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Review of Literature

**Introduction**

The Detroit Rescue Mission Ministries has been serving the homeless of the Detroit area for 107 years (DRMM) by achieving its mission statement to “provide hope to the hopeless, disadvantaged, and homeless men, women, and children of our community by ministering to the total person – body, soul, and spirit, with services and programs designed to address spiritual, physical, emotional, and social needs to those seeking assistance in hopes of them becoming faithful Christians disciple into a local church, rehabilitated and employed, and living productive and restored lives (DRMM).” In order to fulfill mission statements such as these organizations, especially nonprofits, must have a structurally sound communication system. But what does it mean for a communication system to be structurally sound? In this paper, we will highlight the research of various authors in orderto answer the research question of why a structurally sound communication system is important within nonprofit organizations. The research we selected reviewed the complexity of communication, strategic communication between parties, how to communicate clearly, and how to develop and measure communication. With these factors in consideration, nonprofits can ensure they have all elements of communication covered, hence creating a structurally sound system.

**Complexity of Communication**

In Souder’s (2016) article, Lawrence claims that communication in nonprofit organizations are more complex than for-profit because of the multiple constituencies and multiple viewpoints, specifically in regards to their mission among many other things (Souder, 2016). The mission statement of nonprofit organizations is what position the viewpoints of employees and outsiders. It is essential to an organization’s survival. The mission statement helps attracts employees being both normative and political. However, mission statements do not retain employees (Souder, 2016). The communication afterwards contributes to retention. This communication comes in the form of a strategic plan which implies action at conceptual levels and then eventually at instrumental levels. (Souder, 2016).

Communications of an organization are complicated multilevel systems, the elements of the system are interconnected and can be modified and are interchangeable (Karnaukhova & Polyanskaya, 2015). Karnaukhova splits up this multi level system into four groups. The first group interprets communication as the main connection between a system and its parts. The second group interprets communication as technical, suggesting that communication is the way of transferring information. The third group interprets communication as biological. This interpretation refers to the standpoint of the biology term, knowledge exchange between animals. The last group interprets communication as social. Communication is the swapping of information and ideas from person to person through verbal and nonverbal language (Karnaukhova & Polyanskaya, 2015). Breaking down the different points of view communication can be looked at allows organizations to realize that this process is and cannot be linear. Communication comes in different forms, levels, and directions. This is important for those involved understand this multilevel system in order to position the organization to accomplish its mission statement (Karnaukhova & Polyanskaya, 2015).

The effect of communication has been studied extensively in the recent years. In a recent article, it describes non-profit communication is an important issue. (Dimitrov, 2008). After this assertion, more research was done in order to understand the complexity of communication in non-profits. There are “four very basic communication modes: (1) advocacy, (2) charity, (3) community service, and (4) public education campaigns“ (Dimitrov, 2008). Although the general features of communication are well known, the inner workings of several different communication and techniques fuel the organization. Out of the listed basic communication modes, charity and community service modes can easily be related to what the Detroit Rescue Mission Ministries would use in order to communicate since DRMM is a charitable non-profit organization that utilizes community service to function. Dimitrov found that charity communication “revolves around faculties such as fundraising and grant proposals, marketing and branding, advertising, and public relations.” The DRMM utilizes grants and other monetary donations in order to be able to provide services to the homeless in the Detroit Area. Dimitrov found that community service communication “depends on the quality of their marketing research, cultural diversity skills, values-based public relations, reputation-building, public affairs and communication campaigns.” The DRMM offers housing to a wide variety of people, thus having a diverse group of clients. The organization is based on spirituality, and their programs reflect these values as well as their service. The complexity of communication, whether it is the various modes and techniques or the multi level systems utilized, has lead to the abundance of communication based research focusing on the various parts of strategic communication.

**Strategic Communication**

Communication Between Donors and Non-Profit Organizations:

A non-profit organization relies heavily on others to donate funds so that it can operate smoothly. This makes it crucial that the organization put information about themselves out so that potential donors can understand exactly what it is that the non-profit does. This increases the chance of people donating to the cause and supporting it. Since this is an important part of a non-profit there is an ongoing conversation on how this is achieved through communications. The goal of nonprofit communications is to reach potential donors and is essential to the livelihood of these organizations (Whatley et al., 2010). This ongoing conversation covers the topic of how nonprofits need good communications and how they can obtain this. There are so many tools for organizations to have good communications but unfortunately there just isn’t enough guidance (Whatley et al., 2010).

When a survey was conducted on nonprofit professionals and their communications capabilities and levels of expertise, it showed how important communications is when trying to achieve funding from donors. It revealed that lack of resources is a major barrier to the success of nonprofits; many say that their donors don’t understand the importance of communications (Whatley et al., 2010). This lack of understanding is what leads to the lack of resources necessary to perform communications at a level that will draw donors in. Another part of this conversation states that communications efforts are given to interns and staff members of lower levels who don’t have the experience needed to market the organization (“PRWeb Newswire,” 2014). The lack of anyone caring enough to give the task of communications to staff with more experience is leading to nonprofits losing money in potential donors (“PRWeb Newswire,” 2014). This conversation fits right into the communications of the Detroit Rescue Mission Ministries. The topics mentioned in this conversation are what are happening in Genesis 2. Since communicating with donors is essential in a non-profit organization, there has been further research on how to communicate in a clear, effective way to insure the message has been expressed and understood.

Communicating Clearly and Effectively:

In the article *Developing a Communications Strategy For the Development Operation* by, [Joyce Braun Poderis](http://www.raise-funds.com/author/joyce-braun-poderis/) (2015) expresses how and what non profit organizations do to communicate their fundraising goals and plans to donors, prospects, and others able to influence them (Poderis, 2015). This means that It is crucial for the development departments to work with the communications department for the organization to run successfully. They both need to have a clear understanding of what the mission of the organization is or else there is no way that the community can stay together if both parties have different goals in mind. The organization also needs to keep in mind what created the foundation of the business and not focus on the prospect of money because this may show through and make the statements seem false.

Every non profit organization needs to clarify who they want to influence. Every message is going to make a statement and define a community. The message needs to be clear, and consistent to prevent audience confusion. In order to influence the audience one needs to find a relatable subject to be the poster person for the ministry.The media is a heavy influence during this day and age and this should be heavily exposed. Now, it is pretty simple to send out a mass text or to post a simple notification on twitter, facebook, etc. While using media to expose an institution the organization needs to keep in mind who is going to see it and who that specific social media targets should be used.

This literature brings up specific indicators of good communications within a nonprofit organization that can be barriers to non-effective nonprofits. Leadership involvement in communications is the key to highly effective organizations. Without this leadership role the ability to communicate effectively is hindered (Whatley et al., 2010). Nonprofits work more efficiently when there is a significant leadership involvement. There must be a commitment to focusing their efforts on achieving the communications goals they have placed. Most successful nonprofits (61%) have a documented communication plan (Whatley et al., 2010). Another key factor in effective communications is having staff that is capable of performing communications. Organizations with trained staff member or access to staff training are highly effective in their communications. Fifty seven percent of professionals in nonprofit organizations say that not having staff training or skilled staff is a barrier (Whatley et al., 2010).

One of the most direct ways to encourage a response from an audience is to make it easy for them to communicate with the organization, as stated by Henley (2001) in “*Integrated Marketing Communications for Local Non-Profit Organizations*.” If the audience members send a message and get no response, they will lose respect for the organization and direct their efforts elsewhere (Henley, 2001). The experts in integrated marketing communications for nonprofit organizations state that keeping an open line of communication with their audience is the best way to achieve their mission and maintain their volunteers and clients. Without an audience (volunteers, residents, donors), the organization loses opportunities. The book, “*Strategic Communications for Nonprofit Organizations*” expresses similar views, but also includes a detailed seven step plan to achieve success.

Patterson and Radtke (2009) are presidents of a strategic communications firm called Radiant Communications. They describe a seven step planning process: preparing to plan, situation analysis, target audiences, fostering audience support, promoting the nonprofit organization, vehicles and dissemination strategies, and ensuring that the plan succeeds. Strategic communications is the key to successful social change; it is mission driven, audience focused, and action oriented (Patterson & Radtke, 2009). Both literatures agree that focusing on the audience is an important part of a successful plan. The experts in this field range from strategic communication steps to integrated marketing in a non-profit organization. However, both agree that a constant flow of communication between the speaker and audience is important to success of the organization. As a result of clear and effective communication, there has been further research done on how to develop communication strategies as well as how to measure the effectiveness of communication.

Developing and Measuring Communication:

The article, *"Developing a Communications Strategy"* (n.d.) is centered around research specializing in developing a communication strategy. The article is a simple, easy read and contains bulleted numbered steps. These steps include statement of purpose, situation, and organizational objectives and communication objectives. Again, the organization and communication is the most important part of this article. This article states that everything done should be measureable, this way goals can be met and achieved. If goals are not realistic or cannot be measured then there is no way to tell if an organization is meeting them (“Developing a Communications Strategy”, n.d.).

The DRMM utilizes communication in order to spread the word of their facility and programs. According to Venessa Bowers, in the business of effective communication we need measurable results. To be accepted into one of the DRMM facilities, there is a main hotline to call. Information can also be gained from their website. Although they are getting the information out, it is not measurable, “that means we need to know if our message got to the right people and convinced them to take action” (Bowers, 2000). The ‘right people’ for the DRMM information would be the homeless. From common knowledge, most, if not all, homeless people do not have access to computers resulting in them not having easy access to DRMM information. Although there are pay phones that can be used, they also cost money which some may not have as well as not having access to the main hotline placement number.

**Conclusion**

Although there has been considerable research about the various ways of external communication and complex communication levels, there has not been much research put forth about communication within the non-profit facility, such as verbal and nonverbal communication. The purpose of this paper is to design a research method that will answer the research question of, “Where do the clients go during the day?”. In this paper, we attempt to develop a research method by introducing the audience to the research method of Photovoice and explain how we will use this to create our own method. From there, we clearly identify the problem. We will then break down the design of the solution as well as the criteria needed to complete this method. We will conclude with explaining how we set up the process as well as any final thoughts. The remainder of the paper is divided into six sections: Introduction, Problem, Solution, Methodology, Conclusion, and Appendices.

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