

EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION AS A TOOL FOR INDUSTRIAL HARMONY, HIGH PRODUCTIVITY AND DEVELOPMENT: A FOCUS ON ACADEMIC ENVIRONMENT

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ABSTRACT

Communication is considered as the propelling force behind industrial harmony and a device for ascertaining and taking remedial action to ensure the achievement of the desired goals. This however depends on how effective the communication is. In the course of understanding the situation of things in budding academic environment vis-à-vis the people's perception of communication system and its processes, this study focuses on an academic institution in Niger State. It employed both quantitative and qualitative methods to collect data from the respondents. The findings revealed Staff forum, Memo and Notice Boards as media of communication in the study area; more than 50% of the respondents affirmed regularity of usage of identified media of communication in management of affairs of the establishment. Therefore meetings as a medium of communication between subordinates and supervisors should be used more often.

Keywords: *Effective communication, industrial harmony, high productivity, development.*

INTRODUCTION

Communication as a process of exchanging ideas, attitudes, feelings and information through an appropriate channel from one person to the other is a basis for every endeavour of man; it prompts people to act and think in certain ways and touches every sphere of human activity (Silver 2000). Man extends himself to others through communication; he increases the frontier of his knowledge and experience through the process. For communication to be effective the message sent by the source or sender must be clear and not ambiguous (Michael 1998). Communication may occur in small groups, such as families, clubs, religious groups, friendship groups, or work groups. The chief aim of communication is to effect change in someone, that is, to shape action or to secure inactiveness in the total interest of a business enterprise (Sharp 2001). It is a flux that binds people together in an organization.

It can be considered as the inspiring force resulting to industrial harmony and can be a device for ascertaining and taking remedial action to ensure the achievement of the desired goals (Easy Communication, 2006). It is therefore necessary for groups to communicate well, both among themselves and with other groups, so that their members can perform their work effectively and make good decisions (Lievrouw 2008). The inference here is that communication breakdown is the single greatest barrier to corporate excellence. To avert this, conventional Industrial Relations see effective channels of communication (between the employer and its managers on one hand, and the employees and their representatives on the other hand) as essential for eliminating misunderstandings and ultimately the industrial conflicts (Babayo 2003, Moore 1999).

Effective communication thus becomes one of the basic ingredients needed for safe-piloting of organizations since it has been acknowledged that conflict is inevitable in any organization. From time to time with workforce, regular interactive relationship between the superiors and the subordinates and within the superiors as well as within the subordinates effective communication is seen as genuine panacea for industrial harmony and better ground for realization of the organization's objectives (Reed 1999). Over the years, communication experts have realized that effective communication is fundamental to the survival of organizations hence its classification as an important element of human beings beside the physical requirements of food and shelter. So, wherever there is need to organize, communication is surely a necessity; a situation where effective communication ceases in any organization, organized behaviour also ceases; what follows is chaos which is antithetical to achievement of goals and objectives of the organization general well being of mankind (Daniel 2002; Ronaldson 2001). The study seeks to understand the communication process within an academic environment. It is in the light of this that the work is focusing on communication processes between the Senior Staff Association of Federal College of Wildlife Management, New Bussa and the Management of the College.

The study has the following as its objectives: examining the respondents' view of concept of communication; find out the existing media of communication within the study site; investigate the regularity of the usage of media of communication; examine the effectiveness of media of communication; examine the respondents' position on Effectiveness of Communication as a tool for Industrial harmony and workability of Superior/Subordinate Process of Communication in an organization; find out the best approaches for crisis resolution in an organization; rating of identified approach in crisis resolution; understand the factor(s) that can engender effective Labour/Management relations and document the implications of ineffective communication in Organizations.

METHODOLOGY

The study Site and Population: The site for this work was Federal College of Wildlife Management (FCWM), New Bussa; the members of Senior Staff Association of

Federal College of Wildlife Management, New Bussa formed the study population. New Bussa, the location of the College is the political headquarters of Borgu Kingdom and administrative headquarters of Borgu Local Government area of Niger State. Sampling Instrument: Two research instruments were adopted for this work. They are quantitative method (that involved the use of questionnaire) and qualitative (in-depth interview). The two instruments were employed in eliciting information from the target population of this study.

Sampling Procedure and Sample Size: The Questionnaires were distributed to the willing members of Senior Staff Association of FCWM. Willingness to partake in the study was resorted to due to refusal of some members to take part in the study. Also the association formed the focus of the study, because it is the foremost union in the College with large number of members. The quantitative and qualitative methods were used in collecting data from 50 and 5 respondents respectively, thus bringing the sample size to 55 respondents. Procedure for Data Analysis: The quantitative data obtained was analyzed through the use of Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS). The data generated were expressed in simple frequency and percentage and interpreted accordingly. Open code software package was used in analyzing qualitative data for this study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The data from this work revealed that the respondents within the age cohort of 30 - 50 years are 42 percent while those who were above 50 years of age are 58 percent. It was also shown that 92 percent of the respondents were married while the remaining 8 percent are single. Educational status of the respondents in this study revealed as follows: B.SC/HND (76 percent); M.Sc. (22 percent) and PhD (2 percent). Majority of the respondents have spent between 3 - 5 years in the study area (46 percent); 20 percent of them have spent more than 5 years, the remaining 34 percent are yet to clock 3 years in their place of work.

Effective Media - Views and Regularity of Usage: The entire study population affirmed their knowledge of media of communication in their establishment (from the College management to the Union and the Executive council of the Union to the members). The media according to them include Staff forum (50 percent), Memo (20 percent) and Notice boards (30 percent). On the regularity of usage of the above mentioned media of communication between the Management and the Union and between the Union and the members, the respondents revealed that the media are employed regularly (58 percent), quarterly (12 percent) and as occasion demands (30 percent). Talking on how the communication channel should move, a past Chairman of the Union revealed thus: Effective communication should not be one-way traffic affair; it should be bi-directional. In a union/organisation, bi-directional communication does not suffice, what they need is organizational communication: "The process of creating and exchanging messages within a network of interdependent relationships to cope with environmental uncertainties" (Goldhaber,

1986). This is the normal and ideal communication mode in organization that strives for prompt realization of the goals for its establishment. One of the current executive members of the association threw more light on usage of communication in the college. According to him:

Our establishment recognizes the need for industrial harmony hence the constant communication of issues pertaining to staff welfare to the appropriate quarters. The authority is conscious of havoc poor communication could cause in an organization like this; so whenever any issue came up (either has to do with the entire system, or pertains to the staff) efforts are always made to pass the message across. Meetings are held with the association's executive where situation demands for such in order to resolve issues or pass information across; the executive of the association always pass such information across to the members immediately.

EFFECTIVENESS OF MEDIA OF COMMUNICATION

The respondents are of the view that all the above mentioned media of communication are very effective (64 percent); those that see the media as fairly effective constitute 26 percent, while 10 percent of them did not respond to this issue. Majority of the respondents believe that when communication is effective, it will facilitate industrial harmony (94 percent), but 6 percent of the respondents could not decide on this issue. The entire study population did not believe in superior-subordinate process of communication as the sole mode of communication within an establishment. They equally see dialogue as the best option for crisis resolution in every organization. To drive the point home, they rated dialogue as highly effective tool for crisis resolution. Buttressing this further, one of the current executive members of the Union talked about industrial situation in the College and the strategies being used to attain this. According to him:

We enjoy relative peace on campus here since it is not always possible to avoid misunderstanding between the workers and the management, but the management has never relent in keeping us informed on whatever is going on here particularly the issues that have to do with workers. Also we have been keeping our members informed on activities of the association; outcome of meetings with the management and feedback on any transaction we are having outside the College on behalf of the members. As a result of this, the members have never had course to doubt our integrity. If there was any grey area to clarify, they would try their best to call the attention of the executive to it; in some occasions they would call for meeting where various issues would be discussed and matters resolved.

Another Executive member of the Union in his contribution corroborated the view of the last speaker on harmonious industrial situation in the study area and how it was achieved. In his words: Like every other conventional organization, we have occasions when we have disagreed with the management of our College, but glory be to God Almighty that such disagreements have never degenerated into chaotic situations. We have been sustaining smooth relationship that existed between the management and the Union on this campus. It also

worth noting that for long time now, we've never had course to disagree over any issue due to effective communication system that we are building upon for harmonious academic community.

EFFECTIVE INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS OF INEFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

Free flow of information was identified by the entire study population as an impetus for effective industrial harmony; they equally listed the implications of ineffective communication in organizations. Such implication according to the respondents include avenue for rumor mongering to thrive (38 percent); misunderstanding of policies by the employees (30 percent); welfare of workers always suffer neglect (20 percent); as well as setbacks to the organization in terms of realization of its goals and objectives (12 percent). A senior staff in the college equally submitted that:

Industrial harmony for high productivity of organization and overall development of the society is a function of effective communication between the stakeholders within such organization. The stakeholders here include the management of such organization and the Union within it on the one hand, and the Executive of the Union and the members on the other hand. So the issue should not be seen as only the availability of good remuneration. Though good remuneration can't be ruled out but it should be complemented with effective communication for meaningful results.

Another ex-member of the executive of the Union said:

Inefficient communication in an organization is indicative of a faulty corporate chain; a situation that is likely to snowball into mutual distrust, resentment, gossip, feeling of incompetence and insecurity among members of the organization thus resulting in total communication breakdown.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This work has revealed that the respondents have adequate knowledge about the concept of effective communication and its relevance in an organization. It also revealed that good industrial relations and peaceful atmosphere within an organization is not limited to wages and good fringe benefits obtainable within such an organization. Conducive industrial atmosphere where mutual understanding and trust reign is noted as major benefit that is derivable from effective communication in organizations; it is on this that the individuals' roles for realization of organizational were anchored. This finding therefore corroborated the position of Herzberg who in his study found out that money only serves to satisfy the hygiene factors and that motivation goes beyond what wages can provide. This implies the best paid organizations may not have the best industrial atmosphere, while organizations with relatively low wages may have a peaceful industrial atmosphere and reasonably satisfied workforce.

It is therefore obvious that achieving peaceful working relations between labour and management is a product of good and effective communication network

within the organization. It affords opportunity for the workers to have sense of recognition as part of the system in which they are working; allowing them to participate in the decisions that affect their working lives within that organization. This will facilitate a meeting point between the goals of the organization and that of the workers for the zeal that will ensure attainment of the common objectives of the organization.

In reference to the study site, the respondents affirmed the effectiveness of communication system in their establishment. In order to build on this gain, this work recommends that management should create enabling environment to foster cooperation and mutual interest in organizational goals, and encouragement of feedback. They should create forum for sharing of experiences with subordinates and try to understand their feelings and special problems. The use of meetings as a medium of communication between subordinates and supervisors should be used more often. This will help promote understanding between the subordinates and supervisors.

Table 1: Socio-demographic Characteristics

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Age		
30 - 50 years	21	42.0
Above 50 years	29	58.0
Marital Status		
Single	04	08.0
Married	46	92.0
Level of Education		
B.Sc/HND	38	76.0
M.Sc.	11	22.0
PhD	01	02.0
Years of Membership of the Association		
Less than 3 years	17	34.0
3 - 5 years	23	46.0
Above 5 years	10	20.0

Source: Fieldwork 2009

Table 2: Communication and Industrial Harmony

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Existing Media of Communication		
Staff forum	25	50.0
Memo	10	20.0
Notice Boards	15	30.0
Regularity of Usage of Media of Communication		
Regularly	29	58.0
Quarterly	06	12.0
As occasion demands	15	30.0

Effectiveness of Media of Communication		
Very Effective	32	64.0
Fairly Effective	13	26.0
No Response	05	10.0
Effectiveness of Communication, tool for Industrial Harmony		
Agreed	47	94.0
Undecided	03	06.0
Adoption of Superior/Subordinate Process of Communication		
Strongly Disagree	50	100.0
Viable approach for crisis resolution in an organization		
Dialogue	50	100.0
Rating of efficacy of dialogue in Crisis Resolution		
Highly effective	50	100.0
Effective Labour/Mgt Relations		
Free flow of Information	50	100.0
Implications of Ineffective Communication in Organizations		
Rumour mongering thrives	19	38.0
Misunderstanding of Policies	15	30.0
Welfare of workers suffer	10	20.0
Setbacks to the Organisation	06	12.0

Source: Fieldwork 2009

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