



Nkumba
University

THE UNIVERSITY COMMUNICATION POLICY



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Foreword

Executive internal and external communication is a powerful force that not only helps organizations to be more successful, but also helps enrich employees' lives in meaningful ways - Paul Barton

This policy document stipulates how Nkumba University (NU) will handle communication with its different stakeholders. The policy is founded on the strength of the NU Strategic Plan which emphasizes communication between the university and its stakeholders as a two-way process; open communication from governance organs to its stakeholders and a system that encourages feedback.

Addressing the concerns of our stakeholders, the university shall provide the necessary communication infrastructure to ensure that information reaches its stakeholders using the most effective means. We shall also undertake stakeholder surveys to gauge perceptions so that we project a right identity to stakeholders. The policy puts in place a solid communication structure that will give every facet of university life adequate visibility. The structure will ensure that academic and research activities and community relations are anchored on different communication platforms to reach the targeted stakeholders. Communication of research from scholars and students will be prioritized as a key output of the communication office.

To ensure that the university takes advantage of web-based technology and other online platforms, a structure providing for personnel in each school of the University is catered for in the policy. The personnel will ensure that our web based communication strategy is timely, focused on creating mutual understanding with our stakeholders and shall ensure that our products and services are available through different interactive fora.

The policy demonstrates that NU is among institutions that have embraced best communication practices. It defines how communication is structured and practised. NU has chosen this path to realize its vision of moving towards being a global education institution which can only be achieved by emphasizing the centrality of the stakeholders in our communication web. We appreciate feedback in any format as the best way of strengthening our university.

The management of NU commits itself to the implementation of this policy and will subject it to periodic reviews to ensure its relevance in line with the changing circumstances and needs of our stakeholders.

Executive Summary

Communication is the creation and sharing of meaning through common symbols. In an institutional framework, it is the fine thread that connects all the activities and functions both internally and externally. It is therefore critical to the effective functioning and productivity of any enterprise. It can of course take many forms and shapes depending on the nature of who is communicating and for what one is communicating. It can be quite complex and the rapid growth in the Information Communication Technology (ICT) has added to its complexity.

Every organization has its own nature and culture and in this regard, Nkumba University (NU) occupies a social and cultural space particular to itself in the Ugandan academic arena. Taking into consideration dimensions and complexity of communication and its effects in as far as they are put in place to add value to the proper functioning of our university, it is in order for the university community to have a common understanding in this matter. This need perhaps together with the requirement from the National Council for Higher Education brought about the requirement to come up with a communication policy.

This communication policy seeks to address the internal and external communication function of the university. In regard to internal communication, the committee focused on communication as it happens within the administrative structure of the university as well as the dissemination of knowledge which is the core function of our institution. In regard to external communication, the committee looked critically at the Public Relations department of the university and recommended strengthening the office with the possibility of a decentralized structure that extends to the schools and directorates.

Developments in ICTs cannot be under looked by any institution that intends to be productive and competitive in today's world. As such, the use of Information Communication Technology (ICT) within our communication function will take a centre stage in the implementation of this policy. It is expected that this policy will enable the university community to harness opportunities availed by the internal and external communication function of the university.

1 Introduction

1.1 Preamble

All over the world, there have been changes in the handling of corporate communication with an implication that if an organization has to survive and thrive, then it must communicate effectively with all its stakeholders. NU continues to generate knowledge and it must ensure that the knowledge is appropriately transmitted to stakeholders. Consequently, the manner in which the university communicates, the content of that communication and the feedback generated are powerful indicators for the university to position itself strategically as it releases its goods, products, and services to the market.

A major challenge facing NU is updating the content of information and presenting it in appropriate form to its diverse audiences. The range of audiences makes it imperative that the university develops appropriate approaches to sharing information and to gauging feedback. This policy was developed against this backdrop as part of the university's commitment to provide stakeholders with timely, accurate, objective and complete information. The policy will enable a smooth flow of information and create feedback mechanisms.

To this end, as part of the university's commitment to providing stakeholders with timely, accurate, objective and complete information, the policy establishes the principles, rules of engagement, processes and procedures for communication within the university community and with the university's stakeholders.

1.2 Purpose

The aim of this policy is to outline the principles, guidelines, practices and processes that the university will embrace in fostering excellent internal and external communication. Implementing the policy, the university will realize its vision, mission and core values by reaching out to its stakeholders with messages that help to create a sense of ownership of the policy.

2 Background to the communication function in NU

2.1 Corporate communication at NU

The Communication function at NU is based in the Office of the Vice Chancellor who is also the Chief Public Relations Officer of the university. The department is headed by a Public Relations officer who is assisted by the Marketing Officer and a Website Officer. The Public Relations Department is an important reference point for many internal and external stakeholders. It is mandated to carry out the following duties:

- Deal with all links between the university and a variety of publics;
- Manage all information on NU e-communication platforms; websites and social media page;
- Profile and market the university through avenues such as documentaries, in-house publications and supplements;
- Monitor all media for information that can have impact on the business of the University;
- Manage all NU events in liaison with other departments;
- Manage corporate responsibility activities;
- Handle advertising of NU services;
- Perform any other functions as may be assigned.

2.2 Communication practices

The University's Public Relations Department in the Office of the Vice Chancellor handles all communication activities. Best practices dictate that for purposes of sending uniform messages from and portraying a common identity of the university, the communication function should be centralised and coordinated from a focal point.

3 A situational analysis of Communication in NU

3.1 Information reach

The assumption is that the usual modes of communication including; emails, memos and circulars send important information to everyone who needs to know and that everyone will receive this information. It is possible however that information does not reach people who do not use some of these methods of communication.

3.2 Uniformity of information

Sometimes, different supervisors give different, conflicting messages on important issues. These messages cause confusion and distrust among employees and other stakeholders.

3.3 Flow of information

Information may not get to employees when and where they need it. Without vital information at the right time and in the right place, the decision-making process is hampered. This delay impacts negatively on completion and outcomes of ongoing projects and activities.

3.4 Sharing of information

In some cases, critical information is not shared by key stakeholders. The top management sometimes does not engage the employees, who have regular contacts with the customers on important aspects of the institution thus hampering feedback at all levels.

3.5 Clarity of expectations

The existing structures that are designed to establish effective information sharing and ownership have not yet produced the desired impact with respect to harmonizing expectations. The structures have not been utilized optimally to benefit the wider membership among management, staff and students.

3.6 Sharing of trust and information

Some employees are not freely sharing information with one another. This gap has a bearing on trust, which is an integral element of our institutional core values: a lack of trust has the impact of allowing unhealthy intra-institutional competition which undermines productivity of teams, departments or units and the institution as a whole.

3.7 Sequencing and systematizing of information

In every institution, there are limits to the amount and nature of information that can be received, processed and effectively handled by any one unit. The apparent absence of clear communication policy guidelines results in unduly large amounts of information being channelled to units at once resulting in information overload.

3.8 Uptake of communication technologies

The university uses a number of different communication technologies such as data-based reporting systems, e-mail, intranet, bulletin boards, websites, social media and video conferencing. They are cost-effective in eliminating distance barriers and providing information to large numbers of people quickly. In spite of the robust ICT infrastructure in place, the uptake in use of these technologies by many members of the university community has not been impressive and consistent at different levels. The low uptake could be explained by people's preference for more personalized modes of communication.

3.9 Attitude issues

The more traditional communication problems such as the manner in which messages are coded and receiver resistance to change often fail to meet their objectives. Some of the communication sent out is lofty, vague and impersonal to the extent that a message is never

really understood and therefore fails to make the intended impact. Furthermore, pervasive rumours and indications influence against desired changes in the university.

3.10 Fragmented communication

In addition, communication within the university tends to be fragmented in that it is perceived only as a tool rather than a thread within a system. At the same time, communication takes place in disparate and isolated ways rather than in a collaborative and well-coordinated way as a concerted effort geared towards achieving the overall goals of communication in the university.

4 Rationale for a Communication Policy

Communication is an important tool for disseminating the university's values and philosophy to its external and internal publics. Internal communication is particularly vital in strengthening the organisational culture and feeling of commitment and belonging among staff and students. To support the university's quest for world-class excellence, there is need for effective communication among all stakeholders, hence, the rationale for a comprehensive communication policy.

Overall, the policy should ensure that there is a viable approach to communication at all times and that the responsibilities and expectations of staff are identified and understood.

4.1 Goal and objectives

The goal of this policy is to support the university's aspirations and mandate through effective, timely and faultless communication among all NU stakeholders.

Firstly, the broad objectives of the NU Communication Policy are to:

- a) Provide efficient and effective communication mechanisms among management, staff, students and other stakeholders;
- b) Promote the coherence and consistence of information flow, internally and externally;
- c) Minimize communication breakdown and delays including overseeing a customer feedback programme;
- d) Promote the use of appropriate channels of communication and
- e) Disseminate research findings.

Secondly, the specific objectives of the NU Communication Policy are to:

- a) Interpret information emanating from the university and present it in a useful and sustainable manner to enhance relations with stakeholders;
- b) Correct lapses in the flow of information between the groups both that make up the

- constituency of the university and which constitute opposition to and competition with the university;
- c) Facilitate the role of the university in taking up its place in society as a gesture of cooperation in civil, educational and charitable situations, and
 - d) Facilitate the role of the university in articulating its interests and to direct attention to its activities through the development of a visible, long term community relations and outreach programme for research uptake.

4.2 Justification

The policy emphasises professionalism in communication and serves as a guide to members of the university community with respect to their responsibility in serving the interests of the university. It therefore outlines the planned effort to influence opinions through good character and responsible performance based on mutually satisfactory communication. There is a need to gain public goodwill and acceptance as well as to sustain and expand the market for university products and services. Cultivating and enhancing confidence in dealer and distributor relations has the critical impact of protecting the reputation and integrity of the university.

5 Best Practices in Communication

5.1 Principles of good communication practice

Presently, the university endeavours to provide its stakeholders with timely, accurate, clear, objective and complete information about its policies, programmes, services and initiatives. Consequently, to realize the university's communication goal, this policy outlines core principles of good communication practice as a guide to its stakeholders. It is appropriate to adapt these principles to suit the working environment.

5.1.1 Effectiveness

The university shall ensure that all communication is effective and appropriate and shall convey information and respond to requests by stakeholders through appropriate communication channels.

5.1.2 Clarity

The university undertakes to transmit clear, uniform and easily understood information, using appropriate the university logo, corporate colours and publications to reinforce, clarify or authenticate communication.

5.1.3 Being Proactive

The university shall continue to demonstrate leadership by proactively seeking and engaging external contacts in areas of mutual interest in line with its vision and mission.

5.1.4 Transparency

The university shall continue to be as transparent and accountable as possible, disclosing reasons for decisions made, while the management shall openly engage in dialogue as appropriate.

5.1.5 Efficiency

The university shall endeavour to ensure that all information duly reaches the intended recipients.

5.1.6 Cultural awareness

As an institution that is international in character, the university shall continue to respect cultural diversity of all stakeholders in its communication.

5.1.7 Responsibility

The university shall endeavour to ensure that all editorial operations and marketing of the university's products, which constitute an integral part of the institution's communication process, reflect a high level of accountability and responsibility.

5.1.8 Integrity

Internal and external communication, like all other university activities shall continue to be guided by high levels of integrity.

5.2 Communication processes

All communication processes in the university must therefore be guided by the same values that characterize the best communication practices in the worldwide. These practices are embedded in the code of conduct and should be adhered to at all levels of university operations.

5.2.1 The University Spokesperson

On all matters pertaining to the university, the Vice Chancellor is the chief spokesperson of NU. From time to time as and when necessary, the Vice Chancellor may authorize other

officers such as the Public relations Officer to be spokespersons. These officers will be fully informed on developments in the university requiring external communication or response. In this connection, Heads of units are expected to keep the spokesperson apprised on significant developments in the university.

5.2.2 Audiences

The university has two types of audiences or publics: internal and external.

5.2.3 Internal audiences

The internal audiences of the university are staff and students.

5.2.4 External audiences

The external audiences of the university include the Government of Uganda, the Ministry of Education, the National Council for Higher Education, collaborating institutions, suppliers, industry, development partners, parents or guardians, alumni and the general public. The mass media is one of the most sensitive and key audiences of the university because, if they carry clear information, the university can better be understood. To this end, the Communication Office will seek to:

- a) Provide accurate and objective information about the university;
- b) Maintain an open-door policy culture;
- c) Package as newsworthy and current information coming from the university, and
- d) Monitor the media continuously for whatever information is published regarding the university.

5.3 Types and methods of communication

5.3.1 Internal communication

To maintain a good working environment for the realization of its vision and mission, the university aims at facilitating efficient and effective internal communication to staff and students as well as to all its stakeholders within the University only. In this respect, it will utilize, but not limit to utilizing, these three communication channels:

Internal communication helps employees in performing their work, developing a clear sense of organization mission and identifying and promptly dealing with potential problems within the University and the rest of the world.

- a) Vertical communication this is communication between employees on different hierarchical positions)
- b) Downward communication this communication right from the top management vice chancellor, management, officers, assistants

- c) Upward communication this is communication from the lower staff upwards. These include assistants, officers, management, vice chancellor
- d) Horizontal this is communication between individuals on the same hierarchical positions)

All the above forms of communication can be done using the following ways;

- a) Letters and Memos: this is written communication from the different University Units such as Vice Chancellors, Academic registry, University Secretary, Human Resource, Schools among others which is placed in form of letters or memos but has vital component of communication for the university stakeholders.
- b) New media: web-based communication including; web sites, Facebook, twitter, WhatsApp, google+ among others; controls on these will be professionally done at the content level.
- c) Staff Meetings: this is communication where staff exchange information, plan and coordinate program activities routinely if it is necessary. In such meetings communication is passed on in real-time and recipients acquire it. The minutes that emanate out of the meetings will act as proof of whatever communication was made to the staff.

All communication should be easy to understand and devoid of slang, obscene, offensive or discriminatory remarks, ethnic slurs or sexist innuendoes. At the same time, the university shall predominantly promote technology enabled avenues for disseminating educational content.

5.3.2 External communication

This is a form of communication where the exchange of information is both within the organization itself and outside the organization. It should be noted that organisations communicate to the world on a daily basis in a formal and informal way.

For any external communication within the organisation special attention is paid to formal communication. Regardless of how it is undertaken (letter, e-mail, web, telephone or some other way) the efficient external communication will be the first step in creating the appropriate image. Careful branding starting with the organisation logo, colours, created letter heads, reports, presentations or web pages, send the outside world an important message about the work and quality of the organization. This could be done in a variety of ways as shown below;

- a) Print media: newsletters, newspaper articles and supplements, Varsity Focus, fliers and ad-hoc publications; written communication will remain a vital component of communication in the university.
- b) Broadcast (both radio and television): documentaries, podcasts, advertorials, interviews and spots.
- c) New media: web-based communication including; web sites, Facebook, twitter,

WhatsApp, google+ among others; controls on these will be professionally done at the content level.

- d) Meetings: this is communication where university staff with other external stakeholders such as funders can exchange information, plan and coordinate program activities routinely if it is necessary. In such meetings communication is passed on in real-time and recipients acquire it. The minutes that emanate out of the meetings will act as proof of whatever communication was made to the staff.

5.3.3 Electronic communication

E-mail, social media and the web are the primary modes of electronic communication and constitute a key platform for external communication. The Public Relations Office shall have the overall editorial responsibility for all university website content. The content of the university web pages should always be up-to-date, user-friendly and regulated to conform to the objectives of the institution. The content must meet the set standard for web publishing as defined in the NU ICT Policy.

Furthermore, the university shall encourage the use of email, social media and the website as guided by the University ICT Policy as a way of engaging with external stakeholders. At the same time, the university shall encourage the generation of general podcasts and video clips for marketing and enhancing its corporate image; these must however be authorised by the Vice Chancellor. Meanwhile, access to Information Technology (IT) shall be made more available to staff, while the university shall embrace the use of social media and blogging by the university community to the external stakeholders.

5.3.4 Public lectures

Public lectures are tools of delivery and engagement with external audiences. It is envisaged that the university shall continue to attract prominent personalities and international academics wishing to interact and discourse with the university community. These engagements are critical to the enhancement of the image of the university.

5.3.5 Meetings

Normally the university uses meetings such as courtesy calls, meetings with collaborating institutions, staff meetings, and governance and management meetings to communicate with stakeholders. Given the importance of meetings for sharing of and passing on information, the university shall regulate them to ensure that the agenda, lists of participants, timing and minutes or records are available, as it is appropriate to good communication practices.

5.3.6 General guidelines for internal communication

The university shall encourage openness in internal communication and sharing of information

unless the content is deemed likely to compromise the interests of the university.

5.3.7 Flow of information

The university shall encourage the use of communication channels that facilitate authentic dialogue and feedback.

5.3.8 Crisis communication

The university shall continue to proactively prevent events that are likely to lead to loss of stakeholder confidence and to take care of events stemming from rumors, speculation and insider lack of confidence that give the university negative publicity. In these cases, appropriate crisis communication shall enable the university to respond rapidly and effectively to potentially negative situations.

Given the importance of crisis communication:

1. Only the Vice Chancellor or an authorized person shall give information to the media;
2. The Public Relations office shall maintain regular contact with stakeholders and give advice where issues or developments appear to cause problems;
3. The Public Relations office shall monitor local and international news and events and advise the Vice Chancellor on issues or events relevant to the university.

5.3.9 Crisis response

When a crisis occurs, the Vice Chancellor shall develop and advise on appropriate strategies to deal with the situation and communicate appropriate information to relevant stakeholders.

5.3.10 Crisis Communication Management Team

In case of a crisis, the University Management, Council and Senate shall become the Crisis Communication Management Team (CCMT) and co-opt other members as the situation may demand. The Public Relations Officer shall be a member of the team. The CCMT shall constantly monitor, interpret and manage issues with potential to escalate into crises and shall gather details about crises and approve strategies for internal and external communication.

5.3.11 Releasing information to the media

The Vice Chancellor in collaboration with the Public Relations office shall release relevant, appropriate and verifiable information to the media regarding any crisis. The Public Relations office shall institute mechanisms to continually monitor media coverage and respond to it accordingly.

5.3.12 Corporate Advertising

In utilizing print, electronic and support media for corporate advertising, the university shall use corporate advertising to continually promote a positive image of and ensure observance of the best advertising principles and practices in the university.

The use of NU name and logo in advertising by collaborating or any institutions without authority from the Vice Chancellor is prohibited and shall be subject to legal action. The production of promotional university items or material shall at all times reflect the correct institutional name and logo. Where there are uncertainties, the concerned parties shall consult with the Vice Chancellor.

5.4 Branding

Branding is a powerful identity tool for any organization and should be clear to all NU stakeholders. To maintain its strong brand, the University will use the correct logo and name as well as the right fonts and colour (these to be confirmed by PR Team) at all times to reflect the true identity to its stakeholders.

The university logo shall not be used unnecessarily by staff, students and any one on any document without consent from the University management. The logo shall not be modified in anyway without the full consent of the University management. All this will be done to protect the University logo from being abused in any way and hence keep the brand intact.

5.5 Responsibility

All staff are duty bound to make known the good name of the university and all employees have a responsibility to demonstrate the institutional standards in communication.

5.6 Staff

Members of staff shall:

- a) Be aware of the communication policy and demonstrate the institutional standards in communication;
- b) Demonstrate the principles of good practice;
- c) Be responsible for ensuring that they communicate effectively and appropriately in line with the given standards of communication;
- d) Be aware of the various methods of communication and utilize them appropriately in their work;
- e) Tackle incidents of poor communication in proactive and constructive way;
- f) Ensure that information is shared appropriately and in a timely manner and
- g) Consider careful feedback in situations where stakeholders constructively raise issues relating to poor or inappropriate communication and adjust their communication style appropriately and timely.

5.6.1 Supervisory and management staff

All the supervisory and managerial staff shall ensure that:

- a) All staff members are sensitized on the Communication Policy;
- b) Communication systems and processes actively support the vision and mission of the university;
- c) They act as role models by leading by example and demonstrating good practice in all aspects of communication;
- d) Effective, timely and appropriate feedback is provided to staff and students;
- e) They reflect on communication standards and practices within their respective teams and identify opportunities for improvement;
- f) They take action to ensure they are resolved amicably where staff and students raise issues of poor communication;
- g) There is effective communication among the staff, students and other stakeholders;
- h) They support and promote a culture that encourages inclusion, transparency and involvement of all concerned parties;
- i) All staff members in their areas of responsibility have an understanding of the strategic direction of the institution, faculty and service departments, and
- j) There is consistency, equity and parity in communication processes across the university.

5.6.2 Monitoring and Evaluation

The Communication Office shall:

- a) Develop appropriate strategies for monitoring and evaluation of the Communication Policy;
- b) Carry out annual evaluation on the implementation of the policy, and
- c) Define the short-term, mid-term and long-term interventions based on the outcomes of the evaluation reports.

5.7 Review

To enhance uniformity with national and international higher education aims, this policy shall be reviewed every three years in line with emerging global trends in communication.



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