienated from the organization. They believe work can become a series of meaningless tasks to be done in the easiest way possible. Although some managers claim that failing communication is due to employees being disinterested in anything broader than their precise job, studies repeatedly have shown that this is not true.

Employees expect information about the organization directly from the top executives. Employees want to know about future organizational plans and productivity improvements.

**Methods of downward communication** - Fielding (2006:52) believes that downward communication forms two basic methods which are oral and written. Oral or face to face communication has the advantage of immediacy. If the communication is unclear, questions can be asked on the spot. It is also easier to pick up the non-verbal cues with the immediate feedback. Employees tend to take the information as credible and they pay attention to any information received personally. It is believed that the face to face medium, including the group discussions, speeches, presentations and video tapes convey the human side of the executive and the cues of personal interest, caring and trust filtered out of a written medium. The major problem is that the manager must make time to deliver the message to all at the same time.

Written downward communication have more formality and permanence and quite often that is what formal communication entails. Since most of the communication is based on instructions and policies, it is mostly done in writing.
For example, at SAPO, when employees are given policies they are done in writing so that employees have a point of reference.

Pace & Faules (1994:127) concurs with Fielding that the types of information which are usually communicated from superiors to subordinates are: information on how to do the job, the rationale for doing the job, organizational policies and practices, employee performance and information to develop a sense of mission.

2.7.4 UPWARD COMMUNICATION

Upward communication allows for information flow from subordinate to supervisor. The subordinate will direct questions and suggestions on achieving the goals of the organization through the upward communication channel.

The purpose of upward communication is to give feedback regarding employee attitude and feelings. It provides suggestions for improved procedures and techniques, new ideas as well as feedback regarding how well the downward communication system is working. It also provides information about production and goal attainment which serves as a monitoring system. If they are far from achieving the goal, the information about the goal attainment will caution the employees so that they can factor improvement. The request for support and assistance can also be elicited through the channel. This also welcomes the surfacing of employee grievances before they become problematic and enables strong employee involvement with the organization and with their jobs. For example, at SAPO, there are various forums which encourage employees to forward their suggestions and ideas to management even when there are problems. This results in fewer problems because problems are detected during their early stages. Consequently, Fielding (2006:52) believes that by using upward communication, managers can identify early warnings.
Whilst there are benefits of upward communication, Gibson and Hodgetts (1991:221) identify problems or barriers of upward communication. They believe that some managers regard upward channel as time consuming and some know how to keep these channels open. Employees sometimes find it difficult to engage in upward communication because they are accustomed to receiving information and not generating it.

Pace & Faules (1994:22) also believe that upward communication functions include; the supply of valuable information for decision making by those who direct the organization and supervise the activities of others. This provides an understanding of the messages by giving feedback, encourage open and honest communication and create loyalty to the organization by giving employees an opportunity to contribute ideas and suggestions.

Gibson and Hodgetts (1991:224) identify three problems which cause barriers in upward communication, viz.:

**Fear** of reprisal when in many instances organizations, reward the people who echo the ideas and support the decision of their managers. As a result, people are afraid to speak out or be a voice of dissent. Pace & Faules (1994:21) also identify fear as one of the challenges because they state that employees fear victimization if they send negative messages to their superiors.

**Filters**: Employees often feel that their ideas and concerns are modified as they are transmitted from their direct supervisor upward through the organization. In some instances the supervisors change the ideas to fit the organization and what they would like to hear, fearing that the idea or concern will fail.

**Time**: Many managers give the impression that they don’t have the time to listen to what employees have to say. For example, an employee approaches the
supervisor’s office to tell him/her about an idea. When one gets there, the supervisor ignores the employee.

Gibson and Hodgetts (1991:224) advise that the most important prerequisite for satisfactory upward communication is trust especially in instances where employees feel they will be punished or criticized for their feedback. Superiors should reinforce and reward upward communication by being attentive and provide feedback. Many organizational problems can also be avoided if managers take time to listen and identify the advanced signals provided by upward communication channels.

2.8 MANAGEMENT COMMUNICATION

Steyn & Puth (2000:6) strongly believe that management communication is the only field of study that integrates communication and management. It is the means to an end which is the achievement of organizational goals. As alluded to earlier without proper communication of the goals the achievement of the goals is not feasible. One of management’s roles is to ensure proper communication management. Barker & Angelopulo (2006:13) defined management communication as management use, adaptation and creation of language, symbols and signs for effective and profitable management of the corporate enterprise.

Andrews & Andrews (2004:13) also agree that management communication process aims to achieve an outcome that matches the goal. What the core activity of management communication is to; analyze, design, create and verify. This then relates to the communication strategy within an organization which is exactly the purpose of the study. Once the gaps are identified through the analysis of SAPO, the plan will be designed to address the gaps. Thereafter messages and channels will be created and implemented. Lastly, the plan will be verified to establish functionality.
Andrew & Andrews (2004:13) maintain that analysis includes the identification of objectives for communication. That is the audience would like to hear and also consider the best channels for communication. Messages need to be timed in order to capture the attention of the employees.

Once the intention is identified, communication needs to be scheduled. The communication tasks are prioritized. The right message is delivered at the right sequence which ensures that the audience doesn’t get lost. Once the audience understand they stand a better chance to comply with the message.

Verifying the communication product will test what have been prepared on three levels which are; outcomes of audience, the media, and timing.

2.9 COMPLEXITIES OF ORGANIZATIONAL COMMUNICATION

The study will take into cognisance the complexities of organizational communication whist it analyses organizational communication at SAPO. The complexities are stated below.

The definition of organizational communication sees the organizational communication as a simple process. Whilst theorists such as Conrad & Scott Poole (2005:21) state that communication is an exceptionally complex process, organizational communication is even worse. Amongst theorists themselves there is no consensus regarding the definition. Each theorist has a different focus area. None of the theorists mentioned the ethical consideration in organizational communication.

Conrad & Scott Poole (1999:411) also identify some complexities in organizational communication. They believe that people interpretation of the messages in an organization is influenced by the taken-for-granted assumptions of their societies in return those interpretations guide their communication. They
also feel that communication system is also influenced by strategies of organizing and by individual employee strategic choices. Seeger view is related to this although his basis is on the rights of individual privacy. Seeger (1997:7) maintains that the individual right of privacy is somewhat diminished in the organization context. The supervisors and managers often monitor activities of workers on the job to ensure that they are complying with policy and procedures. There is a constant need to balance the individual’s needs against the organizations one. Conrad & Scott Poole (1999:411) agree with Seeger in that organizations control interpersonal relations of its members, all organizations place people in interdependent role, and consequently rely on control for coordination and survival. Seeger (1997:7) further argues that there is no room for good works in profit-making organization “There is only one social responsibility of business to use its resources and engage in activities designed to increase its profits”.

In evaluating the organizational theories Conrad & Scott Poole (1999:411) believe that Bureaucracy was meant to minimize nepotism and although some managers believes in clear lines of authority. If organizational roles are formalized, specialized and clear differences in power and status between supervisors and their subordinates are increased. Where supervisors and subordinates relationships are governed by policies and procedures, trust and shared interpretation of information tend to be reduced.

2.10 CONCLUSION

Organizational communication coordinates the various functions in an organization. Organizations are structured differently, the power and authority influences the flow of communication. Some organizations are up of tall structures whilst some are made up of flat structures. Communication flow differs
from organization to organization depending on which organizational style they subscribe to i.e. bureaucratic, systematic or Humanistic.

Organizational communication serves different roles which include coordinating various activities to achieve the organizational goals. Information travels through various flows within an organization i.e. upward, downward, horizontally and diagonally.

Management communication assists in identifying the gaps and designing the right message which travels through the appropriate channels.

There are complexities around organizational communication which include the power struggle amongst the various authority levels. The various flows of information are informed by the authority to communicate meaning who communicates to whom. That is why management communication identifies the audience the channels and the messages. In organizational communication the most encouraged flow is downward more than upward because upward gives instruction.

Chapter three will discuss the methodology used at SAPO in collecting data to critically analyse organizational communication.
CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3. INTRODUCTION

This chapter will provide an overview and discussion of the methods and techniques employed to collect the research data. It will focus on the suitability of responses to the four questions posed in chapter one, viz:

(i) Are the employees of SAPO receiving adequate information for them to carry out their duties successfully and what type of information do they need to carry their duties successfully?

(ii) Are the channels of communication open and effective for delivery of messages at SAPO?

(iii) How can organizational communication at SAPO be improved in order to meet the expectations?

(iv) Do the different flows of communication in an organization take away the democratic powers of employees?

Because organizational communication is broad, the focus of the study will be on the different flows of organisational communication at SAPO-PE as an organization as well as on the employee’s extent of understanding the different flows and usage. Downs & Adrian (2004:53) hold the view that since organizations are structured in a hierarchical format, it is common to analyze communication in terms of the direction in which it flows. The most common flows are viz.: downward, upward, horizontal and diagonal communication.
3.1 RESEARCH PARADIGM:

WHY A QUALITATIVE RESEARCH METHOD

The qualitative research paradigm was used so that the study could be done at SAPO’s natural setting where employees are at their workplace and where the communication flow occurs. The qualitative approach was most suitable for explaining the participant’s perceptions.

Creswell (2003:191) also agrees that the objective of qualitative research is to understand a particular social situation, event, role, group or interaction. Consequently, qualitative research is utilized to analyze the organizational communication at SAPO in order to gain an understanding of the process and its shortcomings with the view of improving organizational communication.

Wimmer & Dominick (2000:43) refer to qualitative research as several methods of data collection which include focus groups, field observation, in-depth interviews and case studies. Creswell (2003:181) says that the natural setting enables the researcher to develop a level of detail about the individual or place and to be highly involved in actual experiences of participants.

The qualitative method is flexible in that the questions can be refined during the study. For instance, there were questions which were not applicable to the SAPO management group which were later refined to fit the need. With the qualitative method it is possible to look at the holistic response of SAPO participants. Furthermore, the researcher could look at the environment, the verbal and non-verbal interpretations. Creswell (2003:181) believes that the more complex interactive and encompassing the narrative, the better the qualitative study.

Objectivity is seen as a challenge in the qualitative method. In this study, this was addressed through employing an independent facilitator to be part of the focus groups and be a scribe. Being a scribe, gave the independent facilitator an opportunity to do quality checks.
The analytical/explanatory approach was used to conduct this research. The analytical approach was used because it goes beyond describing the characteristics to analyze and explain why or how there is a lack of organizational communication at SAPO. The analytical approach aims at understanding organizational communication at SAPO and assessing the relationship between the different flows. In this study, the focus is on analyzing and explaining how and why the information flows in the organization.

3.2 SAMPLE

A representative sample (target population) was drawn among the SAPO employees. The sample was drawn by the human resources department and they were categorized according to the different strata, for example, management, full time labour representative, supervisors and operational staff. At SAPO there are two levels of management namely: senior managers (who form the executive team) and middle managers. There are three trade unions which represent the employees who are led by three full time union representatives. The trade union leaders have offices where they consult with employees on a full time basis. Their most important role is to give feedback to their members. The quayside or operations employees are the major contributors to the core business.

In order to have a representative sample and outcomes which can be applicable to the organization (SAPO-PE), stratified sampling was used. Subgroups called strata were included in the sample in the same proportion as they occur in the population. Wimmer & Dominick (2000:68) state that stratified sampling ensures that a sample is drawn from a homogeneous subset of the population. Considering that SAPO is a productivity driven organization, each member or employee has his/her role to fulfill. Therefore, it was difficult to keep many people out of work which would have a financial and time constraint on the study. The population consists of 500 SAPO employees at the Port Elizabeth division of which four focus groups consisting of six to eight people selected as a sample. The selection has been supported by Krueger & Casey (2000:26) who state that the researcher
can plan three or four focus groups with any one type of participants. Once they are conducted, the researcher should determine if they have reached saturation point. If the researcher receives new information then the researcher can conduct more focus groups. The different strata were represented by managers, supervisors, full time union representatives, and operational staff. Wimmer & Dominick (2000:73) also confirm that the sample size is always controlled by cost and time.

The operational staff forms the largest number of respondents. Du Plooy (1997:59) argues that disproportionate stratified sampling can be used when one stratum is particularly more important in which case that stratum is over represented or over sampled.

Age, gender and race have not been considered because they deem to be irrelevant to the study. Another advantage of stratified sampling is that it reduces costs and increase accuracy.

The disadvantage of stratified sampling is that its application requires time and effort to divide the population into different strata especially when it is large. It is also difficult when the different stratum is made up of subgroups. Stratified sampling requires proper knowledge of the different strata and subgroups so that they can be selected accordingly. As mentioned earlier, the researcher is an employee of SAPO. Consequently, it is easy for the researcher to identify the different subgroups.

Collis & Hussey (2003:157) maintain that in a positivistic study, a representative or good sample is one in which the results obtained for the sample can be taken to be true for the wide population because it is easier to generalize. Stratified random sampling overcomes this problem as each identifiable strata of the population is taken into account.

For the purpose of this study, shift patterns were taken into consideration to ensure availability of the participants.
3.3 DATA COLLECTION MATERIAL

3.3.1 INTERVIEWS

Data was collected via interviews which were conducted through focus groups. Creswell (2003:188) writes that in interviews, the researcher conducts face to face interviews with participants or engages in focus groups. Groups consisting of six to eight employees were used at SAPO because of availability and cost to the company of having to hire temporary employees to stand in for the study participants. Marshall & Rossman (1999:114) believe that focus group interviews generally range from seven to ten people. However, smaller focus groups can range from four to as large as twelve.

The interviews comprised of structured questions which were meant to solicit employees opinion on organizational communication. The interviews lasted an hour on average.

A supporting environment was created so that the participants could share information freely. There were four focus groups conducted in order to identify trends in the perceptions and opinions expressed. These were revealed through careful systematic analysis.

Open ended questions were used with the objective of allowing participants to respond freely. Control over the responses were ensured through the guidance of the facilitator. Sometimes role playing and mirror questions were asked to direct the responses in line with the discussion document. Questions were posed in simple and unambiguous language. Du Plooy (2002:144) writes that mirror questions repeat the respondent’s response, either to obtain further information or confirm what has been said. Open ended questions were used to obtain the information in order to critically analyze the organizational communication in SAPO. The open ended questions enabled respondents to express views without being restricted. Du Plooy (1997:133) believes that open ended questions allow respondents to answer the question in their own words and encourage respondents
to express their attitudes and opinions. Closed ended questions were used because they are quicker to respond to and provide specific responses.

The study at SAPO used open ended questions which required respondents to generate their own responses whilst in closed ended questions, respondents select a response from a list provided by the researcher. Since closed ended questions provide uniformity of response and responses are easily quantified, it is easy to formulate a view based on the responses.

In formulating the questions, the following was taken into consideration and avoided, viz.: double barrel questions, loaded language, leading questions, incomplete questions and vague questions. The length of the questions were also considered when the questions were formulated.

Wimmer & Dominick (1994:138) also confirm that the questions be worded such that they ensure accurate transmission of respondents responses to researchers. They should un-ambiguously communicate the desired information to the respondent. They further advise that questions written for group administration must be concise and easy to read and understood to enable the participant to respond.

### 3.3.2 FOCUS GROUPS

A focus group is a group of people who are selected from the larger population to enter into a facilitated discussion on certain questions. According to Du Plooy (2002:178), focus groups have become popular in recent years because it provides data that is rich in ideas and supplies opinions and attitudes from the subject point of view. Du Plooy (2002:178) supports the combination of data collection tools by saying, “depending on the objective of the research, focus group interviews can be combined with in-depth interviews, observations, surveys and even experimental design”. Focus groups are used to resolve problems in organizational communication. It also provides an opportunity to those who are illiterate or do not understand the question.
Krueger (1994:6) states that a focus group is a special type of group in terms of purpose, size, composition and procedures. It is composed of seven to ten participants who are selected because they have certain characteristics in common that relate to the topic of the focus group.

A focus group was selected from amongst the employees of SAPO who share common characteristics relevant to the study.

The focus group interview approach was chosen for this study because they are cost effective and participants perceive the group as a social unit which shares the same experiences. Krueger (1994:10) also believes that interviews are effective because they tap into human tendencies. As a product of an environment, people are influenced by people around them. Other people’s opinions can be listened to and shared in a focus group setting than in an individual setting. The format allows the facilitator to probe for more information and seek clarity when it is unclear. It has high face validity because the technique is easily understood and the results seem believable to those using the information.

According to Krueger (1994:16), the six characteristics of focus groups relate to people assembled in a series of groups who posses certain characteristics and provide data of a qualitative nature in a focused discussion.

The focus group at SAPO went through three stages namely: planning the study, conducting the interviews and analyzing and reporting.

Marshall and Rossman (1999:114) believe that focus groups are socially orientated, that is, studying participants in an atmosphere more natural than artificial experimental experiences. Negative and positive comments were equally encouraged. Participants were told from the outset that there are no correct or incorrect answers. They were also encouraged to share their opinions even if they differed from others.
The facilitator served several roles at the focus group i.e moderating, listening, observing and analyzing, using an inductive process.

The questions for the focus group were formulated in advance. Cognisance was taken of the fact that a group representing diverse interest or characteristics is likely to contribute to conflict and division rather than complimentary discussion. Du Plooy (2002: 180) also agrees that the mixed group is often utilized because of the cost involved. It is also advisable to recruit more than twelve people to obtain a realistic view.

The respondents were briefed of the objective of the survey, that is, to critically analyze organizational communication at SAPO. This involved identifying the shortcomings of organizational communication and to address them. They were also informed that the interview would be approximately an hour. The respondents were sent invitations detailing the venue and time. They were provided with comfortable chairs and water. Identification cards were allocated to each person. The following ground rules were clearly articulated, viz.:

- The respondents and their responses will remain anonymous.
- There are no correct or incorrect answers.
- Respondents can speak freely.
- Respondents must respect each other’s opinion.
- Their opinions will be recorded on a flip chart by the independent facilitator.

A number of control procedures advised by Du Plooy (2002:182) include selection of a setting which is conducive to the topic and population parameters. The ethical implications and the importance of debriefing must also be considered.

The limitations were addressed by re-affirming the rules when the group was getting out of control. Fortunately the groups were small.
3.4 ETHICAL CONSIDERATION

Creswell (2003:201) believes that ethical consideration should include the researcher’s obligation to respect the rights, needs, values and desires of respondents. The employees at SAPO were informed that their responses will be treated with anonymity.

3.5 DATA RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY

According to Collis and Hussey (2003:186), reliability is concerned with the findings of the research. The findings can be considered reliable if (you or anyone else) repeated the study/research and obtain similar results. Whilst validity is concerned with the extent to which the research findings accurately represent what is happening in the situation, the data collected can also be perceived as a true picture of what is being studied. The challenge with the positivist view is that the data might not reveal what it intended to draw due to various reasons such as ambiguous questions and respondents being bored. The questions were made simple and clear. Participants were kept active through debate and discussions. The presence of the independent facilitator assisted in generating lively debates.

Collis & Hussey (2003:58) maintain that validity is the extent to which the research findings accurately represent what is actually taking place in the situation. An effect or a test is valid if it demonstrates or measures what the researcher thinks or claims it does. Collis & Hussey (2003:58) state that research errors such as faulty research procedures, poor samples and inaccurate or misleading measurements can undermine validity. Creswell (2003:196) suggests that the use of an external auditor to review the entire project can be used as a strategy to check the accuracy of the study.

In critically analyzing organizational communication at SAPO, the validity was ensured by following the questions and procedures correctly. According to Collis & Hussey (2003:59), there are various ways to address the challenge of validity, that is, the most common is face validity which involves ensuring tests and
measures used by the researcher do actually measure or represent what they are supposed to measure or represent. Du Plooy (2002:125) states that face validity, which is sometimes called content validity, is determined by the quality of an item. Although the researcher’s judgment might be seen as biased, the independent facilitator was seen as objective.

3.6 DATA ANALYSIS

The data analysis process was designed to draw logical references from the text or image data collected. Creswell (2003:191) believes that there are various generic steps involved in data analysis which involves organizing and preparing the data for analysis, reading through all the data and putting it into categories. The process generates description of the setting or themes/categories of people for analysis. The final step involves drawing inferences or interpretation of the data where it captures the lessons learnt.

The data analysis for the study of organizational communication at SAPO followed the abovementioned. Firstly, the data was organized and prepared by recording the focus group notes and sorting out the questionnaires according to different strata. Secondly, all the data had to be read to get a general sense of the information and compile notes on the general thoughts. The third step involved commencing with a detailed analysis of the categorization process. The information was categorized into different themes and patterns from the various group’s responses. The fourth step was to use the categorized data to generate a description of the setting, giving themes to the different strata. Fifthly, a decision was taken on how the description and themes will be presented, that is, a narrative passage to convey the findings of the analysis. Finally, the sixth step involved interpretation of the data, feedback regarding the four flows of communication as well as their recommendations.
3.7 GENERALISATION

Generalization is concerned with the application of research results to cases or situations beyond those examined in the study. It is the extent to which the researcher can draw conclusions about aspects based on information about another. In the study, a sample was drawn from the population. From the sample, generalized conclusions will be drawn from the data collected. For example, the results of the study will present the opinion of all SAPO (P.E. division employees).

3.8 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The area which was used for the research was the Port Elizabeth terminals Bulk terminal, Container terminal, Car terminal and Break Bulk terminal. These areas represent SAPO, Port Elizabeth. These areas are managed by different managers which mean each communication experience will be different from employee to employee.

The limitations of the study are that the employees are working different shifts and some are illiterate. The request for releasing the selected employees for the focus group was done in advance. The data collection method and peers assisted the illiterate employees.

3.9 CONCLUSION

In this chapter, the use of the qualitative research method in the study of organizational communication was justified. In conducting the empirical search there were procedures and rules which the researcher adhered to. The most important ones were based on selecting the sample, designing the questions and taking into consideration the ethical issues. Reliability and validity of the study was one of the important factors when the organizational communication study was conducted.
In the following chapter, the findings of the focus groups will be presented.
CHAPTER FOUR

RESEARCH FINDINGS

4. INTRODUCTION

This chapter will provide the research findings. Chapter five will deal with conclusion and recommendations pertaining to this research. Empirical data was collected through focus group interviews. The empirical survey on organizational communication in SAPO, Port Elizabeth division, attempted to answer the four key questions below which were posed in chapter one, viz.:

(i) Are the employees of SAPO receiving adequate information for them to carry out their duties successfully and what type of information do they need to carry their duties successfully?

(ii) Are the channels of communication open and effective for delivery of messages at SAPO?

(iii) How can organizational communication at SAPO be improved in order to meet the expectations?

(iv) Do the different flows of communication in an organization take away the democratic powers of employees?

The above-mentioned questions were the basis of the empirical search, which endeavoured to gather information to enable the researcher to critically analyze organizational communication at SAPO.
4.1 FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS

4.1.1 MANAGERS DISCUSSION

The first group comprised of five managers although six managers were invited but due to operational requirements, only five attended. The divisions represented were Container, Bulk, Break-bulk and car terminal and support services.

It was explained that the session which would be approximately an hour, was part of a communication study aimed at improving organizational communication at SAPO. The identities of the participants will be kept anonymous. It was further explained that each attendee will receive a card with an alphabetical letter that will be the identity for the duration of the discussion. These will be displayed on the desk. For example, if ones name is Phillip and one is given A as an identity, then the person will be referred to as A. Noleen, the research assistant was introduced as a scribe and observer to ensure that the discussions are focused and fair. After the identity cards were distributed, the facilitator laid the ground rules.

The discussion entailed the perceptions on information related to the organization, employees, the job and the channels of communication.

INFORMATION RELATED SAPO AS AN ORGANIZATION

Participants were asked about the type of information they have access to in order to get an understanding of which formal messages goes through the various channels of communication.

What information do you have access to about SAPO as an organization?

Managers felt that they have access to SAPO’s operational strategy as a whole. Participant A responded that “I have seen the SAPO strategic objectives and initiatives which support it as well as timeframes.” Participant B asked others if
they are aware that SAPO will be operating the new container terminal with two
berths in 2008. The other participants nodded in agreement. They further stated
that they get feedback about marketing trends, finances and human resource
challenges and achievements as well as Head Office snapshots. Participant B
insisted that it is information snapshots because it is sifted. What managers are
told is normally selected and the superiors do not supply detailed information.
The remuneration packages of managers were cited as an example. The packages
which had been discussed with the business unit executive had not yet been
communicated to the managers. The managers also cited the example of the
customer services department which changed its strategy from customer services
to commercial strategy. They also believe that the strategies are introduced and
not properly monitored in order to give feedback on the success and failures, so
that all employees can work together to achieve the objectives. Participants A also
believe that as an important stakeholder and implementers of the strategy they
should be kept abreast of all decisions and changes. It was considered unfair that
the trade unions are regarded as most important people in SAPO. Trade union
representatives have access to all the communication before it is distributed.
Participant C tried to make the group understand that it is just the nature of their
jobs and not that the trade union representatives are more important. Also, the
latter are in the position to rubber stamp all the changes within the organization.

Who or what is your source of information?

Most managers responded that their sources of information include the
communication sessions, operational committee, Joint transformation committee,
Business Unit Executive Roadshows, CEO Roadshows, newsletters, trade unions
and circulars. The different forums serve various roles. Some are for information
sharing while others for decision-making. For instance, the communication
session serves the information sharing roles and the Joint transformation
committees jointly take decisions on transformation issues.
The ‘Opsbrief’ is the most popular daily circular which entails policy changes, changes within the organization and urgent messages.

**How frequently do you receive the information?**

The managers responded that some communication forums are daily such as the Opsbrief and others monthly such as communication sessions. The frequency also depends on the availability of information, for example, financial related information is accessible monthly only. The group expressed the Opsbrief followed by the road shows as the most effective channels of communication.

**If you were to improve communication/ information flow what would you do?**

The managers felt that if they were to improve communication flow within SAPO, they would first analyze the current sessions. Each of the sessions will entail a clear set objectives, specific timeframes and duration. Once the latter is in place, then each person should adhere to the rules of the meetings. Participant B confirmed that sometimes these sessions are too long and winding. For example, the recent CEO Road show which was scheduled for an hour lasted almost two hours because it included an industrial theatre. People should know that employees concentration span depend on the time of the day. Participant D said “To improve communication I would measure communication as part of the performance system. For managers it will be part of the key performance area. Once the strategy is introduced, feedback on the progress of the strategy must be given monthly. The Road show should be jointly planned around operation and shipping schedule, because ideally every employee is compelled to attend. Occasionally, off-loading of cargo can interfere with their attendance. Participant A confirmed the statement by saying “Ja iy is reg (yes you are right) we are running operations here, we do not have time to listen to things which are not related to the job. Clients pressurize us for quick turn around of their vessels”.
INFORMATION RELATED TO EMPLOYEES

Are all the personnel at all levels in the organization consulted regarding organizational policy relevant to their position?

The managers claimed that all employees are consulted on policies. Some policies are designed at Head Office which are then implemented at the terminal. “To maintain uniformity, the policies should be centralized”. This was the comment about the cascading of policies from Head Office. Participant C stated that “Policies are formulated and comments are invited. However, there is lack of commitment because employees do not bother to comment. This resulted in a heated debate because some managers felt that even if the employees are invited for comments, they do not reflect any interest. However, once the policies are implemented, they are quick to deny awareness of the policy.

Is information distributed to all levels of SAPO?

Managers felt that they do their best to get the message cascaded to all levels. “We try our utmost to give information to our supervisors but often the message does not get through” claimed participant B. The message is not cascaded because supervisors do not know what they are expected to do. They do not operate according to their job descriptions. If they did, we would not have this problem today. Some of supervisors cannot even use a computer” confirmed participant C. In support of the supervisors, participant A said “Haai moenie so wees nie (no do not be like that) it is because we do not have time to give them information nor do we have information to cascade down.”
What do you think is the importance of receiving the type of information in your current job? How does this information contribute towards the successful finishing of your job?

The managers believe that the policy information is important in controlling the actions of the employees. “If you know the policy, then you operate accordingly”. Participant B agreed that the policy information also assist in getting to know the goals and consequently, one can work towards achieving the goals. “Policy also assists the managers to instill discipline amongst the employees.” says one of the managers.

The managers felt that the most important topic which drives their daily tasks is productivity and service delivery. “This has shaped our thinking as well as our actions. We constantly think about work” responded participant B.

Does your supervisor congratulate you when you do good work?

The managers responded that they are not adequately congratulated and when they have done something wrong they are severely reprimanded. Participant B responded strongly that: “We are not congratulated, if we are, it is rare. A common occurrence nowadays is that people like to take the glory but when we are wrong we are reprimanded on the spot and nobody shares that pain of being reprimanded with us. Participant A claimed that the superiors congratulated in their meetings but those acknowledgements do not go down the people who have actually done the work. Participant D felt that if employees can be motivated, they would do more.

When the facilitator asked the managers if they are doing the same to their subordinates. Participant A confirmed by saying: “Yes, we give credit where it is due, we even go an extra-mile and request a token of appreciation for best performers. Participant B believes that people do not understand the importance
of motivating staff especially in the shipping industry. By motivating employees, one nurtures the relationship, “In ons besigheid daar is altyd iets wat sal verkeerd loop.” (In our business, there will always be something which will go wrong).

If one has not understood an instruction, is there openness of communication available for all personnel to consult with management on various levels in the organization?

This question was intended to find out if the superiors are always there to assist the subordinates, which is a form of upward communication. The managers responded that the lines of communication are open and there is upward communication. The response showed that the managers do ask for clarity although sometimes it is seen as challenging the authority of the instruction. They also said that not all superiors welcomed questions from subordinates regarding instructions. Some superiors are not even accessible. “The superiors think managers do not want to do the tasks. The bottom line is that the job needs to be done,” Says participant D.

INFORMATION RELATED TO THE JOB

If you haven’t received any information regarding your job and the company vision, who do you turn to for advice and information?

The managers responded to the above by saying they turn to their peers and colleagues for advice and information on organization strategy and plans. Participant B said “For the job related information we turn to our colleagues or people who know”. Participant C believes that they have surrounded themselves with people who know as part of the support group, so that one can use their input in time of need. The managers acknowledge that sometimes it is difficult to find assistance because knowledge is power and people protect their turfs. Participant A claims that, “It is sometimes difficult to find assistance because people believe
that knowledge is power. They tend to keep the knowledge to themselves so that they are one step ahead of the others. By so doing the organization suffers”.

**How does your physical work setting affect your communication at SAPO?**

The managers believe that their physical work setting does not affect their communication because they have other communication tools, which minimizes the distance from the sources of information. Participant A said that they use e-mails, mobile phones and the intranet as other forms of communication.

**INFORMATION RELATED TO CHANNELS**

What kinds of information do you tend to receive and how frequently?

All the managers agreed that through the various channels, they would like to receive information regarding the strategy of the company so that they can align themselves with it. They would like to hear about the progress on the strategy as well as views information on market trends. Participant A said: “We would like to see the cargo volumes so that we can plan accordingly. Participant C said: “We would also like to see how we are doing financially because we want to know whether we will get bonuses.” Furthermore, the changes in the hierarchical structure, employees who have been promoted and those who have left the organization is also of interest.

The frequency varies with the channels used for example, a newsletter is released bi-monthly and an ‘Opsbrief’ daily.
How often do you receive information of little value? Give an example

For managers information is power. They do not consider any information of lesser value. However, sometimes outdated information is sent to them for consideration.

After the session, the managers were thanked for their participation and attendance.

SUMMARY OF DISCUSSION WITH MANAGERS

In summary, the managers believe that they are getting information but it is unsatisfactory. They feel that communication is not their responsibility. Information on this level flows from their superiors about the job and about SAPO. Information also flows amongst the personnel on the same level which is referred to as lateral communication, this is the most popular. Assistance is also sourced from other departments, which is called diagonal. There is substantial downward communication flow, due to their position and nature of giving instructions.

It is evident that there is a power struggle between the different levels. Power depends on where the person is placed in the hierarchy of the organization. The decisions are restricted to those who are higher in the organizational hierarchy.

Another inference which can be drawn from the interview is that managers seldom acknowledge the people whom they work with. They take the credit but are quick to reprimand persons for a job which is of a poor standard. Staff need to be continually motivated. However, if they are not, which seems to be the challenge in this instance, then cooperative and communication problems can arise.
The concern is that although there are channels for communication, these channels are not used effectively. The staff continually express dissatisfaction about the time constraints. It must be borne in mind that managers are employed to strike a balance between the organization’s needs and its personnel. Every effort must be made to fulfill the employees thirst for information.

Manager’s suggestions of improving communication include training, right timing for the communication platforms and newsletter with more pictures.

4.1.2 SUPERVISORS DISCUSSION

The discussion was held at SAPO’s the New Mess and Ablution Room. This is where employees have their lunch and relax. The time was 15h00, just after the second shift of the day had started. It was planned to have six participants. However, only four supervisors attended due to operational requirements. Fortunately they were from various working areas.

The facilitator greeted and welcomed the supervisors to the session discussion session. It was explained to that the session which would be approximately an hour, was part of a communication study aimed at improving organizational communication at SAPO. The identities of the participants will be kept anonymous. It was further explained that each attendee will receive a card with an alphabetical letter that will be the identity for the duration of the discussion. These will be displayed on the desk. For example, if ones name is Phillip and one is given A as an identity, then the person will be referred to as A. Noleen, the assistant was introduced as a scribe and observer to ensure that the discussions are focused and fair. After the identity cards were distributed, the facilitator laid the ground rules. For example, Cell phones off, respect each others opinions etc

The discussion was around various perceptions i.e. information related to the organization, employees, the job and the channels of communication.
INFORMATION RELATED TO SAPO AS AN ORGANIZATION

What information do you have access to about SAPO as an organization you working for?

The supervisors believe that they have access to the vision, mission of SAPO and also the values which guide their behaviour. Sometimes we are invited to sessions where marketing trends are shared, the finances and human resource issues. Safety has become a very important factor at SAPO, according to Participant A. “In fact Safety is so important that it determines our bonuses” says participant B.

Who or what is your source of information?

The supervisors source of information is the managers, green area meetings, communication sessions, newsletter and ‘opsbrief’. They also feel that their colleagues in the same department are their source of information. Participant C: “The business unit executive sessions and sometimes the managers are my source of information.” The supervisors also felt that visible management can also enable supervisors to access more information. Participant B: “It is hard for us to obtain information. We rarely see the managers and if we see them, they chat about trivial matters and not about the actual issues.

“We sometimes ask the unions for information because they continually have access to the latest news.” The facilitator enquired from the supervisor the reason for seeking information from trade unions instead of their managers. The unanimous response from the supervisors was that the trade unions are trustworthy. Participant D: “Sometimes companies design strategies just to get rid of us, so the unions are there to protect us. Hey ons moet slim wees met hierdie mense.” (Hey, we must be clever when we deal with these people).
How frequently do you receive information?

The supervisors also felt that the frequency depended on the type of information which is shared for instance, financial information is only available on a monthly basis because all the financial related results is only available then. The adhoc information is done through the Opsbrief which is basically as and when it is required to be issued. Work related information is compiled daily according to participant A. Although sessions are arranged only on a monthly basis, we miss these sessions because of operational duties. Participant E confirmed that operations which deals with the handling of cargo, is a problem that is why sometimes supervisors alternate their attendance. Sometimes those who were requested to attend the session do not even bother to provide feedback. “How can we be expected to understand what is happening in this company?”

If you were to improve communication/ information flow what would you do?

The supervisors felt that if they were to improve communication they would make more frequent contact with fellow colleagues. Other measures the latter would improve communication are: improve the distribution of the newsletter, ensure that the people who have attended meetings on a rotational basis give feedback to those who have not attended as well as encourage managers to address employees more frequently.

INFORMATION RELATED TO EMPLOYEES

Are all the personnel at all levels in the organization consulted regarding organizational policy relevant to their position?

All the supervisors claimed that they are not consulted about the policies but they are expected to implement them. Participant A : “We are not consulted regarding policies, they are implemented. For example, the alcohol and drug abuse policy.”
The facilitator enquired as to who is supposed to consult them. They responded that the managers and trade unions. “Nee hulle doen net wat hulle wil.” (No, they do just as they wish) said participant B. They felt that policy decisions impact on the different tasks in the different areas.

Is information distributed to all levels within SAPO?

The supervisors were unsure whether the messages are cascaded down to the rest of SAPO personnel. They felt that the employees should also show interest in getting the information whilst the source must make the information available. Participant D: “I would not say that information is cascaded down to all levels because the persons who were supposed to share the information, do not. Participant B added: “I do not know how this can be solved because we expect messages from the managers whilst our subordinates expects the information from us. More to that they expect us to cascade the information down, we do not have time to do so”.

What do you think is the importance of receiving the type of information in your current job? How does this information contribute towards achieving the objective?

The supervisors expressed that their input towards the formulation of policies is important because at the end, the policies are implemented by them. Participant C: “We will be able to ensure that people operate according to the procedures. The policies will assist us to control the tasks at hand more efficiently. “The information on policies assist one to operate according to the rules and regulations. If the rules are not followed, a person can be dismissed. We need to protect our jobs”, says participant B. Participant D felt that the performance standards are communicated loud and clear. For example, an operator is expected to handle 20 containers an hour. If an employee fails to meet the objective, either he or she must do as requested or ship out.
Does your supervisor congratulate you when you do good work?

The supervisors said that they are rarely congratulated by their managers. Participant A: “We are rarely congratulated, but when we do something wrong the managers become verbally aggressive.” Participant C supported the statement by saying “Unyanisile.” (that is true) We work under tremendous pressure and we expect to be pampered. Congratulating us lifts up our spirits which makes us, wanting to do more. Acknowledgement is a good feeling because it values our contributions. Participant D: “We can in return also congratulate our subordinates. We need to strike a balance that is, a person must be acknowledged for doing good work and reprimanded for any wrong actions. Nowadays one also needs to be careful of what one says because messages are carried directly to the unions.”

If you haven’t understood the instruction is there openness of communication available for all personnel to consult with management levels in the organization?

The supervisors felt that when they do not understand an instruction they consult with staff in the management level at SAPO. Sometimes when one approaches superiors they do not have time to assist or repeat themselves. Participant B: “Some managers are unapproachable while others are friendly. Often they do not even have time to listen to new ideas so when will they make time to listen questions?” Participant A: “It is not only about time but about pride, that is, who are we to come up with workable solutions?” The supervisors firmly believe that they do make time to talk to their subordinates.

INFORMATION RELATED TO THE JOB

If you haven’t received any information regarding your job and the company vision, who do you turn to for advice and information?
The supervisors said they turn to their colleagues for advice and if they cannot help, they then turn to their bosses or the trade unions. We have created a support system whereby we work as a team and support each other, said Participant A. They are aware of the competition which might take place among themselves and which might result in wrong information being shared.

**How does your physical work setting affect your communication at SAPO?**

Some supervisors said that they are out of reach whilst some believe that their physical work setting does not impact their communication. Participant A: “We are at the Bulk terminal on the other side of the port. We feel that we are sometimes left out. However we do get information about our jobs daily.” In the new areas there is not even a notice board. Participant C said that sometimes if one needs information a person can visits the main building.

**INFORMATION RELATED TO COMMUNICATION CHANNELS**

**Describe the formal channels through which you receive information?**

The supervisors named the channels through which they receive information as: newsletter, communication session, Roadshows and ‘Opsbriefs’. The supervisors were particularly interested in information related to their tasks, advancement opportunities, operations outside ones department and SAPO’s financial performance. They gave responses such as “I want to know if I have a future with the company.” They also felt that the frequency depended on the availability of information. Participant A: “We cannot say much on the frequency, but we need to be kept informed.”
How often do you receive information of little value? Give an example.

Supervisors felt that they sometimes receive information of little value. For example newsletter which are outdated.

If we have insufficient information, we consult the trade union representatives. We trust that they will give us accurate information.

SUMMARY OF THE DISCUSSION WITH SUPERVISORS

The supervisors are second in charge according to the organizational structure of SAPO. From the discussion it was inferred that they do not have enough information to cascade down neither do they have time to do so. The operational requirements are seen as a scapegoat especially when they do not want to do something. For example they would say it is not possible due to operational requirements.

Since there are issues of trust between the supervisors and management, they both prefer to go to the unions for first hand information. Consequently, this shifts the power of information to unions which then results in a stronger negotiations muscle from the trade unions because they know more than their managers. The challenge in relying on unions for messages is that they are also push their position of power. This can result in the interpretation of the message to their advantage than SAPO.

It is also a concern that the hard working personnel are rarely motivated through acknowledgements when they have done well.
4.1.3 FULL TIME UNION REPRESENTATIVES DISCUSSION

A discussion session was held with the above personnel at 10h00 at the container boardroom. Three of the full time union representatives attended the session. It was hoped that Shop Stewards would join the full time union representatives but unfortunately, they were occupied with operational requirements. The three trade union representatives that were represented were: South African Transport & Allied Trade Union (SATAWU), United Transport & Allied Trade Union (UTATU) and United Association of South Africa (UASA).

The rules and purpose of the discussion were set as in the previous groups and they were given their identity cards.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE COMPANY

What information do you have access to about SAPO as an organization?

The full time union representatives believed that they have access to SAPO strategies for each sector, the financial performance, the changing marketing trends and the plans to get more cargo. They also have access to the restructuring document of the Multi-Purpose Terminals. Participant B: “Some of us are local representatives who serve on the national union forums. Consequently we have access to information even before it is shared with our local colleagues.

Who or what is your source of information?

Some of the full time union representatives source of information are similar to the other groups. They range from the Joint Transformation Committee, Newsletter, Communication sessions, Level one meetings, National restructuring committee and our trade union meetings, according to Participant B.
The trade union representatives said that they have access to information at anytime. Participant A: “We do not rule out the possibilities of receiving sifted information. Some information we receive daily, monthly. It depends on the type of information.”

If you were to improve communication/ information flow what would you do?

The trade union representatives said that one way of improving communication was for all managers to sign a transparency agreement. This agreement would commit the managers to be transparent and share all information. By so doing, it would guarantee first hand information for all the SAPO staff. “Sometimes managers paint a rosy picture and fail to mention negative consequences. For example, the new container terminal at the Port of Ngqura is going to complement the Port Elizabeth container terminal. The plan to get the container volumes which will feed the two terminals are still unclear. Logic tells us that if there are insufficient container volumes, then one of the terminals will have to shut down. None of this is communicated to us.” according to Participant C.

The trade union representatives said that they could improve communication by minimizing the dependence on labour to cascade the information down because this puts them under pressure to communicate.

“We would also encourage joint Roadshow with management on key issues like the alcohol and drug abuse policy. When such matters are discussed jointly, the employees are guaranteed authentic information. This will also encourage compliance from the employees.” The representatives said that they would encourage the managers to be visible. They would also encourage managers to have discussions with their employees each month in order to create awareness and cover areas which are unclear in the organizational plan. According to Participant A, Head Office should be encouraged to filter down information to lower levels.
INFORMATION RELATED TO THE EMPLOYEES

Are all the personnel at all levels in the organization consulted regarding organizational policies relevant to their positions?

The full time union representatives felt that not all employees are consulted regarding organizational policies. Participant B: “At the terminal level employees are consulted through their trade unions who give feedback to Head Office on issues which can impact employees negatively.” The facilitator enquired about those who do not belong to trade unions, how they receive information. The response from participant B was that those are the benefits of being a union member. “You get first hand information and you get it on time”. “Bayakuzibonela” (they will see for themselves). “What we have found out is that although efforts are made to communicate organizational policies some people are just not interested in policies until they are affected. We do understand that the policies are just rules which strengthen management control over the employees.

Is information distributed to all levels?

The full time union representatives do not believe that the information is distributed to all levels. They said that although they are tasked with having to transfer information, they do not feel that the messages reach all the levels. The supervisors are given sufficient time to obtain and distribute information but they show limited interest which results in a lack of communication to the lower levels. There is no green area meeting to prove that they are not interested.

The full time union representatives said that the information on policies assist them in carrying out their duties. “The policy informs us about rules and procedures to accomplish the tasks. There are heavy penalties for non-compliance and this also depends on the nature of the policy. Policies assist us in protecting our members especially if the policy is not clearly communicated. The employees
would not be able to protect themselves. Participant A: “We neither want ourselves nor our members to be fired for silly mistakes.” Participant B made an example of the alcohol abuse policy where they were given an opportunity to comment. The policy was subsequently implemented.

Does your supervisor congratulate you when you do good work?

The Full time union representatives said that they are neither acknowledged nor congratulated. “Even when deadlines are met, they do not congratulate us, instead, they want to terminate our services because they do not appreciate our hard work at all,” according to Participant B. Management is of the opinion that we cannot be congratulated because we are seen as trouble makers, said Participant C.

If one has not understood an instruction, is there openness of communication available for all personnel to consult with management on various levels in the organization?

The full time union representatives said that they can find information whenever they need information on a specific issue. “Fortunately or unfortunately we can knock on any door to get information. “We have the collective bargaining power that is why some things are easier for us,” according to Participant C.

INFORMATION RELATED TO THE JOB

If you haven’t received any information regarding your job and the company vision, whom do you turn to for advice and information?

The trade unions representatives felt that they can turn to any person for information. “We turn to other trade union representatives for more information. We also turn to managers if our fellow colleagues cannot help us.” said
participant A. They said they are also careful about the information that they get from management because managers sometimes select what to communicate. They also know which channels to follow. The communication policy states clearly the procedures to be followed for non-corporation. For example, if they cannot find what they want from level one, they go to the next level until the request is adhered to.

The trade union representatives said that the physical setting does not have an impact on their communication. Participant B: “It does not impact on us because we have access to all the areas at all times. We also use e-mail and mobile phones to reach our members who can do likewise.”

**INFORMATION RELATED TO CHANNELS OF COMMUNICATION**

**What kinds of information do you tend to receive and how frequently?**

The trade union representatives require information on various issues pertaining to the organization. “We would like to receive information relating to SAPO as an organization so that we can take informed decisions and also advise our members accordingly. We would also like to receive information about our daily tasks, in changes in the hierarchical structures and details of the financial situation.” enclosed participant B.

**How often do you receive information of little value? Give an example**

According to the trade union representatives, they occasionally felt that they do receive information which is of little value. “We receive information of little value only when a manager gives us information which does not assist us in solving the challenges. For example, we would like to know why the Multi-Purpose terminal employees do not have a recognition scheme like the container
terminal employees. Management gives us only the reasons on why it cannot be done.

Do you feel you sometimes don’t get enough information?

As mentioned before, there is no feedback on crucial issues. Often, the managers buy time by using delaying tactics.

Is there some information which you think has been left out about SAPO’s communication process?

The trade union representatives were satisfied that the discussion had covered the most important communication areas within SAPO.

**SUMMARY OF DISCUSSION WITH FULL TIME TRADE UNION REPRESENTATIVES**

The discussion revealed that the full time shop stewards have more access to strategic information which gives them more bargaining power. As a result, the lower levels are dependent on them for information. Even if information is communicated to the employees by their superiors, they still believe that it will only make sense when they hear it from their trade unions representatives. That was the reason for proposing a Joint Roadshow with management which aimed at creating awareness, on policies and changes within the terminal.

Consequently, management at the terminal is placed in a difficult situation because whatever they say, is opposed if it is not forth coming from the trade unions. This might cause a delay in implementing the strategies and also communicating them to all the employees. The other challenge with implementing SAPO strategy would be the support from the various internal
stakeholders. If the trade unions are unhappy with the strategy, they will influence and advise their members negatively.

It was inferred that trade union representatives do not cascade the messages downward. This resulted in some of the messages not reaching the target. For example, supervisors said that they were not consulted regarding the alcohol abuse policy, whilst the trade union representatives were tasked with debating it with their members. The other challenge is that not all employees belong to trade unions. So those who do not belong to trade unions do not always receive all the information.

The information for the trade unions serves another purpose, they want the information in order to defend their membership.

The issue of trust amongst management and labour is evident. The question is how they encourage upward communication, if there is lack of trust.

4.1.4 OPERATIONAL STAFF DISCUSSION

The discussion with operational staff was held at 10h00 at the Risk Boardroom. There was limited time for the discussion because there were two vessels on the Quayside off-loading which required the services of all operational employees. They enquired what the discussion entail and wished to know whether we will talk about salaries.

INFORMATION RELATED TO SAPO AS AN ORGANIZATION

What information do you have access to about SAPO as an organization?

The operational staff responded that they have an idea of what SAPO’s strategic objective is. “We know that SAPO would like to be a leader in terminal
operations.” Said participant E. “We know there are values according to which we are expected to operate. Participant D: “SWITCH (the acronym stands for Service excellence, Work smart and cut costs, Innovative problem solving, Teamwork, Commitment and Happy workforce) is our values” says participant B. “Dis omtrent wat ons weet.” (It is basically what we know). Participant E: “Asizazi ezinye kuba kaloku abaphathi bayazifihla ezi zinto” (That is all we know because managers keep certain information to themselves).

Who or what is your source of information?

The source of information varied from notice boards and to meetings. Participant A: “The notice boards are my source of information”. Participant C: “Ons hoor baie min by die groen area meetings ook, dis net werk” (We hear even less at the green area meetingsl). Participant D: “We read newsletter whilst sometimes we ask the trade unions and supervisors for information. The Road shows are also a reliable source of information when they are released to attend. Sometimes the Road shows are held either on a quarterly or on an adhoc basis depending on the need.

If you were to improve communication/ information flow what would you do?

The operational staff said that, if they were to improve communication they would ensure that green area meetings take place regularly. They would encourage managers to visit the Quayside and encourage employees to talk to their managers regularly.

INFORMATION RELATED TO EMPLOYEES

Are all the personnel at all levels in the organization consulted regarding organizational policies relevant to their position?
All the operational staff said that they are not consulted about the policies. “We only made aware about the policies when they are implemented. For example, the alcohol and drug abuse policy our opinion were ignored. SAPO has adopted a take it or leave it attitude which then results in less consultation. The trade unions do inform us about policies but they cannot contribute and their recommendations are not taken into consideration, according to Participant D. “Managers only inform us about policies which have a major impact on us,” said participant B.

Is information distributed to all levels of SAPO?

The facilitator was informed about the operational staff that they did not get the information which is intended for them. Participant C: “Some of the employees on the Quayside had not even heard of the policies. Although the supervisors and managers communicate, they have a language problem. Consequently, the information is announced but in languages which are not understood by all.

Does your supervisor congratulate you when you do good work?

The operational staff also said that their supervisors do not congratulate even if they got in extra time. Participant A: “Some of the supervisors are just slave drivers. We are rarely congratulated, we sometimes congratulate ourselves and we trust that the performance bonus will give us something back.” Participant B: “Unyanisile” (that is true).

If you haven’t understood the instruction is there openness of communication available for all personnel to consult with management?

The operational staff were happy that they can approach their supervisors for information. “We sometimes go to our supervisors and if they do not respond, we go through the trade unions and the next level of management.”
INFORMATION RELATED TO THE JOB

How does your physical work setting affect your communication at SAPO?

The operational staff had mixed feeling about the impact of the physical setting. They felt that because they work at a distance from the main office they are left out. Participant D: “We from bulk feel out of touch. We hardly see people visits but we do occasionally receive information”. “We also feel out of space at Breakbulk and we do not see much coming forth to us,” responded participant E. “The main building employees are always informed.” Said Participant F.

INFORMATION RELATED TO CHANNELS OF COMMUNICATION

What kind of information do you tend to receive and how frequently?

The operational staff would like to receive information related to their jobs and SAPO as a company. “Ek wil graag weet van die Maatskappy (I would like to know about the company). We would like to know about promotion opportunities and salary negotiations. The frequency depends on when the information is available, but they would prefer to receive information every month.

How often do you receive information of little value? Give an example

Sometimes, they receive information of little value. Vulindlela newsletters is one of those which contains information about the other terminals projects specifically the container terminal in Durban. “We want to hear about Port Elizabeth specifically,” responded participant E.
Do you sometimes feel you do not get enough information?

The operational staff felt that information was not forthcoming regarding issues they want to know about. The new Port is being built but nobody is bold enough to tell them about the future plans.

**SUMMARY OF DISCUSSION WITH OPERATIONAL STAFF**

The operational staff feels the same as the other groups. They cite almost the same challenges which varies from trust to lack of information. The main issue for them is the lack of information around the new port.

If the managers do not release them for meetings, then and they do not have access to information. All that they hear about is work.

4.2 CONCLUSION

The chapter has presented raw data from the four focus groups which represented different categories or levels within the SAPO organizational structure. After each group discussion, a summary of the main points was presented.

The four groups held different experiences about communication but the views were in many instances similar. The groups main challenge is trust amongst each other as employees of SAPO, which makes it difficult for upward communication. The most popular communication flow is the horizontal flow. Most groups felt that they can only turn to their peers for help.

The major similarity amongst the groups is that they are dissatisfied with the communication flow. For the groups communication is not their responsibility, communication is seen as a not a priority.
There is no strong communication drive from management, for example if employees do not feel like going to the session, they accept that and put handling of the cargo first. The power of communication resides with the trade unions.

In the next chapter which is the conclusion findings and recommendations will be made to improve organizational communication at SAPO.
CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this chapter is to give a critical analysis and discussion of the findings in light of the literature that was reviewed in Chapter two. This chapter will also comment on the weaknesses and the strengths of the four communication flows at SAPO. Lastly, recommendations will be given of how to improve organizational communication within SAPO.

The data obtained during the discussions with the focus groups will be analyzed by utilizing various themes. The themes will cover information related to SAPO, to the job, to employees and channels. These are the contexts within which communication takes place in an organization. The analysis will focus on one of the three communication categories identified by Byers (1997:5) which is internal operational communication. Internal operational communications consist of structured communication within the organization which is directly related to achieving the organization’s goal.

5.1 DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

5.1.1 INFORMATION RELATED TO SAPO AS AN ORGANIZATION

The empirical search revealed that the four focus groups confirmed that they have heard about SAPO’s strategy through various platforms. The managers and full time union representatives are exposed to more information than the supervisors and operational staff. The mentioned role-players are of the opinions that have a fair understanding of SAPO’s goals and objectives. This was argued by Downs & Adrian (2004:61) that employees need information about the organization so that
they can make informed decisions. He further argues that the information provided by SAPO links the employees with the organization.

Although employees are aware of SAPO’s strategy, there is no commitment from the organization on providing regular feedback or updates in order for employees to feel part of the implementation strategy. Information regarding SAPO’s strategy is provided top down. Consequently there is no feedback or input by the lower level employees towards the strategy. Some of the managers expressed concern that they were not part of the strategy formulation process, but were expected to implement the strategies. According to the SAPO strategy document, all the key stakeholders were considered, but not everybody was prepared to take ownership of the strategy at the management level. The full time union representatives did not voice a concern on the formulation of the strategy. It can be inferred that since the strategy of SAPO is a top down process, they remained silent on the matter.

The empirical search also revealed that information regarding SAPO gets lost due to the many hierarchical levels the messages have to pass through. Changes in goals and objectives or updates with regard to SAPO direction pass from the manager to full time union representatives, supervisors and operational staff. Supervisors maintain that operations cannot be delayed due to staff meetings because it is costly for clients. Consequently, the message is sent through various channels and structures which have an impact on the way SAPO communicates to its employees.

It can be deduced from the responses given by the focus groups that SAPO is seen as a modern organization which subscribes to tall structures qualities. SAPO make use of written regulations and procedures but sometimes instructions are given verbally. Power is concentrated at the top with the Business Unit Executive at the helm. As the structure goes down so does the power of authority. Authority is vested in the position, subordinates follow orders from the office superior.
Communication is influenced by the organizational structure. An employee at SAPO may not communicate with employees without clearing the message with his/her superiors. SAPO believes that an organization not only has a function of producing a service but also the need to fulfill the employee’s needs of job satisfaction. Tukiainen (2001:49) supports this principle and states that the right timing of information flow and quality of information specifies the experience of general functioning of information flow.

5.1.2 INFORMATION RELATED TO EMPLOYEES

The empirical research revealed that managers hold the view that SAPO policies are important hence they should be the ones to ensure that they are implemented. The policies control the behaviors of the employees and instill behavioral uniformity amongst employees. Miller (1999:122) supports the mentioned view and states that organizations exert control in the workplace through rules and regulations. Control emancipates itself through identification and discipline. Employees perceive themselves as one or as a collective group. When an individual identifies himself/herself with SAPO strategies, the individual takes on the responsibility of achieving them. Discipline through communication interaction result in work groups developing techniques to reward and punish behavior that conforms with or deviates from the values identified as important by the work group. These disciplinary techniques might include direct criticism, the use of silence or social pressure. The values upheld emanate from management and the discipline is carried out by work groups. Seegers (1997:7) states that the individual right of privacy somewhat diminishes in an organization context. The supervisors are instilling the same policies and rules to all employees. Furthermore, supervisors and managers often monitor activities of workers on the job to ensure that they comply with the policies and procedures. The organizations interest takes priority to those of individuals.
The full time union representatives feel that they are well versed on policies because they protect their members as well as their jobs. Miller (1999: 121) perceives policies similarly. Miller believes that individuals can be controlled and dominated in organizations through policies which relate to employees. Full time union representatives maintain that they are consulted before policies are implemented. Whist the other two groups feel they are not consulted. This is a challenge for personnel who are in charge of effective communication. Given the fact that most employees at SAPO belong to trade unions, it is expected that half the operational staff focus groups be aware of current policy on alcohol abuse. But the research showed that even the full time union representative who prides themselves with first hand information, their communication to lower levels was ineffective.

The four groups agreed that they are rarely acknowledged for work well done. They are, however, severely reprimanded when they have done something wrong. Power emancipates itself through the policies of recognition and the superiors are expected to recognize their subordinates meaningfully. They have a right to simultaneously recognize and reprimand. Conner & Douglas (2005:210) believe that managers should motivate job performance rather than demand it. Managers would accomplish more by viewing their employees as self-motivated, committed, responsible and creative members of the organization rather than viewing them as irresponsible and lazy. Down & Adrian (2004:60) support the statement by arguing that motivation is fostered upon employees by clarifying what is to be done, how well they are doing and what can be done to improve performance.

The empirical research revealed that all the different levels, the personnel feel comfortable with the assistance from their peers. Some participants on the supervisory level stated that some managers are inaccessible, while others ignore complaints or suggestions. This makes upward communication difficult. One of the communication functions in an organization identified by Robbins (1998:310)
is innovation. Robbins argues that for modern organizations to adapt to the environment, they should turn to the employees for suggestions. If this channel is closed, employees will not make any contributions.

5.1.3 INFORMATION RELATED TO THE JOB

All focus groups expressed that they are more comfortable with their peer assistance than the manager’s assistance. Managers, supervisors and operational staff use trade union representatives as their second source of information. The information from the unions might differ from the original information because it might be biased or sifted. This then confirms that all communication at SAPO is task-orientated. This supports the Marxist theory of modes and means of production. Employees’ lives take second place whilst production is priority. That is why the supervisors and the employees strongly feel that operations takes priority over anything else. Power emancipates itself through control and urgency which is exerted by management to operations.

Some employees expressed concern that the physical environment is not conducive to effective communication. The personnel at Bulk terminal stated that they are not part of the information mainstream. Other employees said that they are within the mainstream but they are too busy to concentrate on activities which do not affect them. E-mail and telephonic modes of communication were considered more effective for both the managers and the full time union representatives.

5.1.4 INFORMATION RELATED TO CHANNELS OF COMMUNICATION

The empirical search revealed that there are various channels which are used to transfer messages. However, the operational staff does not have access to all these channels. They rely on word of mouth and the notice boards. The managers and full time union representatives utilize various communication channels. Those
who lag behind are the supervisors and the operational staff. The communication channels and tools go with the span of control or authority. The more responsibilities you have the more access you have to the communication tools. The managers have laptops which they can carry wherever they go, which means they can send messages from anywhere in the world. They can log onto the intranet which the operational staff do not have access to.

The frequent communication sessions take place monthly to which managers, and supervisors and union representatives are invited. The supervisors do not even have time to attend these sessions due to lack of commitment. The full time union representatives make concerted efforts to attend. The information to which the operational staff has access to enable them to execute their daily duties enough for them to carry out their duties is seen as adequate.

After the fourth group the need to interview more groups was assessed and a decision was made against it based on the assumption that no new information will be forthcoming.

5.2 STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF THE FLOWS

5.2.1 DOWNWARD COMMUNICATION FLOW

The study shows that downward communication does take place although it is not effective. Information does not reach all the employees, although efforts are made to do so. As stated in chapter two, downward communications plays a critical role in the success of an organization. Strengths of downward communication at SAPO includes: Various communication structures are in place, employees are aware of the communication channels and employees associate themselves with SAPO strategies towards which they would like to contribute. Weaknesses of downward communication include: lack of motivation from supervisors, frequency of messages sent, lack of feedback on strategies, lack of trust and
selective communication and the lack of information which compromises the support of strategies. The management style at SAPO is regarded as rigid and task-orientated than people-orientated. SAPO is not different from other organizations as argued by Miller (1999:19). According to the latter the majority of communication in an organization flows downward in the form of rules, orders and directives. In such instances there is little feedback that moves upwards from the lower levels and employees towards a higher level of management. Fielding (2006:51) states that downward communication provides specific instructions, rationale, and necessary data regarding the procedures, policies and practices of the organization. SAPO follows Fielding’s view. SAPO uses downward communication to provide instructions, rationale, data regarding data policies and procedures.

5.2.2 UPWARD COMMUNICATION FLOW

Upward communication flow is used minimally within SAPO. The mentioned flow is only used when there is a complaint or a grievance. Some of the strengths include; established procedures and channels. Weaknesses of upward communication include: lack of trust, fear of intimidation, superiors do not have time to listen, less feedback is required from operational staff and the only group who can use this flow successfully are the unions. If SAPO were to be measured against the four important functions of communication identified by Fielding (2006:46), which are helping staff to generate new ideas and adapt to changes, they would fail. Employees at the lower levels felt that communication does not give them a chance to generate ideas because the channels are unclear. Upward communication is characterized by fear of victimization. This then supports the classical theory which states that in such organizations, communication is mainly downward and less upward.
5.2.3 DIAGONAL COMMUNICATION FLOW

Different departments use diagonal communication flow to get assistance in accomplishing their jobs. The strengths of diagonal communication flow include: open channels of communication and established relationships whereas weaknesses include: lack of time to nurture the relationships and diagonal communication is sometimes seen as bypassing authority.

Employees especially, trade union representatives use diagonal communication effectively. Even the managers ask the trade union representatives for information. This concurs with Gibson & Hodgetts (1991:221) in that the purpose of diagonal communication re-enforces the concept of authority rather than authority of position. Van Staden, Marx & Erasmus-Kritzinger (2002:22) confirmed during their study that diagonal communication does not take place along the normal lines of authority but across the different levels of authority.

5.2.4 HORIZONTAL COMMUNICATION FLOW

The empirical research revealed that horizontal communication at SAPO is effective. The study showed that managers would rather talk to their peers than to their superiors. The strengths of horizontal communication include: support base whilst weaknesses include: lack of trust, silo mentality and reluctance of sharing information with others. The managers at SAPO would ask assistance from their peers than ask from their superiors. Barker & Angelopulo (2006:75) sees horizontal communication flow as operating at lower levels where it is used to solve problems, task co-ordination and conflict resolution. This creates a sense of belonging among SAPO employees and adherence to rules and procedures which are enforced by management and team members.
The study revealed that the various levels at SAPO are highly dependent on horizontal or lateral communication flow. As stated in chapter two by Downs and Adrian (2004:28), lateral communication flow is the most frequent and routine form of communication which takes place among personnel who operate at the same level.

5.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

5.3.1 DOWNWARD COMMUNICATION

As a matter of clarity, downward communication is perceived as information flowing from management to employees whilst the information can also flow from the supervisor to the lower levels.

Based on the weaknesses of downward communication, the following recommendations can be implemented to improve downward communication.

**Use of written communication:**
As indicated in the findings, employees prefer written and oral communication. A message should firstly be communicated orally and then confirmed in writing. The message can also be translated into other languages such as Xhosa and Afrikaans. The most effective method for transfer of written messages is the Opsbrief, which is the daily circular. The latter will also assist in providing the necessary information for the job to be done. The literature review indicated that oral communication backed up by a written message is the most effective method of transmitting information. Managers have also suggested that the newsletter contain more photographs to attract the readers.

Communication channels should be kept open so that in cases where only written channels were used, employees have the opportunity to seek clarity through the open channels. In times of crisis, the communicator must know exactly which
channel to utilize. Communication must not be held back because of non-availability of channels (Van Staden, Marx & Erasmus-Kritzinger, 2002:23). The latter authors also suggest that for more effective communication across levels in an organization, communication routes should be kept open.

**Effective communication at all authority levels:**
The lengthier the number of levels of authority in an organization, the more levels the message has to pass. Each authority level should ensure that the message is passed on to the next level with speed and accuracy. By so doing, perceptions are managed and the information is credible. Van Staden, Marx & Erasmus-Kritzinger (2002:23) believe that messages should not pass through too many levels before they reach their destination.

Managers and supervisors must be made aware of their responsibilities to ensure effective downward communication. This should be measured through their key performance areas (KPA).

**Provide feedback:**
Most of the concerns of the respondents on downward communication were the lack of feedback at SAPO. The managers and supervisors did not provide feedback to the employees on matters raised as concerns. Effective feedback can solve emerging problems and ensure effectiveness of messages. For example, feedback from management can be measured if the manager understands the problem directed at them. Line managers and supervisors have a vital role to play as translators of policies to lower levels therefore, constant feedback is needed.

**Task rationale:**
Task rationale can include explaining to employees their roles and how their role relates to that of others. The environmental pressure and competition can also be incorporated into the message. Communicating the rationale will enhance teamwork and break away the silo relations.
Effective downward communication can be achieved through analyzing the subordinates receiving the message, combining the oral and written forms of communication, monitoring subordinate feedback and managers continually desiring to communicate with subordinates.

5.3.2 UPWARD COMMUNICATION

Communication from the lower levels of authority to top levels of authority tends to be undermined by the managers or supervisors. The importance of upward communication tends to be undermined by the superiors. It is recommended that the skilful use of sympathetic listening by managers and supervisors is the most effective method of encouraging communication ideas upwards.

Visible management and supervisors:
It is proposed that managers most regularly visit the work place of sub-ordinates. It was suggested by a respondent that managers dedicate time to listen to employees on lower levels. This will afford the subordinates more opportunities to communicate upward.

Encourage upward communication:
Managers and supervisors at SAPO should encourage effective upward communication. Aligning communication with their KPAs will ensure that they do so. The success of this should be measured through feedback obtained from the lower levels of authority. There should also be willingness by managers and supervisors to encourage open communication from subordinates to superiors. All other means of upward communication should also be freely available to staff.

At SAPO, upward communication is seen as an open door policy which is not favoured because it is time consuming. Furthermore, managers should be able to
accept criticism levelled by upward communication. Employees should be prepared to criticise practices and suggest ideas.

**Communication training:**
Employees should be sent for communication training so that they can enhance their confidence and be able to communicate on higher levels. Adult Basic Education Training (ABET) should be provided for those who are illiterate. The managers also need to sharpen their communication skills.

It would assist if managers can cultivate a genuine desire to hear bad news along with good news. Managers and supervisors should at regular intervals pay visit to see how things are done at operations. They should also meet periodically with various groups to discuss progress, problems and develop an art of listening to employees.

5.3.3 **HORIZONTAL COMMUNICATION**

Employees on the different levels must learn to share information. If they cannot share information with each other SAPO will not meet its objective. For example managers are employed to fulfil certain roles which compliment each other. If the managers do not communicate with each other, they will loose information which could assist them to achieve SAPO’s goals.

**Trust:**
The basis of all the channels of communication is trust. Transparency and giving accurate information can improve the levels of trust amongst the employees of SAPO.

5.3.4 **DIAGONAL COMMUNICATION**
Diagonal communication is based on relationships rather than authority or position. Therefore, it involves trust. Employees must be made aware of the roles of diagonal communication which is not about bypassing authority but speeding up the communication process.

Managers should also use management communication as advised by Andrews and Andrews (2004:13); it would help if the situation is analyzed and a plan be designed which will ensure that the correct information is communicated.

5.4 CONCLUSION

The purpose of the study was to critically analyse organizational communication at SAPO and propose recommendations of how to improve the different flows.

The literature study enhanced the understanding of organizational communication and the different flows of information in an organization. The literature review also enhanced the understanding and the thinking of different theorists and researchers of organizational communication. In seeking the understanding of the different flows, the functions or roles of communication was also discussed. Organization is meaningless without communication because communication is the nerve of an organization.

The classical, human and systems theories of an organization suggested that communication plays a vital role within an organization. Different motivational theories were discussed which presented a holistic view of the organization.

The different flows are managed at the different levels of authority in an organization. Managers and supervisors are in control of the downward communication. Lower level employees are in control of the upward communication, whilst employees at the same level of authority control the communication at their level.
The study of organizational communication further highlighted the vital role of managers in communication in an organization. Management communication can assist SAPO to identify the gaps as well as addressing them.
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Dear Sir/Madam

MA MEDIA STUDIES: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF ORGANIZATIONAL COMMUNICATION IN SOUTH AFRICAN PORT OPERATIONS, PORT ELIZABETH DIVISION

You are cordially invited to an information sharing session (interview), which is part of the organizational communication research being currently undertaken at SAPO towards the completion of my treatise.

TIME : 10h00
DATE : 24 November 2006
Venue : New Mess Ablution

All information will be treated as strictly confidential and it will be impossible to identify any individual on the strength of the results included in the final report.

The research has been necessitated by the assumption that organizational communication at SAPO, P.E. division needs to be improved.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Yours Sincerely

Sindi Mbunge
Researcher

DISCUSSION DOCUMENT FOR FOCUS GROUPS
### Information related to SAPO as an organization

2. What information do you have access to about SAPO as an organization?

3. Who or what is your source of information?

4. How frequently do you receive the information?

5. If you were to improve communication/information flow what would you do?

### Information related to the employees

6. Are all the personnel at all levels in the organization consulted regarding organizational policy relevant to their position?

7. Is information distributed to all levels?

8. Does your supervisor congratulate you when you do good work?

9. If you haven’t understood the instruction is there openness of communication available for all personnel to consult with management levels in organization?

### Information related to the job
10. If you haven’t received any information regarding your job and the company vision, who do you turn to for advice and information?

11. How does your physical work setting here affect your communication at SAPO?

Information related to Channels of communication

13. What kinds of information do you tend to receive and how frequent?

14. How often do you receive information of little value? Give an example

Is there some information which you think has been left out about SAPO’s communication process?

END