

Communicating development innovation in North Sumatra via group communication

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Abstract This research aims to explore the dynamics of group communication in the dissemination of development innovations within the Department of Communications and Informatics in North Sumatra Province. This study adopts a qualitative approach using the Case Study model. Data collection involves four techniques: (1) interviews, (2) participant observation, (3) documentation studies, and (4) reference searches. Informants were selected using the purposive sampling technique and snowball sampling. Data analysis follows the Miles, Huberman, and Spradley model, encompassing three steps: data reduction, data presentation, and drawing or verifying conclusions. The study's findings reveal that group communication within the Department revolves around the division and detailed allocation of tasks and responsibilities to individual employees. The dissemination of development innovations in North Sumatra utilises diverse communication techniques, encompassing brochures, posters, billboards, banners, television, RRI, websites, and email as the media for group communication programs.

Keywords: group communication, innovation, local government

INTRODUCTION

Humans, as social beings, rely on interactions with others and the acquisition of information for their survival. Effective communication is essential in seeking and exchanging information (Harris & Sherblom, 2018). The existence of human interaction implies the existence of a communication process (Hidayat, 2020; Putri & Putro, 2020; Susilo, 2022). Through communication, individuals can express their emotions and convey their desires to others (Bretagnolle, 2019). Moreover, communication enables humans to share information and deliver messages to one another (Tsai et al., 2019).

In the ever-evolving era of globalisation, embracing technology alongside traditional communication is imperative (Bandrovskiy, 2020; Irwansyah, 2020; Nhon et al., 2018; Walther et al., 2015). Communication empowers individuals to articulate their preferences and opinions (Downey & Bedard, 2019). Consequently, meeting the diverse

needs of the public is often achievable through flexible and accessible information dissemination (Liu et al., 2018).

In ethical communication, honesty takes centre stage as the fundamental principle. Communication provides information reliably and factually, avoiding deception or disseminating clear facts (Agbo et al., 2020). This principle of "honesty" is intricately connected to other guiding values, such as responsibility and consistency. Consistency in the information shared with multiple parties and taking personal responsibility for the immediate and long-term effects of transparent communication are essential aspects of ethical practice (Argote et al., 2018).

Living alone in the modern world presents significant challenges, as effective communication and access to knowledge are fundamental for fulfilling basic human needs (Mohanty & Mohanty, 2018). Proficiency in communication is essential for establishing social interactions in daily life, with group communication being a pivotal aspect of this skill (Vijayakumar et al., 2018). Successful group functioning relies on members' ability to communicate effectively. However, various issues concerning group communication may arise as a group collaborates on tasks (Mikkola & Valo, 2019). It becomes crucial for group members to identify communication barriers and devise strategies to overcome them.

During group discussions, members sometimes become so focused on defending their perspectives that they lose sight of the original collective objective (Susilo, 2022). This preoccupation with being right may overshadow the group's interests. To ensure productive group dynamics, members must prioritise the greater good of the group and collaborate to address challenges collectively, setting aside personal interests (An et al., 2018).

A functional decision-making body requires effective leadership and equitable participation from all members on critical matters (Sederholm et al., 2021; Tkalac Verčič, 2021). Instances of hierarchical dominance, where senior employees, managers, or executives perceive their opinions as more valuable than those of their lower-ranking counterparts, can hinder group dynamics (Sarada et al., 2020). Communication forms the foundation of any successful organisation, and suppressing input based on rank can lead to breakdowns in the group's overall effectiveness.

When group communication falters, many problems can arise, including duplicated efforts, improper submissions, and missed deadlines. Effective communication is essential for an organisation to represent its entirety, encompassing its internal and external reputation (Radke et al., 2021a). As a government organisation, the Communication and Information Office of North Sumatra Province is not immune to these challenges, and there is room for improvement in dialogue and information dissemination, particularly concerning group communication.

The North Sumatra, Communication and Informatics Office employs coffee mornings, press conferences, and public meetings to engage in group communication and disseminate information about development advancements. These events invite various stakeholders, including community leaders, government officials, religious figures, and the press, to stay informed about the progress of developments in North Sumatra. However, the efficacy of these communication efforts is in question, prompting the organisation to develop more relevant and strategic initiatives tailored to societal needs.

To address this issue, the Office of Communication and Informatics has adopted a group communication approach to engage with potential groups in the region. Moreover, the public relations team collaborates with other departments to promote spreading information regarding development innovations. This approach, known as communication for development, aims to utilise communication to drive social progress and sustainability. It involves engaging stakeholders and policymakers, creating an enabling environment, assessing risks and opportunities, and facilitating information sharing (Zulaikha & Paribrata, 2017).

Group communication plays a crucial role in disseminating knowledge among group members, fostering shared traits that contribute to achieving common goals (Dowell et al., 2019). The North Sumatra Communication and Informatics Office emerges as a consistent practitioner of group communication, delivering valuable information, including development ideas, to the people of North Sumatra.

Due to its vast size, promoting the dissemination of development innovations within the North Sumatra Province's 33 Regencies/Cities necessitates active public relations engagement in government entities. Public relations plays a pivotal role in facilitating the diffusion of these development advancements (Allagui & Breslow, 2016; Brunner & Smallwood, 2019; Halff & Gregory, 2014). However, it is essential to recognise that to effectively maximise the spread of development ideas, fostering goodwill and favourable public opinion or establishing cooperative connections with the public is essential.

Given this background, it becomes imperative to evaluate the effectiveness of group communication efforts in disseminating development innovations within the North Sumatra Province. Specifically, an assessment of the Communication and Informatics Office of North Sumatra Province's group communication strategies is necessary to gain deeper insights into their impact.

METHODOLOGY

This research employs a qualitative research field methodology to provide a comprehensive and descriptive account of the studied scenario and circumstances (W. Neuman, 2013; W. L. Neuman, 2011). The data used in this investigation falls into two categories: primary data, collected directly from informants and key research sources, and

secondary data, derived from relevant, peer-reviewed publications, scientific papers, and established research findings.

The informants for this study were carefully selected using a purposive technique, a common approach in qualitative research. Secondary data from credible sources were incorporated to complement the primary data, ensuring a robust foundation for the research. The data-gathering methods involved in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation, all of which contributed to the richness of this qualitative study.

In analysing the gathered information, descriptive methods were employed to present and interpret the findings (Yin, 2014). This research aims to provide a comprehensive and insightful understanding of the studied subject matter.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Community Communication practices by the North Sumatra Province Communication and Informatics Office

In group dynamics, three distinct types of groups can be identified: primary and secondary groups, membership groups, reference groups, and descriptive and perspective groups (Susilo, 2022). Primary groups are characterised by close, personal, and emotionally invested relationships among their members, whereas secondary groups consist of individuals who maintain more distant and less personal connections (Bitman, 2023).

The following classification pertains to membership and reference groups. Membership groups comprise individuals who are physically and administratively part of the group, while reference groups serve as benchmarks for self-evaluation or attitude formation.

The final categorisation includes descriptive and perspective groups. Descriptive groups consist of members seeking self-understanding and developing a new social identity through mutual discussions, aiming to address problems collectively (Hidayah et al., 2020).

According to insights from an interview with the Head of the North Sumatra Province Information and Communication Service, the dissemination of development innovations in the province involves the establishment of various groups, such as KIM (Community Information Communication), coffee mornings, and Public Relations Group, to facilitate the communication and dissemination process.

An effective group can empower its members, allowing them to realise their potential while embracing the group's collective identity (Kong, 2020). This group dynamic can manifest in various contexts, whether within a family, a problem-solving team, a conversation group, or a decision-making committee.

To foster effective group communication, the North Sumatra Province Information and Communication Service has actively facilitated forming community information groups in villages, sub-districts, and

districts/cities. These groups encompass diverse segments of society, such as farmers, fishermen, and small businesses, aiming to engage and inform local communities. Additionally, the service organises group coffee mornings, inviting community members, religious leaders, and organisational figures to provide feedback and suggestions on government programs. Print and electronic media outlets are also invited to these gatherings, amplifying the promotion of development projects.

The communication approach employed by the North Sumatra Information and Communication Service ensures that no individual dominates or is dominated during group interactions. The size of the group is determined by its composition and objectives. Small groups are conducive to communication situations that involve verbal feedback, which can occur in forums, meetings, conversations, lectures, and other similar formats (Bylieva et al., 2020). While small groups offer direct interpersonal interactions among communicators, large groups, such as those involving giants or numerous individuals, may provide less personal contact in comparison (Luo et al., 2021).

Furthermore, the North Sumatra Information and Communication Service advocates incorporating local cultures, such as ludruk (East Javanese Situated Drama), dance, wayang plays, and lectures, into relevant government programs tailored to specific regions, including remote areas. This cultural integration enhances the effectiveness of group communication efforts, ensuring inclusivity and relevance to local communities.

In disseminating development innovations in the North Sumatra Province, group communication significantly informs the general public. Group communication refers to interactions among multiple communicators and communicants, often involving face-to-face communication where individuals can see and engage with each other (Budyanti et al., 2020). This type of communication is further categorised into small and large group communication based on their distinctive characteristics.

Small group communication, as described by Ranganathan (Ranganathan, 2020a), refers to communication scenarios that can be transformed into interpersonal communication with each communicant (Radke et al., 2021b). It involves a dialogical and circular process, emphasising verbal feedback. In this setting, communicants can comprehend the communicator's message and respond accordingly, seeking clarification, asking questions, or engaging in arguments when needed (Sok et al., 2019). During the interview with the Head of the North Sumatra Information and Communication Service Program Subdivision, various communication strategies within the office's group activities were discussed. These activities included quizzes, klompen capir (quizzes) groups, and shows featuring stories about ongoing developments carried out by city districts, all under the Community Information Group (KIM) umbrella.

In summary, face-to-face communication is an integral part of group communication, with small and large group communication being the two distinct categories, each with unique characteristics (Ranganathan, 2020b).

The North Sumatra Province Communication and Informatics Service Group communication function

The presence of a group in society entails various roles, encompassing therapeutic functions, social interactions, education, persuasion, problem-solving, and decision-making (Jiang & Lu, 2018). These activities are undertaken for the betterment of society, the groups themselves, and their members.

The North Sumatra Information and Communication Service Office plays a significant role in disseminating development innovations within North Sumatra, making the public aware of the progress achieved by various agencies under the provincial government. According to the interview with the Head of the Information and Communication Service Office of North Sumatra Province, group communication fulfils this duty.

The Public Information Center Section of the Information and Communication Service of North Sumatra was established to accomplish this objective. The Section utilises various communication channels such as websites, emails, banners, and leaflets to carry out its functions (Muhammad et al., 2018; Oyedeki & Mahmoud, 2018; Putra & Prasetyo, 2017; Rony & Panuju, 2018). These activities align with the interests of society, the groups, and constituents, highlighting their significance (Dreher, 2020).

The interviews also revealed several challenges the North Sumatra Information and Communication Service Office faced. These include issues with human resources, funding availability, and the community's limited attention and involvement. To address these challenges, employees dealing with telematics issues need training and education, and there should be improved facilities and infrastructure to support the duties of the Information and Communication Service. Additionally, efforts should be made to engage and support the community in establishing community information groups. Enhancing the capabilities and resources of the Information and Communication Service can effectively address these challenges.

Growth and Innovation Distributed through Group Communication by the North Sumatra Province Communication and Information Service

Innovation and progress are intricately linked, encompassing novel ideas, actions, or products. This study focuses on disseminating government messages and ideas regarding the type of development—both physical and psychological—envisioned by the North Sumatra Provincial government. As a social change process, development seeks to enhance societal and material conditions. The North Sumatra

Provincial Government actively communicates development-related messages through socialisation and dissemination efforts, seeking support from the community to ensure the success of development endeavours. Examples of development innovations include the construction of highways, toll roads, offices, and drainage repairs.

Based on interviews with the Finance Subdivision of the North Sumatra Information and Communication Service Office, various communication channels are employed to disseminate development innovations in the province. These include the production of websites, emails, banners, and brochures aligned with the vision and mission of the Information and Communication Service. Additionally, the service engages stage performers for broadcasting development messages through television and radio and occasionally publishes newspapers, subject to funding limitations. Modern electronic equipment is deemed essential for the service's efficiency.

The Communication Facilities, Dissemination, and Broadcasting Section of the Information and Communication Service of North Sumatra Province organises regular group communication meetings called Bakohumas to ensure that every agency in the Regency/City is informed about developments in North Sumatra Province.

Communication aspects must align with the requirements specified in Figure 1 for successful dissemination. Ensuring the message's compatibility with these aspects enhances the effectiveness of the communication process in spreading development advances throughout North Sumatra.

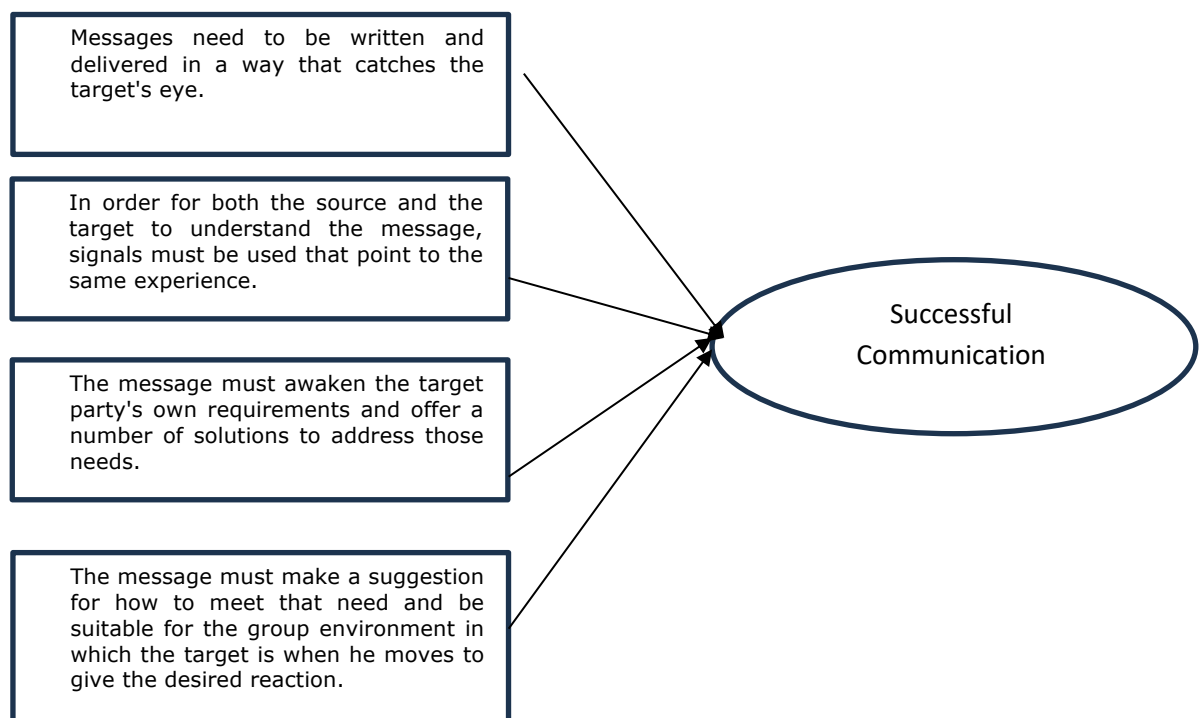


Figure 1. Model of Successful Communication
Source: Author Findings (2023)

The Information and Communication Service of North Sumatra Province employs various mass media platforms, email, and websites to disseminate development innovations. Mass media is a powerful tool connecting information sources with recipients, enabling widespread visibility, readership, and listenership (Nematzadeh et al., 2019). Emery, Ault, and Agee classify mass communication mediums into print media or visuals, effectively delivering messages to their target audiences. Examples of print media include newspapers, magazines, books, pamphlets, billboards, and express mail. On the other hand, radio and television serve as dual-purpose audio-visual mediums. Additionally, social communication mediums, popular in rural areas, encompass locations such as houses of worship, village halls, social gatherings, art stages, and community events (Pitt et al., 2019).

The collective communication within a group has a significant influence on the operational dynamics and effectiveness of communication among bureaucrats in an organisational or governmental context. Effective group communication plays a vital role in bureaucratic environments, as it is essential for facilitating decision-making, formulating policies, and executing administrative procedures. Group talks facilitate effective communication among bureaucrats, allowing for the exchange of crucial information, knowledge sharing, and coordination of collective endeavours aimed at accomplishing shared objectives. Regularly scheduled meetings and collaborative brainstorming sessions offer a valuable opportunity for bureaucrats to engage with a range of perspectives. This enables them to engage in critical analysis of intricate issues and make well-informed decisions that are in line with the overarching objectives of the organisation.

Furthermore, the practise of group communication within bureaucratic settings fosters a culture of openness and responsibility. The facilitation of unrestricted information exchange among team members and departments serves to diminish the probability of information silos and miscommunication. Effective and transparent communication has a crucial role in mitigating misunderstandings, conflicts, and redundancies in tasks, therefore optimising the bureaucratic workflow. Moreover, the utilisation of group communication fosters the facilitation of collaboration and cooperation among bureaucrats, so promoting a sense of unity and discouraging individualistic tendencies. The use of a collaborative method cultivates a collective consciousness and shared objective, hence yielding a bureaucratic system that is characterised by enhanced efficiency and responsiveness.

Moreover, within bureaucratic structures, group communication plays a crucial role in enabling the sharing of best practises and the distribution of knowledge across various hierarchical levels within the organisation. Regular group meetings, workshops, and training sessions give bureaucrats with valuable opportunity to engage in knowledge exchange, so enhancing their competencies and expertise. The sharing

of knowledge facilitates the development of a well-informed and skilled bureaucratic workforce, enabling them to effectively tackle intricate difficulties by employing creative and inventive approaches. Efficient communication among bureaucrats, in turn, boosts the organization's capacity to successfully react to dynamic conditions and adequately address the public's requirements.

In summary, it can be asserted that group communication plays a substantial role in shaping communication dynamics within bureaucratic settings. The implementation of this approach facilitates the enhancement of decision-making efficacy, transparency, and collaboration inside the bureaucratic framework, hence resulting in a more efficient and responsive bureaucratic system. Group communication has a crucial role in improving the overall efficiency and effectiveness of bureaucratic operations by facilitating knowledge exchange and promoting cooperation. This, in turn, enables organisations to better serve their mission and successfully address the interests of the public.

To enhance the dissemination of development innovations in the Province of North Sumatra, the Information and Communication Service actively conducts workshops and encourages community engagement. Despite their current efforts, there is room for further optimisation of innovative communication strategies. For instance, advancements in information technology, such as utilising social media platforms, should be leveraged to reach a wider audience. Collaboration with North Sumatra's colleges and universities can facilitate informative sessions, fostering an environment of active communication and knowledge-sharing. By embracing these advancements, the Information and Communication Service can effectively propel the dissemination of development innovations to new heights.

CONCLUSIONS

The North Sumatra Province's Department of Communication and Informatics employs two main methods for group communication: coffee mornings and PR meeting sessions. These approaches facilitate face-to-face communication, as both communicators and communicants are physically present and can see and interact. In addition to these direct interactions, the North Sumatra Communication and Information Service utilises various media channels such as billboards, websites, emails, and banners to promote development innovations.

Furthermore, the Public Relations Communication Group serves as a regional group established by the province's North Sumatra Information and Communication Office, explicitly informing the public about the ongoing programs and initiatives. Through these diverse communication methods, the Department aims to effectively disseminate information and engage with the community regarding the development efforts in the region.

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