Chapter 5

COMMUNICATION INFRASTRUCTURE

Kochi Refineries Limited has been making use of manifold channels in the employee communication process. This chapter deals with those types of communication channels, systematically being made use of by this organisation, employing technology or other infrastructure in communications. It involves mainly inter-personal communication and group communication activities. The face-to-face and alternative communication activities are dealt with in subsequent chapters. The first section, under each category, gives a theoretical framework on the scope and importance of the technology or channel. Then the description of the communication process as practised in KRL is attempted. This is based on data and information collected by studying primary sources, interviews with those actually handling the tasks, participant observation method besides studying official documents relating to them. The last section forms the critique portion with analysis and assessments.

5.1 The Telephone

The importance of interactive media is associated, first, with their capability to extend person-to-person communication, beyond face-to-face settings. Through audio, audio-visual, and electronic text channels individuals can communicate with others who are geographically dispersed. Second, interactive media offer the potential to overcome a few important limitations of
one-way mass media. Whereas the public is a receiver of one-way mass communication, the public can send and receive messages through interactive media. And although mass media are controlled by a relatively small number of individuals working in large institutional settings, some forms of interactive media are controlled by individuals or small groups working in a wide range of settings. The most common form of interactive media of communication is a telephone. The telephone network in some cases provides audio-conferencing facilities among groups at one or more locations. This form of communication is generally classified as audio teleconferencing.

The telephone has come a long way since Alexander Graham Bell was awarded a patent on the first telephone and placed the first phone call way back in 1876. Today there are more than 220 million telephones in the United States alone with one telephone for every person. In India there are only around 7 telephones per 1000 persons.

The telephone system plays an important role in the communication process of KRL. One of the most frequently utilised communication channels by every employee in the organisation, irrespective of grades, or categories is the telephone. Both in terms of the nature of the hardware availability and also in the habit of employees the telephone system has become an easily accessible and regularly used communication tool, in KRL.
A close look at the telephone infrastructure shows the degree of distribution and thereby accessibility of the system to employees who are physically scattered.

Accessibility of the telephone is high in the organisation. Practically each room has a telephone connection. If more than two officers are sitting in a room then additional lines are provided.

Table 5.1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Details of Telephone Facility Available to Employees at Workplace</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Nature of telephone facility</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct (external) lines with STD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct (external) lines without STD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lines with intercom &amp; external dialling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intercom-only telephones</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mobile phones</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Kochi Refineries Ltd. : Database of the administration section.

At the workplace there are 781 telephone sets with external dialling facility, provided by the Telecommunications Department (Table 5.1). Of these 105 telephones have subscriber trunk dialling (STD) facility for outstation calls.

In addition there are 760 intercom telephones owned and maintained by the company itself. Of these 421 sets have external dialling facility also in addition to the intercom use.
All general managers and functional directors are provided with mobile phones. Also two other key officials have been provided with this facility due to the peculiar nature of their responsibilities. One is the operating manager in the night shift and the other the chief of public relations.

In addition to these all deputy general managers are given reimbursement facility towards telephone call charges relating to mobile phones also.

All the officers of and above the rank of managers have telephones at their residences of which the call charges are reimbursed by the company. Depending on the different grades they get varied extent of reimbursement towards the cost of telephone charges incurred. On the basis of need certain officers below the grade of managers are also provided telephones at their residences. The annual limit for reimbursement of residential telephones owned by the officers, as shown in Table 5.2, ranges from Rs.8364 to Rs.34020 depending on the grade of the officer.

In order to assess the importance the company is paying on providing telephones to the employees it would be appropriate to have a look at the quantum of expenditure incurred by the organisation towards this. During the financial year 1999-2000 KRL had spent Rs.83.47 lakhs for telephone charges, Rs.0.55 lakhs for telex, Rs.16.74 lakhs for postal expenses including courier and speed post charges and Rs. 1.35 lakhs for mobile phones. For long distance intercom connection the company had spent Rs.1.94 lakhs and for residential
telephones Rs.18.42 lakhs. The total expenditure incurred for these telecommunication expenses came to Rs.122.47 lakhs.

**Table 5.2**

**Annual Eligibility towards Telephone Expenses at Officers' Residences**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Amount in rupees per annum</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Manager (and others on need basis)</td>
<td>8364</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior Manager</td>
<td>9936</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chief Manager</td>
<td>12300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deputy General Manager</td>
<td>20664</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Manager</td>
<td>25200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Directors</td>
<td>29610</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chairman &amp; Managing Director</td>
<td>34020</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Kochi Refineries Ltd.: Database of administration section.

Another factor contributing to the high density of communication infrastructure is the accessibility of telephones to employees at work place. Including intercoms there are 1541 active telephone connections in the organisation. This meant that almost every employee had an access to telephone, because in a shift this would be the maximum number of employees on duty.

In an industrial establishment it has been a positive sign as it enabled vertical and horizontal communication. It was found that the telephone system in
KRL is one of the most used and effective channels of interpersonal communication.

In order to study the telephone culture in KRL the participant observation technique was made use of by observing the employees using telephones. Sometimes the researcher made use of the telephone itself to find out the style of conversation of employees at different grades and various functional areas. In-depth interviews were also conducted with a number of active as well as passive telephone users. Some of the important findings are as follows:

a) The Telephone was a friendly medium of communication for all sections of employees. Very few employees had inhibitions in making telephone calls or answering calls. Though the newly joined employees were noticed to have some nervousness in making and receiving calls, once they got fully inducted into the organisational culture they also become friendly with the medium.

b) There was no correlation between the grade or status of an employee in the organisational hierarchy and the quantum of telephone usage. But there was a strong correlation between the nature of task performed by an employee and the telephone usage. Those working in the plant area in technical jobs make more number of telephone calls for official and personal purposes. It was mainly due to their geographic distance from the main administrative office limiting their chances to make face-to-face communication. Another reason was the availability of extra time they got while waiting for doing routine
specific jobs. Moreover, during night shifts while they got bored or when they worked in isolation or when they felt sleepy the shift employees were observed as interested in conversation over telephone particularly with others on duty. Such talks were more informal and personal and less of official nature. Often human resources personnel receive more calls, at work place, as other employees call up for clarification on their benefits and compensations, like status of leave, salary deductions, and loan applications.

c) The number of telephone calls either made or received by an employee was high in KRL. On an average, the middle level managers used to make around 20 calls and receive another 30 calls a day. In the human resources department there were many employees making more than 40 calls a day and receiving an equal number.

d) Employees felt that there would be chaos and confusion if there was a breakdown in telephone system on a day, when asked what they would feel in such an eventuality when there was a total breakdown of telephone system on a day. Almost all the employees felt that the telephone was an integral part of their work-life and they would not be able to work in a congenial and productive manner without the telephone. Most of the employees, particularly senior executives responded that the single most important channel of communication in KRL was the telephone.
e) It was found that all the technological facilities available with the intercom telephones were not being utilised in KRL. Certain facilities like call waiting in queue, and call-forwarding were commonly being used. But the telephone-conferencing facility which enabled more than two users to discuss matters, simultaneously, was not been used by anybody in the organisation. This could foster mutual communication and avoid unnecessary meetings.

f) Most employees in KRL did have the habit of talking briefly and precisely. Such telephone manners like identifying the caller's name first, starting with introductory sentences to set up the frame of communication and politeness in the tone were observed on most of them. Banging the receivers and shouting through the telephone were not observed anytime by the researcher during the period of study.

The telephone system in KRL was found to be a powerful instrument of inter-personal communication. It was made use of mostly for official purposes and rarely for personal communication. It has been helping the organisation in taking quick decisions based on timely information. The ubiquitous nature of the telephone and access to all employees as well as the culture of usage had made the interpersonal communication in KRL fast, frequent and barrier-free. It has been helping the organisation to contain operational difficulties that could have caused due to absence of timely sharing of information. The power of the
telephone in transmitting information quickly and at low cost had been effectively being made use of by the organisation.

In the knowledge management point of view the telephone system had provided an active facility for knowledge sharing in KRL. It had also helped the organisation in reducing the bureaucratic and hierarchical cultures enabling junior level employees to communicate with seniors. Telephone system in KRL has been a powerful interpersonal communication channel effective in the directions of top-to-bottom, bottom-to-top and lateral communication, thus facilitating free flow of information which is necessary for a learning organisation.

5.2 The Library

With the exception of speech itself, no human invention has played so important a role in communication for so long a time as the book. Nothing else has been so prevalent and effective as a means of storing and transmitting to others records, knowledge, literature, speculations, and entertainment characteristic of human society. A library is a collection of books (and often other materials) assembled for a specific purpose or range of purposes and housed to accommodate both the materials and those who will consult or study them.

The so-called special libraries like the in-house library of a company, usually provided to serve a restricted readership, are largely a creation of the
twentieth century. Many such libraries are small and very highly specialised and their small staff members are appointed primarily to make information readily available to other employees. Because of this prime responsibility of information provision of timely and up-to-date nature - the book has always tended to be less important than the periodicals in these collections. The staffs of special libraries are normally required not merely to provide the periodicals but also to draw the attention of readers to their contents. Special libraries were pioneered mostly in the industrialised nations of the West and particularly in the United States, United Kingdom, France and Germany, but later appeared in other countries.

The present day library collects films, videocassettes and disks, computer disks, records, maps, and other items in addition to books in order to assimilate the many forms of communication.

New information technologies have created changes far beyond the simple storage and retrieval of information. The information environment itself has changed. The value of information, its use, and its dissemination are considered pivotal in an organisation. Hence the library stands on the threshold of an explosion in the methods by which information is stored, viewed, interpreted, retrieved, and disseminated.

KRL encourages its employees to become ‘learning persons’ who are interested in continuous learning. The company feels that if only the individual employees are learning persons can the company become a learning organisation.
This meant that employees should be good at ‘capturing’ knowledge as an ongoing process and also committed to putting the acquired knowledge into practice. In fact they are expected to be good ‘knowledge managers’.

With this end in view KRL has provided different facilities. Most important among them is the KRL library. It has a good collection of books, mostly on subjects related to the industry it belongs. Hence the books are mainly on areas like petroleum refining, chemical engineering, mechanical engineering, process engineering, environmental science, pollution control, safety, oil economics, maintenance, general management, human resources management, industrial psychology, corporate governance, industrial relations, finance, portfolio management, industrial law and information technology.

In addition to the books which are authentic texts of reputed authors collected from different countries, there are professional journals also. These publications are also mostly related to the subjects mentioned above.

The KRL library has a collection of about 4000 books. It subscribes 96 periodicals of which 29 are foreign. It also receives a large number of free copies of different journals. It has a number of compact discs (CD-ROMs) and computer floppies with technical details like codes and specifications that are at times used by engineers particularly during periods of maintenance and modifications of plant and machinery.
Besides these the library has an Internet, on a dedicated leased line, by which a user could access any website without dial-up.

The library is connected with a LAN (local area network) computer system through which it disseminates regular information like latest arrivals as well as brief news items relating to the operations of the company. Such information posted in this networked computer system are accessible to all senior executives.

Another activity of the KRL library is the library information service. This is a monthly bulletin carrying copies of news, articles and other information published in recent journals that are of relevance to executives. Copies are sent simultaneously to all executives in the organisation. This is being done as an extension of the library facilities so as to enable the busy executives to get to know the latest developments and trends in the industry even without visiting the library physically.

The library is housed in the administrative building equipped with modern infrastructure facilities like suitable furniture and lighting besides a centrally air-conditioned hall. It has a computerised cataloguing system. The library is manned by two qualified library personnel.

Another feature of the library is that there are no daily newspapers or other general publications. There are no books for light-reading like fiction or useful arts. The idea behind this system is to make the environment a purely
knowledge or information dissemination centre and it is expected that the users reach the library with all seriousness for updating their technical knowledge for becoming more effective in discharging their responsibilities in the organisation.

The total expenditure for books and journals for the financial year 1999-2000 was Rs.32 lakhs.²

Based on observation on the functioning of the library using ethnographic methods and interviews with regular users and a cross section of employees mostly non-users the following facts were collected.

a) There were very few regular users of the library, numbering around 15 only. Most of them were engineers at middle level and below. The number of directors and general managers who visited the library during the last two year period was nil. Only two or three deputy general managers had visited the library on a couple of occasions during the two year period, that too for purpose other than reading or selecting books or journals.

b) The reason for not visiting the library for most of them was 'lack of time'. A few deputy general managers and general managers stated that whenever they wanted books they could collect them through their secretaries or other subordinate officers. When asked about their habit of reading books most of the senior executives said that they were not in the habit of serious reading. With one or two exceptions none of the executives were having a membership of any one library outside. The money they spent for purchasing
non-fiction books for them to read were practically nil during the study period, in the case of almost all. The reason of lack of time to visit the library was because of overload of official work, according to most of them.

c) However, the new, young professionals who were mostly fresh from the college stated that they were interested in using the library. To them, the problem was the timing of the library working hours. Their work in the general shift used to start at 8.15 am and finish at 5.00 pm with a lunch interval of 45 minutes from 12.45 pm to 1.30 pm. The timing of the library hours was also the same. They suggested that they should be given an opportunity to use the library at lunch interval. At that time one of the two librarians could man the library by availing their lunch at staggered intervals.

d) It was stated by the users that many books were old and not the latest. According to them, latest books useful to most departments were not purchased and displayed. The main librarian, stated that the procedure for purchasing books was initiated based on the suggestions for purchasing new books by officers themselves and sometimes by the librarian herself. The suggestions were then put up to the library advisory committee comprising of general manager in charge of technical and development, deputy general manager in charge of research and development and deputy general manager in charge of technical services. It was this committee which was taking a final decision on the matter. Often for all suggestions presented a positive
decision is taken. But the meetings are not very regular and the suggestions received are too few. By the time many of the suggestions are implemented the purchase would be made after a couple of months and sometimes years after the publishing dates.

e) The on-line Internet facility functioning at the library has facilitates for on-line search without any dial up by the users. But the users stated that they were not allowed to use the computer themselves whatever be their expertise in computer or Internet operations. All what they could do was to leave a slip containing the web-address and the information they wanted and later the librarian would search the net. Then a print out is taken which could be collected by them later. The users felt that this was against the spirit of capturing information using Internet as the additional Internet linkages in the areas of their expertise, available easily on the web, were denied to them as they were not getting the access directly.

In the interview, the librarian answered that she feared misuse of the Internet by the users as the Internet could access obscene and pornographic sites also. It was difficult, she felt, to keep track of all such “undesired usage”.

f) The regular techo-scan publication of the KRL library which is an index service of information on books and their highlights of contents were regularly read by those having the Local Area Network (LAN) access. The
librarian stated that this was a step to update the knowledge in various areas of relevance to the company for all executives, as they were not making use of the library personally. This was an out-reach of the library service. However, middle and junior level officers and workmen felt that this was not of any use to the vast majority of employees as they did not have access to LAN computers. Those who did have access felt that the outreach service was very useful and they regularly went through the abstracts. But the absence of links to related web-sites were limiting the scope for further enlarging the knowledge made available.

In a knowledge-driven organisation the role played by the in-plant library is be pivotal. It should be a place where latest books, journals, compact-discs, videos and all other channels of explicit knowledge are continuously captured and procured. There should be effective built-in systems for each of these activities. A modern library should be able to cater to the knowledge needs of the members of the organisation. It should have a pro-active approach in inviting the members to visit the library and make full use of its services. It should not confine its responsibilities just to cater to the needs of seekers of library services but also encourage anyone to seek knowledge in a congenial and convenient manner. The KRL library was observed as weak in the knowledge management angle though rich in physical infrastructure, in the availability of trained and qualified personnel, infrastructure and in the other
important inputs, viz. the availability of financial resources and a willing management to support it.

5.3 Periodicals at Home

As a medium of communication newspapers have been most notable as purveyors of information, whereas books and magazines have been the dominant medium for ideas. Readers around the world, are dependent on newspapers for information about events affecting their daily lives.

The company believes that the officers should know what was happening around them. It is considered that an efficient officer has a social sensitivity. Hence an officer being primarily a member of the society in which he lives has to monitor continuously what is happening around him in various walks of life. The organisation being a sub-system of the larger social entity what is going on in the society should be understood by him.

With this aim in view KRL has a scheme in which it encourages all officers to subscribe to periodicals like newspapers and magazines of their choice, with a monetary ceiling, delivered at their homes.

The eligibility pattern as applicable to different grades of officers is as follows:

All officers of KRL are availing the financial benefit to buy periodicals at home. Most of them are found to be subscribing to two dailies, one in English and another in the vernacular language. The majority of them read one of the
Table 5.3

Monthly Eligibility for Purchase of Periodicals Pertaining to Officers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Amount in rupees (per month)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A, B &amp; C</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D&amp;F</td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F&amp;G</td>
<td>400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H</td>
<td>500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>600</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Kochi Refineries Limited: Database of the welfare section

dailies to capture important news of the day before they reach the office in the morning. Random interviews revealed that this was because they wanted to participate in the social communication at office and they would feel isolated if they were behind in capturing the important news of the day. Detailed reading of newspapers, particularly the serious articles and editorials were mostly done after they reached back home in the evening.

5.4 Press Clipping Service

Yet another information sharing activity based on mass-media undertaken everyday in KRL is the press clipping service. Important and relevant news items which appeared in a day’s newspapers are cut out and pasted on a sheet of a paper, and photo-copies of these are circulated simultaneously among senior executives.
Every morning, the public relations (PR) section started its work by scanning the mass media, particularly the daily newspapers to search for news items/reports on the company and also for those items that had relevance to its operations. The exercise was done jointly by four or five persons simultaneously at a high speed so as to complete cutting out such items in a couple of minutes.

Even though many departments in the company were subscribing to one or two newspapers of relevance to their functions the PR section ran the daily press clipping service.

The objective of this service is to make the top management aware of the information carried by the mass media concerning the operations of the organisation. This also gives them a feedback of the public opinion. This may be in the form of complaints, suggestions, appreciation or even mere reports of their performance like financial or physical performance. It gives the pulse of the feelings of people on what they felt about the corporate governance.

The rationale for the press clipping service as stated by senior PR officers were the following:
(a) Executives might not get time to scan all dailies themselves every day (b) The time of executives in searching for relevant news could be reduced (c) Financial savings for the company in reducing the number of newspapers provided to executives at home. (d) Enabled executives to notice even apparently irrelevant items in a perspective/context (e) Helped them to discuss
the reported items among themselves for corrective action, if required. (f) Archiving of reports for future use, particularly for scanning them in the data bank.

From the beginning of 2001 KRL started using Lotus Notes for circulating the press clippings by using the computer network (Local Area Network). This proved to be faster, cheaper and more effective. The interviews with senior executives revealed that all of them were in the habit of regularly reading the press clippings posted in the computer. They preferred to get the clippings through the Lotus Notes and not through photocopies. Most of the executives said they had taken action on several occasions based on the press clipping service. The press clipping services over the Lotus Notes had also given an impetus for all the executives to use the computer every day. It has also been helping to boost the knowledge sharing culture in the organisation, as the clippings include articles and news on the topics of interest to the organisation.

5.5 Computers at Work Place

The company has a corporate computer network system called LAN (Local Area Network) which connects all the members of senior management, mainly all directors, general managers and deputy general managers. The objective of this LAN is to disseminate information among the top management. It facilitates a two way on-line communication at the work-place.
In addition to this central function, it also take care of E-mail, Refinery Operating Manuals (Document Management System), Internet website and work flow applications.

Besides the corporate LAN, the company has a Business Systems LAN. Both the servers acted as central data bases where applications for materials department and finance department resided in varying programming languages.

Yet another LAN system is being used by the Design Engineering group of the Technical Services Department. It has a speed of 100 mbps and covered all the computers within the design group. It has a link to the computer in process engineering, and energy and environment groups.

The projects department also has a LAN connecting all the rooms of that department in the administration building. Remote access users in the project site and project warehouse dial into this network. The number of users is around 30. Oracle based application is being operated for procurement and warehousing applications.

Regarding the general computing environment, the company has adopted Microsoft Office 97/2000 on Windows 95/98 as the end user computing standard. End users also use applications developed by the computer and automation (C&A) department in programming languages like Oracle and Ingress.
KRL has hosted its own website namely www.kochirefineries.com. Updated information on the company is posted on this site on a regular basis, by the corporate communications section.

KRL has installed a 64 kbps, 50-user base line which is integrated to the LAN. This enables all LAN users to make use of the Internet, any time, on-line without any kind of dial-ups for connectivity.

In addition to these Internet facilities which come under dedicated leased line, there are 20 separate accounts with VSNL for Internet connectivity. The total number of personal computers available in the Company is more than 200. Common computers which could be used by any employee are also kept in some departments.

Recently, as part of office automation, the Lotus Notes based system has been installed. This is effectively being used for internal E-mail. Lotus Notes is a groupware, which is a collaborate technology that helps people work in groups. Members of the group can be individuals who are constantly connected to each other via a local area network (LAN), individuals who are sometimes on the road, individuals who always work remotely and must dial into a Notes Server to exchange data with members of the workshop, or individuals who connect to other members of the work group using a web browser over the Internet.
Communication is the most important function of Lotus Note. It enables the members of a work group to communicate with each other. It encourages members to exchange electronic mail effortlessly with copies to wherever they want to spend. Messages can be posted like on a notice board and collaborative action can be taken. Lotus Notes can also be used to co-ordinate the flow of work in an organisation effortlessly.

In KRL, Lotus Notes was introduced in 2000. The facility is provided to all directors, general managers, deputy general managers and chief managers. All those who are having a local area network connectivity are given the Lotus Notes facility. Because of the simplicity of operations and user-friendly methods, this technology has become a wide-spread medium of communication among this group in KRL. This is found to be cost-effective and providing easier communication compared to fax, mail, telex or telephone or even face-to-face meetings. Another feature is the transparency of communication without distortions compared to other means of communication. This has been effective not only in horizontal and downward communication flows, but also in upward communication. Those lower rank functionaries who have reluctance in face-to-face meetings, or telephoning their superiors are found to be more at home communicating with them using Lotus Notes.

In KRL the Lotus Notes is not provided to all computers in the organisation. Hence the usage has been restricted based on status or
hierarchical considerations. A groupware like Lotus Notes can be really effective only if it is provided to all members of the work-groups on a need-basis and not in terms of grades in the organisational hierarchy.

5.6 Computers at Home

Most of the officers at KRL are provided with personal computers at their residences. The company spent for each of these officers an amount of Rs.50,000/-.

Almost all these computers are of latest technology. Most of them have Internet connectivity in their home personal computers.

The main purpose behind the scheme was to make officers computer-friendly so that they can collect, process, store and retrieve information any time. This might help the officers to avail the world's reservoir of information and knowledge through the information superhighway. It facilitates their knowledge updating process in their areas of interest at their congenial surroundings and convenient timings.

A number of computer training programmes organised by the company enabled the officers to make the best use of their computers at home. In addition to the knowledge management functions officers make use of the E-mail facility available for communication among their colleagues as well as with outsiders scattered all over the world.
5.7 The Channel Music

'Music' is a general term for many modes of human communication using movements that produce and reproduce sounds. The subject on the impact of music on human beings comes under ethnomusicology which is a discipline that combines scientific and humanistic methods of research to study human musical communication. Music is a form of communication involving composers, performers, and listeners. Perception of music occurs by means of physiological structures that make it possible to identify individual and combined pitches, duration and volume. Lack of knowledge of formal theory does not prevent ordinary people from speaking of music, however. Theoretical aspect of music are usually transmitted within definable social groups. In a certain social group only the educated know theory, and knowledge of theory becomes a symbol of a certain social and intellectual standing. Theories can be classified as either prescriptive or descriptive. Prescriptive theory attempts to define how music should be performed. Descriptive theory attempts to categorize and encapsulate in words the practice of music.

KRL has a channel music system in the administrative building, canteen halls, entrance area at the security gate, and at the medical centre building.

This centralised communication system was installed essentially as a public address system to make common announcements particularly during emergency situations like fire, explosion and so on. Instructions could be given
to the employees on the actions they had to perform during such situations. It could be to wear personal protecting equipment like gas masks, or to activate the fire extinguishing gadgets installed at all locations. It could also be evacuation messages. As such accidents could happen any time in a hazardous process plant like a refinery every time the equipment was tested and maintained well.

The public relations section then brought out an idea of introducing the 'channel music' in the existing public address system which has speakers all around. The hardware facilities already existed to run audio programmes any time. The idea was to make use of the idle facility for a different productive purpose.

Every morning the employees arrive office at about 7:45 a.m. though the general shift started only at 8:15 a.m. Normally they have their breakfast in the canteen. This half an hour is utilised for playing selected music to enrich their 'enthusiasm' and put people at ease.

The music is selected carefully to suit the tastes of different people. But whether it is Hindustani or Western classical or Carnatic or ethnic instrumental or Kerala music, the underlying principle is that it should put their mind to ease and peaceful, and enthusiastic to work for the whole day. The same music can be listened to while having food (at breakfast and lunch time) and while reaching the reception or corridors.
As a value addition to the system, an ‘education effort’ to give employees some details about the music of the day has been done by KRL. At the entrance, reception, canteen hall and lobby, small colourful posters are displayed on which are written the type of the music being played, brief details about the music, the name of performer and instruments. When the section head was interviewed as to find out the rationale behind this system, he stated that the company wanted to make people listen to the work of great masters in Indian, western, and eastern classical and folk music and also to understand a little bit about the theoretical and technical background of what they listened to. It could arouse the curiosity of at least some among the employees to know more about music. It has been observed that a number of employees used to visit the concerned officer in-charge-of selection and storage place of the cassettes to know more about the music they had just heard or how they could get copies of the cassette or compact disc.

Informal interviews with a cross section of employees revealed the following:

a) Most of the employees who were interviewed said that they regularly listened to the music being played.

b) Most of the employees stated that music, particularly at leisure time, was very pleasing and that it often took away their tension and stress at work and put them at ease and in a relaxing mood.
c) Some of them said that when the music started playing it gave them an indication that it was leisure time and when switched off they got a message that it was time for work.

d) Many employees complained that this facility was confined to the administrative building and those working in the plant area and workshops on the shop floor were denied this.

e) The system was introduced in 2000 and the first step the concerned officer, who himself was a lover of music, did was to learn by himself the subject of music which could bring in anticipated results. He first discussed with those employees interested in music; then he went to study similar places where such a system was existing like star hotels in the city as well as modern music stores. He read literature, reviews or albums, and made personal discussions with the music store managers as well as sales assistant to know their practical experiences in preferences of people in music selection. It was then that a large collection was made, which is being updated regularly. This was really a small experiment in the knowledge procurement, processing and implementing.

An examination of the system revealed that an element of learning has been existing in this activity. The whole project necessitated the concerned officers to study the practical and theoretical aspects of the various dimensions of music as well the different tastes and preferences of employees. By displaying
posters with relevant information about the music being played was disseminated to all employees daily. There is a degree of music education in it. This experiment cannot be wished away as a tiny experiment in music playing but should be viewed as an experiment in widening the horizon of employees encouraging them to acquire knowledge even on such simple matters they encounter in their daily lives.

5.8 Internal Mail

Written messages, including typed, printed and hand-written ones on paper, are commonly used within an organisation. While the oral communication medium is fast, easy and low-cost, written or printed communication is slower, more difficult and costlier than telephones. But it has inherent advantages of clarity and permanency. Paper can be read and re-read for comprehension at the pace of the reader and at his own convenient time. While telephone messages cannot be stored, easily papers can be preserved for a long time.

The internal mailing system of KRL functioned like a post office where letters, circulars or other written or printed forms of communication are collected, sorted and delivered to the addressees within the company. Inter-departmental as well as intra-departmental communication is handled through this system, as there are no peons in the organisation.
The company makes use of the postal department of the Government of India, and private courier services for the conventional mailing needs of the organisation in sending letters and parcels, to outside.

For handling the mailing function there is a separate mail section which is manned by one officer to supervise the task, one general clerk for recording and sorting and four mail messengers who are like postmen responsible for mail collection and distribution of letters among different departments. In a day, the section handles around 1000 letters. Out of these around 700 are incoming letters and 300 outgoing ones. Besides there are about 100 circulars and inter-departmental memos handled by this section daily.4

The incoming postage articles are collected from the nearby post office every morning by a mail messenger and brought to the mail room where all the four mail messengers sort out and delivered in person.

Many of the employees felt that there was an increasing trend among employees to ask for written memos for getting something done which was earlier done by telephonic instruction. Many felt that this was because of the lack of trust among themselves. Some stated that they were afraid that the responsibility of possible error in an action could be passed on to them if proper written instructions were given. Some others felt that telephonic instructions from bosses should be backed up later by a written conformation which could avoid delay in taking decision and possible anxiety on the final outcome.
Most of the problems connected with written messages on paper, as handled by the mailing system, can be avoided by effective utilisation of networked computers like the local area network (LAN) and the use of groupware like Lotus Notes which enables much faster, easier and low cost, and efficient system of internal communication, which could be stored, printed, reprocessed, forwarded, or replied instantaneously and simultaneously. But the lacuna in KRL is the lack of accessibility of networked computer system to every employee.

5.9 Notice Boards

Display boards are common channels of communication within an organisation. This is an effective medium for downward communication. Besides such official notice boards, there are display boards managed by trade unions, cultural groups and other organised groups. Irrespective of the size and nature of the organisation, notice boards are considered as a quick low-cost yet effective method of internal communication.

It was observed that KRL was making use of this channel of communication widely. There are 17 notice boards fixed at places where employees are likely to assemble like the common entrance, reception area, canteen lobby, control rooms, various departmental lobbies, club house, school and other common places. On an average, 20 notices were displayed in a month. These are relating to vacancy notifications, strikes, compensation and
benefits, achievements, promotions, transfers, appointments, details of talks, seminars, information on new procedures, visits of important delegations, and press clippings relating to the company. Sometimes specialised articles published by magazines of general interest are also displayed. In addition there is a weekly notice displayed called “Buy and Sell information service” which is nothing but advertisement of things one employee would like to buy or sell within the members of the organisation. It is more like a classified advertisement, but with identity of the advertiser. Some of the commonly advertised items during the 1999-2000 period were: cars, scooters, cycles, furniture, kitchen utensils, cameras, land and houses.

Here are some of the observations made on the habit of using the notice-boards in KRL:

1. Notice boards are regularly visited with keen interest by workers and junior level officers. Directors, general managers and deputy general managers seldom read the notice displayed. This is mainly because copies of these notices are sent to them directly by the notice issuing authorities. Moreover, for them, the use of Lotus Notes has reduced the need for physically going to the display places for information.

2. The most widely read notices are those affecting the employees directly. Information on promotions, transfers, job vacancy notification, financial or
other material benefits they are going to get, attract a large number of employees to the notice boards.

3. Most of the notices displayed are in bilingual format, i.e., in Hindi and English. Very rarely notices in vernacular languages are displayed.

4. A content analysis of all the notices displayed on the notice boards during the year 2000 revealed that usage of first person 'I' was totally absent. As a matter of culture, all official letters and notices use only 'we' instead of 'I'. However, the signature, name, designation and date of issue were invariably present in the notices displayed.

5. The language used in the official notices has been observed to be simple, direct, comprising of short sentences and short paragraphs. Clarity and brevity were important criteria for drafting notices.

KRL has been managing this communication channel of notice boards in an effective manner. Care has been taken to use the right contents in a simple and comprehensive style. In practice, only section heads who are of and above the rank of senior managers are permitted to issue notices. This is to ensure uniformity of style and credibility of the sources. There is an officer responsible for displaying notices and managing the notice-boards, including replacing old ones with new ones. Though the notice boards are managed well, it could be made better in the communication angle, for instance, by encouraging the use of vernacular language also. The system has been seen as providing a regular
channel of information dissemination enabling employees to know what is happening in the organisation and those information that have an impact on their work and welfare. It has created an atmosphere of rich information sharing which is important for a learning organisation, even though it is a one-way free flow of information.

5.10 Critique

From the above it can be seen that KRL has a strong infrastructure in communication. The hardware availability and the accompanying software solutions are appropriate and state-of-the-art. In spite of that there are a few shortcomings which are limiting the scope of some of these channels of communications.

KRL has been making effective use of the telephone medium for interpersonal communication, in terms of density and accessibility. However, the audio conferencing facility which could enable small group communication at workplace has remained unutilised.

In spite of the modern physical infrastructure availability, the KRL library has not become a knowledge resource centre where employees could capture knowledge for their professional updation. It is not pro-active taking full advantage of the information technology tools to support the learning process among employees. It is not taking a lead in the knowledge dissemination activities making use of all forms of communication and
education. It is not functioning as a project specific endeavour and functioning more like a bureaucratic department.

The decision of the company to encourage reading of current periodicals at home by giving financial support, the daily press clipping service, and provision of computers at homes of officers are all appropriate actions to make employees continuously learning individuals. However, the decision of the management to provide LAN and Lotus Notes up to certain levels only up to senior manager level has limited the scope of this powerful medium of group communication at work place. Hence the scope of knowledge sharing is limited to the senior and middle management team hence not able to take full advantage of the facility at enterprise level.

The conventional communication functions like mailing system and notice boards are handled by KRL in an effective way. They are helping the internal communication process. But a lot of money, time and effort could be saved if such modern systems like Lotus Notes are made accessible to all employees without much cost.

Besides giving such importance to providing infrastructure in communications KRL has been undertaking a number of initiatives in employee communication through the human resources management activities, that are dealt with in the next chapter.
References


2. Ibid.


4. Kochi Refineries Limited: data collected from the files of the mail section.