

ROLE OF COMMUNICATION IN LABOUR MANAGEMENT RELATIONS

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Abstract

Effective communication is an indispensable management tool. For any organization to function maximally, there must be communication because management and subordinates must interact for the organization to move forward. Communication is transfer of ideas from the sender to the receiver. Communication serves two key functions for management. It provides a vehicle by which one can implement a plan of action co-ordinated towards a common goal and a means by which members of an organization can be motivated to execute the plans willingly and enthusiastically. Furthermore, to achieve a two-way communication between staff and give them a sense of belonging, the management should embark on training and staff development programmes by way of conducting workshops, seminars, conferences to improve their working relationship and adequately discharge its mission. This paper examines all these issues and how relevant in helping to transforming the labour management relations in policy formulation and implementation.

Introduction

Communication can be defined in various ways. No matter the words used, certain basic concepts cannot be left out. For the purpose of this paper, we can say that communication is the means by which people in organization exchange information and transmit meaning from sender (encoder) to receiver (decoder) regarding the operations of the organization. It involves some interchange of ideas, emotions and facts between and among people through words, letters and symbols.

To Porter and Robert (1976), communication implies an attempt to share meaning by transmitting messages among people. Communication can also be viewed as a transactional process where people construct meaning and develop expectations about what is happening around them through the exchange of symbols, Myers and Myers (1982).

Scott and Mitchell (1976), view communication as a vehicle by which information relevant to decision is transferred, it is fundamental to the implementation of decision. Communication, whether written, oral, formal or informal is goal directed in organizations, broadly intended to secure performance at all levels that results in the implementation of decisions and the achievement of organization goals.

Katz and Kahn (1978), opined that communication is the exchange of information and the transmission of meaning, it is the very essence of a social system of an organization. It involves the transfer of information from the sender to the receiver with information being understood by the receiver (Quoted in Clark, 2000). From the various definitions given above, the central thrust of communication is directed towards the achievements of organizational goal, co-operative efforts and group interactions. It is the process of sending and receiving information. It is also the sharing of ideas for mutual understanding. For an effective communication, there must be a common frame of reference between the sender and the receiver. In order words, there must be a common understanding of the intent and purposes of the message sent by the receiver. Therefore, communication can only take place when a message is sent, received and well understood by both parties. In essence, for communication to be effective, the message must be meaningful and relevant.

Importance

Experience has shown that good communication is absolutely necessary in every aspect of management because of the important functions it fulfills. It is the means by which social inputs are fed into social systems. Human behaviour is modified and change is effected by means of communication. Information is made productive and goals are achieved. The foundation upon which every organization and administration, irrespective of the size must be built is communication.

It holds the key to every interpersonal relationship. Without communication, organization members cannot be linked together and activities co-ordinated to achieve objective. A good illustration is the construction of the Biblical Tower of Babel which collapsed because of the inability and failure of the builders to understand themselves through communication (see the Holy Bible Genesis 11:1-9). According to Bernard, C. I. (1938) in Umoh, S. M. (2000:182), communication occupies a central place in organization theory because the structure, extensiveness and scope of organization are almost entirely determined by communication techniques. This is why we must pay attention not only to the media of communication, but also to the personal interrelationship of people in the management of communication process.

Purpose

In broad terms, the purpose of communication is to effect some changes and influence people's actions and behaviour towards the welfare of the organization. For instance, business require information about government regulations, prices in the market, competition, new technology, climate, business cycle, etc, to be able to make good decisions about their product lines, distribution policies, marketing strategies, production quality and quantity and so forth.

Specifically it helps in the Following Ways:

1. To establish meaningful goals;
2. To develop plans;
3. To recruit, select, develop and appraise staff;
4. To control operation;
5. To organize resources effectively and efficiently;
6. To lead, direct, motivate and create a conducive working climate;
7. To manage funds economically;
8. To adjust policies to suit circumstances;
9. To relate organization to its external environment, for instance, making managers aware of customer preference, availability of suppliers and raw materials, sentiments of the community and government policies and regulations.

Whose Responsibility to Communicate?

Since it has been established that communication is intended to influence action, it is reasonable that members in the organization should share some responsibilities in the process of communication. The General Manager (G.M.) or the President of the corporation is not expected to always be the giver or originator of information, nor should the subordinate always be at the receiving end. Umoh, S. M. (2000:184), says: "for communication to fulfill its intended function, the two parties-giver and receiver must occasionally exchange their role." To benefit maximally, however, the chief executive must determine how relevant the information he has received is to the progress of the enterprise. He should then release such information in time to those affected. The subordinates, in turn, should not wait for things to get out of control before they intimate management.

Ingredients in Communication

1. **Source:** This is the originator of the idea. The sender encodes the idea and the message is transmitted to the receiver.
2. **Receiver:** The receiver receives the message and decodes it. This symbol comes as a block; he thinks about the message and tries to reason out the meaning of the message.
3. **Message:** It is the encoded ideas or thoughts that have been put into form that people can understand.
4. **Media:** This is the form by which a message is transmitted. A message can be sent either by facial expressions, written or spoken words. The media means the medium through which the message is sent.
5. **Channel:** This is the means by which a message is sent out. It can be through the mouth, eyes, gestures or writing.
6. **Effects:** This is the reaction of the receiver after decoding the message. There can be a wrong decoding by the receiver if there is no common field of experience between the source and receiver. In essence, the receiver must be able to decode the message. Therefore, the above listed points must be presented before effective communication can take place.

Channels of Communication

Channel is the network linkage through which the message travels from the sender to the receiver. The medium used may be oral, written or non-verbal form and may be transmitted through one or a combination of the following: letter, bill board, memorandum, magazines, radio, newspapers, meetings, bulletins, circulars, etc.

Formal Channels of Communication

In formal communication, communication flows from top executives to subordinates and to operative employees. It is the management that provides the channel through which communication flows downwards. The major channels used in downward communication include the following.

1. The chain of command, that is organizational structure;
2. Porters and bulletin boards;
3. Letters and pay inserts;
4. Company periodicals;
5. Employee hand book and pamphlet;
6. Loud speaker and intercom system;
7. Information racks;
8. The organizational grapevine;
9. Annual reports;
10. The labour union.

Upward communication deals with communication from subordinates to the superior and this should be kept open by encouraging subordinates to use them. Some of the channels for upward communication are:

1. Chain of command;
2. The grievance procedures;
3. Counseling;
4. Morale questionnaires;
5. An open door policy;

6. Exit interview;
7. The organizational grapevine;
8. Labour union;
9. Informers and anonymous complaints.

Upward communication is very necessary in order to promote good human relations. It is through the means that management monitors the feeling of employees and takes appropriate actions to correct what would otherwise lead to costly labour management disputes.

There is equally communication among people on the same level in the organizational hierarchy often referred to as lateral communication. The communication is very important if work processes are to be facilitated, Nwachukwu (1992).

What Managers should Communicate

The manager's office is often flooded with pieces of information that may not contribute towards attainment of corporate objectives. He should sift the relevant from the irrelevant and use them appropriately.

The employee is the focal point of management communication. Therefore, an effective manager must plan the contents of his communication to suit the interest of his employees from the first day of his recruitment till the day he leaves the organization. This does not mean always saying things that will please the employee.

Orientation affords an opportunity to stabilize the new employee emotionally. He is led to generate a feeling of familiarity with his colleagues, supervisors, subordinates and top management. He is informed of the social, ethical, political, legal, technological and economic environments within which the organization operates. Policies, rules, plans, programmes, etc are also explained as he starts operating till he can function independently.

Next, comes the periods to inform the worker of how well he has performed his qualities, strengths and weaknesses. His rewards or punishments are also communicated accordingly. We refer to this as appraisal.

Insurance schemes, accident prevention programmes, free medical treatment and other fringe benefit devices are disclosed. Clearly explained matters do not necessarily mean securing employee's approval and support; but standard of response is raised.

From the above discussion, we see that the manager's communications centre around the employee till the day he leaves the organization.

For the Manager to do this easily, the Information at his Disposal

- (a) Must reach him easily and flow fast;
- (b) Must be appropriate and sufficient in amount;
- (c) Must not be overloaded, but relevant;
- (d) Must not be maximum but pertinent.

Therefore, the manager must always ask himself what he really needs to know about his job or what would happen if he did not get such information on a regular basis.

Barriers to Effective Communication

The following factors could cause communication gap in any work organization:

- (1) **Distortion:** This is the transformation of the meaning of a message by changing its contents. This will affect the relationships between the management and labour as

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there will be lack of trust and credibility in the organizational policies made and sold to workers by management.

- (2) **Filtering:** This occurs when the sender sieves the information and transmits only the favourable aspect of it. When the whole picture is not presented, there can scarcely be a meeting of the minds. Employees sieve information in order to look favourable before the superior.
- (3) **Over Loading:** Over loading occurs when too much information is passed at the same time. This bugs down the entire system. Judicious selection of information helps to avoid clogging the entire system with irrelevant information. In organization where there are too many memoranda floating around, the management form the habit of not reading their mails.
- (4) **Routing:** It is essential that all information be properly sent to the right people who are expected to benefit from them. When a person receives a mail which has no meaning or significance to him, he gets infuriated. The timing of information can equally, cause communication gap in the organization. Information should be current. Sending information when it had already gone out through the grapevine, diluted or distorted is very injurious to an organization's image. Employees, like to know what goes on in the organization and as such prefer to get authentic information from management.
- (5) Physical environmental factors can reduce or prevent the sending and receiving of messages. Such physical interferences include distance, distracting noise and the break down or elimination of communication media such as telephones and inter office memoranda.
- (6) Differences in personal and psychological make up of the individual may create barriers between people as different people respond differently to similar stimuli because of their varying backgrounds and orientations.
- (7) **Semantics:** The idiosyncrasies of language such as multiple meaning of words and differences in connotations and interpretations of language from individual experience may cause communication breakdown.
- (8) **Lack of Communication Policy:** Most companies do not have clear-cut and stated policy dealing with intra or inter organizational communication. Employees want straight forward honest balanced information and not propaganda. Informed employees are better more productive. They get more out of their work and they do better job for the company.
- (9) **Insufficient Communication Training:** It has been indicated by Braimah (1988), that where communication training was employed, attitudes of the employees were twice as favourable to the company as compared to business where no training was given.

- (10) **Lack of Feedback:** A highly hierarchical organization structure system adopts a pyramidal communication system and therefore makes it difficult to have immediate feedback to a message sent through the chains of command. Lack of adequate feedback is in itself a barrier to harmonious relationship as the source might be unable to adjust further communication with his receiver.

Suggestion for Improved Labour Management Relations

In order to have a free flow of information and improve labour management relations in the organization, management should adopt the following ways.

- (a) **Allow for Participatory Management:** Workers' participation in management should be sent as a contributing factor to efficient utilization of human and material resources within an enterprise. According to Bermann (1975), when workers are not informed and involved in the formation of organizational goals, productivity will be affected because workers who did not derive job satisfaction from such a system will undoubtedly not put in their best.

Advantages

- (i) Workers have ideas, which can be useful;
- (ii) Effective communications upwards are essential to sound decision-making at the top;
- (iii) Workers will accept decisions better if they participate in them;
- (iv) Workers will work more intelligently if, through participation in decision, they are better informed about the reasons for the intentions of decision making;
- (v) Workers' participation will foster more co-operative attitudes among workers and management, thus raising efficiency by improving teamwork and reducing the loss of efficiency arising from industrial disputes.
- (b) **Access to Information:** There is every likelihood for workers to be more committed to the cause of an organization in which they work if and where they have free access to information. Katz and Kahn, (1966) said, workers that have little access to information have a low job production. In other words, accessibility to information can be viewed as an important factor determining harmonious labour management relations which ultimately affects organizational effectiveness.
- (c) **Message Repetition and Multi-Channel Communication Systems:** Message must be repeated through several channels for effective communication to take place. For example, news bulletins, circulars, memoranda, journals, telephone conversations, meetings and even suggestion boxes. The ultimate goal of multi channels of communication system in an organization is to obviate the loading of a single formal communication medium and also to ensure a free flow of communication among the rank and file of workers and management staffers in any organization.
- (d) **Communication Policies:** All levels of management be made communication conscious. Management should provide adequate proof in wanting to improve communications and that all communication channels be employed to provide whatever information that is needed and wanted. The need for the establishment of communication policies in

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- organization include: Keeping employers informed of company's goals, objectives and plans about the market place and about negative, sensitive and controversial issues, others are to provide information fast, encourage or mandate every superior to meet on a frequent and regular basis for an honest two-way discussion of job-related situation.
- (e) **Bureaucratic Dispensation:** New structure should be brought in which will be compatible with our culture, stage of development and orientation. Some of the present systems do not only inhibit the workers' chance to attain self actualization but they also frustrate and kill innovativeness as well as serve as a cog in the wheel of needed progress because of their long and tedious processes.
 - (f) **Avoid Delay in Communication:** Information solves the problems of uncertainty in human communication. As a result, workers should be informed about the happenings in the organization to avoid rumour mongering and conflict. Management should not assume that workers will understand or find out what the organization is experiencing, but rather, workers should be part and parcel of the organization.
 - (g) **Cultivate Better Human Relations System:** Management should cultivate good human relations with their workers because good human relations practice at work is better than increase in workers' salaries. According to Maslow's Hierarchy of needs, human beings cherish the sense of belonging and self actualization. A worker will be more productive and efficient if he is recognized and appreciated. He will willingly work towards achieving the organizational goal.

Conclusion

Effective communication, play a vital role in any society that enjoys opportunities for expression in organization, politics, business, education, religion, government, the media and so forth. People, communicate in times and places, giving a different setting, situation and barrier, but, importantly, the burden of responsibility on one, is not to communicate, but communicate to understand an issue, its causes and the advantages of all possible causes of action. Communication, as they say, is a *sine-quo-non*; every one must not do without.

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