



Exploring the Impact of Organizational Structure on the Role of Local Government Communication Officers in Tanzania: A Qualitative Study

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ABSTRACT

The significance of the roles played by communication officers in ensuring organisational success cannot be overstated, yet these professionals may face obstacles in large organisations due to structural factors. This study aimed to identify the impact of organisational structure to the functions of communication staff at local authorities in five municipal councils within Dar es Salaam City, Tanzania. A qualitative research approach was employed, with purposive sampling used to select 14 respondents, consisting of nine communication officers and five executive directors. Data was collected through in-depth interviews, observations, and document reviews. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the collected data. The study's findings revealed that the primary challenge faced by communication staff in Dar es Salaam city was the independence of the communication unit, leading to secondary issues such as budget constraints and subpar working environments. The study

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concludes that, due to the lack of autonomy in the communication unit, communication activities were primarily technical rather than management functions, as communication officers were not involved in decision-making meetings where key decisions about the councils were made. The study recommends that local councils in Tanzania should improve their organisational structure to allow communication officers to be members of the Council Management Team (CMT), thereby aligning communication activities with the overall strategic plan of the councils.

Keywords: *Government communication; government communication officer; public relations; organisational structure.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The art of government communication is far from simple, resembling more the complex process of persuasion rather than the straightforward act of killing a chicken. As such, it demands a methodical approach, solid decision-making, and tools tailored to the specific public concern at hand (Yeheysh, 2017). In today's modern world, the role of public communication officers has become increasingly crucial in ensuring the effectiveness and transparency of public administrations (Valentini, 2013). The performance of government communication officers within any public institution is largely determined by the organisational structure of the institution itself (Yahaya, 2018). According to Abukashawa (2013) and Zahradnik (2012), a well-defined organisational structure provides ample space for the performance of communication officers in public institutions.

2. MATERIALS

2.1 Government Communication Officers

Government communication officers are described with different titles depending on the structure of an organization. In most cases, the organization's management considers the roles played by the individuals assigned and determines the appropriate title to refer to them (Putra, 2009). This paper has replaced all the available titles in the communication sector, including information officers, communication managers, public relations officers, public relations and communication directors, marketing managers, public affairs officers, communication managers, corporate affairs officers/managers, and similar positions with the term "government communication officer". Different scholars have presented different arguments regarding who qualifies as a government communication officer or information officer.

Aziona et al. (Aziona et al, 2014) describe government communication officers as

individuals who work for government institutions and are responsible for handling communication for both internal and external audiences. Putra (Putra, 2009), on the other hand, defines government communication staff as individuals who possess a combination of functional, management, and negotiating skills, as well as analytical and well-developed communication skills, and an understanding of people and human psychology. According to Pallas et al. (2014), a communication officer in an organization must balance disseminating accurate, impartial, and complete information with advocating for the needs of the public, political leadership, and government. Based on these descriptions, government staff with this role is responsible for describing, enhancing, and defending the organization's image through communication, ultimately contributing to the organization's success in achieving its goals and objectives.

2.2 Government Communication Officer's Roles

Roles are the regular tasks people complete at their place of employment (Van Heerden, 2009). According to Putra (2009), creating and planning communication content that would be disseminated to the public through the media are among the communication officer's roles. Scholars such as Putra (2009), Onsongo et al. (2017), Cutlip et al. (2006), and Grunig (2009) contemplate the roles of public communication officers by combining them into managerial and technician roles. Moreover, Dozier (1992) cited in Onsongo et al. (2017) argues that managerial roles are those communication activities planned and managed at the management level in which the communication officer is part of the decision-making body. Communication officers assume a senior position allowing them to attend management meetings, whereas technician roles are associated with minor communication duties, including writing press releases, media mobilization, photo-taking, website

supervision, news dissemination, and other technical tasks.

According to Lindenmann (2006) a communication officer must carry out several duties, including:

- Gathering the information necessary for communication professionals to perform their tasks efficiently and effectively.
- Establishing standards for collecting data on the opinions of key target audience groups.
- Planning, developing, or refining public communication programs or activities.
- Recording or monitoring important programs, activities, or events related to the organization.
- Assessing the overall effectiveness of communication programs or activities by comparing expected results to predetermined objectives.
- Establishing protocols for crisis communication and providing perspective on issues through emergency monitoring.
- Determining the appropriate time and setting for promoting or publicizing specific programs, activities, or events.

Center & Broom (2006), cited in Onsongo (2017), argue that the technician role is the lowest-level role performed by communication officers and is considered an entry-level position. This paper aims to investigate the organisational structure of Dar es Salaam local councils and how it affects the roles and responsibilities of communication staff. The organisational structure determines the level of autonomy of the unit/department, the rank, position, and budget allocation of communication activities.

2.3 Roles of Government Communication Officers in Tanzania

Tanzania is a liberal democratic state that upholds the principles of freedom of speech, freedom of the press, and the right to express oneself, as outlined in its constitution (United Republic of Tanzania, 1977). In accordance with these principles, the government communication system in Tanzania is open and transparent, as established by the Tanzania Public Service Standing Order No. C. 16 (United Republic of Tanzania, 2009). This standing order specifies the roles of communication officers within the government communication structure of the

country. It stipulates that the Director of Information Services (MAELEZO) is the designated channel for the dissemination of important government information to the press and broadcasting services. The order aims to ensure that ministries, independent departments, regions, and local government authorities keep the Director of Information Services informed of their activities and that all chief executive officers in the public service establish information, education, and communication units or appoint a public servant to serve as a communication officer with the Information Services Division.

Following the Public Service Standing Order and civil service reform programs aimed at combating poverty and promoting economic growth (Itika, 2015), the career needs assessment of 1998 and 2000 led to the establishment of government communication units (GCUs) in most government institutions, from central to local authorities (Government Circular, 2002). The functions of government communication officers are outlined in the GCU guidelines, which include:

- i. Promoting institutional activities, programs, and policies;
- ii. Producing various documents for institutional reforms;
- iii. Distributing documents and printed materials to stakeholders;
- iv. Coordinating press briefings for the institution;
- v. Coordinating the preparation of ministerial papers for workshops, seminars, and conferences;
- vi. Updating the institution's information website and advising the division unit and extra-ministerial departments, executive agencies, and government institutions on the production of various documents (United Republic of Tanzania, 2013).

Upon examining these functions, it is evident that the scope of communication officers' functions in Tanzania is limited. For instance, the GCU guidelines do not provide clear instructions on how to promote dialogue between the government and the public, resulting in a one-way communication approach rather than two-way traffic. Moreover, the position of communication officer within the organisational structure is not explicitly defined in the guidelines. Accordingly, Matenda (2022) highlights discrepancies in the positioning of government communication officers across ministries, independent departments, agencies,

and local government authorities. Furthermore, even the communication strategies differ among public institutions, with each institution having its unique communication strategy.

2.4 Theoretical Perspective

Government communications are practiced in various countries and settings. However, numerous studies on public relations and communication focus on the roles, functions, and contributions of communication in institutional development. Despite the diverse application of models in different cultural settings, theorists (Grunig, 2022a) developed a theory known as the excellence theory of public relations after conducting 15 years of research. It is important to note that the development of this theory resulted from a project called the Excellence Study, which aimed to answer three questions: "Why, how, and to what extent" does communication affect organisational goals and objectives?

The lengthy academic debate led to the integration of numerous theories across various fields such as communication, public relations, management, organisational psychology, sociology, social and cognitive psychology, feminist studies, political science, decision-making, and culture. These theories primarily focus on measuring the ideal of communication. The questions raised in the debate hold significant importance in both theoretical propositions and the practice of government communication, as they delve into the core of communication within organizations, whether public or private. In this study, the researcher discusses the government communication sector with an open mind, recognizing it as a rapidly growing strategic management tool. Government communication practitioners strive to strategically manage communication functions.

According to Grunig and Repper (1992), as cited in Shamsan and Otieno (2015) the concept of strategic communication does not have a clear definition. The majority of academic discourses refer to strategic communication as plans, objectives, and evaluation of communication programs that involve the parameters of organisational objectives. In this view, government communication should be a strategic management tool that always seeks to serve the interests of the government and the public in a balanced order, aiming to contribute to the government's prescribed goals and objectives

(2015). Notably, the researcher was inspired to conduct this study by Anani-Bossman (2018) to develop a framework for public relations practice in the financial services sector in Ghana, as stated:

The last two decades has witnessed PR scholarship putting forward theories which seek to look at PR practice from both the local and global perspectives. For example, while PR practice in Europe is based on the reflective paradigm, the Americans support the relational paradigm, the European dimension of public relations put emphasis on the initiation of relationships with stakeholders. (p. 5)

In various scholarly arguments, it is noteworthy that Africa seems to be overlooked in the development of theory that addresses the challenges faced by government communication officers within theoretical parameters. It is important to note that most of the academics researched in this area were from South Africa, neglecting other parts of Africa (Anani-Bossman, 2018). South Africa has academically demonstrated the contribution of communication management to institutional growth over the years. As (Steyn, 2007) quoted in Anani-Bossman (Anani-Bossman, 2018) argues, significant contributions were made in distinguishing between strategic communication management and 'communication management' at different organisational levels. In her master's dissertation on the practice of Public Relations in Africa, Van Heerden (2004) identifies three main models that influence communication practices in Africa: two-way symmetrical, two-way asymmetrical/symmetrical and public information/press agency. Therefore, the excellence theory of public relations is considered the most suitable guiding principle for this study.

2.4.1 The excellence theory

The Excellence Theory, developed by Grunig and Grunig in 1984, states that the participation of public relations officers in strategic decision-making can help improve management behavior, rather than just interpreting it to the public. In a detailed manner, the Excellence Theory specifies how public relations make institutions more effective and how PR is organized and managed by scanning the organisational environment and contributing to organisational success. The term 'excellence' in the theory is used as an attributive

factor that makes an organization effective in achieving its goals. The significance of the Excellence Theory to the current study lies in its framework for organisational achievements, as it provides the foundation for the entire strategic communication plan of the organisation. As noted earlier, during the Excellence study by Grunig et al. (2022a), four essential principles for the strategic management of public relations were established, including:

1. The involvement of public relations in strategic management.
2. The empowerment of public relations in the dominant coalition's direct reporting relationship.
3. The use of a two-way symmetrical model of public relations.
4. Knowledge potential for the managerial role and symmetrical communication.

Despite the differences in cultural, political, and social environments of each country, the four principles are cross-cutting elements that can apply to diverse appeals for communication officers to be part of the management. Additionally, considering the inner sense of the principles and the general theory at large, the theory calls for planned communication activities aligned with the strategic plans of the organization. Tench (2011) and Zerfass (2008), cited in Anani-Bossman (2018), argue that for organizations to be effective, the communication sector must be a part of the organisational policy decision-making process. This is only possible if the communication activities are a management function originating from the organisational structure, thereby allowing communication staff to be members of the decision-making body.

Communication practitioners, as noted by Putra (2009), function as facilitators by helping organizations align their objectives with the needs of stakeholders and various environmental conditions. Adherence to the aforementioned four principles in practical application demonstrates the dedication of government communication staff and reduces potential challenges in communication practices. Grunig et al. (2002a) emphasize that in organizations where communication activities are not considered a management function, as in the case of the excellence theory, significant contributions to organisational goals cannot be achieved. Teresa (17), Louw (2012), Martinelli (2012), and Zahradnik (2012) highlight the limited appreciation and understanding of the role of

public communication officers by some elected or appointed officials, who often view communication as a luxury rather than a necessity. The research explores the situation of public communication officers in Dar es Salaam city.

2.4.2 Statement of the problem

The expansion of government communication officers and the government communication sector has been remarkable, leading to the establishment of such positions in almost all government institutions. However, how these units and practices are incorporated into the organisational structure remains unclear. Various studies, including those by Teresa (2017), Gezihagne (2018), Kiambi (2010), Njuru (2011), Kaleli et al. (2021), Omondi (2012), Nyambega (2021), Onsongo et al. (2017), Saleh (2017), and Anyijuka (2016), have highlighted the role of the organisational structure as the primary cause of challenges faced by government communication officers. The organisational structure grants autonomy to the department, and department heads are part of the strategic planning and decision-making body of the institution.

In the 1980s, Tanzania implemented numerous policy reforms, including public management strategies, civil service reform programs, public service reform programs, and local government reform programs, to combat poverty and promote economic growth (Itika, 2015). The public service reform programs followed by the career needs assessment of 1998 and 2000 led to the establishment of a government communication unit and the mass deployment of communication officers in almost all government institutions, from central to local government authorities (Government Circular, 2002). Despite the significant progress in the government communication sector, there is limited knowledge about how communication units are represented in the organisational structure of public institutions and their impact on the practice of government communication officers. Moreover, all of the cited studies are from outside Tanzania. This paper aims to investigate how the organisational structure affects the roles performed by government communication officers in five municipal councils within Dar es Salaam City.

3. METHODOLOGY

The present study was conducted in Dar es Salaam City, Tanzania, with a focus on five municipal councils. This city was selected as it is

the largest in Tanzania, serving as the national commercial hub and home to the majority of the country's businesses, accounting for over half of the national tax revenue. Despite the official shift of government operations to Dodoma, Dar es Salaam remains focused on public and private activities, providing a platform for unparalleled opportunities in the country (Dar es Salaam master plan report, 2018). Dar es Salaam is the third fastest-growing city in Africa, leading the list of Africa's rapid urbanization rates, and the ninth fastest-growing city in the world (Doyle, 2017). According to the National Bureau of Statistics report of 2022, Dar es Salaam is the leading region with a population of over 5.38 million people, equivalent to 8.7 percent of the total population. Additionally, Nyssola et al. (2021) rank Dar es Salaam city as the world's fastest-growing city with a population of approximately seven million people and expect it to have more than 50 million by 2060.

The study focused on the local councils due to the reasons that local councils in Tanzania, by nature, are people-centered. They aim to give more power to the people to competently participate in the planning and implementation of development programs within their respective areas and generally throughout the country (Shadrack, 2010). According to Kanyama et al. (2005) Dar es Salaam city is experiencing a unique growth resulting in great pressure on the delivery of social economic services from the respective authorities. Undoubtedly, intense and strategic communication is required, and such communication necessity should be a management function. In the light of management function, communication activities will be well planned, implemented, and evaluated, and communication function organized at a management level.

This study primarily used a qualitative research approach, focusing on the experiences of communication officers' practices within the existing organisational structure of the local councils in Dar es Salaam. The qualitative approach, as a research method, explores attitudes, behavior, and experiences, viewing the social world as a human creation rather than a discovery (Dawson 2007); (Oduro-Ofori, 2011). While the study predominantly employed a qualitative approach, there were also some quantitative elements, particularly during the thematic analysis, which aided in the development of themes. Additionally, the numerical data from respondents in the sample

size added a quantitative aspect. However, despite including quantitative elements to achieve the research objectives, the qualitative inclination was not compromised. Instead, the quantitative elements complemented the qualitative findings and conclusions.

The population of the study consisted of communication officers and executive directors of Dar es Salaam city. The selection of this population was based on the availability of the required information for the study. The researcher employed the purposive sampling technique, which is a strategy where the researcher identifies respondents who can provide rich information to answer the research questions (Kombo, 2006), Flick, (2018). The sample size for this study was 14 respondents, with 9 being municipal communication officers and 5 being executive directors.

The data collection procedure involved collecting both primary and secondary data. Primary data was collected through interviews and observations. The methods were chosen to align with the qualitative research approach and case study design used in the current study. To establish primary data, documentary sources such as relevant books, journals, articles, official publications, municipal websites, newspaper clippings, reports, and seminar papers were used. Qualitative data, which is the main focus of this study, was analyzed using thematic analysis. This involved organizing the collected raw data, identifying general ideas from the participants, coding by removing unnecessary parts, describing the major themes, presenting descriptive information using tables, and capturing the overall essence from the themes.

The researcher sought permission and an introduction letter from the Vice Chancellor of the University of Dar es Salaam before beginning fieldwork. The Vice Chancellor is legally responsible for issuing research permits to students and academic staff members. The researcher emphasized the importance of maintaining respondent anonymity and information confidentiality, in accordance with the codes of conduct. Additionally, local council communication officers were identified with numbers 1-9, Executive Directors with letters A to E, and municipal councils with AA to AE to ensure individuality.

4. RESULTS

The main objective is to identify the impact of the organisational structure on the functions of the

communication staff at local authorities in five municipal councils within Dar es Salaam City, Tanzania. The lack of independence of the communication unit emerges as the major challenge. Other related challenges include budget constraints and poor working environments.

4.1 Autonomous of Communication Unit

Of the nine communication officers surveyed, seven reported significant obstacles in their communication practices that were attributable to the organisational structure. These structures place communication units under the purview of information communication technology (ICT) departments, which are typically headed by ICT personnel. The communication officers asserted that their organization's structure assigns department heads with the responsibility of forming management teams, which gives them the ability to attend committee meetings known as the committee management team (CMT). However, this structure allegedly hinders the representation of communication officers in decision-making processes. For instance, a respondent from the municipal council AD mentioned that the absence of an independent communication department led to infrequent attendance of CMT meetings. According to her, attending the management meetings never occurs unless there is something special that requires her clarification, as she puts it in the following quotation:

I think the organisational structure is the nucleus of our communication problems. All of our communication challenges need the attention of the entire management, but unfortunately, I don't have the opportunity to attend the meeting because our communication unit is not an independent department. This means that my communication programs and plans will be presented by someone else (ICT manager) who is not an expert in that area. There is always a difference in the presentation of departmental issues between an expert and a non-expert in that field.

In this quotation, the officer expresses concern about the lack of a communication officer's seat in the management committee. This absence undermines the opportunity for presenting views that could enhance organisational communication. Respondents from the same council also share this perspective. One of the

respondents mentions the challenges of planning and implementing communication programs due to the gap between decision-making meetings and the communication team. Similar to the previous interviewee, this respondent believes that addressing communication challenges would require the attention of management. They emphasize the importance of being present in the room where decisions are made, as indicated here:

What I see as a major drawback in my job is the council's setup, where the communication unit is under the ICT department and is headed by ICT personnel. There is no way I can plan and implement my communication programs since they have to be channeled to another person who is not a professional in that area. Sometimes, I do face unnecessary delays in addressing my concerns because the head of the department doesn't understand or see the urgency of my issue.

Looking at this quotation and the one from the previous respondent, there is a clear pattern that can be seen in their responses. Regarding this, the interviewees seem to believe that the problem is not just the absence of an autonomous communication department, but also the placement of communication matters under the leadership of someone who is not part of the public communication profession. By saying "...doesn't understand or see the emergence of my issue," the second interviewee highlights why placing communication under someone who is not a communication officer is wrong and detrimental to organisational communication. This pattern was noted in responses provided by interviewees recruited in municipal council AC and AB, respectively. However, these responses presented slight differences. For example, respondents from municipal AB indicated that they were allowed to attend the CMT, although not as members, but as communication officers invited by the Executive Director to take photos.

My experience here is that one of us (from the Communication Unit) attends the meeting not as a CMT member but rather as a photographer. Sometimes, you might not be aware that there is a meeting, but at last, you are contacted to bring your camera and go to the conference room. In performing the role of taking photos, you may have a chance to address some communication-

related issues as they emerge in the meeting.

In the above quotation, the respondent explains in detail the feeling that they are not valued as a communication officer performing a significant role rather than just being a photographer. Based on their explanations, the respondent is not happy with the experience of being asked to attend the CMT at a moment of photo-taking. The obtained answers indicate that without a role in photo-taking, the respondent has nothing to do in the management meeting unless there is a relevant issue to clarify. These answers imply that communication activities are considered as simple as taking photographs. Meanwhile, no one is present in the meeting to raise and defend communication-related issues.

Based on the above findings, the general observations made from this data show that executive directors have a different perception of the organisational structure regarding the exclusion of communication staff from strategic meetings. For example, Executive Director B told the researcher:

To me, I value communication officers as very important staff members, not only here but in all the councils I have worked for. You can track my record. I provide an opportunity to participate in all management meetings and necessary activities. In the past, the communication unit wasn't there, which is why some managers ignored them. But any accounting officer who knows their importance should involve them in the decision-making processes. At my council, we strive to make them happy by providing them with working equipment such as iPods, and modern cameras, approving their budgets, and allowing them to contact the media directly without bureaucratic controls.

In the quotation above, the executive director seems to know and value the role of the communication officer in her council. Not only in the current council, but she also declares doing the same in other councils she has worked for. The executive director admits that the maximum involvement of government communication officers in all council activities is a crucial step in making communication officers plan their communication programs. The respondent is aware that the communication industry in the local council is new compared to other fields, which is the reason it has been ignored. She

believes that if the council wants to achieve its goals and objectives, communication officers should be given significant attention, including a budget, working tools, and a full mandate to exercise their duties. Similar views were shared by Executive Director D, who also backed up the communication officer's lamentation over the independence of the communication unit and appealed for performance enhancement. He recommended that:

For the sake of effectiveness, I agree with those who advocate for the separation of the Department of ICT from Public Relations. It is clear that combining the two units with equal importance would result in one unit overshadowing the other. In my experience, ICT tends to have a higher standing, for instance, if the system were to fail, it would cause a complete halt, including tax collection and payment in hospitals, leading to chaos. This creates biases towards certain staff members. In my opinion, we should separate them and elevate the Public Relations unit to a full department by bolstering it with additional components such as protocol, making it more comprehensive and larger. I urge communication officers to engage in a thorough debate and propose a vision for the communication or public relations department, highlighting the value they would bring to the councils. By standing alone, even budgetary issues could be addressed and improved.

In the above quotations, the executive directors B & D seem to have similar views on the importance of communication officers in their council. However, Executive Director B demonstrated advancement in facilitating communication activities. Executive Director D identifies the communication unit as having the same weight and value as the ICT unit, but combining them can automatically cause biases from the management. Indeed, despite arguing for equal weights of the two units, for him ICT is superior to the communication unit as he said "...for example, now if the system collapses, it means everything will stop, no tax collection, payment in our hospitals will stop; it will be chaos for sure..." such a statement reflects his inner feeling over the supremacy of the departments.

Based on his answers, it seems that communication units need to be restructured and endowed with other functions like protocols so that they can bring more impact to public

institutions. While the mentioned respondents were arguing for councils' communication staff involvement in the decision-making body and separation of the two units, slight differences were provided by Executive Director C who thinks that nothing is wrong with the organisational structure. Instead, the problem lies within the communication officers themselves. As the respondent said:

Indeed, our communication officers do not attend CMT because of the council's structure, which serves as our guide. However, sometimes it depends on the management decision, which is at the discretion of each council. Nevertheless, I do not consider it good practice for communication officers to be part of the management team. How many departments will we have in the meeting? The fact that the communication unit is a part of the ICT is not an issue. The real issue is for communication officers to fully understand and appreciate their position within the established structure. In my opinion, many of the challenges faced by communication officers stem from a lack of clarity about their responsibilities. They often lack professionalism, and I question whether they fully comprehend the scope of their role and functions.

Following the above quotation, the respondent seems to be in a "comfort zone" with the organisational structure. What is seen by communication personnel and respondents B and C as the epicenter of the challenges marring organisational communication for her is not the case. The executive director believes that since the ministry concern has provided the structure putting communication officers under the ICT department, it should be respected and obeyed. However, the respondent acknowledges that the management (the executive director) has the power to decide otherwise when it comes to the issue of local councils' communication staff attending the management meetings (CMT). In her opinion, the great challenge is the professionalism, enthusiasm, and flexibility of councils' communication experts within the existing structure.

Interestingly, the findings revealed that despite the structure being the same, not all communication units of the studied councils were headed by ICT managers. At the AA municipal council (city council), for example, the department was headed by a communication

officer. As one would expect, due to this difference, collected data show that the challenges facing communication officers of this council were slightly different from those faced by communication officers of councils headed by ICT managers. Here is a quotation extracted from responses provided by an interviewee who also happened to be the head of the department:

Here, the question of structure is not a problem. I am the head of the unit/department. Together with my team, we plan, implement, and evaluate our communication programs. I am happy with my position and my colleagues since I do what I am supposed to do. I feel valued.

The above answer provided an argument that the communication unit, headed by communication personnel, diminishes some challenges facing government communication officers in performing their duties. Notably, it proved that despite the organisational structure provided by the ministry, there is an alternative for communication officers to be the head of the department instead of ICT personnel. In line with the answer from the head of the department, the researcher extended their inquiry to an interviewee who was part of the top management, on how a communication officer was instituted as the head of the department. Executive Director A responded by saying that either ICT personnel or communication officers can head the concerned department, provided that the required qualifications are met. Here is how the interviewee responded:

For me, anyone can be the head of the department, provided they qualify. My motivation was to empower my communication officers with enough information. You cannot have a spokesperson in your organization that is not well-informed. Making her the head of the department means I am pushing her into the decision-making team. Including a communication officer in senior management meetings makes it easy for us to incorporate communication programs within our master plan.

In this quotation, it is clear that there is no statutory boundary for communication officers to be the head of the department. The management can appoint anyone to be the head of the department, provided the established criteria are

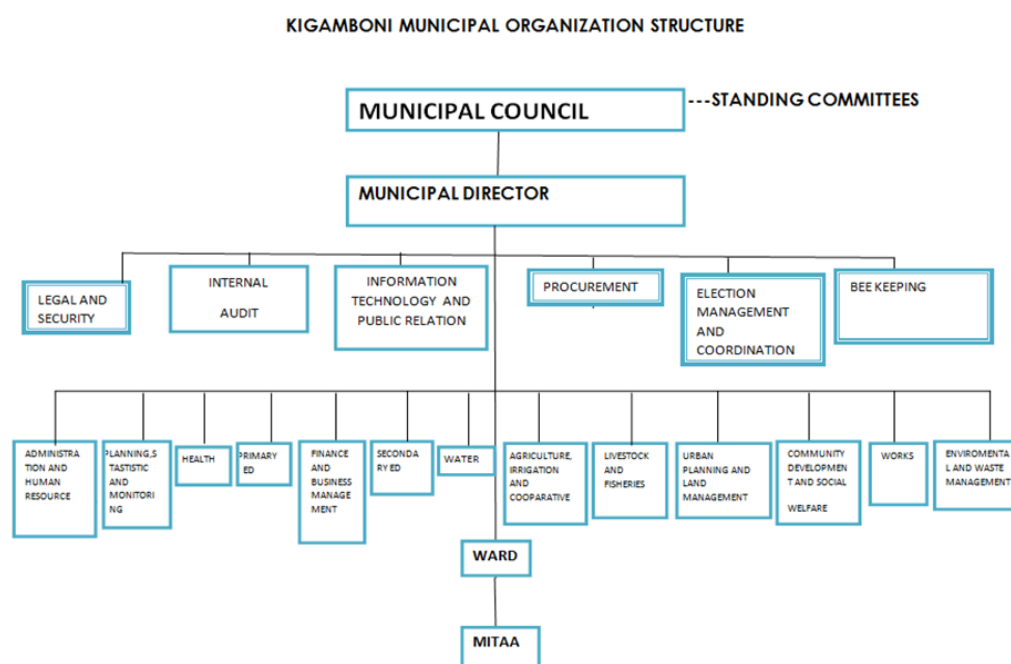


Fig. 1. Organisational structure showing the position of the public relations unit with the information technology unit forming one department

observed. Indeed, following this statement, which says, "Actually, my motivation was to empower my communication officers with enough information," proves that relinquishing some challenges to communication officers depends on understanding the capacity of the top management. Additionally, it provides evidence that communication programs can be easily accommodated if there is significant representation in the decision-making team. The question of whether the communication unit or public relations should be under ICT in the local councils of Tanzania is the countryside formation in which all organisational structures have the same format. Hereunder is the organisational structure of the Kigamboni municipal council, representing other councils of the Dar es Salaam region and the whole country.

The above findings show that communication officers work in departments that are a combination of communication units and ICT units. These departments are typically led by ICT managers. The first six departments are supervised by individuals designated as the head of the department, who are qualified to be members of the decision-making team. These findings suggest that although the organisational structures of the studied councils may seem similar, their operations can be customized based on suggestions or decisions made by

Executive Directors. In particular, the differences observed relate to the leadership of the department overseeing communication activities and the participation of communication officers in decision-making meetings.

4.2 Budget Constrains

The absence of communication officers in CMT is an outcome of the organisational structure, and the budget for communication activities receives little attention. In this subtheme, there was a general agreement among the respondents that budget allocations were insufficient; however, the magnitude of the problem differed from one council to another. For instance, one respondent from the AE council said:

Our budget is not sufficient to manage all communication activities, such as advertisements. I wish to have numerous adverts in the media, but the budget constraints limit me. In my opinion, the communication unit within the council should be a separate unit with its own vote. This would allow for more activities, as I believe that within an institution, a communication unit functions as a small media house. However, this can only be made possible with a sufficient budget.

The above quotation captures the communication officer in a lighthearted mood regarding the budget allocation for communication activities. Indeed, one of the challenges facing the respondent in planning her communication program is the lack of separate votes for communication. The responses suggest that without an independent communication unit with its own budget vote, very little can be accomplished. This was also reported by some of the respondents; the budget itself was not seen as a serious problem, but rather the procedural steps required accessing the allocated funds. For example, one respondent from AD Municipality reported that:

To some extent, the budget is not a problem. Our allocation is about Tzs. 200-300 million (approx. USD 100,000 to 130,000) per year. The problem lies in the acceptability of communication activities within the allocated budget.

The above quotations from communication officers reflect the serious problem that the procedural process to access the allocation fund is the hitch for planning substantial communication programs, whether or not the budget allocation is sufficient. In general, these results indicate that limited public awareness promotion on matters that affect the public is due to financial constraints. As a result, most communication activities receive limited attention from the media. Overall, the interviewed local councils' communication officers addressed the question of budget constraints.

4.3 Poor Working Offices

Since the majority of the communications officers in the local councils that were studied were integrated into the ICT department, there were issues with office space for communication activities. Upon observation, it was found that only one council had two offices for the communication officers - one office was occupied by the department head and the second office was used by the subordinates. The remaining four municipal councils had their communication officers attached to the ICT offices. These officers were allocated space in corners and shared offices with staff from various professions. A respondent from the AD municipality informed the researcher that:

Take a look, this is our office, and I don't even have a permanent chair to sit on. We

share the space with the ICT staff, and sometimes I used to go to the library and use it as my working office. Our office is overcrowded, as you can see. I don't even have a space where we can conduct our interviews. This is because the management thinks that my role is the same as ICT roles, so they don't see the importance of giving me a separate office from the ICT staff.

The following quote suggests that the working environment of communication officers in the local councils interviewed was not suitable to support the functions of communication staff.

5. DISCUSSION

Based on the findings, communication officers have cited the merger of communication and ICT units and the placement of these units under the leadership of non-communication professionals as a challenge to effective communication. This structure contradicts existing literature, which has extensively examined the relationship between organisational structure, organisational communication, and effective communication (Winarso, 2018, Renani et al, 2017, Yahaya, 2018, Zura, 2016). Similarly, Grunig (2006) emphasizes the importance of communication officers' involvement in decision-making, as their exclusion would render their function futile and unable to fulfill its essential requirements.

According to various scholars, communication is a vital management function that determines the success or failure of organizations. To ensure that communication programs are aligned with the strategic plans of municipal councils, it is essential to have an individual with expertise in communication as part of the management team. A well-organized, coordinated, and supervised flow of information is crucial for the success of an organization, as per the findings of Winarso (2018), Renani et al. (2017), Yahaya (2018), and Zura (2016).

A good working environment, including an appropriate office location with sufficient space, can also contribute to the performance of communication officers in public institutions, as per Abukashawa (2013) and Zahradnik (2012). Public communication becomes a strategic management function when it helps institutions formulate their attitude to achieve their goals, as per Plowman (2005), cited in Chen and Ni (2021).

Communication officers who are part of the organization's management team have the opportunity to participate in decision-making processes, where major problems are discussed, and procedures and programs are adopted, implemented, and evaluated, as per Boudreaux (2005). However, the government communication officers interviewed in this study are generally not part of such meetings, thus they are not involved in the activities mentioned here.

Limited appreciation of the role played by communication officers is the reason for their exclusion from top management teams, as stated by Kiambi (2010) and Njuru (2011), cited in Kaleli et al. (2021). Ananto (2004), cited in Anggreni (2018), confirms that when a communication officer becomes part of a management team, determining their function becomes easier.

This study reveals a state of affairs that contradicts the Excellence Theory proposed by Anani-Bossman (2011), which suggests that communication officers should be integrated into organizations' management teams and given managerial responsibilities. Gezihagne (2018) emphasizes the issue of budget allocation, indicating that financial constraints are one of the barriers that hinder the performance of communication officers. Abukashawa (2013) echoes this view, stating that inadequate budgets can lead to various other problems, such as a lack of equipment and training. This challenge is closely linked to the major challenges mentioned earlier, as budgetary matters are usually addressed and determined in management meetings that exclude communication staff.

Budget constraints had a detrimental impact on numerous communication-related aspects, such as capacity building, media advertisements, publications, and the availability of equipment (such as cameras and computers). Additionally, communication units were unable to conduct research and assess the general communication landscape of their councils. This is particularly concerning given that Solomon and Johnson (2013) argue that evaluation is crucial for determining the effectiveness of programs, methods, or tools and provides feedback that can be relayed to council management. It is essential to note that effective communication can only be achieved through systematic planning, research, implementation, and evaluation of

communication activities to measure their outcomes (Sanders and Canel, 2015). According to Canel & Sanders (2015), Nxumalo (2015), and Sasser (2015), communication officers should be actively involved in budgeting and other technical matters.

Following Abukashawa (2013) and Zahradnik (2012), a favorable working environment, which includes a suitable office location with ample space, can positively impact the performance of communication officers in public institutions. As defined by Manusia (2007) and cited in Nugroho & Wahjoedi (2023), the work environment encompasses the equipment and supplies utilized, the surroundings in which an individual works, as well as their working practices and organisational arrangements. Notably, Nugroho & Wahjoedi (2023) emphasize that the surrounding conditions at work, such as cleanliness, noise, and others, can affect employees' ability to complete their assigned tasks.

Abukashawa (2013) further identifies several challenges faced by public communication officers, including a poor position in the organisational chart, insufficient resources, lack of budget allocations, small department sizes, inadequate training, and insufficient research. Conversely, Asunta (2016) underscores the importance of understanding the role and meaning of the communication sector, organisational culture, and structure, as well as the resources available in the organisation, in determining the position and performance of communication officers (Dewson et al. 2006, National Bureau of Statistics, Waraka wa maendeleo ya Utumishi, 2022).

6. CONCLUSION

In contemporary public administration, the role of government communication has become a vital component of the management function. It is essential that it contributes to achieving the institutional goals of public institutions and demonstrates government accountability through measurable outcomes. The placement of communication officers within the organisational structure and in the management process is consequential in the implementation of the communication function. Failing to include communication officers in decision-making bodies can result in significant challenges, as indicated in the study's major findings. Furthermore, the study shows that

communication units are often managed by ICT experts rather than skilled communication personnel, which diminishes the likelihood that the communication function will be aligned with the council's major plans.

Based on these findings, it is recommended that communication activities be planned and organized at the management level by involving the local authority's communication staff in management meetings (CMT). Without the inclusion of communication officers in other departmental events, effective communication between the council and the public will not be realised.

DISCLAIMER (ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE)

Author(s) hereby declare that NO generative AI technologies such as Large Language Models (ChatGPT, COPILOT, etc) and text-to-image generators have been used during writing or editing of manuscripts.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Author has declared that no competing interests exist.

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