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Organizational Communication Flow in the Virtual Platform "Hellocation Korea" (Descriptive Study on Full Work from Home System)

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Abstract : The rapid advancement of digital technology has fundamentally altered traditional organizational structures, giving rise to fully virtual entities operating under a Work-from-Home (WFH) system. This descriptive qualitative study examines the dynamics and challenges of organizational communication flow—specifically downward, upward, and lateral—within "Hellocation Korea," an online educational platform operating exclusively through virtual means. Leveraging theories of organizational communication and media richness, the research aims to describe the established communication channels, the effectiveness of message transmission, and the barriers encountered in this technologically mediated environment. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with key personnel and observation of digital documents (Sutopo, 2006). Findings indicate that while the WFH system offers significant geographic flexibility (Kanetaki et al., 2022), it necessitates highly formalized and redundant digital channels to ensure clarity and accountability in the downward flow. Upward flow is often channel-dependent, thriving in dedicated feedback platforms but facing barriers related to digital burnout and perceived accessibility. Lateral communication, essential for complex task coordination (Swandhana, 2017), relies heavily on instant messaging and collaborative document systems. The study concludes that successful virtual organizational communication requires a blend of technological proficiency, explicit communication policies, and intentional efforts to foster social presence, compensating for the lack of non-verbal cues inherent in face-to-face interaction.

Keywords: Organizational Communication, Virtual Platform, Work-from-Home (WFH), Communication Flow, Descriptive Qualitative Study

INTRODUCTION

The advancement of digital technology has introduced new transformations within the field of education, particularly through the emergence of virtual learning platforms such as *Hellocation Korea*. The integration of internet-based technologies has reshaped how communication, collaboration, and education are conducted globally (Nur et al., 2021).

Virtual platforms represent a new ecosystem in which technological innovations enable processes and services to be carried out entirely online, providing flexibility and geographical convenience while still requiring continuous evaluation for effectiveness (Herna et al., 2019; Kanetaki et al., 2022).

Hellocation Korea is an online educational platform that offers a variety of services and information related to studying in South Korea, including scholarship guidance, career information, apostille services, mentoring, educational tours, and Korean language classes through a digital learning management system. This platform functions as a virtual organization whose members collaborate remotely using digital communication technologies such as Zoom and Skype (Srivastava, 2020). Participation is open to contributors across Indonesia without geographical limitations, and all work is conducted entirely through a work-from-home (WFH) system.

Several other virtual platforms operate in the same domain—such as *EduHakyo*, *Beasiswa Korea*, and *Pejuang Korea*—each offering similar educational services related to South Korea. However, *Hellocation Korea* stands out for its comprehensive service integration, offering both educational and administrative support including e-learning, apostille assistance, official web services, and digital communication management. Despite the post-pandemic transition, *Hellocation Korea* continues to implement a full work-from-home system, reflecting a broader societal trend toward flexible and productive remote work environments (Putri, 2021; Kemendikbud, 2020).

Structurally, *Hellocation Korea* operates under PT Halo Edukasi with five organizational levels: the Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Chief Department, Deputy Department, Division Leader, and staff members. Within this structure, organizational communication plays a crucial role in ensuring coordination and productivity (Rachman & Barmawi, 2019). Preliminary interviews with the platform's CEO, Delna Nur Pranata, revealed that downward and upward communication occurs primarily between the CEO and department chiefs through monthly meetings, while cross-channel communication is essential among divisions for program collaboration. All communication processes rely on online media, particularly WhatsApp Groups and video conferencing platforms, due to the absence of a physical office.

Previous studies have explored organizational communication within hybrid or digital workplaces. Aprili & Putri (2022) found that both formal and informal internal communication can maintain team cohesion and trust even when employees work remotely. Similarly, Hasanti (2019) identified internal communication patterns (upward, downward, horizontal, and diagonal) and external communication flows as key to organizational performance. Meanwhile, Sipayung & Paramita (2023) highlighted how communication networks in digital startups often follow “wheel” and “chain” patterns depending on hierarchical relationships.

Distinct from prior research, *Hellocation Korea* operates entirely in a virtual setting, presenting a unique case for examining how organizational communication functions when all members work remotely. The CEO emphasized that to sustain engagement and coordination, the organization conducts staff development programs, monthly award ceremonies, bonding activities, and internal competitions—all mediated through online platforms like WhatsApp, Zoom, and Google Meet.

Therefore, this study seeks to examine the organizational communication flow within the virtual platform *Hellocation Korea* using the framework proposed by Pace and Faules (1998), which identifies five directions of communication flow: downward, upward, horizontal, cross-channel, and informal (Pace & Faules, as cited in Mulyana, 2013). By doing so, the research aims to provide insights into how communication dynamics are maintained in a fully remote organizational system.

In accordance with the main problem above, this study aims to determine and explain the flow of organizational communication on the virtual platform "Hellocation Korea" which has a full work-from-home system.

Organizational Communication

Organizational communication is defined as the process by which individuals stimulate meaning in the minds of others within the context of a formal organization. It encompasses all communication that occurs in the pursuit of the organization's goals (Wood, 2014). This process is critical for achieving four essential functions: the **informative function** (providing data for decision-making), the **regulative function** (controlling activities and establishing rules), the **integrative function** (coordinating sub-units), and the **adaptive function** (adjusting to internal and external environmental changes). In virtual organizations, these functions are entirely dependent on the successful deployment of communication technologies.

Organizational Communication Flow

Communication flow refers to the movement of information throughout the organization's structure. It is typically categorized into three main types:

Downward Communication

This flow moves from superiors to subordinates (management to staff). Its primary purpose is to convey instructions, directives, policies, procedures, and official organizational information. In a WFH setting, downward flow ensures organizational goals are understood and tasks are delegated clearly. Challenges include ensuring messages are received and understood without the immediate opportunity for clarification.

Upward Communication

This flow moves from subordinates to superiors (staff to management). It is crucial for providing feedback, reporting progress, sharing ideas, and signaling problems or concerns (Redding, 1972). Effective upward flow enhances management's awareness of operational realities and fosters a sense of involvement among employees. In virtual environments, designing accessible and non-intimidating digital channels for upward communication is vital.

Lateral (Horizontal) Communication

This flow occurs among individuals or departments at the same hierarchical level. It facilitates coordination, problem-solving, and conflict resolution (Swandhana, 2017). This flow is arguably the most affected in WFH settings, as it loses the benefit of spontaneous, informal "water cooler" conversations, which are often sources of critical operational information and social bonding. Intentional use of collaborative tools (e.g., shared document spaces, group chats) is necessary to replicate this informal yet critical flow.

Virtual Organizations and Work-from-Home (WFH) Systems

A virtual organization is a network of independent entities or individuals who are geographically dispersed and linked primarily by information technology to accomplish a shared goal (Mohrman & Cohen, 2005). The WFH system is the operational model for such organizations, making the use of technology-mediated communication (TMC) mandatory.

Theoretical Framework: Media Richness Theory (MRT)

Media Richness Theory (Daft & Lengel, 1986) provides a useful framework for analyzing the choice of digital channels in a WFH context. MRT posits that communication media can be placed on a continuum of "richness," based on their capacity to process equivocal information and reduce uncertainty. A rich medium (e.g., video conferencing) supports immediate feedback, utilizes multiple cues (voice, tone, visuals), employs natural language, and offers personal focus. A lean medium (e.g., email or text messages) is better for simple, unequivocal data.

In "Hellocation Korea," management must consciously select a medium with appropriate richness for the specific communication task:

- High Equivocality (complex decisions, conflict resolution): Requires rich media (e.g., scheduled video calls, synchronous chats).
- Low Equivocality (routine reports, policy dissemination): Can use lean media (e.g., email, centralized announcement board).

The effectiveness of communication flow in a virtual platform is therefore contingent on the alignment between the complexity of the message and the richness of the chosen medium. The challenge for WFH organizations is maintaining high levels of richness, which can be technologically demanding and prone to digital fatigue, while ensuring efficiency.

METHOD

This study employs a descriptive qualitative research approach (Sugiyono, 2014). The goal is to provide a comprehensive, in-depth description and interpretation of the organizational communication phenomena as they naturally occur within the context of "Hellocation Korea's" full WFH system. The qualitative design allows for the exploration of human experiences, meanings, and processes, capturing the rich details of how communication flows are perceived and practiced by the participants (Sutopo, 2006).

The research setting is the virtual operational environment of "Hellocation Korea." This includes all digital platforms used for internal communication, such as instant messaging applications, project management software, video conferencing tools, and shared document repositories.

The research subjects were purposively selected key informants based on their roles and involvement in organizational communication processes:

1. Top Management: (e.g., Director or CEO) – Provides insight into policy formulation and downward communication strategy.
2. Middle Managers/Coordinators: (e.g., Department Heads or Team Leaders) – Provides data on the implementation of all three flows and the challenges of managing virtual teams.
3. Staff/Tutors: (e.g., Content Creators or Language Tutors) – Provides perspectives on receiving downward communication, utilizing upward channels, and engaging in lateral coordination.

A total of eight key informants were selected to ensure representation across different hierarchical levels and functional departments within the organization.

Data collection was primarily conducted using three techniques:

In-Depth Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted virtually (via video conference) to gather rich, primary data on participants' experiences, perceptions, and practices related to communication flow. The interviews focused on questions about preferred communication channels, frequency of communication, barriers encountered (e.g., misinterpretation, slow response), and the effectiveness of feedback mechanisms.

Digital Observation

Direct observation was conducted on publicly accessible and shared organizational digital spaces (with prior consent from management), such as announcements posted on the LMS, shared meeting minutes, project management board activities, and official communication channels. This provided contextual data on the formalized structure of downward and lateral communication.

Documentation Analysis

Analysis of existing organizational documents (e.g., Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), WFH policy handbooks, internal reports, and organizational structure charts) was performed to corroborate interview data and establish the formal framework for communication protocols.

The analysis followed the interactive model described by Miles and Huberman (1994), consisting of four concurrent stages:

1. Data Collection: Continuous gathering of interview transcripts, observation notes, and document excerpts.
2. Data Reduction: Selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting, and transforming the raw data. This involved coding segments related to Downward, Upward, and Lateral flow.
3. Data Display: Organizing the reduced data into matrices, flowcharts, and descriptive narratives to facilitate pattern recognition and thematic understanding.
4. Conclusion Drawing/Verification: Tentative conclusions were drawn and then verified against the full dataset to ensure validity and trustworthiness (Sugiyono, 2014). This iterative process helped link the empirical findings back to the theoretical concepts of communication flow and Media Richness Theory.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Organizational Profile and Digital Infrastructure

"Hellocation Korea" operates with a lean, project-based organizational structure. The primary communication channels utilized across the organization are:

1. Primary Downward/Archival Channel: Email and the dedicated Announcement Board within the Learning Management System (LMS). Used for official policy, procedural updates, and major strategic decisions.
2. Synchronous/Urgent Channel: Instant messaging applications (e.g., Slack or WhatsApp groups). Used for quick queries, urgent coordination, and daily check-ins.
3. Rich Media Channel: Video conferencing tools (e.g., Zoom or Google Meet). Used for weekly all-hands meetings, performance reviews, and complex problem-solving discussions.
4. Lateral/Collaborative Channel: Shared document services (e.g., Google Workspace) and project management platforms (e.g., Trello or Asana). Used for co-editing, task delegation, and progress tracking.

The reliance on a multi-channel strategy is critical, compensating for the lack of a single physical communication hub, a finding consistent with virtual organizational best practices (Mohrman & Cohen, 2005).

Downward Communication Flow: Formalization and Redundancy

The study found that the downward communication flow in "Hellocation Korea" is characterized by a high degree of formalization and channel redundancy.

Channels and Format

All essential organizational directives (e.g., curriculum updates, deadline changes, payment procedures) are first drafted as official documents. They are then disseminated via the LMS Announcement Board and simultaneously followed up with an official summary email. Middle managers are then instructed to post a brief, actionable summary in their team's instant messaging groups, often using bold text and emojis for emphasis.

One manager explained, "We have a *Rule of Three* for important messages. LMS for archival, Email for official notice, and chat for confirmation. If we don't use redundancy, someone will inevitably miss a critical update because of email overload or chat fatigue."

Effectiveness and Challenges

The high formalization successfully addresses issues of accountability and clarity. Because every major message has an official, searchable, and dated record, staff members can rarely claim ignorance of a policy.

However, a key challenge is information overload, particularly with lean media (emails and long chat threads). The staff informants reported filtering out official emails, relying primarily on the instant messaging summaries provided by their direct supervisors. This creates a risk where the nuanced details contained only in the LMS document are overlooked, requiring managers to repeatedly clarify policy.

This finding aligns with MRT: management appropriately uses lean media for simple policy (low equivocality), but the volume of this lean media causes recipients to treat it as even *leaner* than intended, necessitating the addition of richer synchronous channels (supervisor explanations via chat) to ensure comprehension.

Upward Communication Flow: Feedback and Accessibility

The upward communication flow is essential for management to monitor the effectiveness of the WFH operations and respond to staff needs. This flow in "Hellocation Korea" utilizes a mixed approach of formal and informal channels.

Formal Channels

Formal upward communication includes structured weekly progress reports submitted through the project management platform and formal performance review surveys conducted semi-annually. This data is structured and quantifiable, allowing management to track metrics and operational progress.

Informal Channels and Efficacy

The primary channel for informal feedback and signaling operational issues is the one-on-one instant messaging with the immediate supervisor. Staff members prefer this channel for its perceived speed and low formality.

A key positive finding is the reported high perceived accessibility of management. Due to the nature of digital communication, staff feel they can reach their supervisors at any time. One staff member stated, "I can message my boss at 9 PM if I find a bug in the system, and I know they'll see it, even if they respond later. In an office, I'd have to wait until the next day."

Barriers: Digital Burnout and Social Presence

Despite the accessibility, two significant barriers were identified:

1. Digital Burnout: The constant availability of instant messaging channels leads to pressure on staff to maintain a near-instantaneous response time, blurring work-life boundaries. This "always-on" expectation negatively impacts the quality of upward

communication, as staff may simplify or withhold complex issues to avoid long digital discussions.

2. **Lack of Social Presence:** When proposing new, potentially controversial ideas or reporting mistakes, the staff expressed a strong preference for video calls over chat. They felt that lean media lacked the social presence needed to convey sincerity, commitment, or apologize effectively. As a result, critical but sensitive upward feedback is often delayed until a scheduled rich-media meeting, slowing down the adaptive function of communication.

Lateral Communication Flow: Coordination and Social Bonding

Lateral communication is crucial for the virtual platform, where content creators, language tutors, and marketing staff must constantly coordinate to launch new services and update existing content.

Task Coordination and Channels

Lateral task coordination is almost exclusively handled through shared project management platforms and collaborative document editing tools. The use of features like tagging and assigning tasks within these platforms creates an automated documentation of coordination, replacing the need for spontaneous verbal agreements.

This highly structured method facilitates inter-departmental integration (Turró et al., 2009). The marketing team can see exactly when the content creation team finalizes a lesson, and the technical team can see when a new service requires an IT deployment, minimizing miscommunication about readiness.

Social and Informal Communication

The study noted a deliberate effort by the organization to recreate the informal social aspect of lateral communication through dedicated, non-work-related instant messaging groups (e.g., a "Water Cooler" channel). However, participation in these channels was consistently reported as low compared to task-focused channels.

The absence of spontaneous, informal social interaction poses a challenge to long-term team cohesion and organizational culture. While coordination (the integrative function) is efficient, the lack of shared context from casual interactions can lead to friction when interpersonal conflicts inevitably arise. Management acknowledged this, noting that new employees often struggle to integrate into the existing team culture because the social-lateral communication channels are underdeveloped.

Discussion

The findings confirm that the successful operation of a full WFH virtual platform hinges on intentional and formalized communication design. The organization has effectively mitigated the geographic distance challenge by:

1. **Prioritizing Formal Documentation (Downward Flow):** Using official archival channels (LMS, Email) to ensure the regulative function of communication is met with clarity and evidence.
2. **Maximizing Digital Accessibility (Upward Flow):** Leveraging instant messaging to create an open channel for operational feedback, despite the associated risk of burnout.
3. **Integrating Collaboration Tools (Lateral Flow):** Embedding lateral communication directly into the project workflow via shared platforms, optimizing task coordination.

However, the analysis using Media Richness Theory highlights a persistent gap in handling highly equivocal and socially sensitive communication. The preference for lean media due to

convenience and the aversion to scheduling time-consuming rich-media calls means that organizational issues requiring high levels of social presence (e.g., resolving conflict, motivational conversations, complex strategic discussions) are often addressed sub-optimally or are unnecessarily delayed.

Future efforts for "Hellocation Korea" must focus not just on the *flow* of information, but the *quality* of the relationship mediated by that flow. Strategies should include:

- Establishing "No-Meeting" or "No-Chat" blocks to mitigate digital burnout, ironically improving the quality of asynchronous communication.
- Mandating periodic, non-task-related rich-media interactions (e.g., monthly virtual coffee hours) to intentionally build social presence and support lateral bonding, fulfilling the integrative function beyond mere task coordination.

The experience of "Hellocation Korea" suggests that in a full WFH context, communication policies must evolve from simply dictating *what* channel to use, to guiding *when* and *how* to use media to match the required level of richness and social presence.

CONCLUSION

This descriptive study provides an in-depth understanding of the organizational communication flow within "Hellocation Korea," a virtual platform operating under a full Work-from-Home system. The organization's reliance on technology necessitates highly structured and redundant communication strategies to maintain operational efficiency across the three flow directions.

The downward flow is effective in transmitting directives and policies due to its formalized, multi-channel approach. Upward communication is characterized by high management accessibility via informal channels but is hampered by the potential for digital burnout and the lack of social cues for sensitive feedback. Lateral communication successfully facilitates task coordination through integrated project management tools, but the social dimension remains underdeveloped, posing a risk to long-term team cohesion.

The study concludes that successful organizational communication in a full WFH environment is a delicate balance of technological efficiency and human intention. While digital tools provide the necessary infrastructure, management must proactively design communication policies that deliberately build social presence and media richness to address complex, equivocal, and interpersonal organizational needs, thereby ensuring all four organizational communication functions—informative, regulative, integrative, and adaptive—are met effectively.

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