Chapter 10

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Communication is an activity which cuts across all the functions in an organisation. It cannot be considered as an independent task of any group or department. In most of the activities integration has to be achieved through peer-level cross-organisational communication rather than through hierarchy. Cross-functional communication is needed because every important process crosses the boundaries of one department.

In the industrial era, the large-scale but stable means of production pushed us toward distant, formal, and unequal relationships at work. Today, our complex and knowledge intensive tasks push us toward relationships that are close, open, honest and more nearly equal. Because "organisation" is about how we structure our relationships, these new realities would completely change our ideas about methods and pattern of organisation. The pre-requisite for all these is effective communication within the organisation.

The objectives of the study were to examine the nature, scope and process of communication in KRL, to find out how communication was helping it in managing knowledge, to identify the practices there and to evaluate the innovations in organisational communication, developed by KRL. The major findings of the study are given below.
In general, the organisational culture of KRL is conducive for growth. There exists a spirit of learning among the people in the organisation. Whenever the executives face a challenge in taking a decision, however small or big it is, they resort to studying how such situations are managed in other organisations. Decisions are taken based only on facts and information drawn from the intellectual capital available within the organisation and elsewhere. There is no room for emotional decision-making at any level.

Once an assignment is given, the powers for executing the job is also delegated to the officer. He has the freedom to produce results in the most productive and efficient manner in his own way, within the broad guidelines of the organisation. He has to take decisions on matters delegated to him and there is no question of passing on the responsibility to his superiors. It has enabled the officers to find out solutions to problems they face every day by making use of their own intellectual capabilities fully as well as by capturing the knowledge of their colleagues — the intellectual capital within the organisation and the knowledge from elsewhere.

Another dimension of the organisational culture of KRL is that the innovators and creative persons are held in high esteem whatever be their status in the organisational hierarchy. Such persons with high innovative skills are immediately noticed though the rewarding mechanism is not effective. Recognitions like fast-track promotion and posting as per choice are not practised there. Previous educational background, degrees obtained, position held and other
achievements in the ‘having mode’ are giving way for intellectual capital value, in the ‘being mode’.

Yet another aspect of the KRL knowledge culture is the willingness to teach and to be taught. In the workplace situation most meetings do have a high knowledge content, both tacit and explicit. Hence the researcher could notice the vibrancy of meetings at KRL where a number of relevant questions are asked and explanations sought. These meetings are not merely platforms for communication for its own sake, but forums for sharing of knowledge of practical relevance.

Some of the human resources management factors like the absence of peons and attenders, the ban on recruitment of relations of employees, the high level of educational qualifications required for appointment, the informality in interpersonal communication, the absence of names and designation boards in offices and addressing by first name have a bearing on the communication process as well as the learning culture.

KRL shows other strong signs of a learning organisation. It has been successful in recruiting people with high knowledge and skills. After recruitment they get opportunities to be innovative so that they become entrepreneurial risk-takers. Most of the senior grade officials manning key functions at sectional, departmental and corporate levels believe in the philosophy that anyone in the organisation can teach them a thing or two and they are willing to be taught. It seldom hurts such persons, who are in sizeable number, to say “I have made a
mistake” especially to their juniors. It is observed that most of the senior colleagues give due credit to their juniors where it is due and often put them in the forefront. They seldom take glory for the work done by their subordinates. The continuous training given to employees at all levels particularly in the new skills like those in computer and information technology has given a boost in the recent past to its efforts to function as a knowledge-based organisation with its thrust on the intellectual capital available within the organisation.

The availability of the strong technological infrastructure in communication has resulted in a high density of communication facilities available to the vast majority of employees. The telephone lines in almost every room in the organisation, availability of computers in each and every section, ‘local area network’ facilities for executives, and on-line dedicated Internet and intranet availability have their own influences on the way people work and the intellectual exchanges taking place there. Both conventional channels like telephone, notice board, and written mail as well as alternative channels are providing employees opportunities for expressing their voices. The availability of such vertical, horizontal and diagonal communication structures is a characteristic of a democratic communication scenario. Though unusual in industrial organisations, it is visible in KRL.

But the availability of communication technology alone is not the answer to all communication problems in an organisation. Mowlana (2001) states that it is not the form of communication that matters most but the content. Knowledge does
not become valuable simply because the speaker has access to the modern media. But KRL makes use of a mix of various types of media to encourage communication in all directions to facilitate dissemination of information and knowledge.

Some of the human resource management activities like the annual appraisal system, employee grievance redressal machinery and the suggestion scheme have provided platforms from where individual employees can make their voices heard, encouraging upward communication within the organisation.

The oral communication system has been effectively made use of by the organisation in the proper discharge of the day-to-day activities. Though quite a lot of time is spent on each day, particularly by the officers, it minimises miscommunication and irons out differences, resulting in quick decision-making process. Moreover the meetings in KRL employ the time management principles.

By introducing innovation in bringing out an alternative house-magazine, KRL could take advantage in establishing and continuously maintaining such values as mutual understanding, goodwill, and contentment among the important stake-holders - the employees and their families. The route taken by the magazine, in alternative and democratic communication, had its effects on forming the organisational culture as well as in disseminating and reinforcing those values being fostered by the organisation.

The forums available in KRL for social communication like the 'social interaction programme', 'discover refinery programme' and departmental get-
together provide regular occasions for employees to interact among themselves at horizontal levels and also at vertical levels, particularly in the bottom-up direction of communication flow. These have resulted in triggering positive impact on the employees who themselves have started voluntary communication groups of their own.

Though some of the established upward communication activities are being practised in KRL the senior management is not as serious in such activities as they handle the business process like manufacturing and project implementation functions. There are a number of successful social communication channels. They are not effectively made use of by the management by utilising the advantage of the possibilities of communication in the upward direction. The well-conceived and innovative social communication channels are not being participated by the senior management in KRL. Hence these activities confine themselves as mere employee-welfare measures and not as instruments used for promoting cross cultural interaction against hierarchy and for the organisational development. What KRL lacks here is the exploitation of the available opportunities in this direction.

KRL is providing several facilities for the employees to capture knowledge for their own professional updation as well as for leveraging that knowledge for the development of the organisation. Computers at home, cable TV allowances, periodicals at home, professional updation allowance, educational support, membership to professional bodies and the in-house library are all good practices.
But what KRL lacks is the follow-up and support facilities. It is pertinent to note Eapen’s (1973) comments on the mass media, in a different context. “Messages over mass media cannot be disseminated without human interactions. There is little doubt that people do learn from them, but to be translated into action these learnings require support from various forms of interpersonal communication and on-the-spot support.” This holds good in the case of organisational communication in KRL also.

As hypothesised there exists a strong density of infrastructure facilities for internal communication in KRL. Both in terms of technology and accessibility it ranks high. It has been revealed that there is enough scope for alternative communication channels even in an industrial organisation. The success of KRL is partly due to the smooth flow of information and knowledge in KRL, and communication plays a key role.

Suggestions

1. Communication and culture of an organisation are closely linked. In fact they are dependent on each other. Communication can also be viewed as a major carrier of culture. Hence right from choosing the media to creating the messages and disseminating them, all aspects of communication should be in tune with the culture of the organisation or rather the culture of the people, who constitute an organisation. If this aspect of communication is ignored the such activities would be exercises in futility, wasting precious time, effort and money. It could create negative results causing adverse effects to the
organisational functioning. In other words such communication programmes can do more harm than good. KRL should hence closely monitor the effectiveness of the employee communication activities and suitable adaptations have to be made on a continuous basis.

2. If the communication process is democratic and people-oriented the effectiveness of communication would be more than a vertical communication system. The lateral, or horizontal communication and the two-way communication systems are more people-friendly and hence more powerful as instruments for achieving the desired goals. KRL should fully make use of the horizontal communication systems already available in the organisation for managing knowledge also.

3. Communication in an organisation, which strives for harnessing knowledge, skills and involvement of people, is more difficult to practice than a conventional centre-to-periphery system where few persons communicate to large groups as a one-way free flow. Harnessing people's power for a productive, positive, voluntary exercise requires high professional skills, sincerity, patience and perseverance on the part of work-group leaders. Any organisation can make use of this principle for achieving its desired goals.

4. An organisation can make use of two strategies in communication. First to make use of the existing media of communication in making it culture-centric, democratic with active involvement of people. The second is to innovate new media taking advantage of the local culture, skills, ethos, and values of the
people around. Often these would be low-cost, appropriate and hence more effective, like the SIP and *JwalaDhwani* of KRL. This applies to all situations in organisational communication.

5. The success of an organisation in achieving its goals has a strong bearing on its nature and effectiveness of the communication process. Hence due attention has to be paid to recruit trained and talented communication experts who are learning persons. They should be given functional autonomy and they have to be reporting directly to the chief executive officer of the organisation.

6. Though it is necessary to have specialised and qualified personnel to act as leaders in communication, it is not entirely their function to execute all communication activities themselves. The availability of organisational communication specialities who are software experts, is scarce in KRL like many other organisations in the country. Communication, according to most managers, seems to be a subject which can be practised by anybody without proper specialised education, unlike other professional disciplines like manufacturing, maintenance or even human resources management. Any organisation seriously interested in making itself a knowledge-managed one should strengthen the internal communication systems. Moreover every employee should be trained to develop his communication skills to make his voice heard. Managers should be trained in communication skills, both in listening or rather capturing information and disseminating information in an effective manner. Communication specialists can only trigger the process of
innovation and be catalysts in accelerating the pace of the flow of communication.

7. KRL has to accelerate its efforts to become a more knowledge-based organisation at all levels in the company. To put this into practice, the hierarchical structure would have to be changed into a flat structure where strategic business units with different work groups would take the position of the compartmentalised departments. The intra-group or intra-team communication and co-operation, with greater powers to the members for taking quick decisions and flexibility in work practices could bring-in better results. This should also be triggered by well-designed knowledge management techniques, and converting the existing training to education in its wider context. The accessibility of LAN and Lotus Notes have to be provided to all employees in the organisation and all the computer systems are to be integrated.

This 'ethnographic' study on the communication within KRL has thrown light on the various dimensions of communication and related aspects like knowledge management and human resource management in the cultural milieu of the organisation. The communication experiments, though practised with a high degree of success cannot be implanted in other organisations without appropriate adaptations. These should be done after taking into account the culture, values and ethos of the people who constitute that organisation.

However, the findings of the study would be useful to any organisation in its effort to be a successful one, in terms of achieving its goals, by effectively
managing its information, communication and knowledge. Also, we need more knowledge on many other facets of organisational communication which only further researches could provide.

References

