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S/No.	Contents	Author(s)	Pages
1.	Managerial Communication Skills: A Means for Business Survival	E. A. Dangana and Mohammed Lawal Inuwa	1-6
2.	The Grammatical Errors Typical of Advanced Users and Learners of English as a Second Language HND I Students of Auchi Polytechnic as a Case Study	Kekere-Ekun Joseph, Udvebure A. A. and Daniah J. D.	7-13
3.	Communication: An Instrument for Wealth Creation	Otanocha, B. Omonigho and Nkwor, Chimezie Agbafor	14-18
4.	The 'Audience Concept' in Mass Communication	Agbo Patrick Monday and Ndaliman Mikailu	19-24
5.	Les Techniques Abordes Dans Les Litteratures Orales Africaines: Les Cases Des Contes	Igunbor E. Gloria	25-29
6.	Effective Communication: A Tool for Organisational Stability and Growth	Friday F. Nchuchuwe and David Adejuwon	30-37
7.	Poetry as a Source of History: A Case Study of Ibibio	Thomas Thomas	38-39
8.	A Roadmap to Africa's Development: Prospects and Challenges of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD)	Korikiye, MC Wenibowei, Sophia, John and Digha, Opaminola N.	40-51
9.	Ibibio Work Songs: Their Philosophies, Cultural Values, Literary Imports and Implications for National Orientation in a Developing Economy	Ubong E. Josiah	52-59
10.	The Benefits of People's Participation for a Peaceful Democracy and Good Governance in Nigeria	Paul Y. Mbaya	60-68
11.	Verbal Nominalization in Igbo	Georgina O. Maduagwu	69-74
12.	The Nigerian State Citizenship and Insurgency in Niger Delta	L. A. Afinotan	75-84
13.	The Effects of Commercial Pressures on News Organisations	Adesina Lukuman Azeez	85-90
14.	"La Societe Etrange Chez Albert Camus: Le Cas De L'Etranger"	Ogiriki, A. R.	91-97
15.	Art, Employment and Society	Godwin Ogheneruemu Iriwieri	98-104
16.	Community Participation in Rural Development: A Study of Rural Communities in Akwa Ibom and Cross River States, Nigeria	Festus Nkpoyen and Adalikwu, Rose Amokeye	105-111
17.	Nigeria Language and Culture in African Music Communication Prospect: The Socio-Developmental Challenges	Okoro, Justice C.	112-118
18.	Autosegmental Account of some Kanuri Tonal Processes	Abba Kura Shettima and Shettima Umara Bulakarima	119-126
19.	Le Rapport Homme-Energie a Travers L'Histoire	Ogiriki, A. R.	127-130

EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION: A TOOL FOR ORGANIZATIONAL STABILITY AND GROWTH

FRIDAY F. NCHUCHUWE / DAVID ADEJUWON

Department of Industrial Relations and Public Administration
Lagos State University, Ojo, State, Nigeria

ABSTRACT

The paper examines effective communications as a veritable tool for organizational stability and growth. It makes a conceptual clarification of communication and effective communication and highlights the various means or methods through which communications can be carried out and its essence while also exposing the major barriers to effective communications in organizations. It views the deluge of modern means of Communication since the 1980's and concludes that organizations which seek stability and growth should embrace modern information technologies to make communication more effective and a veritable tool in organizations.

INTRODUCTION

Communication permeates all works of life, be it social, domestic, religious, industrial, educational etc. It is the life blood of any successful system. Most part of the human life is devoted to communication in one form or another. Ironically, communication skills are seldom taken seriously because of the assumption that it can be learned without much ado. All management functions depend on the precision and clarity of information disseminated from time to time. Thus, what makes organization or any social life for that matter to grow and be stable is effective communication. As (Bhagwan and Bhushan, 2006: 284) put it, for the successful achievement of organizational objectives, effective communication is really of vital importance. Millet (2001:912) rightly describes communication as the "bloodstream of administrative organization",

and Pfiffner (2001:4) portrays it as "the heart of management". It is in realization of this fact that a great percentage of the literatures on management are replete with articles on communication. In top democracies of the world, conferences, workshops, and other training programmes are organized to develop communication skills. For an organization to gain a competitive advantage, managers must strive to increase efficiency, quality, responsiveness to customers, and innovation through effective communication. Effective communication is essential for attaining organizational goals and thus is a necessity for gaining a competitive advantage. Managers therefore must have a good understanding of the communication process if they are to perform effectively (Jones and George, 2009:424). Because managers must communicate with others to perform their various roles and tasks, managers spend most of their time communicating, whether in meetings, in telephone conversations, through e-mails, or in face - to - face interactions among others. Indeed, some experts estimate that managers spend approximately 85% of their time engaged in some form of communication. Effective communication is so important that managers cannot just be concerned that they themselves are effective communicators; they also have to help their subordinates to be effective communicators. When all members of an organization are able to communicate effectively with each other and with people outside the organization, the organization is much more likely to grow and gain a competitive stability. Our objective in this paper therefore is to highlight some important means that can aid effective communications in organizations and look at the likely barriers. The paper is divided into the following segments: conceptual framework, effective communication process model, Means or methods of communication in organizations, Factors influencing the choice of communication methods in organizations, Barriers and remedies to effective communication in organizations, the impact of information technology on effective communication and conclusion.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Communication is the transfer of information from a sender to receiver, with the information being understood by the receiver (Wehrich and Koontz, 2006:443). As Bhagwan and Bhushan (2006:285) put it, communication is a process which involves the elements of sender (the person who intends to make contact), ideas (subject.. matter of communication), encoding (language or symbols), channel (media agencies like telephone, telegram, circular etc.), receiver (person to whom the message is sent), decoding (conversion of symbols received from the sender), and feedback (ensuring that the receiver has got the message and understood it properly). According to Naidu (2005:260), communication may be defined as an interactive process by which one person makes his ideas and feelings known to another. In a communication process the sender of information seeks to establish commonness with the receiver of information. It brings various minds together on common issues. In the words of Cuning (1972:334), the word communication describes the process Of conveying messages (facts, ideas, attitudes and opinions) from one person to another so that they are understood. Communication according to Louis (1999:297) is the sum total of the things one does when he wants to create understanding in the mind of another. It involves a systematic and continuous process of telling, listening and understanding. In the views of Chijioke (2001:1), communication is a process of transfer of information from one person to another. It is also a vehicle by which we get things done. In an organization or society, effective communication is important in the management of various activities. A breakdown in communication can affect the proper running of any organization and make it to become unstable, but effective communication engenders the achievement of goals and results. From the above definitions, it shows that communication is a two-way process. It does not only mean communicating decisions or instructions to the subordinates but the subordinates also have to communicate facts and information to the authority in the organization. Communication therefore, applies to all phases of managing, it is particularly important in the function of leading. An effective

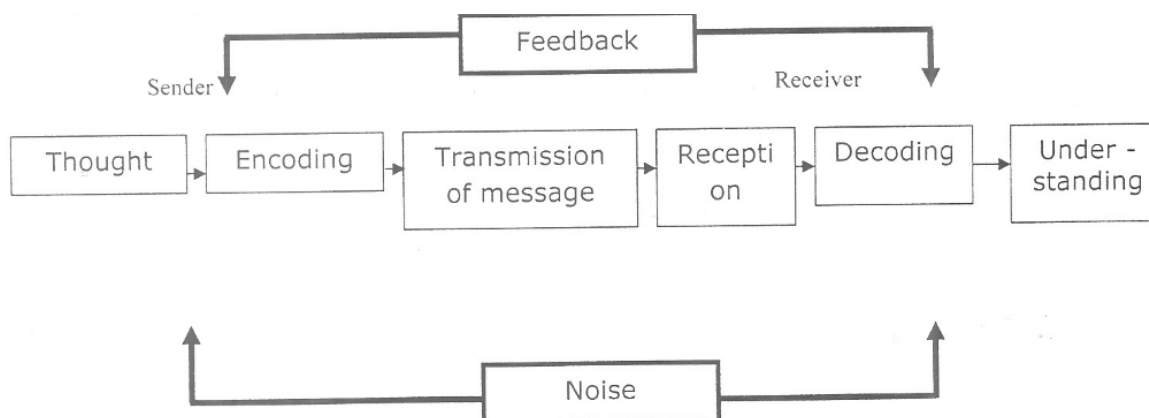
communication should therefore encompass the seven (C's) of communication which states that it should be clear, concise, complete, correct, constant, compact and concrete.

EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION PROCESS MODEL

Communication process involves the sender, the transmission of a message through a selected channel, and the receiver. Put differently, communication process can be seen as the steps between a source and a receiver that result in the transference and understanding of meaning. Communication process involves at least five elements namely;

- The source (encoder)
- The message
- The channel
- The Receiver (decoder)
- The effect.

The specific steps in the communication process according to Weihrich and Koontz (2006:444) is diagrammatically shown below:



The communication process as shown in the above diagram involves at least five elements, namely – sender of the message, the channel, the receiver, the effect and feedback in communication. Thus, a typical Communication process begins with the sender, who has a thought or an idea, which is then encoded in a way that can be

understood by the receiver. The channels are delivery media. The message may be oral or written, and its transmission may be through a memorandum, a computer, the telephone, e-mail, or other media. Weihrich and Koontz (ibid) therefore observed that since many choices are available, each with its advantages and disadvantages, the proper selection of the channel is vital for effective communication. The receiver is the individual or group of individual to whom a message is directed. The receiver decodes the messages received. Ability to decode, that is, given correct meaning as intended in the message requires knowledge, experience, and relationship with sender matter in this respect (Idowu, 2003:86). Communication is affected by "noise", which is anything-whether in the sender, the transmission, or the receiver- that hinders communication, for example, physical distraction. status differences and effects, semantic errors, and inexperience on the part of the sender/receiver. In order to check the effectiveness of communication, it must have feedback. This involves the receiver sending back a message to the sender of an earlier message received. The feedback reveals if the initial message has been properly understood or interpreted by the receiver. The feedback process improves communication process. Hence feedback channel should be "kept open". Summarily, the communication model provides an overview of the communication process, identifies the critical variables, and shows their relationships. This in turn helps managers pinpoint communication problems so that they can take steps to solve them, or, even better, prevent the difficulties from occurring in the first place. Managers therefore must have a good understanding of the communication process if they are to perform effectively.

MEANS OR METHODS OF COMMUNICATION IN ORGANISATIONS

There are different means or methods of making communications in organizations. This means or methods are what are generally referred to as Medium or Channel. The Medium or Channel is the link that connects the source and the receiver or put in another way, the conveyer of the message or the carrier or better still the organ through

which the message or that which is to be passed across is sent. For example, messages can be transmitted through letters, memoranda (memos), posters, handbills, leaflets or other printed papers, a computer, the telephone, fax machines, telegrams among others in organizations. Television, video set, and projectors are also useful media of transmitting information (Nchuchuwe. 2008:142-143). The means of communication can be written or unwritten (oral or verbal).

Written communication

It deals with the pieces of information or ideas that are printed or hand written. It is also called written formal communication. It has the advantage of providing records, references, and legal defences. It promotes uniformity in policies and procedures. On the other hand, it may provide no immediate feedback and may take a long time to know whether a message has been received and properly understood. Some of the methods of written communications are:

Letters: these are hand - written or type-written messages usually on a white paper containing pieces of information from the source of the information to the receiver usually delivered by post or by hand. It can be used within or outside organizations.

Memoranda (memo): it is written information usually addressed to the employees. It is usually brief, clear and straightforward. It is one of the fastest and easy ways to communicate in an organization. One of its shortcomings is that its shortness may a. times not allow for a full exposition of the matter under consideration.

Reports: reports are official information given about an event. It gives complete analysis of the matter under review and could be daily, weekly, monthly, quarterly or yearly depending on the requirement of the organization.

Newsletter: this is a document usually containing information about events in an organization. It contains information such as on promotion, transfer, demotion, retrenchment, retirement, meetings, seminars and so on.

Press conference: this is a situation whereby an official (usually a senior official or any other designated officer) addresses the press and provides answers to questions raised by members of the press on issues raised during the conference. It provides immediate feedback and such feedbacks clear any misunderstanding in the message communicated.

Press release: this is usually a document distributed to press on important issues about the organization in order to give it a wider publicity instead of a press conference.

Circulars: these are used in an organization as a means of communicating information to members of the organization. They show the source (where they emanate from) and the recipients of the information.

Handbooks/Manuals: they are short reference books that contain information about an organization or particular Departments of an organization. For example, an organization can publish handbooks explaining any aspect of its activities. Such publications are very helpful to people who want to have information about the organization. If well written, they reduce enquires from the public about issues of interest.

Bulletins or periodicals: these are publications that appear at regular intervals in organizations containing announcements of recent or current events or items of current interest.

Notice Boards: these are boards or platforms placed in conspicuous or strategic positions in organizations so that information or notices can be posted on them for those

concerned to easily see them. It is incumbent on those to whom such messages are addressed to read it on the notice boards. Failure to do so does not relieve them of any obligation demanded by the notice.

Pamphlets, Booklets and Brochures: these are small books .of few pages containing useful information about the services or products of an organization. They are usually distributed to those who are interested in the services or products of the organization. As Eboh (1994:128-129) and Osuofia (2006:23-24), put it, they are vast and easy ways to communicate with the interested parties.

Oral communication

Oral communication can occur in a face-to-face meeting of two people or in a presentation to large audience. It can be formal or informal, or planned or accidental. It is formal when held in formal situations for example, meetings or seminars. It is informal when the information is not got through official channels. Rich information content is possible in face to face communication because it can generate a high level of interactivity between the sender and the receiver. The major advantage of oral communication is that it makes possible speedy exchange of ideas with immediate feedback. On the other hand, it does not always save time, and records are not usually kept and can be easily denied.

Forms of oral communication include:

Staff meetings: this implies a situation where two or more members of staff in an organization comes together to deliberate on salient issues affecting the organization. Such meetings are usually headed by a chairman who presides and a secretary who takes minutes of the meeting. Meetings have been found to be a unifying factor in organizations. No organization can function effectively and efficiently without regular staff meetings. With regular meetings, members of staff do contribute to decision

making. As a result of staff meetings, decisions arrived at are conveyed in the minutes of the meeting, which are there after communicated to members.

Telephone: - this is an electronic device through which one can talk, speak, send messages or communicate to another over long distances. This important means of communication saves time and money as people do not have to go from one office to another to seek or give out information. It can also be used to communicate with a large audience through the loud speakers.

Seminars: Seminars are usually organized activities for study and discussions. It usually takes some days and organized around specific topics. At the end of each study, discussions are held to clarify any cloudy area. Organizations do organize seminars to educate their workforce on significant matters or issues about the organization. Workshops and symposiums also fall under this method.

Non -verbal and non - written communications

In organizations, a lot of non-verbal and non-written communications do take place everyday. It can take place in face to - face conversations or even when the sender and the receiver of a message are separated by distance. When two persons are conversing, whether face — to - face or over a telephone, their tones can tell a lot. Hesitations before answering questions during conversations can also indicate a lot. However, other examples that fall under this method include directional signs and charts.

FACTORS INFLUENCING THE CHOICE OF COMMUNICATION METHODS IN ORGANISATIONS

In choosing any of the above methods of communication in an organization, the following factors should be considered.

Speed and Urgency: The period within which a message is required to get to its destination is very important because this determines the choice of method(s) to be used

Safety and Confidence: When any information is considered confidential, it must not only be so tagged but special courier or messenger should be used to convey it to the right destination.

Accuracy and Precision: Verbal or written methods are prone to inaccuracy. In some cases it is necessary to support oral communication with written communication in order to avoid misrepresentation or misunderstanding of ideas.

Cost consideration: A method of communication can be preferred to another due to cost consideration in terms of time wastage and monetary value television message is more expensive than radio message.

Referencing: Since reserved copies of documents serves as authentic source of data at a later date and can be tendered as evidence, written form of communication is preferable. Even though oral speech can be memorized, they are hardly used as evidence (e.g. court and official cases) due to lack of signature and evidence of authorization.

Size and Location of the target audience: Even though Public Address System (PAS) is good for a large group, this may be noisy and ineffective for a relatively small team like committee members. As the group size increases communication becomes more complex and difficult and as such the methods get increasingly formal. Face-to-face method then gives way to writing of all kinds of memos, notices and letters.

BARRIERS AND REMEDIES TO EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION IN ORGANISATIONS

The communication system is affected by distortion and filtering. A message can be distorted when the level of noise is high, a poor communication channel is selected or

when there is confusion in the content of the message. In real organizations, communications are often imperfect because of structural and human limitations. Public administration, therefore, need to recognize that there are considerable barriers to timely and accurate communication within organization (Naidu, 2005:264). The following are some of the barriers to effective communication.

Lack of planning: Good communication seldom happens by chance. Too often, people start talking and writing without first thinking, planning, and stating the purpose of the message. Yet giving the reasons for a directive, selecting the most appropriate channel, and choosing proper timing can greatly improve understanding and reduce resistance to change.

Semantic distortion: The communication flow-links can be distorted in several ways including noise, pitch of sound, interference, distractions, interruptions, colors and content rigidity, interception etc, which can be deliberate or accidental. This is because different people understand words and interpret facts differently. Different perceptions of information by different people are great handicaps to effective communication.

Badly expressed messages: This refers to lack of clarity and precision on the part of the sender - Poor organization of ideas, awkward sentence structure, and lack of coherence. The lack of clarity and precision, which can be costly, can be avoided through greater care in encoding the message.

Organizational inadequacies: - In this situation, policies and organization protocol make it difficult for information to flow freely. Naidu (2005:265) is of the opinion that, the hierarchical nature and superior-subordinate status relationship of the bureaucratic life further complicate the communications process. Sometimes, the subordinates edit the reports, in order to present a brighter picture, avoiding information that is not palatable to the superior. Since such reports do not give all the facts, the superior, will not be in a position to know what is really going on in the organization.

Size and Distance: The bigger an organization and the larger the number of its employees, the greater is the difficulty of communication. Too many hierarchical levels also pose a problem (Bhagwan and Bhushan, 2006:288). In modern organizations, messages have to pass through several units or locations. As a result some become distorted or never get to the destination. Reliance is often placed more on the written than the spoken word to get the message through, which seriously restricts the effectiveness of communication.

Distrust, Threat, and Fear: - In a climate containing these forces, any message will be viewed with skepticism. Distrust according to Wehrich and Koontz (2006:456) can be the result of inconsistent behaviors by the superior, or it can be due to past experiences in which the subordinate was punished for honestly reporting unfavorable, but true, information to the boss. Similarly, in the light of threat, whether real or imagined, people tend to tighten up, become defensive, and distort information.

Information overload: Information overload creates a condition in which the volume of information received by the manager is greater than his/her capacity -to absorb and use. Managers deluged with overwhelming information and pressures of work tend to leave important matters overlooked or unreported and thus contribute to ineffective communication. Some of the above stated barriers to effective communication in organization have their origins in senders. When messages are unclear, incomplete, or difficult to understand, when they are sent over an inappropriate medium, or when no provision for feedback is made, communication suffers. Other communication barriers have their origins in receivers. When receivers pay no attention to or do not listen to messages or when they make no effort to understand the meaning of a message, communication is likely to be ineffective. To overcome these barriers and effective communication with others, managers (as well as other organizational members) must possess or develop certain communication skills. Some of these skills are particularly important when managers send messages: others are critically when managers receive

messages. These skills help ensure that managers will be able to share information, will have the information they need to make good decision and take action, and will be able to reach a common understanding with others (Jones and George, 2008:635). Effective communication, therefore, is the ability of all the persons in the organization, managers as well as nonmanagers, in working toward a common aim. The following remedies can help overcome the barriers to effective communication. Senders of messages must clarify in their minds what they want to communicate. This means that one of the first steps in communication is to clarify the purpose of the message and to make a plan to achieve the intended end. Also, the use of feedback can deal with distorted communications. Feedback indicates to the sender whether his ideas have been received as they were originally intended. Its use, therefore, improves the communication process. While communicating, be mindful of the overtones as well as the real content of the message e.g. your voice, expressions and apparently every reaction to the responses of the receiver. In addition, the planning of the communication should not be done in a vacuum. Instead, other people should be consulted and encouraged to participate; to collect the facts, analyze the message, and select the appropriate media. The administrator must cultivate the ability to listen. This ability requires allowing the speaker to express his point(s) fully before the listener reaching any conclusion. There must be an established climate of mutual trust between the sender and the receiver. Furthermore, Administrators should develop the capacity to take pains to show that they truly desire accurate communications, even when- the information is unpleasant (Naidu, 2005:265-266; Weihrich & Koontz, 2006;458-460).Public administrators can increase the chances of accurate and effective communication in their organizations by putting these measures mentioned above into practice.

THE IMPACT OF INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY ON EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

Advances in electronic communication make interactive communication possible between senders and receivers, even when they are separated by physical distance and busy schedules. Beginning in the early 1980s there has been an onslaught of new electronic technologies that are largely reshaping the way communication takes place in organizations. Weihrich and Koontz (2006:462-463), observed that organizations are increasingly adopting various electronic devices that improve communication. The computer for instance can store, retrieve, and process data so that they become information. The developments in information technology greatly facilitate organizational control at a relatively low cost. The existence of global information system especially the internet has made the world a global village which can be accessed from the table tops of individuals and organization. Today, it is widely recognized that understanding information system is essential for managers because most organization need information system to survive and prosper. Computer based information technology can greatly facilitate and improve the communication process. It has allowed managers to develop computer based management information systems that provide timely, complete, relevant, and high quality information. Information Technology allows organization to improve their responsiveness to customers, minimize costs, and thus improve their competitive position. The link between information systems, communication, and competitive position is an important one that may determine the success or failure of organizations in an increasingly competitive global environment (Jones and George, 2009:429). Some of the impacts of information technology on effective communication in an organization include; first, a drastic decline in communication cost. For example, with a simple laptop and internet connectivity, the cost of disseminating and retrieving information to and from any part of the world has drastically gone down. Secondly, it has improved the traditional functions of managers in an organization such as planning, organizing, directing, co-coordinating, and

controlling of staff and machines. Thirdly, organizational boundaries become less relevant as a result of electronic communication because information is able to reach wider audience fast and efficient. Fourthly, written communications can be transmitted with all the speed of telephone through e-mail and internet in an increasing number of organizations, instead of inter office memos, for internal, and on-site message and the post office for external messages. Also, electronic communications have revolutionalized both the ability to access other people and to reach them almost instantaneously. In addition, information technology helps in setting up management information systems in various organizations in order to gather and organize information for use by managers, workers and other users.

CONCLUSION

Effective communication is important for the internal functioning of organizations be they private or public and for interaction with the external environment. In an organization, managers should have the information necessary for doing a good job. The information may flow not only downward or upward in the organization structure but also horizontally or diagonally. Communication can be in written form, but more information is communicated orally. In addition, people communicate through gestures and facial expressions. As observed earlier, communication is the process of transmitting information from one person to another through the use of shared symbols. The information may take the form of facts, objective information, or feelings. This paper will help future managers, teams, and employees better understand the importance of managing communication. No doubt, Communication can be affected by some barriers and breakdowns in the communication process. Recognizing these barriers can facilitate not only understanding but also managing. Communication therefore as one of the tools for good management, should be used with caution. Any bottleneck in communication is expected to emanate from the top management. After all the neck of the bottle is always at the top.

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