This paper describes information gathered from Human Resources Representatives and Human Resources Managers at the University of North Carolina Hospitals. The study was conducted to determine the effectiveness of Human Resources Representatives as information intermediaries between Human Resources Managers and employees in departments throughout the Hospitals.

Human Resources Managers are eager to take advantage of Internet technologies as a means of allowing Human Resource Representatives to handle responsibilities that were traditionally handled only by Human Resources departments. Human Resources Representatives demonstrated a willingness to use the Internet to carry out their responsibilities, but many have stated an interest in receiving additional training or printed copies of electronic materials. In order to make the most of the current arrangement, the study recommends that Human Resources Managers commit the necessary resources for providing Human Resources Representatives with the access to information and other tools needed to successfully carry out the role.

Headings:

Organizational communication

Human resource management

Employee communications
A STUDY OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF HUMAN RESOURCES REPRESENTATIVES AS INFORMATION INTERMEDIARIES AT THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA HOSPITALS

by
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A Master’s Paper submitted to the faculty of the School of Information and Library Science of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science in Information Science.

Chapel Hill, North Carolina
April, 2000

Approved by:

__________________________
Advisor
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Changes in the field of health care are affecting employees in every capacity.
Growing competition and the emerging prominence of computerized information systems
have led to major organizational shifts at hospitals across the United States. The Human
Resources (HR) Managers of University of North Carolina Hospitals (UNC-H)
understand that periods of great change can lead to feelings of uneasiness and frustration
among employees. To combat this, the HR management staff has instituted a program
that makes use of human information intermediaries called Human Resource
Representatives, or HR Reps. The goal of the HR Rep system is to improve
communications between the Human Resources Department and employees of UNC
Hospitals.

HR Reps are not employees of the Human Resources Department. Rather, they
are employees who work in departments throughout UNC-H. HR Reps act as liaisons
between the Human Resources Department and their “home”, or operating department.
Their duties include, but are not limited to: communicating information to the operating
department’s employees, processing personnel action forms, and helping department
managers expedite HR related issues. HR Reps are not necessarily supervisors in their
operating department. HR Reps also handle duties that are part of the primary function of
their operating department. For example, an HR Rep in a nursing department may carry
out tasks primarily related to the function of patient care. Therefore, an employee’s
duties as an HR Rep are a just part of his or her normal day-to-day responsibilities.

In a study of over 250 Chief Communication Officers, employee communications
ranked as the number one priority of their organization (Lilienthal 20). In today’s
business world, after years of restructuring, downsizing, and layoffs, one can understand
why communication is such a hot issue. In its Fall/Winter 1998 issue, Human Resources
Management included a special section of articles related to employee communications.
When corporate executives were asked to name the primary goals of employee
communications, improving morale and creating an atmosphere of “goodwill between
employees and management” topped the list. The second most important goal was to
keep employees informed about organizational changes like corporate restructuring
(Argenti 201).

Making the most of an employee communication system requires an
understanding of the world in which we live. Most people are bombarded with hundreds
of messages a day – on TV, radio, newspapers, magazines, the Internet, e-mail, voice
mail, junk mail, just to name a few (Antilla and Moss 32). Ensuring that employees are
effectively receiving important information from management requires the
implementation of a well thought out plan. Oftentimes, big changes like restructuring or
corporate mergers can lead an employee to feel that things are out of control. Clueing
people in to what is actually going on goes along way toward alleviating fears and
frustration. Studies reveal, and experts agree, that the more involved employees are
during times of change, the more likely the company is to succeed in its goals. As
employees’ knowledge of what happens within the organization increases, their sense of contribution and accomplishment will follow suit (Laabs 46-47).

One of the most underrated channels for corporate communication is the “grapevine”. A company’s grapevine refers to communication between employees that is not formally endorsed or distributed by management. Grapevines offer a way for new employees to become assimilated into their organization. All employees benefit from the grapevine in that stronger associations between workers may be formed, regardless of department or job duties. Moreover, studies suggest that as much as ninety percent of information passed along the grapevine is true. In the past, management has often tried to stifle informal information exchanges amongst employees. Recent findings indicate that Human Resource managers are better off encouraging employees to discuss things that aren’t necessarily “officially sanctioned”. Experts say that an active grapevine is a sign of a strong organization. In short, it is a fast, effective way of communicating information (Caudron 26).

Information intermediaries play an important role in the transfer of knowledge. Intermediaries can determine the quality of information, acting as “filters” before dispersing it to users. Some people seem to be in a hurry to turn these types of activities over to machines and let automated processes carry out the retrieval, filtering, and distribution of information. However, researchers who work with technology and have studied the role of information intermediaries note there are certain functions that remain highly intellectual and can only be handled by people. In the end, instead of pitting people and machines against each other, the smartest thing to do is to make use of the strengths of each (Vishik 266-77). Machines may be best for completing complex
calculations and storing large amounts of data, but people are better suited for the “touchy-feely” aspects of communications.

Setting

“UNC Hospitals is a public, academic medical center operated by and for the people of North Carolina” (UNC Health Care). The Hospitals employs about 4000 people in permanent positions and experiences an annual labor turnover rate of about twenty-five percent. In addition, the Hospitals employs a large number of physicians. The Human Resources functions for doctors and certain other medical staff members are handled by a department other than the one used in this study. These are not included in the groups served by HR Reps of the present study.

In addition to its main buildings on the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill campus, UNC Hospitals (UNC-H) operates several satellite facilities. Employees working in facilities not on the UNC main campus include personnel in such diverse areas as patient care, information services, and even human resources. Consequently, HR Reps and the employees they serve work in facilities that are dispersed geographically.

Purpose of the Study

It is likely that organizational restructuring, regardless of industry, will continue well into the 21st century. Advancements in technology and increased business competition will fuel the ever-changing workplace. In light of this, HR departments will be asked to ensure accurate information is disseminated to employees at every level of the organization. Finding efficient means of communicating with employees is a top
priority of any company’s HR department. This is especially true for hospitals that need to be staffed around the clock, 365 days a year.

The Human Resources Managers of UNC Hospitals want to be sure that methods they use to communicate with employees are effective. As a result, it was decided to study the HR Reps who are primarily responsible for communicating Human Resources information to the 4,000 employees of the Hospitals. This report was intended to gather information that HR Managers can use to evaluate the HR Rep system. It will be up to the Managers to decide on and implement changes to the HR Rep system. Ideally, this study will also provide insight that may improve communication between HR Reps and HR Managers.

**Research Question**

Do Human Resource Representatives at UNC Hospitals have sufficient knowledge of, and access to, resources that enable them to carry out their roles as “information intermediaries”? In order to answer this question, it was important to gather pertinent information from both HR Reps and HR Managers. The HR Rep survey was designed to gain insight as to how Reps feel about their role and how they handle certain responsibilities. Information gathered from HR Managers was compared to the HR Rep responses to look for concordances and/or inconsistencies.
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

In a study published in 1991, Harcourt, Richerson, and Wattier attempted to measure the “quality of communication in organizations as assessed by a national sample of middle managers”. This determination would provide a benchmark against which organizations could assess the quality of their internal communications. Middle managers were chosen because they are in positions that communicate “upward, downward, and diagonally”. This unique standing often makes them the best judges of their company’s communication quality (Harcourt et al 348).

To gather data for the study, a questionnaire was sent to over 3600 middle managers throughout the United States. Responses were received from 871 people (24.2 percent). In the end, less than twenty percent of participants said the quality of information they receive is good. Moreover, formal information was ranked below both network communication (“intentional groupings of employees from different departments”) and the grapevine as best sources of organizational information. In light of these findings, the authors of this study urged all organizations to assess the quality of their internal communication systems (Harcourt et al 353-363).

“Business communication researchers and practitioners have rarely attempted to systematically assess the quality of communication within organizations” (Harcourt et al, 348). Although this statement was made almost a decade ago, a review of the current
literature suggests there is still plenty of work to be done in the area of assessing organizational communication. As Harcourt et al pointed out, studies pertaining to corporate communication tend to look at job satisfaction, individual performance, and/or organizational commitment. Communication quality has long been talked about, but few formal assessments have been undertaken (348).

In 1982, Kopec provided helpful information on measuring the quality of an organization’s communication. Basically, a communication audit studies the existing communication programs of an organization and looks for ways to improve them. Kopec says an audit should lead to a series of recommendations. The steps involved in such a project should include an initial planning meeting, interviews with people in managerial positions, gathering and analyzing communication material, interviews with employees, preparing and administering a questionnaire, and examining the results of the data collected. The goal of carrying out such a project is to provide the organization’s management team members with useful information so they may make informed decisions “about future objectives of the organization’s communication” (Kopec 24-25).

Friedman (1981) described an extensive study that was co-sponsored by the International Association of Business Communicators (IABC) and the consulting firm (then called) Towers, Perrin, Forster & Crosby. The study involved a survey of over 45,000 employees in both the United States and Canada and attempted to look at trends regarding how employees obtain organizational information. Immediate supervisors were named as the source employees most often get information from as well as the source from which employees prefer to get their information. The grapevine was named as the second most popular source from which employees get information. Although
most respondents gave their organization’s communications high ratings, many felt more information should be shared with them. Organizations received poor marks regarding “candor, accuracy, completeness, and responsiveness to employees’ views” (Friedman 73).

In a 1997 study Kroll found that companies that use intranets are able to increase the timeliness and effectiveness of their internal communications. Organizations can also save on printing costs and money needed to distribute employee communications materials. Moreover, companies have seen increases in productivity as employees are able to access updated information more efficiently than ever before (Kroll 56).

The review of the literature revealed that although interest in communication within organizations exists, few organizations have conducted formal assessments of the effectiveness of their own internal communication systems. No articles were found that examined the internal communication of a university health care system. The present study will help provide information about the effectiveness of a system that utilizes dispersed representatives to communicate with employees. This report will also offer suggestions for ways to improve that system of communication.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

In November, 1999, the researcher met with six members of the Hospitals’ Human Resource Management staff. This group included the Employment Manager, Employee Benefits Manager, HR Communications Manager, Employee and Management Services HR Services Specialist, Director of HR Services, and the Associate Director of HR Services. This informal, round-table discussion addressed the Hospitals’ HR Rep system and the possibility of conducting a study to assess its effectiveness. The discussion concluded with HR Management’s approval to go ahead with the project. There would be two groups from which data would be gathered: 1) HR Reps and 2) HR Managers.

HR Managers understand that HR Reps will not memorize all the information they are responsible for disseminating. Nonetheless, it is important for HR Reps to be aware of and have access to sources from which they can obtain appropriate information. Having access to resources for providing HR-related forms to the employees in their department is a major part of their role. How Reps feel about their role and duties, in relation to the other responsibilities they have in their departments, can shed light on the productiveness of the HR Rep system as a whole. The survey was intended to gather information that would be used in conjunction with information gathered from HR
Managers. A comparison would then be made between the opinions and expectations of HR Managers and the activities and feelings of HR Reps.

Members of the HR Management staff noted that many HR Reps have extremely busy schedules. In order to receive an adequate response rate of completed surveys, the surveys were to be kept as brief as possible. The surveys were prepared with this in mind and the questions were kept general and basic. In order to pre-test the questions, the researcher met with an employee of the university (UNC) who serves in a role similar to that of an HR Rep at the Hospitals. The university’s HR Rep read the questions and their corresponding answers and offered suggestions for improvement to the researcher. The questions were rewritten based on these comments and an updated version of the survey was then sent to the following HR Managers for review: Employment Manager, Employee Benefits Manager, HR Communications Manager, Employee and Management Services HR Services Specialist, Director of Employee and Management Services, Director of HR Services, and the Associate Director of HR Services. Remarks gathered from these reviewers were used in producing the final draft of the HR Rep survey (Appendix C).

A list of HR Reps was obtained from the HR Communications Manager. Surveys were sent to a total of seventy-nine HR Reps. The first round of surveys was sent out the third week of February, 2000. A second round of surveys was sent out the first week of March, 2000 to people for whom a response had not been received by March 1. Surveys were sent via the Hospitals’ inter-departmental mailing system. Each package sent to HR Reps included the following materials:

1. A cover letter describing the purpose of the study. Respondents were assured their replies would be kept confidential (Appendix A and B)
2. A 4 page, single-sided questionnaire (Appendix C)
3. A return addressed envelope in which to place the completed survey
4. Pre-addressed postcards that were to be returned separately noting that the participant had completed the survey (Appendix E)

Surveys and postcards were returned via inter-department mail to the Employee Relations Office. Participants were asked to place only the completed survey in the return addressed envelope. To ensure confidentiality, respondents were asked to return the pre-addressed postcards separately. This would help determine who had returned a completed questionnaire without being able to match a name to a particular survey. A total of fifty-six completed surveys were returned. This represents a response rate of 70.8 percent.

Seven HR Managers provided information that was used in this study. Three Managers were interviewed on March 2, 2000. They included the Employment Manager, the Employee Benefits Manager, and the HR Communications Manager. The Employee and Management Services HR Services Specialist were interviewed on March 9, 2000. The Director of HR Services was interviewed on March 23, 2000. Each interview took approximately thirty minutes. Because they were not available for interviews, the Director of Employee and Management Services and the Associate Director of HR Services completed printed questionnaires. These questionnaires included the questions that were posed to the other Managers during the interviews.

Once the HR Rep surveys had been received, the answers were coded and entered into the statistical software package SPSS. This data was analyzed to calculate the percentages of answers to each question. That information was compared to the responses provided by the HR Managers.
HR Reps

Seventy-nine HR Reps were sent questionnaires and a total of fifty-six surveys were returned. This equaled a return rate of 70.8 percent. Fifty-five of the fifty-six surveys were deemed usable for the purposes of this study. These results are addressed in detail in the sections that follow. On certain questions, “number of respondents” is less than fifty-five. This is because some participants had left an answer blank. Other participants were asked to skip specific questions depending on how they responded to a previous question. These non-responses were coded as “missing” when answer rates were calculated, and thus were not included when reporting percentages for the results in this section of the paper.

Respondent Demographics

More than half of all respondents have served as an HR Rep for more than three years (51.9 percent). Eight respondents (14.8%) have served between two and three years, eleven respondents (20.4%) have served between one and two years, and seven respondents (13.0%) have served less than a year. These results are shown in Table 1.
Table 1. Responses to Question 1, “How long have you served as an HR Rep at UNC Hospitals?”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years Served as HR Rep</th>
<th>Number of Respondents</th>
<th>Percent of Valid Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than 1 year</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>13.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between 1 and 2 years</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>20.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between 2 and 3 years</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>14.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 3 years</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>51.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 illustrates HR Rep responses regarding their total years of service at UNC Hospitals. Thirty-one respondents have been employees for more than ten years. Ten respondents have worked at the Hospitals between five and ten years, nine people said they have been employees at UNC-H between one and five years, and only five people have been working there less than a year.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years of total service at UNC-H</th>
<th>Number of Respondents</th>
<th>Percent of Valid Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than 1 year</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between 1 and 5 years</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>16.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between 5 and 10 years</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>18.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 10 years</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>56.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Responses to Question 16, “Since your original hire date (excluding any breaks in service), how long have you been an employee at the Hospitals?”

The breakdown of the primary function of each respondent’s department can be seen in Table 3 below. Nearly half of all participants work in nursing/patient care areas, and almost forty percent work in clerical/administrative/professional offices. The rest of the respondents work in information services/telecommunications,
housekeeping/environment services, or in an area other than the choices listed on the questionnaire.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Department’s Primary Function</th>
<th>Number of Respondents</th>
<th>Percent of Valid Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nursing/patient care</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>47.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housekeeping/environmental services</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clerical/administrative/professional</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>38.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information Services/telecommunications</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>55</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3. Responses to Question 17, “Which of the following best describes your department’s primary function?”

**Daily Responsibilities**

As reflected in Table 4, a majority of respondents said they are able to manage their HR Rep responsibilities in line with their normal department duties. However, almost a quarter of the respondents said their HR Rep responsibilities take away from other responsibilities they have in their department. Only three people said they could even spend more time on HR Rep-related duties.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ability to manage departmental duties</th>
<th>Number of Respondents</th>
<th>Percent of Valid Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HR Rep responsibilities take away from departmental duties</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>23.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Able to manage all responsibilities</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>71.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Could spend more time on HR Rep duties</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>52</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4. Responses to Question 2, “Your role as an HR Rep should not prohibit you from meeting other obligations to your department – namely, carrying out normal job duties. In general, which of the following statements best describes your situation?”
It is worth mentioning here that a few respondents consider their HR Rep duties a part of their normal job functions. That is, they felt Question #2 implies that HR Rep responsibilities are separate from normal departmental duties. These people consider HR Rep responsibilities just another part of the normal duties they must perform for their department.

The survey participants were asked to estimate how much time per week they spend carrying out the duties of an HR Rep. Answers to this question are charted in Table 5. Fifteen people (27.8 percent) said they spend fewer than thirty minutes, and another fifteen people said they spend between thirty minutes and one hour. Seventeen HR Reps (31.5 percent) spend between one and two hours, and seven Reps (13.0 percent) spend more than two hours a week.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time spent on HR Rep duties</th>
<th>Number of Respondents</th>
<th>Percent of Valid Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than 30 minutes</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>27.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between 30 minutes and 1 hour</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>27.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between 1 and 2 hours</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>34.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 2 hours</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>13.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5. Responses to Question 4, “In a typical week, how much time do you spend carrying out the duties of an HR Rep?”

When HR Reps do not know the answer to an employee’s question, the first course of action for approximately half of the respondents is to consult the Human Resources web site. About one-third of respondents said they would consult a printed copy of the Hospital’s Policy and Procedures Manual, while one-tenth said they would contact someone in the Human Resource Department. Only one person said he or she
would consult with a supervisor and one other person said he or she would refer the employee somewhere else. Table 6 summarizes these results.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First course of action when HR Rep doesn’t know the answer</th>
<th>Number of Respondents</th>
<th>Percent of Valid Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Consult printed copy of Policies and Procedures Manual</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>34.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consult HR web site</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>50.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contact someone in HR department</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consult with supervisor</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refer employee elsewhere</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>55</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6. Responses to Question 3, “Oftentimes employees will ask question to which HR Reps do not know the answer. When this is the case, which of the following is most likely to be your first course of action?”

One of the main duties of an HR Rep is to provide their department’s employees with HR-related forms. As can be seen in Table 7, An overwhelming majority (76.4 percent), said they would “print a copy of the form obtained on the Internet”. Making a copy of a form in the Hospitals’ Policy and Procedures Manual is the first choice of 21.8 percent of respondents. Only one person said he or she would call the Human Resources Department and ask for the form to be sent, and nobody claimed they would refer the employee somewhere else.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>When employee needs an HR-related form</th>
<th>Number of Respondents</th>
<th>Percent of Valid Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Make a copy of form in Policies and Procedures Manual</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>21.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Print a copy of form obtained on the Internet</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>76.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Call the HR department and ask someone to send a form</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refer employee to someone else</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>55</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7. Responses to Question 11, “When an employee comes to you to obtain an HR-related form, which of the following actions are you most likely to take?”
Electronic and “Traditional” Sources of Information

Fifty three of fifty-five HR Reps said their department has its own printed copy of the Hospitals’ Policies and Procedures Manual. Furthermore, as shown in Table 8, eighty percent of respondents said they either “almost always” or “often” find what they’re looking for when using the Policies and Procedures Manual. Nine respondents (16.4 percent) said they “sometimes” find what they’re looking for, one person said he or she “rarely” finds what they look for, and one person says he or she does not refer to the manual.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experience using Policies and Procedures Manual</th>
<th>Number of Respondents</th>
<th>Percent of Valid Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Almost always find what I’m looking for</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>38.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Often find what I’m looking for</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>41.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes find what I’m looking for</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>16.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rarely find what I’m looking for</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do not refer to Manual</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>55</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 8. Responses to Question 6, “Which of the following best describes your experience when using the Policy and Procedures Manual?”

Fifty-four HR Reps claim to have access to a computer at work with an Internet connection. The same of number said they do not have to wait to use a computer while at work. Table 9 details the experiences of respondents who use the Internet to carry out their HR Rep duties. Over eighty percent said they “almost always” or “often” find what they’re looking for. While 14.8 percent said they “sometimes” find what they’re looking for, only 3.7 percent said they “do not use the Internet to help with my duties as an HR Rep”.

Table 9. Responses to Question 9, “Which of the following best describes your experience when using the Internet to help carry out your duties as an HR Rep?”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experience using the Internet to carry out HR Rep related duties</th>
<th>Number of Respondents</th>
<th>Percent of Valid Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Almost always find what I’m looking for</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Often find what I’m looking for</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>48.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes find what I’m looking for</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>14.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rarely find what I’m looking for</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do not use the Internet</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>55</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

With regard to general feelings about using the Internet for HR Rep-related issues, about two-thirds said they feel “pretty comfortable using the Internet”. Exactly twenty percent said they don’t mind using the Internet, but would “be more comfortable” with additional training. Ten percent said they “often get frustrated” trying to find what they want on the Internet, and another 5.5 percent said they rarely use the Internet to carry out their HR Rep duties. These answers are shown in Table 10.

Table 10. Responses to Question 10, “Generally speaking, how do you feel about using the Internet to help carry out your duties as an HR Rep?”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>General feeling about using the Internet as an HR Rep</th>
<th>Number of Respondents</th>
<th>Percent of Valid Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rarely use the Internet</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Often get frustrated</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t mind, but would be more comfortable with additional training</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>20.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Am pretty comfortable</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>63.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>55</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Training

Formal HR Rep training sessions have been attended by nearly three-fourths of the survey respondents. Of those who have attended training sessions, 53.7 percent rate the training sessions as “good”, 39.0 percent said it was “adequate”, and 7.3 percent said it was “excellent”. None of the respondents rated the training sessions either “not good” or “poor”. These results are shown in the following table.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rate the HR Rep training session</th>
<th>Number of Respondents</th>
<th>Percent of Valid Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Excellent</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>53.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adequate</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>39.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Good</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>41</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 11. Responses to Question 13, “Rarely do people learn everything in training sessions that they will be asked about on the job. With this in mind, how you rate the HR Rep training session(s) in terms of preparing you to carry out your responsibilities as an HR Rep?”

The Reps who have attended at least one formal training session were then asked how many times in the past twelve months they attended one of these sessions. The answers are detailed in Table 12. An overwhelming number of respondents had attended either one or no training sessions in the past year, six have attended “two”, and one person has attended “three”. None of the HR Reps reported attending more than three training sessions.
### Table 12. Responses to Question 14, “How many times in last 12 months have you attended an HR Rep training/update meeting – that is, any HR Rep presentation conducted by Human Resource Services?”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of training sessions attended in past 12 months</th>
<th>Number of Respondents</th>
<th>Percent of Valid Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>One</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>43.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>14.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>39.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>41</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All participants were asked how many times a year they thought an HR Rep *should* attend a formal training or update session. The answers are broken down in Table 13. About one-third said “one” and approximately another third said “two”. “Three” and “four” times a year each received 13.0 percent of responses, while 5.6 percent of respondents recommended “five or more” times a year.

### Table 13. Responses to Question 15, “How many times a year do you think HR Reps should attend training or update meetings?”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Times a year Reps should attend training session</th>
<th>Number of Respondents</th>
<th>Percent of Valid Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>One</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>35.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>13.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>13.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Five or more</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>54</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Additional Comments from HR Reps

Upon completing the last close-ended question, HR Reps were provided a blank space and asked to share their opinions about being an HR Rep and to suggest ideas for improving the HR Rep system. A few people noted isolated or specific issues, but
several people pointed out more general topics. A sample of these comments are included below, as well as a brief discussion on some of the more common themes.

Several HR Reps shared their feelings about using electronic forms of communication to carry out their duties. Someone in an information services/telecommunications area said: “Access to forms on the HR web site helps tremendously.” “I think e-mail messages are the best way to receive notification and/or changes which may occur”, wrote a Rep in a clerical/administrative office. Another Rep in information services/telecommunications agreed: “Updates via e-mail work best for me…” On the other hand, a Rep in a nursing/patient care department says, “The newsletter should be continued – it is most helpful”.

It should be pointed out that not every HR Rep is completely supportive of doing away with “traditional” forms of communication. Someone in nursing/patient care said: “hard copies should be sent to the HR Reps because [at] times the servers are down and you need a back up.” Someone else in nursing/patient care reiterated: “As nice as the intranet system is, total reliance on it is not possible. Computers in the Hospital are frequently down…down-times can last many hours thus affirming the continued need for hard copy.” (Incidentally, the researcher asked the Director of HR Services about this concern among HR Reps of servers being out of service. He mentioned that a couple of weeks prior to our discussion there were technical problems with the server that the Human Resources department uses for storing the web pages. This likely occurred at around the same time some HR Reps completed their questionnaires, and, therefore, was a legitimate concern. As of the date of my interview with the Director, the problem seemed to have been resolved.)

Several Reps talked about the HR Rep training sessions. A clerical/administrative HR Rep said: “I strongly believe that HR training should be available on a monthly basis. I’ve attended one (1) large HR presentation which was largely information overload.” A Rep in nursing/patient care noted: “When you are a ‘new’ HR Rep and attend training you haven’t experienced that many questions that will be asked of you later…if we met a couple times a year we could discuss any changes that have occurred.” Someone in a clerical/administrative area said: “…one time a year is hard to keep up with. HR Reps must be reminded…” And finally, a Rep in nursing/patient care stated: “it would be helpful to have [HR Rep] training within the first two weeks of starting”.

**HR Managers**

One-on-one discussions with the five HR Managers who were interviewed for this project allowed each to talk somewhat in depth about the HR Rep system. Specific questions were asked in order to gather information to compare with the HR Rep responses. The Managers were also invited to talk about issues and expectations which pertain to their particular areas (such as Recruitment or Employee Benefits) as well as HR Services as a whole. Information provided by two HR Managers who completed printed questionnaires is also included in the following discussion.
Demographics

Four out of the seven participants have been Managers in the Hospitals’ Human Resources Department between two and five years. One has been an HR Manager between five and ten years and two have served more than ten years. Responses are shown in Table 14.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years Served as HR Mgr</th>
<th>Number of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than 2 years</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between 2 and 5 years</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between 5 and 10 years</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 10 years</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 14. Question 1 (Manager Survey), “How long have you been a manager in the Human Resources Department of UNC Hospitals?”

The Managers were asked how long they thought the typical HR Rep had been an employee of UNC Hospitals (Question 16 on HR Rep Survey). Five said between one and five years, one said less than one year, and one said between five and ten years. It must be pointed out that the Managers were asked to estimate the average length of employment, whereas the Reps were asked to state how long they have been an employee. The Managers’ responses were likely affected by their knowledge of the Hospitals’ high turnover rate.

Daily Responsibilities

Without question, HR Managers are eager and willing to take advantage of Internet technology. As can be seen throughout this discussion, they wish to promote the Hospitals’ HR web site and increasingly want to move away from reliance on printed
materials. Six out of seven HR Managers would prefer that HR Reps consult the web site as their first course of action when they do not know an answer to an employee’s question.

Managers were asked how much time they thought Reps spent carrying out the duties of that role. The general consensus was “as much time as necessary”. In large departments – those with fifty or more employees - an HR Rep may spend more than half their time handling these responsibilities. On the other hand, there are Reps who work in departments with less than a dozen people. In these cases, a half an hour a week may be adequate to accomplish whatever is necessary to fulfill the role as an HR Rep. In light of this, it was difficult for Managers to suggest how much time an HR Rep should spend carrying out the duties of that role. Again, it depends on the size of the department and types of issues that need to be addressed.

Something that was easier for HR Managers to agree on was their preference as to the first action an HR Rep should take when an employee asks or an HR-related form. All seven said they would want the Rep to “print a copy of the form obtained on the Internet”.

Electronic and “Traditional” Sources of Information

As mentioned earlier, HR Managers are excited about how the Internet can improve their communication with HR Reps. For example, the Hospitals’ HR web site is where Reps will find the latest edition of the Policies and Procedures Manual.

Logistically, the printed version just takes longer to produce and distribute than the on-line version which can be updated almost instantly. Similarly, e-mail messages can
arrive days earlier than “traditional” inter-office memos which must be printed, copied, and then delivered.

Other indicators help shed light on why the HR Managers are willing to embrace new technologies. Only four out of seven thought that at least seventy-five percent of HR Reps could access a printed (non-electronic) copy of the Policies and Procedures Manual whenever necessary. These numbers are shown in Table 15 below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Thoughts on percentage of Reps that can access Policy and Procedures Manual</th>
<th>Number of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than 25%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between 25% to 50%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between 51% to 75%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 75%</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 15. Question 5 (Manager Survey), “What percentage of Reps do you think will answer ‘yes’ to the following question: Does your department have a printed copy of the Hospitals’ Policy and Procedures Manual that you can access whenever necessary?”

Six out of seven Managers think that at least seventy-five percent of HR Reps “have access to a computer at work that connects to the Internet”. One manager thought this statement held true for between only fifty-one and seventy-five percent of Reps. With regard to HR Reps having to “wait to get to use a computer with Internet access”, five HR Managers thought this was true for less than twenty-five percent of Reps, but one thought it was true for between twenty-six and fifty percent.

Question #10 on the HR Rep Survey asks: “Generally speaking, how do you feel about using the Internet to help carry out your duties as an HR Rep?” To draw a comparison, HR Managers were asked which answer they thought would “be the most popular answer given by HR Reps?”. The results are shown in Table 16, and it is worth
pointing out that five Managers thought Reps were most likely to agree with “I don’t mind using the Internet, but I would be more comfortable if I had more training”. In fact, in response to Question #10 on their survey, a large number (63.6%) of HR Reps said “I am pretty comfortable using the Internet”.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How Managers think Reps feel about using the Internet</th>
<th>Number of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rarely use the Internet</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Often get frustrated</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t mind, but would be more comfortable with additional training</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Am pretty comfortable</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>6</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 16. Responses to Question 8 (Manager Survey), “In response to the following question, which of the four choices do you think will be the most popular answer given by HR Reps: Generally speaking, how do you feel about using the Internet to help carry out your duties as an HR Rep?”

**Training**

HR Managers were asked what percentage of HR Reps they thought have attended at least one formal training session. Two Managers said more than seventy-five percent, four said between fifty-one percent and seventy-five percent, and one said between twenty-six percent and fifty percent. Their answers are shown in Table 17.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Managers thoughts on Reps that have attended at least one formal training session</th>
<th>Number of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than 25%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between 26% and 50%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between 51% and 75%</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 75%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>7</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 17. Responses to Question 10 (HR Manager), “What percentage of HR Reps do you think have attended at least one formal training session?”
Finally, HR Managers were asked how many times a year they would like HR Reps to attend a training session or update meeting. Two Managers said “one”, three said “two”, and two said “four”. Answers to questions regarding HR Rep training varied, much like Managers’ thoughts regarding how much time Reps should spend carrying out the duties of the role. Some insight to these topics is provided in the following “Additional Comments” section.

Additional Comments from HR Managers

The HR Managers discussed in some detail what they thought of the HR Rep system and what they would like to see in the near future. This section of the paper will present comments the Managers shared with the researcher during interviews.

Responsibilities of the Hospitals’ Employment Office include posting job vacancies, recruiting applicants, and hiring employees. Handling promotions and terminations, and advertising new positions are just some of things that lead the Employment Office to rely on help from HR Reps. The Employment Manager noted that substantial turnover among HR Reps results in the constant need to train new people for the same position. This, in turn, leads to many “repeat” questions. Making the most of the Hospitals’ HR web site is perhaps one way to reduce repetitive questions. The Employment Manager is very supportive of having the Policies and Procedures Manual available on-line because, among other things, “the web version is more up-to-date”. Moreover, having HR-related forms on the web is another way to ensure HR Reps have access to the latest versions of resources they need.
The Employment Manager supports an initial training session for new HR Reps, as well as follow-up sessions twice a year. The role is “important and complex” enough that Reps can benefit from attending periodic update sessions. She believes that HR Reps are aware of what is available to them on the Internet, but would like more training to be better able to navigate the Hospitals’ web site. Reps should not call the Employment Office for a form that is available on-line. Rather, they should download, copy and distribute as necessary. The Employment Manager sees Reps as being able to play the role of a recruiter – since they are aware of the information available on the web site, they can direct people to look at job openings, benefits, and other items related to employment.

The HR Communications Manager is very much involved with the HR Rep training session, as well as, naturally, ongoing communications with HR Reps. He has noticed that some training session groups are relatively web-savvy and are able to search and retrieve information via the Internet even before attending the meeting. Others, however, are true Internet novices, and getting them up to speed can take a lot of time. He has learned not to assume any level of computer knowledge when working with a new group.

The Communications Manager reiterated that information available on the web is the most updated version. This is true for the Policies and Procedures Manual as well as forms. He expects there will be more changes to the Manual this year than in the recent past, and he will encourage Reps to consult the on-line version first.

The Employee Benefits Office has certainly been affected by what can now be accomplished using Internet technologies. The number of phone calls and amount of
walk-in traffic the office receives has noticeably declined since many forms and pertinent information are now available on-line. The Benefits Manager is looking to put even more resources available on the HR web site. She thinks that the more HR Reps can handle, the more time each HR department will have to spend on strategic management issues. Reps know the employees of their department better than someone in HR would, and it follows that Reps are better suited to address their employees’ concerns.

The HR Services Specialist in Employee and Management Services is in charge of leading the HR Rep training sessions. He says it’s impossible to determine how much time an HR Rep should spend on the duties of this role. Generally, Reps in larger departments will need to spend more time than others simply because they will likely handle more hirings, terminations, promotions, etc. than smaller departments.

The HR Services Specialist says it is sufficient for a Rep to attend one training session per year. He claims other forms of communication (e-mails and newsletters, for example) are adequate for keeping Reps up-to-date with changes. He wants the HR Reps to be as “tech-savvy” as anyone in their department, and to gradually rely less on paper and more on electronic forms of information and data processing. He thinks most Reps are already technically proficient and adequately skilled to navigate the HR web site. In his opinion, this creates an interesting problem because these type of people are likely to be promoted, thus vacating their HR Rep duties. Oftentimes a temporary employee will take over in the position of an HR Rep, but he or she is not likely to remain in the position for long. Placing temporary employees in HR Rep positions may lead to the turnover issues that the Employment Manager alluded to in her discussion with the researcher.
The Director of HR Services is very supportive of moving HR Departments such as Employment, Records Management, and Employee Benefits away from operational activities and getting them into more strategic initiatives. He believes HR Reps should be given the “tool sets” to handle more of the day-to-day responsibilities associated with Human Resources. He expects Reps to be able to do more for themselves and the employees in their departments. Ideally, they will wear many hats including “facilitator, interfercer and communicator”. Admittedly, this will take work. He has found, for example, that Reps call and claim they cannot find appropriate information in the Policies and Procedures Manual. In the end, the information is usually in the Manual, but may be referred in slightly different terms than what the Rep or employee use. Furthermore, some Reps do not take the time to research issues on their own and call the Human Resources Department to give them an answer. These are the types of things that the HR Services Director wants to eliminate. He agrees with the other Managers that the Internet is “the only way to go”. By enabling HR Reps to do more, he believes HR departments will also be able to accomplish more.
CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

On the whole, it appears that HR Reps do have access to the resources that HR Managers would like them to. Nearly all Reps said they have access to a computer at work with Internet access. This is important because the Managers are continuously looking for ways to accomplish things on-line. What may be more important is that so many Reps report they actually use the Internet to carry out the responsibilities of the role. Four out of five say they “almost always” or “often” find what they’re looking for on the Internet. Three out of four say they “print a copy…obtained on the Internet” when an employee asks for an HR-related form. Even though about one out of ten Reps reported they “often get frustrated” when trying to find what they want on the Internet, most of the data collected in this study show that Reps are using the HR web site to accomplish their tasks. This suggests that the Human Resources Department has been successful in two key areas. First, they have adequately promoted using the Internet as a means for Reps to perform their duties. Second, they are presenting the information, instructions, forms, and other materials available on the web in a way that is useful and appropriate for HR Reps. That a majority of HR Reps (63.6 percent) feel “pretty comfortable using the Internet” should come as a pleasant surprise to the Managers who want to do even more on-line.
The topic of HR Rep training is an area which resulted in a variety of responses from both groups that participated in this study. Although nearly three-fourths of Reps have attended at least one formal training session, that leaves about one out of every four Reps who have not. Across the board, Reps and Managers agree that Reps should attend at least one training session per year – especially when they are new to the position. It is difficult to say how many times a year Reps should be asked to attend update sessions or meetings. “As many as necessary” may seem too much like an evasive answer, but even some Managers said that the number depended on things like how much of the Policies and Procedures Manual changes, or if there are new resources (electronic or otherwise) available to Reps.

Scheduling four sessions a year is one solution to this issue. It allows ample opportunity for Reps to attend a session that meets their needs. A downside may be that a new Rep can go up to three months without attending a formal training session. Perhaps “new” HR Rep sessions should be held more often, depending on the number of participants and interest. Administering a training session takes time and other resources, and the benefits must be weighed against the costs. Ultimately, if the Managers really want to make the most of the HR Rep system they should be willing to commit resources that provide Reps with the access to information and other tools needed to successfully carry out the role.

Training and communicating effectively with Reps are significant tasks for HR Managers. Something which caught the researcher’s attention was the number of Rep questionnaires which were returned or which solicited e-mails and phone calls. Several departments reported that the person the envelope was addressed to no longer served in
that role; indeed, some were no longer employees of the Hospitals. It will be imperative for the HR department to maintain a comprehensive list of HR Reps and their contact information. If Reps are going to serve the function of communicating with employees, HR Managers must make sure they can identify the people in these positions.

Several HR Reps mentioned that they did *not* favor completely eliminating printed copies of the resources they use. This seems to stem from their experiences of trying to view web pages, for example, when the server that stored the pages was down. In order to convince Reps that they can rely on the electronic resources available to them, HR Managers must be sure that these resources are readily accessible. In fact, if Reps find they cannot depend on electronic sources, they will probably avoid using them at all.

In recent years, communication specialists have advocated communicating *with* employees, not *to* them (Caudron 26). Too often, companies have been shown to be without a sufficient employee feedback program (Lilienthal 20). The HR Rep system at UNC Hospitals offers an excellent opportunity for HR Managers to make the most the organization’s internal communications. HR Reps, not unlike the middle managers of the Harcourt, Richerson, and Wattier study, are privy to information coming and going from all levels of their departments. Tapping their knowledge as a source of finding out what employees really think can prove invaluable. Moreover, encouraging them to take on the roles of communicator and facilitator in their departments will help ensure accurate information is being transmitted through the grapevine and networks.

Experts recommend that setting expectations and providing the necessary tools and training are two of the most important things managers can do to help employees become better communicators (Gorman 14). Many studies have shown a positive
correlation between communication and job satisfaction (Rodwell et al 280). This is worth noting because the Benefits Manager believes some HR Reps have left their positions because of the way they were treated - both by supervisors and employees in their department. The turnover in HR Reps hurts UNC Hospitals because, as mentioned earlier, the Reps are replaced with new people who have to be trained and, oftentimes, are temporary employees who will not be in that position long. HR Managers must pay attention to the quality of their internal communications systems. This can include, for example, making sure HR Reps are truly comfortable in their roles. The present study found that over twenty percent of Reps agreed with the statement “time I spend on HR Rep duties takes away from the other responsibilities I have to my department”. It is important for Reps to feel they can manage what is expected of them. Job stress can lead to a number of things, not the least of which is vacating one’s current position.

A final point worth mentioning is something that appears often in organizational communication literature. Friedman addresses it in the article she wrote on the IABC employee survey. Repeatedly, employees have said they would like to receive information from their supervisor. This may prove to be a challenge for HR Managers at the Hospitals. HR Reps are often not the supervisor of their department. Employees must be made aware of what information they should ask of their supervisor and what they should ask of their HR Rep. The lines may not always be clear, and this is likely to lead to confusion. Perhaps the Hospitals can conduct an employee survey to see if results show confusion among employees in this area. If so, it will be necessary to publicize the exact role that HR Reps are to play.
The present study was narrow in scope, but it provides a basis on which to build future research. To get the most out of these findings, the Hospitals may want to consider a survey of employees to see how they feel about the HR Rep system. What have their experiences been? Problems? Suggestions? Concerns? Ultimately, it is the entire Hospitals staff that HR Management serves. Employees’ opinions are crucial in deciding what, if any, changes need to be made.
APPENDIX A

COVER LETTER – FIRST MAILING
February 15, 2000

Dear Human Resource Representative:

The UNC Health Care System HR Department is continuously looking for ways to improve communications with employees. As your department's HR Rep, you play an important role in this process. You are invited to share your thoughts and experiences through the enclosed survey. The goal of this project is to determine if HR Reps have sufficient resources to effectively carry out their responsibilities.

Enclosed is a brief questionnaire that should not take more than 10 minutes to complete. In order to accurately determine the needs of HR Reps, it is important to take account of as many completed and returned questionnaires as possible. Responses will be kept confidential, so do not write your name on the questionnaire.

Completed questionnaires may be returned via inter-office mail in the enclosed self-addressed envelope. To ensure confidentiality, return only the questionnaire in the envelope. To avoid a follow-up request, return the enclosed pre-addressed postcard separately. This lets me know who has completed the questionnaire, without matching a name to a particular questionnaire. You may receive a summary of the results of this study by checking the appropriate box on the postcard.

This study is being conducted with the support of managers in Human Resource Services. Results will be shared with them, but they will not see the returned questionnaires. Insight gathered from this study will help them better serve your needs as an HR Rep.

I am happy to answer any questions you have regarding this study. My daytime number is (919) 932-6219, or you may e-mail me at kaufm@ils.unc.edu. As a student here at UNC, I can also meet with you on campus or at the main Hospital. Additional questions may be directed to my faculty advisor, Dr. Barbara B. Moran, at (919) 966-8067, or e-mail at moran@ils.unc.edu. You may address other questions or concerns to David A. Eckerman, Chair, UNC-CH Academic Affairs Institutional Review Board, CB# 4100, 201 Bynum Hall, (919) 962-7761, aa-irb@unc.edu.

Thank you in advance for your time and cooperation.

Sincerely,

Michael Kaufman
M.S., Information Science, May 2000
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
School of Information and Library Science
APPENDIX B

COVER LETTER – SECOND MAILING
The following is the text of the letter that accompanied the second mailing of the HR Rep Survey

March 3, 2000

Dear Human Resources Representative:

About two weeks ago I wrote you to inquire about your opinions and experiences in your role as Human Resource Representative. As of the date of this letter, I have not received a postcard confirming that you have completed and returned the questionnaire. If, in fact, you have returned a completed questionnaire, please disregard this letter.

To reiterate, this study is being done to gather information that will be useful in analyzing and planning improvements in communication processes with Hospitals employees. Your role as HR Rep is crucial in these matters, and your input is valuable. In order for the results of this study to be meaningful, it is important that as many HR Reps as possible complete and return the questionnaire.

For your convenience, I have enclosed another copy of the questionnaire and a self-addressed envelope for you to mail it back. The enclosed postcard should be mailed back separately from the questionnaire. This will allow me to confirm you have returned the questionnaire, but to ensure confidentiality, in no way will your name be matched with your answers. You are asked not to write your name on the questionnaire.

Your cooperation with this project is greatly appreciated. This questionnaire should only take about 10 minutes of your time. If you have any questions, please call me at (919) 932-6219, or e-mail at kaufm@ils.unc.edu. Additional questions may be directed to my faculty advisor, Dr. Barbara B. Moran, at (919) 962-8067, or e-mail at moran@ils.unc.edu. You may address other questions or concerns to David A. Eckerman, Chair, UNC-CH Academic Affairs Institutional Review Board, CB# 4100, 201 bynum Hall, (919) 962-7761, aa-irb@unc.edu.

Sincerely,

Michael Kaufman
M.S., Information Science, May 2000
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
School of Information and Library Science
APPENDIX C

SURVEY INSTRUMENT– HR REPRESENTATIVES
HR Rep Survey 2000

Thank you for completing this questionnaire. Please circle the number of the choice that best matches your answer to each question. To ensure anonymity, do not write your name on this questionnaire. Upon completion, please return the questionnaire by inter-office mail in the accompanying self-addressed envelope. Also, please mail back the enclosed postcard separately so I know you have completed the questionnaire and will not send a follow-up request.

**Q1 - How long have you served as an HR Rep at UNC Hospitals?**
1. Less than one year
2. Between one and two years
3. Between two and three years
4. More than three years

**Q2 - Your role as an HR Rep should not prohibit you from meeting other obligations to your department - namely, carrying out normal job duties. In general, which of the following statements best describes your situation?**
1. Time I spend on HR Rep duties takes away from the other responsibilities I have to my department
2. I am pretty well able to manage my HR Rep duties as well as the other responsibilities to my department
3. I could spend even more time handling the duties of an HR Rep and will still be able to fulfill my other responsibilities to my department

**Q3 - Oftentimes employees will ask questions to which HR Reps do not know the answer. When this is the case, which of the following is most likely to be your first course of action?**
2. Consult the Hospitals’ HR web site (including policy and procedure information)
3. Use Internet sources other than the Hospitals’ HR web site
4. Contact someone in the HR department for assistance
5. Consult with department supervisor or department head
6. Refer the employee to the someone else (including, perhaps, either the HR department or the employee’s supervisor)
Q4 – In a typical week, how much time do you spend carrying out the duties of an HR Rep?

(Note: “week”, in this case, is half your regular pay period hours. So, for someone who works 8:00 – 4:30, Monday to Friday (80 hours a pay period), this refers to a normal 40 hour work week.

1. Less than 30 minutes
2. Between 30 minutes and 1 hour
3. Between 1 and 2 hours
4. More than 2 hours

Q5 - Does your department have a printed copy of the Hospitals’ Policy and Procedures Manual that you can access whenever necessary?

1. Yes
2. No

Q6 - Which of the following best describes your experiences when using the Policy and Procedures Manual?

1. I almost always find the information I’m looking for
2. I often find the information I’m looking for
3. I sometimes find the information I’m looking for
4. I rarely find the information I’m looking for
5. I do not refer to the Policy and Procedures Manual

Q7 - Do you have access to a computer at work that connects to the Internet?

1. Yes (If yes, please continue with question Q8)
2. No (If no, please skip to question Q11)

Q8 – Some departments may require people to share work spaces, including computers. During your normal work hours, do you ever have to wait to get to use a computer with Internet access?

1. Yes
2. No

Q9 – Which of the following best describes your experience when using the Internet to help carry out your duties as an HR Rep?

1. I almost always find what I’m looking for
2. I often find what I’m looking for
3. I sometimes find what I’m looking for
4. I rarely find what I’m looking for
5. I do not use the Internet to help with my duties as an HR Rep
Q10 – Generally speaking, how do you feel about using the Internet to help carry out your duties as an HR Rep.?
1. I rarely use the Internet
2. I often get frustrated trying to find what I want on the Internet
3. I don’t mind using the Internet, but I would be more comfortable if I had more training
4. I am pretty comfortable using the Internet

Q11 - When an employee comes to you to obtain an HR-related form, which of the following actions are you most likely to take?
1. Make a copy from an example in the Hospitals’ Policy and Procedures Manual
2. Print a copy of the form obtained on the Internet
3. Call the HR department to ask them to send a copy of the form
4. Refer the employee to someone else (including, perhaps, either the HR department or the employee’s supervisor)

Q12 - For a variety of reasons, especially when people are in a new position, they may not have completed the recommended training sessions. At this time, have you attended at least one formal training session for HR Reps?
1. Yes (if yes, please continue with question Q13)
2. No (if no, please skip to question Q15)

Q13 – Rarely do people learn everything in training sessions that they will be asked about on the job. With this in mind, how would you rate the HR Rep training session(s) in terms of preparing you to carry out your responsibilities as an HR Rep?
1. Excellent
2. Good
3. Adequate
4. Not good
5. Poor

Q14 – How many times in the last 12 months have you attended an HR Rep training/update meeting - that is, any HR Rep presentation conducted by Human Resources Services?
Q15 - How many times a year do you think HR Reps should attend training or update meetings?

1. One  2. Two  3. Three  4. Four  5. Five or more

Q16 - Since your original hire date (excluding any breaks in service), how long have you been an employee of the Hospitals?

1. Less than one year
2. Between one and five years
3. Between five and 10 years
4. More than 10 years

Q17 - Which of the following best describes your department’s primary function?

1. Nursing/patient care
2. Housekeeping/environmental services
3. Clerical/administrative/professional
4. Information services/Telecommunications

Q18 - This questionnaire was purposely kept short. There may be things you weren’t asked about for which you would like to express your opinion. Please take this opportunity to share feelings or ideas regarding your experience as an HR Rep. Anything which further describes your role, or any ideas for improving the HR Rep system, is appropriate. Feel free to use the other side of this page or additional sheets if necessary. Thank you, again, for your time and consideration.

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
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APPENDIX D

SURVEY INSTRUMENT – HR MANAGERS
HR Managers Survey 2000

Thank you for completing this questionnaire. Please circle the number of the choice that best matches your answer to each question. Upon completion, please return the questionnaire by inter-office mail in the accompanying self-addressed envelope.

Name: _______________________________________________

Position: _____________________________________________

**Q1 - How long have you been a manager in the Human Resources Department of UNC Hospitals?**

1. Less than two years  
2. Between two and five years  
3. Between five and 10 years  
4. More than 10 years

**Q2 - Oftentimes employees will ask questions to which HR Reps do not know the answer. When this is the case, which of the following would you prefer be the HR Rep’s first course of action?**

2. Consult the Hospitals’ HR web site (including policy and procedure information)  
3. Use Internet sources other than the Hospitals’ HR web site  
4. Contact someone in the HR department for assistance  
5. Consult with department supervisor or department head  
6. Refer the employee to the someone else (including, perhaps, either the HR department or the employee’s supervisor)
Q3 – In a typical week, how much time do you think an HR Rep actually spends carrying out the duties of that role?

Note: “week”, in this case, is half your regular pay period hours. So, for someone who works 8:00 – 4:30, Monday to Friday (80 hours a pay period), this refers to a normal 40 hour work week.

1. Less than 30 minutes
2. Between 30 minutes and 1 hour
3. Between 1 and 2 hours
4. More than 2 hours

Q4 – In a typical week, how much time do you think an HR Rep should spend carrying out the duties of that role?

1. Less than 30 minutes
2. Between 30 minutes and 1 hour
3. Between 1 and 2 hours
4. More than 2 hours

Q5 – What percentage of HR Reps do you think will answer “yes” to the following question:

Does your department have a printed copy of the Hospitals’ Policy and Procedures Manual that you can access whenever necessary?

3. Less than 25%
4. 26% to 50%
5. 51% to 75%
6. More than 75%

Q6 – What percentage of HR Reps do you think have access to a computer at work that connects to the Internet?

3. Less than 25%
4. 26% to 50%
5. 51% to 75%
6. More than 75%
Q7 – How many HR Reps do you think will answer “yes” to the following question:

Some departments may require people to share work spaces, including computers. During your normal work hours, do you ever have to wait to get to use a computer with Internet access?

1. Less than 25%
2. 26% to 50%
3. 51% to 75%
4. More than 75%

Q8 – In response to the following question, which of the four choices do you think will be the most popular answer given by HR Reps:

Generally speaking, how do you feel about using the Internet to help carry out your duties as an HR Rep?

1. I rarely use the Internet
2. I often get frustrated trying to find what I want on the Internet
3. I don’t mind using the Internet, but I would be more comfortable if I had more training
4. I am pretty comfortable using the Internet

Q9 - When an employee asks for an HR-related form, which of the following actions would you prefer the HR Rep be most likely to take?

1. Make a copy from an example in the Hospitals’ Policy and Procedures Manual
2. Print a copy of the form obtained on the Internet
3. Call the HR department to ask them to send a copy of the form
4. Refer the employee to someone else (including, perhaps, either the HR department or the employee’s supervisor)

Q10 – What percentage of HR Reps do you think have attended at least one formal training session?

1. Less than 25%
2. 26% to 50%
3. 51% to 75%
4. More than 75%
Q11 – How many times per year would you like HR Reps to attend a training or update session/meeting?

Q12 – On average, how long do you think the typical HR Rep has been an employee of the Hospitals (excluding any breaks in service)?
1. Less than one year
2. Between one and five years
3. Between five and 10 years
4. More than 10 years

This questionnaire was purposely kept short. If there is anything you wish to express or elaborate on, please take this opportunity to do so. Feel free to use the other side of this page or additional sheets if necessary. Thank you, again, for your time and cooperation.
APPENDIX E

PRE-ADDRESSED POSTCARD
The following is an example of the return-addressed postcard that was included with the survey instrument materials sent to HR Reps.

☐ I have completed the HR Rep questionnaire

   HR Rep Name
   HR Rep Department Name
   HR Rep Department Number

☐ I would like to receive a copy of the results of this study
WORKS CITED


