

Counselling Strategies for Handling Inappropriate Communication Patterns among Workers in the Nigerian Tertiary Institutions

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ABSTRACT

Communication is a daily routine for every man irrespective of age, religion, status, beliefs and opinion. It involves the transmission of message(s) from one person to another or group of people. Meaningful and purposeful communication can be realized through verbal (use of words, vocabulary, tone and vocalization) and non-verbal cues (physical environment, movement and body position and paralanguage). Communication is found to be very important in aiding good interpersonal relationship among academic and non-academic staff in Nigerian tertiary institutions. Thus, inappropriate communication patterns will have serious consequences in their relationships. In this paper therefore, the researcher posits that one counseling theory, Rational Emotive Behavioral Therapy (REBT) when employed can assist Academic and Non-Academic Staff in handling inappropriate communication pattern thereby strengthening their good interpersonal relationships. The researcher therefore made certain recommendations based on the findings in handling Inappropriate Communication Patterns among Academic and Non-Academics Staff workers in Nigerian Tertiary Institutions.

INTRODUCTION

Communication is a significant tool used in all daily routine to pilot, persuade, share and network among human beings, and it can be described as a master plan used to achieve goals and objects (Witzany & Madi, 2009; Oyinloye, 2006). Communication is the process by which meaningful information is transmitted from one person to another or a group and meaningless information cannot be regarded as effective communication, since it has no significant meaning attached with it (Mortensen, 1992). The process of communicating one's feelings, beliefs, thoughts, vision and mission to others, in order to benefit from the interaction, is said to be interpersonal effective communication (Ipaye, 1995; Spielgal, 1999). According to Warwick, Girason, Goodnew, Schlzine and Wu (2004), communication is the process by which a person shares information and opinion using words and through gestures, cues, signals and symbols. Hybels and Weavers (2001), Olagunju and Eweniyi (2002) also buttressed this assertion. Idowu and Esere (2007) pointed out various reasons why individuals communicate with one another and without this, there would have been less development in the world. Firstly, individuals communicate to learn more about others and to discover who they are. In Nigerian Tertiary Institutions,

both the academic and non-academic staff should understand that every individual has his/her own worth, but the fact still remains that the issue of personality and ranking should be observed during their interpersonal relationships. Secondly, individuals communicate to learn about the world around us. Also, individuals communicate to share our world with others, it is important for academic colleagues to share their feelings with one another and academic staff should be able to share their feelings either suitable (success, happiness, gladness) or unsuitable (sorrows, pains, failures) experiences, and by these workers will assist and bear their burden together. Wendel (1996) establishes the fact that communication can be used to know each person's flaws and possible solutions in times of predicaments. Knapp (1992), Mehrabian and Feriss (1967) explain that human communicate to persuade or influence others. Reasonable and persuasive words can be used to encourage and build confidence among the junior staff to do what they are not capable of doing.

Major types of Communication: The two major communication patterns are verbal and non-verbal (Anderson, 2007). Idowu and Esere (2007) opined that verbal communication is the used of words, vocabulary, numbers and symbols, and is organized in sentences using language. These can be classified into syntactics, semantics and pragmatics. Syntactic is the relationship between words, semantics is the relationship between a word and what the object really stand for. Pragmatic is the agreement between words and behaviours. Academic and non-academic staff used verbal communication to enjoy their natural relationships.

- (i) Using positive words to challenge limiting beliefs and this is achieved when they establish and phrase their words in clear and obvious comprehension in order not to create negative feelings or emotions for themselves.
- (ii) Asking of wrong question or rhetorical expression in order not to create negative feelings or emotions for themselves.

The non-verbal communication is the type of communication without words, but through body language (Knapp and Hill, 2007) Non- verbal communication can be classified into three namely: physical environment, body position and paralanguage.

Physical Environment, according to Knapp and Hall (2007), include furniture, architectural design and interior decoration; Such as colour, temperatures, noise, lighting conditions and music normally affect workers' behaviours during interaction. Physical environment is sub-divided into proxemics and chronemics. Proxemics is the study of how individual use and understand their space around them. The interpretation of message determined by the space between the sender and receiver and this is different from one culture to another (Hall,1963). Also, as the originator of proxemics in non-verbal communication. He classified proxemics space into four different classes namely; intimate, social, personal and public. Hargies & Dickson (2004) also identified four proxemics which include: primary, secondary, public and interaction territories. Primary Territory is the area that belongs to a particular person only, and such an individual is associated with it. A faculty Officer with high cadre who will never entertain or allow other junior workers to enter his office, talk of expressing their opinions or views except permission is sought prior to the time and individual differences among workers can easily cause inappropriate

communication during conversation and interaction. Secondary Territory is like the primary territory, there is no right to occupancy, though a person will still be regarded as the passive ownership of the particular space. A head of department who would never delegate or allow another person to use his office, he is Mr. All in using school property. This sometimes causes barrier in communication that is inappropriate. Public Territory refers to an area that is meant for all; people who have limited claim of ownership of such space. For instance, a Vice-Chancellor in the midst of co-workers during a conference or workshop being organized in his institution, claims limited ownership to the space provided for such exercise. Interaction Territory is a space created by others during interaction. A boss may organize a mini party for his followers where, they would all dine together and celebrate within his territory. Chronemics on the other hand, is the study of how effectively time is used in non-verbal communication, and reaction to time is a powerful weapon of communication and the way they arrange for communicating with others. This has to do with our being conscious of time, desire and create listening habit rather than hearing habits, timing and lengthening of action as well as his styles of communication do contribute to the interpretation of messages. These may be classified into two dominant time patterns (monochronic time schedule and polychronic time schedule). Monochronic Time Schedule (in-time) is recognized as very vital that should not be wasted at all, proper planning and adequate utilizing of time, especially when one has been booked for appointment and this is peculiar adequate utilizing of time. In polychronic time schedule (P-time), personal important is given priority rather than booking appointment or schedule with others.

Movement and Body Position Kinesics: It was introduced for the first time in the year 1952, by L. Bird Whistle who was formerly a ballet dancer, and later transformed to an anthropologist. Kinesics involves the use of body language, the eyes gestures, smiling and mouth to communicate without words (Otterheimer, 2007). The Eyes are usually used to send message from one person to another and it varies from one culture to another. Eyes can prompt misunderstanding among individuals of different nationalities (Kendon, 2000). In Nigeria, especially among the Yorubas, gazing at the eyes of a person means "do not yield to pressure". In one occasion, a group of senior staff in a famous college of education was holding a meeting while a junior staff was shouting within the premises, and immediately his boss gazed at her through the window, she left the spot immediately. Eye-rolling signifies tiredness, but when rolling eye to heaven means seeking God's divine intervention for safety. Turning of nose among the Nupes, to say "no" instead of eye-rolling by the Yorubas.

During conversation in office, a Senior Administrative Officer used his mouth to ask a messenger to keep quite, by putting his right hand fingers on his lips. A Clerical Officer folding his arms during conflict with her colleagues, expecting a reaction which may be either positive or negative but this differs from culture to culture and from one place to others (Knapp, 1992). The head is used to send messages to others. In Nigeria, for instance, nodding of head response means "no" or to stop an action, but reverse is the case in Bulgaria and Sri-Lanka (Knapp, 1992). Posture is another body language used in communication and this determines the level of each participant, individual differences, and recognition for either communication (Knapp and Hall, 2007). A posture shows the

importance of interpersonal relationship during communication. A school driver putting hand on his waist during crisis means that he is ready to do his worst and this is applicable to the Igbos and Yorubas in Nigeria (Knapp and Hall, 2007). Gesture is also used as one of the non-verbal communications to transmit message from one person to another. This involves the use of hands, arms, body, hand and eyes. It is always hard sometimes to identify language during gestures as well as verbal and non-verbal, since both are used simultaneously. According to Ottenheimer (2007), psychologist Paul Ekman & Wallace Friesen pointed out that gesture could be classified into five types:

- (i) Emblems are gestures with direct verbal translation. A Muslim Staff (Purdah) usually covers her head and body whenever she goes to office.
- (ii) Illustrators are gestures that describe what is said verbally. A boss rolling hand on his head to show is junior worker that he is out of his mind.
- (iii) An effect display is a gesture that conveys feelings. A junior staff burst into tears when he got his promotion letter that had been delayed for donkey years.
- (iv) Regulators are gestures that control interactions. An Assistant Lecturer, for instance, was uttering an abusive language while, a Dean of a faculty was cracking jokes with him, and out of annoyance the man immediately changed his countenance.
- (v) An adaptor is a gesture that facilitates the release of body tension. In this gesture, a worker was envisaging a query a head of him and he was pleading for mercy.

Haptic is also known as touching as non-verbal communication and this includes hand shakes-like holding hands which are common among lovers, kissing of cheek, lips, hand lovers. Forceful interpersonal closeness can be expressed through senior and junior worker such as liking, holding and scratching, touching, open body position and eye contact can also be used in non-verbal communications (Argyle, 1988). Paralanguage is equated as vocalic which is the study of non-verbal cues of the voice. There are various sounds and different ways of hearing them which include time that shows how people pronounce words, and the level of understanding of their listeners, and this is known as prosody (Patterns of sound) and Rhythm (Floyd & Guerrero, 2006). They further explained that, a linguist George L. Trager developed a classification system which comprises of the voice set, voice quality and vocalization. The voice set is the context of the speaker to include the situation, gender (male or female) age individual's culture and mood. The voice qualities are pitch, tempo, rhythm, articulation, nasality, resistance and accents. There are vocalization characterized, which express feelings, while speaking such as laughing and yawning.

A voice quality is the method of presenting message yelling like "Haa" and vocal segregates like "uh-uh" to show the speaker that the listener is still with him or listening. Culture varies from one nationality to another. For a person to be culturally competent, culture of others must be studied and accepted (Julian, 2001). There are several barriers to effective communication and these can cause conflict during interpersonal relationship among academic and non-academic staff. According to Montana and Charnor (2008), the two major barriers are message overload and message complexity. An example is when a messenger overload was asked to distribute files, collect letters, pack refuse and carry academic gowns to the school's store, all at a time. This study adopted the Albert

Ellis Rational-Emotive Behavioural-Therapy in handling inappropriate Communication Patterns. Rational Emotive Behavioural Therapy (REBT) has been identified as the suitable and famous therapy in handling inappropriate communication pattern among academic and non academic staff in Nigerian tertiary Institutions. This problem is rampant among them and it has been regarded as the core factor responsible for poor communication patterns which should be handled with care through adequate counseling techniques.

View of Human Nature: REBT is based on the assumption that human beings are born with a potential for both rational or straight thinking and irrational or crooked thinking. Taking for granted that humans are fallible and they will continue to make mistake but individuals should try to learn how to live at peace with one another.

Ellis (1978) often regarded as the proponent and founder of rational emotive therapy stated some of the key REBT assumption, which are as follows:

- (i) People condition themselves to feel disturbed rather than being conditioned by external forces. The counselor using REBT counseling strategy to tell those workers to be mindful of their words, tone, vocalizations and the ways they use signs and symbols during interactions.
- (ii) People have the biological and cultural tendency to think crookedly and needlessly disturb themselves. The REBT counselor needs to tell academic and non academic staff not to think irrational to disturb themselves but instead they should understand that good interpersonal relationship will be profitable and useful if applied.
- (iii) People have the capacity to change there cognitive, emotive and behavioural process. They can choose to react differently from their usual patterns by refusing to allow themselves from being minimally disturbed for the rest of their life. The counselor teaches those workers to remove uncondusive feelings by replacing them with palatable ones.

Ellis (1987) identified three major absolustic, "should", "must", "ought" demands which can be equated to be three major "musts" affecting individuals thinking.

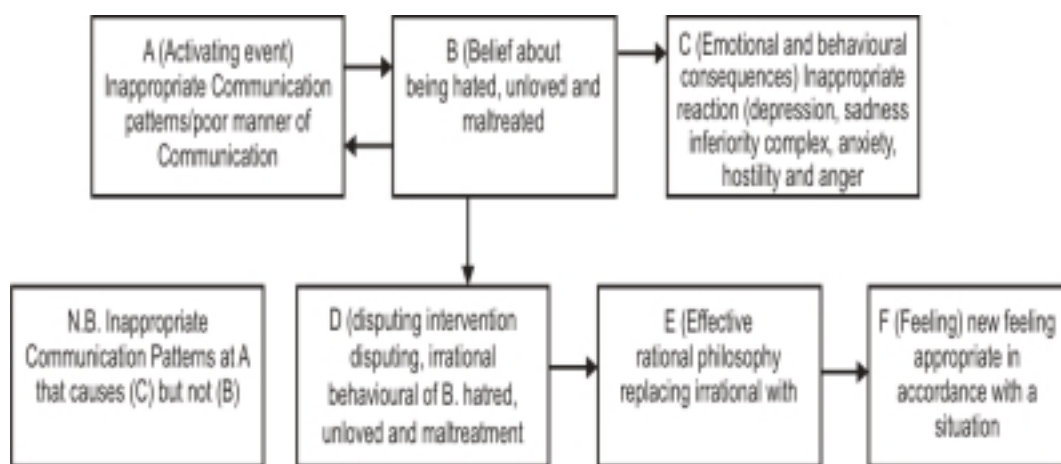


Fig. 1: A.B.C. Theory of Personality (Source: Froggat, 2001)

From the fig. 1, “A” describes an event behaviour or attitude, of an individual, “C” is the emotional and behavioural consequence which may be appropriate or inappropriate, “B” is the belief system that “A” causes “C”. The REBT counselor tells a worker that inappropriate communication pattern at A does not cause anxiety, hostility, social pattern, anger, depression and sadness in “C” but a worker's belief about being hated, unloved and maltreated, that is “B” responsible and not “A”. Workers should agree that they really are responsible for being hated, unloved and maltreated. Now “D” is disputing. “D” is the application of the scientific method to help client challenge their irrational beliefs. The principle of logic can be taught, which can be used to nullify unrealistic and unverifiable hypothesis. Ellis (1987) contended that emotional disturbances can be eliminated or modified by directly involved with the feelings such as workers feelings of depressions and sadness. Ellis and Bernard (1986) described the three absolute concepts as debating and discriminating. In the first instance, clients absolute "should" and "must" their dwfulizing, and these dysfunctional beliefs from rational ones.

REBT used other cognitive, emotive or both approaches during the therapy sections and in outside life “E”, an effective philosophy, and which involves a practical, where clients replace inappropriate thought with appropriate ones. If client is successful in doing this, individual also create “F”, or new feelings of appropriately accord with a situation. In relation to the event of inappropriate communication patterns using the A, B, C, D, E and F theory of personality at point “D”, which is disputing. Intervention, the REBT counsellor will use scientific method to help challenge their irrational beliefs. Here, the REBT counsellor will dispute beliefs about hatred, unloved and maltreated at stage “E” the REBT counselor will help workers to replace irrational statements with rational ones. Using of abusive words, tone, slang, signs and symbols during interaction can still be eliminated and feelings of sadness, depression, inferiority complex, anxiety, hostility and anger should be replaced with love and affections. Senior workers should give positive emotions and positive regards and mutual love at all times. At the last stage “F”, the REBT Counsellor success with stage E where a worker with inappropriate communication patterns have a new set of feeling instead of depression, anger, anxiety and sadness where junior and senior workers begin to feel effective mutual love, harmony, peace and rest of mind, freedom from fear and anxiety, hostility, depression and inferiority complex have no chance at their place of works.

Rationale for Using REBT in Handling Inappropriate Communication Patterns

REBT takes steps not only to enable client's minimizing its emotional disturbance and self defecting behaviour but also acquiring a more realistic philosophy of life. The emotional disturbances are observed when workers begin to make various question and statements such as "I am even tired of this kind of job, I will never feel happy for a minute", "Oh God, I wish I had remained jobless" all these statements can attribute and aggravate more disturbances for workers in tertiary institutions. The counsellor helps clients to examine and change values that keep them disturbed, for instance, a worker fear of receiving query from his boss as a result of poor communication patterns and the purpose is not merely to reduce that specific fear, instead, the therapist attempts to work with his exaggerated fears of receiving query as an entity. REBT shrives through re-assessment and the assumption that human problems are philosophically rooted.

The Therapist Functions: RET Counsellor mainly employs persuasive method to deal with client's irrational beliefs. "I must have love or approval from all members of staff in my place of work if not, I cannot cope, and then I am irrelevant". I must perform important tasks competently and perfectly well and if not, I cannot stand it, then I am looked inferior" "I am not treated the way I want and I can't stand it, then I must look for an alternative". The counselor probes clients to validate their ideas and irrational beliefs but, they should do away with them, having it in mind that there is no job that is free from problem and misunderstanding, but the courage of every worker to suppress tensions and handle situations with care enable workers to keeps the ball of affection rolling.

Workers believe that their emotional and behavioural problems are externally caused. Through REBT they discovered that their problems are not externally caused but are mainly the result of there erroneous beliefs. Once workers begin to accept these facts that beliefs are the real cause of their emotions and behaviors, definitely they are able to participate in the cognitive restructuring process (Ellis and Yeager, 1989)

Application of REBT to Correct Inappropriate Communication Patterns

Rational Emotive-Behaviour Therapy is suitable and useful in handling inappropriate communication patterns among staff of Nigerian Tertiary Institutions. Firstly, it is a fact that members of staff in our institutions of learning do usually attribute their problems to external forces such as: individuals, physical, and spiritual. Workers do go to the length of taking spiritual measures to deal with their individual problems at their various offices and places of work not knowing that they are responsible for whatever happens to them. Applying the REBT, it will enable them to alter such irrational beliefs such as: "I don't even know what to do again, upon all what I did my boss does not appreciate" "I am even tired of this kind of job, he will never commend me one day", I will never feel happy for a minute" "Oh God! How I wish I had remained jobless". It is useful for many workers especially when it comes to decision making, many members of staff cannot take their own decisions, but only rely on their Heads of Department, Deans, Principals, Provosts and Vice Chancellor to decide for them and this study will enable them to lean how to make their own decisions, by applying the REBT. This is also useful for academic and non academic staff of tertiary institutions in their communication patterns especially with their wrongly used of verbal and non verbal cues during interaction such as the use of such questions as "Why?", "What?", "Which?", "When?", and "Who?". Let workers look at this conversation between a Yoruba senior driver (Tola), his junior driver who is an Igbo called (Joe) and Tola's boss messenger, a Hausa (Bala).

Tola: Why did you touch my bag for God's sake?

Joe: Your bag! When did I touch it, Oh! God?

Tola: What is wrong with this boy?

Joe: Whose boy?

Tola: You!

Joe: My self? Oga! You better be careful!

Tola: Me? (He was rolling his hand on his head to show Joe that he is crazy).

Joe: Un! Ah! Waoh! "Pause... Waiting for the next action and accidentally Bala the messenger of Tola's boss came in"

Bala: Oga! Oga! This is the money that you asked me to keep for you yesterday while coming from Kano.

Tola: Oh! You have made me to wrong Joe. Oh! I am very sorry.

Joe: Well! God will have mercy upon you.

Poor communication patterns among academic and non academic staff in Nigerian Tertiary Institutions is a subject of discussion that is rampant in Nigerian society. REBT behavioural therapy can also be used in dealing with family problem like marital conflict and discord, broken home, separation, family planning programme, churches and mosque in settling crises if well applied and used correctly (Olakojo 2001). Based on the findings, it was observed that arbitrary use of vocabulary and words do cause misunderstanding among academic and non-academic staff workers in Nigerian tertiary institution. There is always power tussle among academic and non-academic staff workers in Nigerian tertiary institutions when it comes to decisions taking. The Non-Academic Senior Staff workers in Nigerian Tertiary Institutions do normally exercise authority over the junior ones even, when they are wrong. Senior Academic Staff workers usually deny their junior ones who fail to comply with their order in other things outside their primary assignments. Academic and Non-Academic Staff at all levels should be mindful of the way they use non-verbal cues during conversation. The use of "Wh" question like "Why?", "When?", "Where?", "Who?" and "Whose?" should be used in such a way that can bring positive results. There should be mutual interaction among academic and non-academic staff in terms of sitting arrangement. Good positive behaviours and attitudes emitted should always be reinforced among junior workers by the senior ones. Message(s) overloading should be avoided when discharging responsibilities to the junior ones by their boss.

CONCLUSION

The aim of this study was to review the Counselling strategies for handling inappropriate communication patterns among workers in the Nigerian tertiary institutions. Counsellor's involvement in this matter will be more useful. The communicators should be able to identify their present world, what they experience now, their past experience and even what they are likely to experience in the future. The junior staff should be mindful of what they see, hear, and perceive in their environments. They should be meticulous enough in reacting to issues during conversation and interaction with their senior ones. Bearing in mind that their non-carefree attitudes, disobedience and unruly behaviours will have effect on their future, rather the junior staff should learn how to exploit available opportunities and resources to their advantages. The counsellor should always avoid asking of wrong question or rhetorical expression. Workers especially the junior ones should be educated to reduce their usage of verbal pauses such as "Aah"! "Oh"! "Wao"! to reduce tension during crises to affirm a good interpersonal relationship. The use of careless language should also be avoided. For instance, assuming that a junior worker ought to have understood what his boss is saying while interacting with each other.

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