ROLE OF COMMUNICATION IN THE EFFICIENT MANAGEMENT OF AN ORGANIZATION: A CASE STUDY OF DELTA STATE POLYTECHNIC, OGWASHI-UKU

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Abstract
The significance of communication to the efficient management of an organization cannot be overestimated. Without communication, no organization can thrive, much less develop and survive. For the existence as well as the day to day running of every organization, communication is a vital and fundamental process. This study investigated the role of communication in the efficient management of Delta State Polytechnic, Ogwashi-Uku. Data were sourced from 205 staff. Opinion expressed revealed that communication enhances organizational efficiency, boost staff morale, promotes peace and harmonious working relationship among staff and encourages team spirit. The researcher made some recommendations that would help to improve the level of communication in the institution.

Introduction
Organizations exist in order to achieve objectives and to provide satisfaction for their members. Organizations enable objectives to be achieved that could not be achieved by the efforts of individuals on their own. Through co-operative actions, members of an organization can provide a synergistic effect.

Organizations come in all forms, shapes and sizes as they are set up to serve a number of different purposes and to meet a variety of needs. They cover a broad spectrum of social and economic activities, from manufacturing plants and refineries, schools, banks, hotels, to government ministries and departments, and so on. The structure, management and function of these organizations vary because of differences in the nature and type of the organization, their respective goals and objectives, and the behaviour of the people who work in them.

Despite the differences among various organizations there are, however, at least four factors that characterized every organization:

- People
- Objectives
- Structure
- Management

It is the interaction of people in order to achieve objectives which form the basis of an organization. Some form of structure is needed by which people’s interactions and efforts are channeled and coordinated. Similarly some process of management is required by which the activities of the organization, and the efforts of its members, are directed and controlled towards the pursuit of objectives.
The actual effectiveness of the organization will be dependent upon the quality of its people, its objective and structure, and the resources available to it. As Mullins (1996, p.71) contended “the interrelationship of people, objectives and structure, together with the efficient use of available non-human resources, will determine the success or failure of the organization and the extent of its effectiveness”.

Basic to the survival of any organization is communication. It is the vehicle through which daily organizational activities are carried out. Communication serves as an aid to carrying out the management functions of planning, organizing, staffing, directing, reporting, coordinating and controlling of the organizational resources.

It is trite to say that the administrative process in any organization will suffer set back without effective communication. In other words, if there is communication break-down, management efficiency will be affected adversely as administration involves getting things done through and with other people. Communication is the network that binds all members of a department together, making it possible for members to influence and react to one another (Akpovi, 2000, p.25). Good communication therefore, is a sine qua non to the efficient management of an organization.

Research Objectives

This study was conducted to:

1. Determine the nature of communication between management and subordinates in the institution
2. Find out the role of communication in staff motivation
3. Find out the factors that hinder effective communication in the organization
4. Investigate the role of communication in organizational conflict prevention and resolution

Concept of Organization and Communication

Robins (2003, p.152) defined organization as “a consciously coordinated social unit, composed of two or more people that functions on a relatively continuous basis to achieve a common goal or set goals”. Farnham and Horton (1996, p.88) viewed organizations as social constructs created by groups in a society to achieve specific purposes by means of planned and coordinated activities. While Stoner, Freeman and Gilbert (2006, p.94) saw an organization as a pattern of relationships through which people under the direction of managers pursue their common goals.

Organizations could be formal or informal. The difference between the formal and the informal organization is a feature of the degree to which they are structured. Schein (1988, p.15) defined a formal organization as the planned coordination of the activities of a number of people for the achievement of some
common explicit purpose or goal, through division of labour and function, and through a hierarchy of authority and responsibility. An organization is a pattern of roles and a blueprint for their co-ordination. The object of co-ordination is activities, not people. The formal organization can exist independently of the membership of particular individuals. 

The formal organization is:

- Deliberately planned and created;
- Concerned with the co-ordination of activities;
- Hierarchically structured with stated objectives, the specification of tasks and defined relationships of authority and responsibility. (Mullins, 1996, p.72).

An organization chart, for example, gives a representation of the formal structure. Other examples of the formal organization are rules and regulations, policy manuals, standing orders, and job descriptions. Cyert and March (1992, p.52) described formal organization as a coalition of individuals with a number of sub-coalitions. Members of the coalition will be dependent upon the type of organization but could include, for example, managers, administrators, workers, elected representatives, appointed officials, volunteers, shareholders, suppliers, trade union officials, leaders of interest groups, customers, clients, patrons, donors, specialists, consultants, and representatives of external agencies.

The informal organization arises from the interaction of people working in their organization, their psychological and social needs, and the development of groups with their own relationships and norms of behaviour, irrespective of those defined within the formal structure.

- The informal organization is flexible and loosely structured
- Relationships may be left undefined
- Membership is spontaneous and with varying degrees of involvement.

The informal organization can serve a number of important functions.
- It provides satisfaction of members’ social needs, and a sense of personal identity and belonging.
- It provides for additional channels of communication; for example, through the ‘grapevine’ information of importance to particular members is communicated quickly.
- It provides a means of motivation, for example, through status, social interaction, variety in routine or tedious jobs, and informal methods of work
- It provides a feeling of stability and security, and through informal ‘norms’ of behaviour can exercise a form of control over members.
- It provides a means of highlighting deficiencies or weaknesses in the formal organization, for example, areas of duties or responsibilities not covered in job descriptions or outdated systems and procedures. The informal
organization may also be used when formal methods would take too long, or not be appropriate, to deal with an unusual or unforeseen situation (Gray & Starke, 1988, p.62).

The informal organization, therefore, has an influence on the morale, motivation, job satisfaction and performance of staff. It can provide members with greater opportunity to use their initiative and creativity in both personal and organizational development. Covert and informal activities may also have economic consequences for the organization in terms of added values and/or costs that escape ordinary accounting procedures (Egan, 1993, p.33-38).

Every organization can be described in terms of an operating and administrative component. The operating component comprises the people who actually undertake the work of producing the products, or providing the services, while the administrative component comprises managers and analysts, and, is concerned with supervision and co-ordination. Flowing from this, Mintzberg (1979, p.74) analyzed the work organization in terms of five basic components: the operational core; operational support; organizational support; top management; and middle management.

- The operational core is concerned with direct performance of the technical or productive operations and the carrying out of actual task activities of the organization; for example, people putting together parts on an assembly line, teaching in a classroom, treating a patient, cooking meals in a hotel, serving in a bank, repairing a hole in the road.

- Operational support is concerned indirectly with the technical or productive process but closely related to the actual flow of operational work; for example, people working in quality control, work study, progress planning, storekeeping, works maintenance, technical services.

- Organizational support is concerned with provision of services for the whole organization, including the operational core, but which are usually outside the actual flow of operational work; for example, people working in personnel, medical services, canteen, management accounting, office services.

- Top management is concerned with broad objectives and policy, strategic decisions, the work of the organization as a whole and interactions with the external environment; for example, managing director, governors, management team, chief executives, board of directors, council members.

- Middle management is concerned with co-ordination and integration of activities; and providing links with operational support staff and organizational support staff, and between the operational core and top management.
Communication is the process of transmitting and receiving ideas, information and messages. It is seen as a vital aspect of human life. For every joint action by individuals, meanings that have been transmitted by communication become shared. The term “communication” has no uniform definition in the literature. To the contrary, “communication” is found in a confusing variety of renditions. Many of the definitions overlap other terms, like, for example, “reaction”, “activity”, interaction, “or behaviour”.

The Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English defines communication as the “exchange of information, news, ideas or opinions”. Uche (1990, p.79) perceives communication to be “the process of disseminating ideas and for transferring information, values, attitudes and promoting new behavioural patterns that would encourage attitudinal change that is germane for creating a conducive environment for social, political and economic transformation of the individual and his social system”.

Lievrouw (2006, p.101) describes communication as “…the process of sharing ideas, information, and messages with others in a particular time and place. Communication includes writing and talking, as well as non verbal communication (such as facial expressions, body language, or gestures), visual communication (the use of images or pictures, such as painting, photography, video, or film), and electronic communication (telephone calls) electronic mail, cable television, or satellite broadcasts)”. Hedebro (1985, p.5) supposes communication to be situations where messages are transmitted between institutions, people, and media, irrespective of whether there is feedback or not. This is an indication that communication denotes social interactions within the society through the sending and receiving of meaningful messages.

As an instrument of social interaction, it helps people to understand themselves, to keep in touch with other people and to predict their response to situations. Communication is a means by which power is acquired, exercised and sustained. It is the medium through which relationships are established, extended and maintained. It provides a means by which people in business, politics and the professionals act and interact, exchange information and ideas; develop plans, proposals and policies; make decisions and manage men and materials (James, Ode and Soola, 2006, p.56).

Robbins (2003, p.157) identified the following as major functions of communication within an organization:

- **Control** – Communication acts to control member’s behaviour in an organization in several ways, since it has authority hierarchy or hierarchies and formal guidelines that employees are required to follow. For instance, when employees are required to first communicate any job related grievance to their immediate boss, follow their job description or comply with company policies, communication is performing a control function.
• Motivation – Communication fosters motivation by clarifying to employees what is to be done, how well they are doing and what can be done to improve performance if it is sub par or below standard. For example, formation of specific goals, feedback on progress towards the goals and re-enforcement of desired behaviour all stimulate motivation and required communication.

• Emotional Expression - Communication provides a release for the emotional expression of feelings and for fulfillment of social needs. For many employees, their work group is a primary source for social interaction. The communication that takes place within the group is a fundamental mechanism by which members show their frustrations and feelings of satisfaction.

• Information – Communication provides information that individuals and groups need to make decision by transmitting the data to identify and evaluate alternate choices.

Communication Flow in an Organization

The pattern of communication flow in any organization depends on its structure. However, four levels of communication network have been identified as common to modern organizations: vertical, horizontal, quasi-vertical, and diagonal.

• Vertical – This is the flow of official information on job related matters downward or upward a hierarchical structure in an organization.

(i) Down Communication flows from people at higher levels to those at lower level in the organizational hierarchy (Koontz and Weithrich, 1998, p.242). In the view of Arhargba (1996, p.42), it moves from a superior officer to a subordinate, passing through the official channels set up to guide the flow of information. The contents include company goals and objectives, management policies and company plans and strategies (Benson – Eluwa, 1998, p.188).

(ii) Upward Communication flows from subordinate to a superior officer. According to Robbins (2003, p.162), upward communication flows to a higher level in the group or organization. It is used to provide feedback to higher-ups, inform them of progress towards goals and relay current problems. Upward communication keeps managers aware of how employees feel about their jobs, co-workers and the organization in general. When upward communication is encouraged in an organization, it enhances productivity, workers feel involved and are generally more committed especially when their views are accepted and become part of the organization’s policy thrust.
Horizontal communication refers to the flow of information across departments in the organization. The exchange of information here is between departments and peers and provides management the opportunity of harmonizing activities. Evans (1990, p.342) contended that lateral or horizontal communication occurs at all levels of organization and is generally marked by the increased frankness and ease with which groups at similar level communicate. The reason for this is that they are less affected or inhibited by the “chain-of-command” situation which employees tend to experience when communicating with superior.

Diagonal Communication is the flow of information among persons at different levels of who have no direct reporting relationships (Koontz and Weihrich, 1998, p.243). The diagonal communication relies heavily on reservoirs of cooperation and goodwill which the proficient communicator will have been careful to nurture by way of the friendly greetings or brief chat to this and that colleague on his journey through the company’s offices (Evans, 1990, p.211). In this situation, there may be no obvious line of authority, a manager may be dealing with a colleague more senior to him; he or she still will not report to him and may therefore feel under less of an obligation.

Semi-Vertical or Quasi-Vertical Communication is adopted due to certain internal complex situation in an organization. For example, according to Arhagba (1996, p.45) “As workers get more conscious of their rights within a system, trade unions become more assertive in the pursuits of union demands and goals. Consequently, workers participation in managerial decisions making through the use of trade unions has increase. The union leaders in negotiating with management on behalf of the union abandon the official vertical communication chain. The union leaders discuss official matters affecting the workers with the management and then report back to the congress men and women (workers)”. Another setting of semi-vertical communication within an organization is created when adhoc committees are set up or when technical specialist whose expertise may be understood by very few organizational executives is given room to discuss directly with the most superior officer in the organization.

Channels of Communication in an Organization

There are basically two major channels of communication in an organization. These are formal (official) and informal channels.

Formal Channel: This description is applied to those communications that are routed through what is referred to as “official channel”. This route is used to disseminate an organization’s directives and instructions for execution, since it is re-enforced by the authority of those executives who act as “staging-posts” in relaying such requirements. Official messages are expected to go through one’s 7
immediate superior. In giving and receiving information, every organization dictates the use of formal channels, such information is more carefully drafted, examined and has official backings.

**Informal Channels:** These are unofficial sources of official information. They are channels outside the vertical and horizontal channels of communication. Here, information is passed on by word of mouth among interested colleagues who have received it from various sources such as briefings, memoranda, visits, reports and so on. The two main channels of informal communication are rumour and grapevine. However, bypassing is sometimes adopted.

- **Rumour:** This refers to unofficial and unconfirmed information sent through interpersonal channels. There is usually no evidence to substantiate the message. Nobody can point out where the information originate; you will always hear that somebody else told the person who told you. Rumour is usually inaccurate and often malicious. Most of the time, it is fabricated and circulated by persons who are antagonistic to a cause or to the targets of the rumour. When rumours abound, it is a sign that human relations within the organization have, for some reasons degenerated. Rumour will also thrive if there is a gap in communication between management and employees.

- **Grapevine:** The term describes the inter-leaving branches of totally unofficial communication system which has been constructed informally and which is constantly changing. Grapevine carries information that is related to organizational policies, personnel transfer and appointment, promotions, and resignations, problems in the organization and other official matters. The major difference between rumour and grapevine information is that while rumour’s origin cannot be traced, the origin of the latter is traceable. The sources of grapevine news in organizations are usually secretaries and others whose job or personal connections allow them access to official information before it is officially released.

- **Bypassing:** This channel of communication is occasionally adopted in an organization. Sometimes, the urgency or importance of a communication may require that its sender, perhaps a Managing Director or Sales Manager chooses a route which bypasses any immediate management or supervising stage, such as sending a letter to all company employees regarding rumours of a proposed merger or direct relay to all sales staff details of a new bonus scheme (Arhagba, 1996; Evans, 1990; James, Ode, and Soola, 2006).

**Theoretical Framework**

This paper is hinged on the decision-making (or decision theory) approach. Viewing the organization as a system emphasizes the need for good information and channels of communication in order to assist effective decision-making in the organization. Here the focus of attention is on managerial decision-
making and how organizations process and use information in making decisions. Successful management lies in responding to internal and external change. This involves the clarification of objectives, the specification of problems, and the search for and implementation of solutions. The organization is seen as an information-processing network with numerous decision points.

Barnard (1938) cited by Mullins (1996, p.58) stressed the need for co-operative action in organizations. He believed that people’s ability to communicate, and their commitment and contribution to the achievement of a common purpose were necessary for the existence of a co-operative system. These ideas were developed further by Simon. He sees management as meaning decision-making and his concern is with how decisions are made and decision-making can be improved through effective communication (1977, p.101).

Methodology

The survey research method was adopted for the study with the use of questionnaire as the instrument to elicit information from the respondents. The population of the study is the Staff of Delta State Polytechnic, Ogwashi-Uku. The institution has a total of 642 staff, out of which 205 were sampled using the simple random technique. Copies of the questionnaire were administered on respondents who made themselves available in their respective offices. This ensured hundred percent rate of return. Responses from the questionnaire were collated, tabulated and analyzed using simple percentages.

Results

Analysis of the data generated was based on the 205 copies of questionnaire returned. This represented 100 percent rate of return. The high response rate was due to the use of on-the spot administration of the instrument on the respondents by the researcher and his team of research assistants.

Characteristics of Respondents

The demographic characteristics of the respondents were as shown in Table 1.

Table I: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (n = 205)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-40</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41-60</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary Education</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post Primary Education</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tertiary Education</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 1 shows the demographic characteristics of the respondents as they relate to their sex, age and education. Distribution of sex showed that 60 percent were male, while 40 percent were female. The distribution of age grouping showed that 58 percent were between 30 and 40 years; while 42 percent were between 41 and 60 years. Respondents’ level of education indicated that 5 percent had primary education, 25 percent were post primary school leavers, while 70 percent had tertiary education qualifications.

### Nature of Communication Between Management and Subordinates

Respondents were asked to indicate the nature of communication between management and subordinates. Their responses were collated and tabulated as shown in Table 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Forms of communication</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Promotion</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postings</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appointments</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policies</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 shows that promotion (15%), postings (40%), appointments (10%) and policies (35%) are the key focal areas of communication between management and staff in the polytechnic.

### Communication and Staff Motivation

Responses on the role of communication in staff motivation by respondents were as indicated in table 3.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Communication input</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leads to increase productivity</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enhances team work</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aids performance</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promotes feedback</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3 indicates that productivity (26%), team work (30%), performance (19%) and feed back (25%) are some of the areas the impact of communication can be felt in staff motivation.
Barriers to Effective Communication

Responses on the factors that hinder effective communication in the organization were as presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Factors that Hinder effective Communication (n = 205)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Communication barriers</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Failure to communicate</td>
<td>35.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delayed communication</td>
<td>24.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of feedback</td>
<td>29.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over-loading</td>
<td>10.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4 showed that failure to communicate (35.2%), delayed communication (24.8%), lack of feedback (29.7%) and over-loading (10.3%) are the factors that hinder effective communication in Delta State Polytechnic, Ogwashi-Uku.

Communication and Organizational Conflict

Respondents’ opinion on the role of communication in organizational conflict prevention and resolution were as presented in Table 5.

Table 5: Communication and Organizational Conflict (n = 205)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Communication role</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prevents mistrust, apathy and antagonism</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encourages cooperation in conflict</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creates condition for dialogue</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promotes harmony and peace</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5 revealed communication role in organizational conflict prevention and resolution: prevents mistrust, apathy and antagonism (30%), encourages cooperation in conflict situation (16%), creates condition for dialogue (26%) and promotes harmony and peace (28%).

Discussion

The findings validated earlier studies in this direction. Table 2, for instance, was used in addressing the first objective, which sought to know the nature of communication between management and subordinates in the institution. The communication takes the form of promotion (15%), postings (40%), appointments (10%) and policies.

The data in table 3 addressed objective two, which assessed the role of communication in staff motivation. Findings suggest that productivity (26%) enhancement of team work (30%), aiding performance (19%) and feedback promotion (25%) are some of the functions of communication in staff motivation.
This confirmed the positions of several writers. Evans (1990, p.213) said underlying all communication is the need for the sender to motivate the receiver to action or sympathetic understanding. He argued that for messages to have the desired impact on receivers, senders’ communication style should be motivating, involving and encouraging. For Akpovi (2000, p.48), team work is attained when members of an organization understand each other and communicate clearly. Coordinated effort towards common goals is impossible without effective communication of information and ideas, attitudes and feelings among individuals and groups in the organization. Corroborating this view, Imhabekhai and Oyits (2000, p.56) asserted that for any organization to function maximally, there must be communication because management and subordinates must interact for the organization to move forward. Managers therefore are under obligation to motivate their subordinates to greater effort, productivity, better quality standards and performance on the job through effective communication.

The data in table 4 was used to address objective three. Findings from the study indicated that failure to communicate (35.2%), delayed communication (24.8%), lack of feedback (29.7%) and overloading (10.3%) are some of the major factors that hinder effective communication in the polytechnic. Imhabekhai and Oyits (2000, p.59) had identified; distortion, filtering, overloading, routing, physical environment, personal and psychological differences, semantics, lack of feedback, lack of communication policy as factors that could cause communication gap, retard or distort effective communication in an organization.

Table 5 addressed objective four of the study. Findings from the study showed that communication can prevent mistrust, apathy and antagonism (30%), encourage cooperation in conflict situation (16%), create condition for dialogue (26%) and promote harmony and peace (28%). Arhagba (1996, p.49) believes that conflict resolving communication takes place when people involved in a dispute have both motives to cooperate and compete. She identifies bargaining, peace-keeping (mediation) as communication geared towards resolving conflict. Industrial and labour conflicts can be prevented through regular and effective communication between trade unions and management. According to Imhabekhai and Oyits (2000, p.58) “When trade unions channel their grievance to management for action and management promptly takes action on such issues by engaging union leaders in discussion and negotiation, a lasting and acceptable solution can be found to forestall the conflict”.

**Conclusion**

The aim of the study is to examine the role of communication in the efficient management of an organization using Delta State Polytechnic, Ogwashi-Uku as a case study. It was found that effective communication enhances the efficient management of an organization, impact positively on the job performance of staff in the organization, help in reducing or resolving conflicts and promotes harmonious personnel relationship in such organization.
Role Of Communication In The Efficient Management Of An Organization: A Case Study Of Delta State Polytechnic, Ogwashi-Uku

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

- Management should not allow room for communication gap in the system as this will adversely affect the organization.
- Communication between staff in the Polytechnic should be made clear as much as possible and devoid of ambiguities to enable the receiver of the message understand it.
- Line of communication between staff and management should be kept open to avoid rumour mongering which adversely affects organizational efficiency.
- Management and superiors alike should endeavour to commend and reward deserving staff to boost their morale.
- Regular meetings between management and union leaders should be encouraged to resolve contending issues.
- Staff should be sent on training to update their knowledge and sharpen their communication skills.

References


