

COMMUNICATING IN A NEW WAY

To foster trust and collaboration within a community spread out around the world, it is important to consider the connection between communication and transparency.

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EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION: INTRODUCTION

The conversation went something like this:

My spouse (in conversation with a colleague of mine): “Hey! If you see Greg in the office, can you ask him to call me? I can’t seem to reach him.”

My colleague: “Greg is in Texas today, isn’t he?”

My spouse: “Really?”

My colleague: “Let me check with [another colleague] ...Yes, he left this morning.”

My spouse: “That’s funny! That’s why I can’t reach him. He’ll respond when his plane lands.”

In case it is helpful, here are a few other important details:

When I left the house that morning (literally, as I was walking out the door), I said “Hey! I am leaving.” Then I waved and walked out the door.

At that precise moment, my spouse was on the phone with her doctoral supervisor.

Our kids were in the middle of their morning activities, which often include embracing the new day with as much energy as possible (running around with fervor as if sleep is an unwelcome companion that keeps them in shackles during the night).

Needless to say, this was not one of my best moments in effective communication!

The reality is that communicating well is a demanding task. It is hard for couples and families – people who, at least in our case, are around each other all of the time. It is even more difficult for organizations or groups of people who may not be in the same room (or even the same region or country). Within Kairos we have students, mentors, faculty, staff, therapists, board members, partner organizations, and collaborators spread out around the world. With nearly 4,000 people who speak languages ranging from Spanish or English to Mandarin or French and more, “demanding” may not be a strong enough word to describe the task of

communication.

Over the past few years, we have been developing an approach to communication that is effective given the global scope of Kairos. We have identified four goals that guide our communication efforts as well as a few practices that shape our day-to-day work. Next we are going to share how and why we approach communication within the context of Kairos. I'll start by highlighting the four goals we have for communication: Tell the Story, Be Transparent, Encourage Collaboration, and Build Trust.

Goal #1: Tell The Story

Much work has been done on how the human brain responds to story. We are learning that good stories cause the brain to release oxytocin (what Dr. Paul Zak calls the "moral molecule"), that stories impart not only information but also meaning, and that we are neurologically-wired (or genetically predisposed) to respond to stories. In my opinion, the most fascinating of these realities is that, as MacIntyre puts it in *After Virtue*, meaning is narrativial. I find this fascinating because it has been scientifically researched while also being something that has been a key philosophical conversation over the years. Basically, humans learn what something means by virtue of the story in which that thing is embedded. To put that in plain terms, if you want to make something meaningful, put it in a story. If you want to understand what someone else means, you must understand the story in which they have embedded it.

While the various components of a story are important, it is the wider narrative provided by the story as a whole that reveals the true meaning. Professor Snape when viewed through the wider story of Harry Potter is much different than Professor Snape when viewed through an early book in the series. The life, death, resurrection, and reign of Jesus described in the gospels carry meaning within each book but that meaning is enriched when the wider story of God's people and the promise to Abram in Genesis 12:1-3 can be seen.

Stories are powerful. When we share a story, we should be prepared for it to impact people in different ways. This is even more the case when the story we are telling is The Story of God.

Within Kairos, I think it is important for us to remember that our primary task as people who name Jesus as Lord is to "make disciples." Everything we do and say must be done in such a way that we are telling The Story of God – a story of redemption, reconciliation, and revival. Our job is to tell The Story, not simply our story. We are not the primary characters in our own drama. Instead, we are participants in the grand narrative of God making things "on Earth as it is in Heaven."

It is important to have this clarity because we need to constantly be reminded that our work is not about us – lest we begin thinking more highly of ourselves than we ought. Rather, we give glory to God and call attention to the good work God is doing in and through Kairos. Such clarity also helps us narrow the scope of what we

communicate.

Organizations, especially schools, tend to approach communication with the goal of sharing “all things in all ways”. Such an approach tends to dilute the message an organization shares because it is sharing thousands of little disconnected stories rather than “one story.” For example, we devote endless amounts of time to “marketing” specific programs or tracks to specific groups of people as we bow to the “god” of market segmentation (as if what we are doing as a school is selling degrees to a mass market).

Rather, to effectively make disciples and share The Story, we need to narrow the focus of what, when, and how we communicate. In doing so, we will find that sharing The Story requires us, as an organization, to define the organization’s narrative (story). To put that another way, we need to clarify the narrative of the organization and how it fits within The Story of God. Such clarity often means 1) communicating less frequently but more consistently, and 2) reducing the number of “storylines” (e.g., departments, programs, centers, offices, governance structures, strategic initiatives, hierarchy) in favor of a common theme (e.g., a particular platform, team, and/or strategic direction.). Everything we say (which in turn means everything we do), needs to be part of that common theme.

Goal #2: Be Transparent

Next, in the context of organizational communication we must be transparent. In practice, this means sharing information, ideas, challenges, and opportunities freely. In my experience, organizations tend toward keeping information siloed (a kind of “need-to-know” approach) or keeping it hidden. If we are clear on our purpose (The Story) and common theme (e.g., a particular platform, team, and/or strategic direction), then being transparent should be simple. Everyone needs to have access to the same information at the same time and in the same way. Obviously, there are situations when information cannot be shared due to laws and regulations (e.g., HIPPA, FERPA, etc.), but those laws do not impact the majority of institutional communication. We tend to hide things like budgets and financial information, challenges we may be facing, or new information we have learned that we think might give us a “competitive advantage.” Instead, we must be transparent. A lack of transparency erodes trust and hinders collaboration.

Goal #3: Encourage Collaboration

Just as a lack of transparency hinders collaboration, being transparent is one way to encourage it. However, transparency alone is not enough to encourage collaboration. Our practices of communication must encourage everyone within an organization to work together. To achieve this goal, we need to consider the importance of alignment (how well everything we do is mutually reinforcing in the same direction) and “cross-knowledge-ability” (how much each person knows about the organization as a whole). Our day-to-day practices can foster alignment and cross-knowledge-ability or they can reinforce opaque and siloed communication. This means we need to think about how and why we meet, the language we use to describe

our work, and how our work is defined, prioritized, and accomplished within the organization as a whole.

Goal #4: Build Trust

Our prayer is that our efforts in communication build trust within Kairos and with those God places in our care. We believe that trust is built when 1) all have the same information, 2) all understand the same story, and 3) all are working together while pulling in the same direction. At the same time, however, it takes time to build trust. Therefore, we invite faculty, staff, students, therapists, and mentors (i.e., all participants) in Kairos to extend trust before it is earned. Yes, what, when, and how we communicate will build or erode trust, but we must start by extending trust. Transparency, collaboration, and a focus on The Story will help us strengthen the foundation of trust that must exist in any healthy community of people.

We will now look more closely at a few ways in which we strive to achieve these goals within Kairos. As the story I shared at the beginning will show, however, all of us are a work in progress. My prayer is that leaning into the practices will help us achieve these goals! [Back to top](#).

EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION: TELLING THE STORY

Over the next few sections, we are going to look more deeply at a few of the practices that help us pursue those goals.

The first goal we listed was “Tell The Story.” We described that goal as an opportunity to ensure our focus is always where it should be – on telling The Story of God and God’s work of reconciliation as we make disciples. To do this well, as an organization, we need to narrow the focus of what, when, and how we communicate. In our experience, we have found at least two practices help us lean into the goal of telling The Story: 1) God-Focused Stories and 2) Unified Messaging.

God-Focused Stories

Have you ever received a fundraising letter that says something like this?

“Give us money for this exciting thing we are doing (e.g., feeding hungry people, providing shoes, educating the

next generation of church leaders, etc.). Isn't what we did for James a great story? Your gift makes it possible for these things to happen. Without your money, we cannot do this exciting thing. A gift of \$100, will put food on the table for people like James."

Or a marketing piece like this?

"Let me tell you about James! He is a church planter (or missionary/pastor/computer programmer/leader) who is doing amazing things. His church has doubled in size, and people are being baptized every Sunday. You should participate in our programs so that you can do amazing things like James!"

Obviously, helping people receive food, clothing, education, protection, services, etc. is very important. As is leading well, baptizing new believers, and thriving in one's vocation. We are not trying to belittle the importance of such things or the idea that fundraising or marketing is inherently bad. We are, however, trying to call attention to where the focus is often being placed in such communication – on us, on what we do, and on an idea that money is our provider.

As organizations, we tend to talk about the "great things" we are doing for God. Telling The Story requires us to talk about what God is doing – to put the focus on God. Great things may be happening but only because God is doing such things as followers of Jesus follow him on mission. We know this may seem like semantics but our language matters. All communication needs to find its place behind the proclamation of the gospel – the Good News of the Kingdom of God.

In practice, this means our communication shares biblical truth, invites people into a deeper relationship with Jesus, and calls attention to where we see the Kingdom breaking forth. For example, instead of crafting fundraising messaging around the goal of growing gifts by asking people for "their" money, as if they own anything apart from God, it can be reoriented toward growing givers by inviting them to a closer walk with Jesus. That means fundraising messaging becomes more about discipleship than sales. More about inviting people to participate in God's work by being faithful stewards of God's resources. Another example could be writing marketing messages about what God is doing in and through a community of people and inviting others to join God in that work. The list could go on but the point is that our words matter because they define the focus of our communication. Yes, we are participating in God's story in ways that are unique to Kairos, and we are welcome to describe how we are participating. But our focus needs to always be on God and what God is doing in the world.

Unified Messaging

As you can imagine, placing our focus on God means we need to think differently about what, when, and how we communicate. As a global organization, this kind of systemic and integrated thinking can become quite cumbersome in terms of day-to-day practices. With nearly 4,000 people around the world following Jesus on mission as they journey with Kairos, it seems obvious to say that a lot is going on. This reality begs the

question, “How do we communicate well while staying focused on sharing God’s story?”

One answer to that question is unified messaging and it is the practice of narrowing the focus of what, when, and how we communicate. Rather than creating “special” reports or stories or messages for particular groups of people (e.g., one report for the board, a different one for faculty, still another for givers, and more for students or partners), the “what” is a single stream of communication that is open and accessible to everyone in the community. In simple terms, the “what” we are communicating is the same. It is one message and one story with the purpose of inviting people into a closer walk with Jesus.

When we communicate, then, it becomes more about rhythm than reaction. If communication is, first and foremost, about inviting people into a closer walk with Jesus by telling The Story of God, then the rhythm of communication becomes somewhat of a spiritual discipline. It begins to form and shape the ways in which we interact with each other. In Kairos, our rhythm includes weekly blog posts, weekly mentor meetings, bi-weekly Kairos Notes, bi-weekly counseling services team meetings, monthly Kairos Updates, monthly operational meetings, bi-monthly Kairos Sessions, and open board meetings five times per year. That rhythm guides everything we do. By funneling all communication through this rhythm, we narrow the focus of when we communicate and ensure that what we communicate is consistently telling “one message and one story with the purpose of inviting people into a closer walk with Jesus.”

Finally, how we communicate is governed by the concept of “create-once-publish-everywhere.” That concept invites us to communicate through several mediums (email, face-to-face meetings, videos, social media, mail, etc.) without crafting a new message for each one. In doing so, the work of communication can be streamlined, thereby giving more time and attention to the actual message we are sharing.

When we embrace the idea that organizational communication is not about us but rather about the amazing things God is doing, we have the opportunity to invite people into a closer walk with Jesus so that they, like we, can participate in those amazing things. By narrowing the focus of what, when, and how we communicate, we can spend less time on the mechanics of communication thereby freeing time to focus on the message we are sharing. [Back to top.](#)

EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION: BE TRANSPARENT – INTRO

Communicating well is hard, especially in the context of a global movement like Kairos. With students, faculty, staff, board members, therapists, mentors, and partner organizations spread out around the world, it could be easy for the work of communication to be all consuming. Organizations often address this challenge by

attempting to increase the amount of communication. Even then, it seems there is always something that should have been communicated and wasn't, someone that should have been included in a conversation and wasn't, or some piece of information that was unintentionally excluded from a report.

Historically, at least in the schools I have served in or consulted with, when schools attempt to "communicate well" by simply increasing the amount of communication, these communication mishaps tend to eat away at trust within the organization and the impact compounds over time. Eventually, trust erodes to the point that people assume not everything is being shared. They assume that there is a "super special" group of "insiders" who have all of the information and, in order to maintain their power, that group intentionally withholds information.

This tendency and the resulting erosion of trust make sense. When "communicating well" is equated with "communicating everything," the only way forward is to continually increase the amount of communication. That is, we tend to just say more things without reflecting on what we are saying and when we are saying it.

A failure to think critically about the "what" and "when" of communication results in an organizational culture wherein trust is built not by transparency and shared practices but by a belief that everything is being communicated – which is fundamentally impossible. There will always be more that could be said.

Within Kairos, strive to think more deeply about the "what" and "when" of communication because those aspects can have a profound impact on trust. It starts with a shared commitment to transparency and truth-telling rather than a commitment to volume.

Why Transparency?

You may ask, "Why is transparency so important?" or "Doesn't transparency mean sharing everything?" Those are great questions. Let me begin by addressing the idea that "sharing everything" is not the same as being transparent.

When organizations have a goal to share everything, they tend to mean sharing more and more information about rather innocuous activities. They don't actually mean sharing everything. For example, they might say, "We are obviously not going to share the important financial information and if we do it needs to be edited in order to tell a certain story." or "We can't share the bad news about our programs or enrollment." The list goes on. Transparency is not the same thing as sharing everything because organizations don't share everything – especially when they think it will have a negative impact.

Transparency is important because it is a commitment to sharing the good, the bad, and the ugly in a consistent, predictable, and equally accessible way.

Next, we will look more deeply at all of these concepts. We will talk about why transparency is so difficult, why it is important, and the various practices we follow in order to be transparent in our communication within Kairos. [Back to top](#).

EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION: WHY IS TRANSPARENCY SO DIFFICULT?

Let's begin a deeper look at that concept by reflecting a bit on why transparency is so difficult for organizations – particularly institutions of higher education in the modern western context. Kairos is striving to be a fresh expression of how theological education can be a movement, not an institution, which means it is important for us to consider how we overcome the hurdles that so often get in the way of transparent communication. Movements flourish when information is shared freely and openly. To be frank, that has not been the forte of modern western higher education. Instead, we have tended to be opaque in our communication.

But why?

We believe there are at least three reasons it has been (and continues to be) difficult to practice transparent communication. Obviously, there may be more, and there may be ones that are more relevant to particular contexts. The three we share here are those that have been the most prevalent in conversations with seminary administrators, faculty, and board members over the past 15 years. They are: 1) A focus on institutional existence, 2) North American definitions of blessing, and 3) A broken relationship with money.

A Focus on Institutional Existence

Most seminaries trace their founding to the need for “trained pastors” within their particular communities of faith. The wording often varies from situation to situation and focuses on more specific pastoral vocations or sometimes even the formation of “lay leaders.” The point is that the purpose for their founding was to address a communal need.

Over time, institutionalization sets in as structures and processes are developed and become codified. As the institution ages, it accumulates financial and human resources, invests in physical property, develops additional programs, etc., as the stated purpose remains the same (often with a little nuance here and there).

But the work of what Willie Jennings calls “institution building” begins to become the center of attention and energies rather than attention to mission. To put that more bluntly, we shift into a mindset that is focused on our continued existence as an institution as the primary goal. We may wrap this reality in the idea that these structures and these processes are so valuable and unique to fulfilling our vision that they simply must be preserved. If we are honest with ourselves, what has actually occurred is a shift to a new goal: institutional existence. The temptation of shifting focus from the institution serving the mission to the mission serving the institution is subtle but all too real.

When this happens, when we place our ongoing existence as an institution above our commitment to the Great Commission or our participation in The Story, transparency becomes difficult. We begin to run communication through an “institutional risk” filter that attends more to our continued existence than to mission. We think things like, “We can’t say something negative about the institution or people will stop giving or new students will stop enrolling.” Our “institutional risk” filter has more to do with money than mission, and we begin to fear transparency.

North American Definitions of Blessing

Our fear of saying something negative about the school is compounded by the fact that we live in a culture where “blessing” means “more of what I think I need.” This is an outgrowth of our cultural conditioning that tells us more is better. Because “more is better” it’s hard for us to talk about things not growing. In the context of a school, we have to talk about more students, more donors, more programs, more buildings, more provision. Tony Blair, President of Evangelical Seminary, refers to this as the “bigger, better, faster,” mentality and it is pervasive. It informs our thinking around leadership (e.g., how do we produce leaders who can produce more), strategy (e.g., how do we plan to grow our numbers), programs (e.g., how do we design programs that attract and/or impact more students), and much more. When it comes to communication, this mentality leads us to only share good news.

In this culture, it is easy to talk about things that are “growing” because that is what we think people like to hear. However, nothing is ever perfect. If we only share “good” information, then we are not being transparent. Once again, we tend to be afraid of sharing information that is “not good” because of the negative impact it might have on how people see us.

This worrying about how people see us tends to be a common source of institutions’ struggles with transparency. We often think we must keep up appearances. In that effort, we paint a picture of the institution we want people to see rather than the institution as it is. Rather than saying “I don’t know” or “we failed” or “that program/process is broken and we are sorry,” we try as hard as possible to describe reality in a way that presents a particular image – one of growth and increase, as we are silent about our struggles, smaller numbers, and/or scope. Maintaining this image helps us keep face with givers, students, alumni, and

supporters – the people who give the money or refer the students (or at least we think it does). Once again, our failure to be transparent is rooted in our fear of what would happen if people knew the whole story.

A Broken Relationship with Money

That brings us to the third reason we struggle to be transparent – and perhaps the core reason institutions tend to be opaque in our communication. We struggle with transparency because we have a broken relationship with money.

It is common to hear phrases like “If we have \$100,000, then we could...” or “If enrollment grew by 50 students, then our tuition revenue could pay for...” or even “Money makes the world go ‘round.” Language is important, and phrases like these too often reveal our belief that money is what makes ministry happen; that money sustains us.

It is hard to be transparent in our communication if we are worried about how “bad news” will impact the “bottom line” (especially when the “bottom line” is having enough money to ensure institutional existence). But too much focus on the “bottom line” is, at its core, a lack of trust in God which creates a lack of truthfulness in its wake.

To be transparent in our communication as an institution, we must securely place our trust in God. As we trust that God is at work, we are invited to engage in faithful activities which align with that work. Faithfulness will always result in fruitfulness – we just might be surprised by the kind of fruit it produces. Placing our trust in God does not mean trusting that God will ensure we will get the results we want, such as that the institution will always exist, or even that it will grow. Trusting God is risky, and it makes us vulnerable.

God is our sustainer, yes, but God is not a magic genie that grants us whatever we wish for. God provides the resources to do the things God is inviting us to do. When there is a misalignment between what we feel called to do and the resources God has provided, the issue is with our discernment, not God’s provision.

We have work to do, and money is connected to that work, but money is not what sustains us. Money is something we steward. It is not something in which we place our trust. If Kairos fails to have a right relationship with financial resources, then Kairos will always struggle to be transparent.

We talk about stewarding followers of Jesus who flourish in their vocations for the sake of the world. That means our work is not about us. It is about what God is doing in and through our work for the sake of others. To be transparent in our communication, we must first, wholeheartedly, trust that God is our provider and that

our primary mission is to participate in what God is doing – even if that means we put our institution at risk. [Back to top.](#)

EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION: WHY IS TRANSPARENCY IMPORTANT?

Let's continue our conversation about transparency by looking at why it is important! Last time, we shared a bit about why communication is so difficult by highlighting the fact that organizations tend to focus on institutional existence, their cultural understanding of blessing muddies the waters, and they often have a broken relationship with money.

If transparency is so difficult and if being transparent may not always result in the “blessing” we want for a school, then why put so much emphasis on transparent communication?

We believe there are at least three reasons: 1) We see it in Scripture, 2) It builds trust, and 3) It fosters organizational alignment.

We See It in Scripture

We see several passages in Scripture where Jesus invites those around him to be transparent in their communication. Paul does the same in his letters. One of the best examples, in our opinion, is Acts 15. We don't often see this passage through the lens of transparent communication, but let's take a closer look. The conversation, as you may recall, sparked the question of circumcision. The proverbial “minutes” of the meeting are recorded in Acts 15. In the context of transparent communication, there are two verses that stand out.

First, in verse 12, we read that “the whole assembly became silent...,” and then in verse 22, we read that “...the apostles and elders, with the whole church, decided...”

While we don't know exactly how many people were “in the room” so to speak, but we do know that the conversation was in front of the assembly and that the whole church was part of the decision-making process. To put it another way, it was an “open board meeting.” The topic at hand was contentious, even scandalous. And yet, the Jerusalem church chose to be open in its discussions. Perhaps we could do the same?

It Builds Trust

Trust is a key ingredient for organizational effectiveness. When we are truthful in our communication and refrain from being opaque, the members of the community have a shared awareness of what is happening and how the organization is discerning its next steps. It is important to note that building trust will take time, which means transparent communication must be practiced consistently over a long period of time. This is especially true when a community welcomes new people on a relatively regular basis. Within Kairos, we welcome new students and mentors every month. We also welcome new partners on a regular basis. Over the past two years, we have even welcomed new full-time staff and faculty. That's a lot of new names, faces, stories, and relationships!

The early church was also welcoming new people on a regular basis. Its practice of transparency built trust across a wide range of people groups and geographic locations – enough trust that Paul could eventually conduct a collection for the Jerusalem church.

It Fosters Organizational Alignment

Trust is an important foundation for organizational effectiveness. Without it, any community will struggle to work well together. However, without alignment, trust becomes less effective. Trust is important, but if the members of an organization are not “pulling the rope in the same direction,” so to speak, the organization will become stagnant. It will cease to be lively, active, and discerning. Transparency fosters organizational alignment because it empowers members of the organization to become more aware of everything that is going on. When everyone can access the same information, people can gain a broader and deeper understanding of what is happening – even in areas where they don't spend most of their time and energy.

Of course, with the volume of information that is available to be shared, how does a movement like Kairos keep from overwhelming people with transparent communication? To put it another way, how do we keep our commitment to transparency from becoming a commitment to bombarding people with a flood of content that is impossible to digest?

When our communication devolves into a belief that “sharing everything” is the same as “being transparent,” we run the risk of eroding trust (because people miss important pieces of information and, therefore, begin to feel as though things are being hidden) or of enabling misalignment (because there is simply too much information to digest so people just ignore what is being said).

PRACTICES OF TRANSPARENT COMMUNICATION, PART 1

Our current solution to the tension between “sharing everything” and “being transparent” is to engage in five specific practices of transparent communication. They are: Predictable Rhythms, Clear Data, Equal Access, Open Meetings, and Asking Questions/Sharing Concerns. Let’s take a closer look at each of these five practices of transparent communication. Let’s begin by talking about Predictable Rhythms, Clear Data, and Equal Access.

Predictable Rhythms

The first thing we do is funnel all communication into a predictable rhythm. For example, rather than sending several emails to students at various times whenever we feel like something needs to be shared, we limit our communication to one email each month. By sending one email each month, students are more likely to open (e.g., our open rate for that email is nearly twice the industry average) and read it. This approach also requires us to be more thoughtful about when and how we engage in various projects or activities. With increased thoughtfulness comes increased transparency because we are able to share information more explicitly (i.e., we are not being reactive but proactive in our communication).

We utilize predictable rhythms in everything we do. Every week, we share a new blog post. These posts are automatically shared with everyone in the Kairos community. Every two weeks, we share the Kairos Notes with all staff, faculty, therapists, and board members. The key is to funnel all communication into these rhythms. Using rhythms invites us to think more deeply about what we are doing and where we are going as an organization (i.e., it fosters alignment) while also ensuring that nothing is missed (i.e., it builds trust). In addition to the rhythms for our emails, we have predictable rhythms for team meetings, conversations with new students and mentors, and board meetings (which are open for any staff, faculty, therapists, and board members to attend).

Clear Data

Sharing information in a predictable rhythm is only helpful if the information can be understood. This is especially true when sharing quantitative data. In the context of Kairos, we are required to submit reports to various accreditors, the Canadian and U.S. governments, denominations, auditors, and others. We steward financial and physical resources and manage thousands of sessions in our counseling and therapy centers. All of this produces a significant amount of quantitative data. With our commitment to transparency, it is important that the board, faculty, staff, and therapists have access to this data by sharing it in an easily digestible format. A “share everything” approach could result in endless reports that are shared with everyone

even though most people won't read them and/or wouldn't know where to start (i.e., reading an audit cover-to-cover has the tendency to be one of the most boring activities on planet earth – and that is assuming the reader knows what to look for!). Therein lies the challenge: How to be transparent with all of this data without overwhelming or confusing people in the process.

Our solution to this challenge is what we call a monthly dashboard report. Each month our goal is to share a single report that shares the data our community has identified as those most important to track (e.g., debt, cash, operating margin, counseling sessions, enrollment, student engagement, etc.). We gather this information from a plethora of sources within the organization and consolidate it into a one-page document that can be shared via email. The dashboard provides a snapshot of the important data within Kairos. It is meant to be clear, consistent, and transparent. We share the same information every time even if it doesn't seem "good" or like something that should be "public" information. In fact, when other schools have seen this dashboard in one of the presentations we have been invited to give at various conferences, the reaction is usually something like, "You share all of that information? Even the financial data?" It seems our dashboard tends to be clearer and more transparent than the norm.

Equal Access

The practices of predictable rhythms and clear data are only helpful if they are supported by the practice of equal access. Through this practice, we ensure all staff, faculty, therapists, and board members have equal access to all information. For example, if someone wants to see a full audit report, they are welcome to do so. If a faculty member wants to attend a board meeting, she is welcome to do so. In addition to making all information available, the practice of equal access also means that we refrain from developing "special" reports for specific groups of people. For example, we do not create one report for the board and a different one for staff members. Everyone sees the same dashboard and gets the same emails. By providing equal access to information that is shared in a predictable rhythm, everyone can rest assured nothing is being hidden from view. [Back to top.](#)

PRACTICES OF TRANSPARENT COMMUNICATION, PART 2

After discussing Predictable Rhythms, Clear Data, and Equal Access, we will now discuss the last two practices, Open Meetings and Asking Questions/Sharing Concerns, in more detail.

Open Meetings

Equal access, clear data, and predictable rhythms are supported by the practice of open meetings. That is to say that every meeting that includes a significant number of people and/or is a standing meeting of some sort is open to anyone. In our experience, having open meetings does not mean everyone joins every meeting (no one has that much free time). It does mean, however, that nothing is hidden from view and that we encourage people to meet with others who are doing different work within the community (i.e., faculty to be in meetings with staff, board members to interact with therapists, and so on). By encouraging meetings with people engaging in various roles in the organization and opening them to others, the community as a whole learns more about what is happening, develops a deeper understanding of how everything works together, and experiences the benefits of the “integrative system.” Open meetings also help everyone learn and engage in the practice of asking questions/sharing concerns.

Asking Questions/Sharing Concerns

Even with a strong commitment to predictable rhythms, clear data, equal access, and open meetings, the reality is that sometimes information is not shared as timely as it could be. We are human after all. Sometimes an update is not shared early enough or a change occurs but the details are not shared immediately, or someone has a question or is concerned about something but didn’t attend a meeting. This is where the final practice comes into play. We ask questions “without ceasing” and share concerns openly.

That is to say that everyone – students, mentors, faculty, staff, therapists, board members – is expected, even encouraged, to ask questions and share concerns. If something doesn’t make sense, or if information in an email seems out of place, or if someone just wants to know more about a particular topic, the best step is to ask. For students and mentors, the first step is to ask by sending an email to info@sfseminary.edu. When staff, therapists, faculty, and board members have questions, they can ask them to any number of people. The key is that no question or concern is off limits, and everyone is welcome to ask at any time – to anyone. That last part is important. There is not communication hierarchy. That is to say that staff don’t have to “work through supervisors,” and students don’t have to “work through advisors.” Anyone can talk directly with anyone.

This is an important practice not only because it invites everyone to ask questions/share concerns regarding the activity of the organization as a whole but also because it fosters healthy conversation. Organizational communication and relational dynamics within organizations can be stifled by an unwillingness to ask questions or share concerns freely. For example, if someone is “afraid” to ask a question or share a concern in any meeting or with anyone (i.e., they feel as though the question can’t be asked if “the president” is in the room or they feel more open to share if certain types of people are in the room), that could indicate the organization is failing to create a culture of trust and/or is growing quickly and not enough time has passed to build trust. In either situation, the best way for trust to be built is through the experience of asking questions

and sharing concerns openly. As people see positive and non-threatening examples of this practice, they will become more comfortable doing the same. If people are not experiencing non-threatening responses to their questions/concerns (and therefore trust is not being built), the organization has much more work to do! Ironically, it can only do that work if the community shares its questions and concerns!

The practice of asking questions and sharing concerns may be the most important because of the impact it has on “cross-knowledgeability” and relationships. Transparent communication is vital to the effectiveness of any movement or community of people. Asking questions and sharing concerns plays an important role in that work. As such, within Kairos, we encourage people to give voice to their questions and/or concerns in the presence of the community rather than in “special” meetings reserved for “certain” people.

Taken together, these five practices (Predictable Rhythms, Clear Data, Equal Access, Open Meetings, and Asking Questions/Sharing Concern) help create an atmosphere of transparent and effective communication. With such an atmosphere in place, Kairos is able to be more nimble as it discerns where God is inviting us to go next. It also empowers the community to operate in ways that push against, or at least challenge, commonly held assumptions about how corporations or schools should function. [Back to top.](#)
