REPOSITIONING ORGANISATIONAL COMMUNICATION IN NIGERIA FOR ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND SURVIVAL

Essienubong H. Ikpe, Ph.D

Abstract

Organisational Communication is operationalised as "the process of creating and exchanging messages within a network of interdependent relationships to cope with environmental uncertainties" (Goldhaber, 1993:15). It is an area of specialisation in Communication Arts taught to *a* doctorate degree level in Nigerian Universities. Presently, the Curriculum of the two Nigerian Universities offering Organisational Communication is deficient in skills acquisition based on 3CTS, capacity building for teaching and research and exra-curricular activities. To reposition the Curriculum of Organisational Communication, the following content units should be introduced: skills development based on ICTS, computer training, case studies, communication audit, communication training and capacity building for teaching and research. Extra-curricular activities should include: regular facility visits to industries, Students Industrial Work Experience (SIWES). Others are business games, business songs and choruses, business/management debate, and business/management drama. The repositioning process should be based on ICTS needs and globalisation, Nigeria's National Policy on Education, appropriate theoretical framework and society's relevance and quality education for the 21^{sl} century.

Introduction

In 1956, William Whyte labelled most workers "organisation men" because of the large amount of time they spent within organisations. Livenson (1973) claimed that Whyte's statement was true since 90 percent of all working people work in organisations. To substantiate further, when the time we spend in civic and social clubs, religious and educational institutions, hospitals and banks is added, it is relatively simple to conclude that all of us today are organisation men and women.

In an organisation, the most important resource is the human being; the most important vehicle for interaction is communication. People in an organisation have to organise to survive and they do so through the process of communication. The academic discipline that focuses on the nature and effectiveness of human interaction as it occurs in work environment is called Organisational Communication. Organisational Communication is a sub-field of broader academic discipline of communication which addresses similar questions across a wide range of social settings including families, schools, politics, media (Eisenberg and Goodall, 2001). It is actually one of the latest areas of specialisation in Communication Arts discipline. Organisational Communication is the process of creating and exchanging messages within a network of interdependent relationships to cope with environmental uncertainties (Goldhaber, 1993:15).

This discipline was introduced into the Communication Arts Curriculum in the 1960s in the U.S. In Nigeria, it was introduced into Communication and Language Arts Curriculum of the University of Ibadan in the 1970s and in the Communication Arts Curriculum of the University of Uyo in the 1980s. Since its introduction, this academic discipline has had a tremendous pace of development in content and functional application to man and society. The discipline has been taught in the two pioneer institutions in Nigeria from undergraduate to doctorate level. Hence, it is important to assess the importance of Organisational Communication to man, organisation and the human society. It is also important to critically assess its present curriculum. On the basis of the critical assessment, this discussion calls for a repositioning of Organisational Communication Curriculum to meet the. challenges of information and communication technologies (ICTS) needs of the 21st century, the challenging world of work, globalisation, environmental relevance and the future of Organisational Communication. It also calls for the teaching of this professional programme in all Nigerian universities offering Communication Studies.

The Importance of Organisational Communication in the Communication Arts Discipline

Communication Arts is "an all-embracing discipline which concerns itself with all the acts of communicating in both personal and non-personal situations" (Akpan 1987; 44). An organisation is an important communication environment. Hence, we study organisational communication in the Communication Arts discipline to understand and enhance our role in inventing a better future and to maintain some degree of control over work environment. More specifically, as enumerated by Eisenberg and Goodall (1997:17), knowledge of Organisational Communication guides us to:

(i)   ask informed questions about everyday business practices,

(ii)   develop skills that can improve our chances of success,

(iii)   improve the quality of our work life,

(iv)   develop empathy for others who work at varying levels in different industries,

(v)   apply our knowledge and skills in communicating to promote organisational effectiveness.

Scholars and chief executives of organisations have recognised the importance of Organisational Communication. Goldhaber (1993:5) in recognition of the importance of Organizational Communication glorifies it as:

> the life blood of the organisation, the glue that binds the organisation, the oil that smoothes the organisation's functions, the thread that ties the system together, the force that pervades the organisation, and the binding agent that . cements all relationship, and the organisation embalming fluid.

These attributes and tributes emphasise the inevitability of Organisational Communication in the survival of any organisation. Hence, communication is essential to an organisation. Information is vital to effective communication. Therefore, as asserted by Goldhaber (1993), persons who control information, control power. This assertion goes to confirm the quest for and acquisition of information and communication technologies (ICTS) in modern organisations, and the notion of information haves and information-have-not or the information rich and information poor nations, and the resultant effects of information divide or chasm between and among nations and organisations. The issue of information control and power had led to the on-going debate on the New World Information and Communication Order.(NWICO) since the 1990s.

Research findings have supported some of the preceding attributes and tributes by Goldhaber. Goldhaber (1993:5) reports that there is a correlation between effective communication system and high overall organisational performance. Also, some business leaders interviewed by Goldhaber (1993) testified to the importance of effective communication in their organisations. Furthermore, Goldhaber (1993) reports that management and communication consultants say that more than 10 per cent of U.S. business enterprises fail every year primarily because of poor management and ineffective employee communication. Several studies link communication effectiveness to improved productivity in organisations. Tubbs and Hain (1979) in combining the results from eight studies found "consistent and strong support for the assumption that management communication behaviours do play a significant part in contributing to or detracting from total organisational effectiveness". They designed communication training programme for a manufacturing plant that after its implementation, saved $7 million in productivity cost and decreased absenteeism. Another group of studies done in the military by O'Reilly and Roberts (1977) found the following results:

(i)   Individuals who passed information freely were rated as higher performers.

(ii)   Individuals who were rated as having lower performance levels tended to be seen in terms of information overload, redundancy, and gatekeeping functions, (iii)   Individuals who were active participants in communication networks were seen as more productive than isolates.

Clampitt and Downs (1983) also conducted a research that showed that feedback significantly improved productivity.

In Nigeria, a research conducted by Ndada (2000) on "Organisational Communication

Climate and Job Satisfaction in the University of Uyo (1991 - 1997)" confirms that there is a significant relationship between organisational communication climate and employee job satisfaction. Similarly, in a research conducted by Ikpe (2005) on "Communication in Personnel Management and Employee Productivity at Nigerian Breweries PLC, Aba" it was found that there is a significant relationship between effective communication in personnel management and employee productivity. Also, there is a significant relationship between effective communication in personnel management and organisational climate, and employee productivity.

From the foregoing discussion, it can be concluded that all organisational behaviours, and activities, namely: motivation, workplace emotions and values, team dynamics, decision making, organisational power and politics, conflict and negotiation, organisational culture, organisational structure and design etc. are affected directly and indirectly fay communication. Therefore, if organisations must survive, organisational communication must be taught effectively by repositioning it to meet the challenges of the 21^{sf} century. Hence, there is need to re-examine the present Organisational Communication Curriculum in our Nigerian Universities.

Present Organisational Communication Curriculum in Nigerian Universities

A curriculum can be seen as all dynamic series of studies and activities undertaken intra-curricularly and extra-curricularly towards graduation and qualification in a major field of study in a school, college/university. An examination of the curricula of the two universities in Nigeria offering Organisational Communication reveals that both curricula emphasise course outlines which emphasise theories and practice of Organisational Communication. Such course outlines emphasise the teaching of theories of organisation, the process of Organisational Communication and interactional formats of Organisational Communication. Very little or no attention is paid to the practice of the profession in areas of extra-curricular activities, and development of communication skills using ICTS and very little attention to research. Thus, the areas of deficiencies in the present curriculum include inadequate extra-curricula activities such as facility visits, business games such as monopoly, scrabble, chess, business songs and choruses, business/ management drama. These extra-curricular activities provide real life situations and experiences, role models to emulate, skills in strategy and vision development and development of team spirit and group dynamics. Other areas of deficiencies in the curriculum are in the area of additional content units on development of communication skills based on ICTS. These include participant observation, case studies, computer training and Internet and .Intranet accessing, communication audit, and communication training etc. However, to reposition Organisational Communication for organisational development and survival, it is important to be guided by the National Policy on Education and socio-cultural and political relevance of Nigerian Society and relevant theoretical framework.

Organisational Communication, Media Education and National Policy on Education (NPE)

Organisational Communication is an academic discipline in the Communication Arts family. It is also called Administrative Communication (Locker, 2000). It is an aspect of media education. As an important aspect of education, it should pursue the goals of Nigeria's National Policy on Education and should be relevant to the Nigerian society and the 21$^{S(}$ century. This means that it should be within the framework of the global trend in education responding to the demands of the electronic age: the rise of the global village.

Nigeria's philosophy of education is based on the following (NPE, 1998:7):
(a) the development of the individual into a sound and effective citizen;
(b) the full integration of the individual into the community; and
(c) the provision of equal access to educational opportunities for all citizens of the country at the primary, secondary, and tertiary levels both inside and outside the formal school.

A critical assessment of Nigeria's philosophy of education reveals that the curriculum of Organisational **Communication** as an aspect of media education is not wanting. Nevertheless, it calls for an assessment of the goals of the curriculum of Organisational Communication vis-a-vis the goals of tertiary education in Nigeria. The goals of tertiary education in Nigeria shall be to (NPE, 1998:27):
(a) contribute to national development through high level relevant manpower training;
(b) *develop* and inculcate proper values for the survival of the individual and society;

(c) *develop the intellectual capability of Individuals to understand and appreciate their local and* external environments;

(d) acquire both physical and intellectual skills which will enable individuals to be self-reliant and useful members of the society;

(e) promote and encourage scholarship and community service;

(f) forge and cement national unity and promote national and international understanding and interaction.

A critical assessment of these seven goals reveals that goals number 3 and 4 are not fully accommodated in the curriculum of Qrganisational Communication as media education. The curriculum has not made provisions for knowledge production and skills in the computer age. Majority of the students are computer illiterate. Also, the skills taught are unable to promote self-reliance among the trainees. It is on the basis of these deficiencies that Maduewesi (2005:16)

concludes that:

> …it would appear that tertiary education in Nigeria and most Africans has not advanced beyond what it used to be 40 - 50 years ago, in terms of relevance to societal needs.

On the basis of this, she further comments that:

> This probably explains why most African countries have carried forward into the 21^{s1} century glaring deficits of the 20th century in practically all indicators of human development.

These deficiencies call for curriculum reform by repositioning Organisational Communication within the framework of ICTS needs and globalisation, environmental relevance and theoretical imperatives and functionalism.

Theoretical Framework

In addition to Nigeria's National Policy on Education, the repositioning of Organisational Communication   in Nigeria for organisational development and survival   should   be founded on appropriate communication theories and environmental relevance.   The appropriate communication theories include:

Marshall McLuhan's Technological Determinism With Two Relevant Sub-Theses:

(a) We shape tools and they in turn shape us.

(b) The electronic age: the rise of the global village.   This theory and its sub-thesis are discussed in Griffin (2000).

Development Media Theory Discussed by McQuail (1990)
Marshall McLuhan's Technological Determinism Theory

At its core, McLuhan's theory of Technological Determinism postulates that inventions in technology invariably cause cultural change. This means that changes in modes of communication shape human existence. It also shapes human behaviour, relationship and ways of doing things. This implies that the reformed Organisational Communication Curriculum should be based on ICTS needs of the 21$^{s'}$ century. Also, **McLuhan** pictured all of us as members of a simple global village. The electronic media bring us in touch with everyone, everywhere instantaneously. Hence, the proposed repositioning and reforming of the curriculum of Organisational Communication should be based on ICTS and globalisation for survival in the global village.

Development Media Theory

Furthermore, repositioning the curriculum within the framework of ICTS should also tap the knowledge of Development Media Theory. The Development Media theory is based on assumptions about the development needs of the emergent states. According to McQuail (1990), media should

accept and carry out positive development task in line with nationally established policy. So, Organisational Communication should be repositioned to bring out individual, organisation and society's overall development.

With the foundation of Nigeria's National Policy on Education, theoretical framework, environmental relevance and JCTS needs and globalisation, long term goal, we can discuss "Repositioning Organisational Communication for Organisational Development and Survival in Nigeria."

Repositioning Organisational Communication in Nigeria for Organisational Development and Survival

An organisation is a living dynamic entity. This means that change is a constant process in an organisational life. Some changes bring about organisational development (OD). Burke and Schmidt (1970:36) defined OD as a:

> process which attempts to increase organisational effectiveness by integrating individual desires for growth and development with .organisational goais. Typically, this process is a planned change effort which involves a total system over a period of time and these change efforts are related to the organisation's mission.

Goldhaber (1993):321) simply explains OD as:
> a method of changing an organisation and its beliefs, values, attitudes and structures so that it can better adapt to the changing and turbulent environment of coming decades.

OD involves dynamic change. To equip organisations for the dynamic change calls for reforming and revitalising the curriculum of Organisational Communication based on ICTS needs, globalisation, environmental relevance and other knowledge and skills productions. The repositioned curriculum should reflect the following survival treatment:

1.   (a)   Additional content units in developing communication skills based on ICTS.
    (b)   Computer training, Intra.net and Internet accessing.
    (c)   Case studies.
    (d)   Participant observation.
    (e)   . Communication audit
    (f)   Communication training;
    (g)   Capacity building for teaching and research,
    (h)   Knowledge-re-configuration.

2.   Extra Curricular Activities
    (a)   Regular facility visits to industrial establishments.
    (b)   Students Industrial Work Experience (SIWES)
    (c)   Seminars and symposia.
    (d)   Business games, debates and drama.

la.   Additional Content Units on Developing Communication Skills Based on ICTS:
The skills on information processing, information retrieval and information transfer or dissemination technologies should be taught either at the university equipped studio or in apprenticeship arrangement outside the university. This means that the students should be equipped with the skills to use the following modem office equipment: electronic mail, facsimile devices, teleconferences etc.

(b)   **Computer training, Intranet atid Internet Accessing:** The students should be exposed to training in computer networking and Intranet and Internet accessing.
(c)   **Case Studies:**   This should be made an integral component of every unit. This would give

the students practical application, problem solving approaches and experience.

(d) **Participant Observation:** The students should be made to participate to give them industrial experience.

(e) **Communication Audit:** Just as check-ups by accountants and physicians provide clients with

information necessary to maintain health, so does a communication audit provide an organisation with advance information which may prevent major breakdown. Few people would deny the importance of effective communication in maintaining a healthy organisation. Hence, in a repositioned curriculum, communication audit should be taught in theory and in practice. The benefits of communication audit according to Goldbaber (1993) include the following:

(i) deriving valid information about organisation's communication system;

(ii) awareness of current behaviour practices and also likelihood of the future success or failure;

(iii) taking initiatives in planning the organisation's future rather than defensively reacting to communication crises;

(iv) valid information gives an organisation the freedom to choose from alternatives which path it wants to follow as it grows and develops;

(v) by replacing guesswork with accurate data, an organisation can recognise potential problems.

(f) **Communication Training:** This is an outcome of communication audit. The students should be taught professional skills.for.them to serve as trainers during communication counselling. Hence, communication training should expose students to communication training programmes based on ICTS geared towards solving organisational problems identified in the audit.

(g) **Report and Feasibility Writing:** These should be incorporated in the repositioned curriculum to improve the status of professionalism.

(h) Capacity building for teaching and research based on the advice by Maduewesi (2005) on curricular reform and innovation in African tertiary institutions for quality teaching and research to promote scholarship, the repositioned curriculum should build capacity for research and teaching activities at an international standard in identified areas that are crucial for national economic and social advancement. This should be emphasised at the postgraduate degree level.

(i) **Knowledge-Re-configuralion:** As advised by Maduewesi (2005), a knowledge-reconfiguration should form the survival and sustenance policy for the repositioned curriculum. In the words of Maduewesi (2005:23):

> All academics in the African region should be aware that knowledge production and dissemination are no longer self-contained activities carried out in relative institutional isolation. They now involve interaction with a variety of other knowledge producers around the world making use of the new information and communication technologies imperative.

2. **Extra-Curricular Activities**

To inject dynamism into the repositioned curriculum of Organisational Communication, it should be enriched with extra-curricular activities. These include:

(i)   Regular facility visits to industrial establishments to use and have a feel for communication and new development in the world of work.

(ii)   **Students Industrial Work Experience (S1WES**): The   duration   of   this   programme

        should not be less than three months.   It should be properly supervised and reports should be written by the students at the end of the programme.

(iii)   **Seminars and Symposia:**   These should be organised regularly with renewed spirit and an industrial leader should be invited to share his experiences with the students.

Business Games, Debates and Drama

Business games such as monopoly, scrabble, chess, Ibibio traditional business mathematical game (nsa isofi), business songs and choruses, business/management debates and business/management drama should be introduced as extra-curricular activities. These activities provide real life situations and experiences, role models to emulate, skills in strategy and vision development and the development of team spirit and group dynamics.

Conclusion

Repositioning Organisational Communication in Nigeria for organisational development and survival should be guided by the philosophy of "re-thinking and re-engineering education for the 21[SI] century "suggested by Obanya (2002) in the book "Revitalising Education in Africa." The reformation crusade according Obanya should be guided by relevance and quality in education. Relevance relates to the direct beneficiaries: the learner and the society. In this discussion, relevance is expressed in the theoretical imperatives, Nigeria's National Policy on Education and the Nigerian environmental factors such as culture, economy politics etc. Quality is the overall input, process and output of a system or the overall input transformation and output of a system. Both relevance and quality are interdependent and interlocking in achieving the goal. Hence, the two goals should be actively pursued.

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