

Managing Communication within Societal Organisations for Optimal Results

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Abstract

As human beings, we co-exist in societies that in themselves are often too large to manage which necessitates the forming of various organisations in which people function in order to live and achieve the benefits of life. The coming together of people in any organisation basically entails communication for the achievement of set personal and organisational goals against the back drop of which communication should be managed within organisations in a way that optimal results could be achieved. However, although the people in organisations may have been engaging in communication for a life time, they could still not have mastered it. Hence, this paper engages the descriptive design to highlight the concept of communication in organisations, the types of communication flow in organisations, the patterns of organisational communication, and some common pitfalls in organisational communication by managers alongside some proffered recommendations including the holding of regular meetings between management and staff and the regular giving of work status report by staff to management that could enhance healthy organisational communication for optimal results.

Key Words and Phrases: Society; Organisation; Communication; Managing; Optimal results

1.0 Introduction

An organisation consists of people, whether very many or few who come together regularly to achieve common tasks or goals. People have different backgrounds, interests and individual goals even when they come together in organisations which has far reaching consequences for the management of organisations whose task is to control the people in a way that would be systematic and purposeful enough for the achievement of both the personal goals of such people as well as those of the organisations. The coming together

of people entails communication; the need suddenly arises for people to relate through one form of communication or another, otherwise, nothing or only very little would be achieved. In every organisation, communication is necessary to deliver and receive information from one another and as such it is the reciprocal exchange of understanding (Kumbhar, 2013).

Hence, the crux of the matter of this presentation is the discussion of how the people at the helm of affairs in organisations i.e. the management staff, can engage the others in meaningful communication that could enhance the achievement of their goals, both personal and organisational.

The rest of this paper dwells on:

- * Organisational communication
- * Types of communication flow in organisations.
- * The patterns of organisational communication
- * Common pitfalls in organisational communication by managers
- * Conclusion and recommendations.

1.1 Organisational communication

Generally, communication is a behavior that entails the exchange of ideas, thoughts, data or feelings between parties, using verbal or non-verbal symbols to be understood and acted upon in order to achieve set personal or organisational goals. It is an integral aspect of human life since its existence signifies life (Osasona and Onjewu, 2003). However, the interpretation we give to communication varies and changes depending at times on the people or the situation involved (Little In Agamah, 2007).

Organisational communication, broadly speaking enables people who are together achieve individual or collective goals. People in any organisation can relate with one another only through some form of communication to which the resolve of management is very crucial. For any organisation to survive and succeed, the people should be capable of maintaining among themselves effective and continuing relations enabled by the way and manner communication is handled by management. The management is made of the managers, the people who take the major decisions in the organisation and are also charged with the task of conveying same to the others and coordinating them for the achievement of the desired goals. The conveying of decisions to others in an organisation which is communication is a functional and integral part of the organisational operation.

The aims of communication may be to complete a task, to create and maintain satisfying human relationships, convey information/directives /decisions or

to classify the roles of the individuals in an organisation. Furthermore, the structure of an organisation is determined in part by the network of the channels or paths along which communications is facilitated between members and the departments.

According to Chruden and Sherman cited in Agamah (2007), communication in an organisation is continuous. They opine that at all levels of an organisation, among and between executives, managers and all other members of staff, the communication process is continuously in action, conveying information, ideas, attitude and feelings among individuals and groups. Therefore, communication is the link between management and the other staff members in organisations.

Much of the communication in organisations is formally conveyed through writing and speech. Ideally, an organisation is an information process system in which messages of all sorts are imported, sorted, analysed and well distributed in an efficient way for the achievement of organisational goals.

Within organisations, official information transfer is compulsory and is passed through the lines of authority being the organisational chart which shows the hierarchy of power, authority and relationships within a setup. There are layers of authority within every organisation through which communication must flow vertically, horizontally or diagonally as will be more fully discussed under the patterns of organizational communication later in this paper.

1.2 Types of communication flow in organisations

It is now possible to explain the type of communication in organisations as follows:

Formal communication: the messages that move along their prescribed and regulated pathways are known as formal communication. The content of such messages strictly relate to the work and related activities of the organisation concerned. Formal communication maybe verbal, non-verbal or written in the form of letters, telephone calls, memos, circulars, computer printout, etc. All formal communication is recorded and filed as part of an organisation's records with file copies kept by the sender, the receiver and the other officers that require the information. They could be work orders or instructions, accounting records and reports, inventory and sales reports, policy statements, job descriptions, etc. The network of formal communication with accompanying filling places, serves purposes including: first, the definition of the routes over which all important messages travel. Second, the provision of a road map for senders and receivers of information to follow. Also, the indication of the route to those who will act and those who must be kept informed of planned action,

work in progress and work results. Fourth, the provision of a place for the storage of information that may be required for planning, operations and control. Finally, it delineates an orderly system for superior and subordinates to keep each other informed (Anonymous, 2007).

Informal communication: the formal communication in every organisation usually falls short of meeting all the needs of communication required in it. The gap between the needs of the formal system and those of the total system is bridged by an informal communication system consisting of a large number of messages, bits of information, opinions and expression of feelings among people and groups over paths and by means that are chosen for convenience and necessity rather than for priority or in conformity with the formal message that are sent and received or the paths over which they move in any organisation and the truth is that without informal messages, formal work will not be accomplished, and the organisation itself, made of psychological, social, economic and technical needs cannot continue to function.

Festinger in Onjewu (2014, p. 6) advanced three general sources of pressure that generate informal communication among human groups. They include:

· **People's need to share with one another** and agree on important opinions and attitudes in order to feel that they belong together in groups. Hence, much information is exchanged unofficially in the organisation as a whole and among members of sub groups which satisfies the need to conform and to share positions on issues.

- * **People's need to share with superiors and others** their hopes and ambitions in satisfaction of the need for achievement, affiliation and power.
- * **People's need to express emotions** such as joy, anger, hostility and the likes as a means of "blowing the stream"

Additionally, a fourth source is:

- * **The need to bypass "official channels"** for the sake of expediency in getting and giving information about performance on a job.

Informal communication takes the form of rumour and grapevine. In the case of rumours, they are talks or stories that are often times inaccurate, malicious and avaricious containing only half truths if any. Rumour monger use it to cause disaffection and malice and to serve relationships. Grapevine is the positive counterpart of rumour in which well-founded stories are not owned up to by anyone in the organisation. Such stories relate to policy issues, personnel transfer, promotion, etc. They emanate from formal sources handed out informally and are fairly more accurate though more incomplete than rumours.

The rumour and the grapevine must, however, not be relied upon as being authentic.

1.3 *Patterns of communication flow in organisations*

The basic patterns of formal communication within organisations are discussed as follows:

Vertical communication: is the flow of communication in a hierarchy. It is the passage of communication from the top to the bottom line in the power and authority hierarchy or vice versa, i.e. from the highest to lowest level in an organisation and the upward flow of communication from the lowest to the highest level in an organisation. Vertical communication flow is thus the downward and the upward flow of communication. According to Agamah (2007), in the past, workers were assumed to have been employed to work silently and passively for their pay and nothing more. Their opinions, attitudes, emotions and other concerns were immaterial and they were without question but recent studies have proved such an assumption as wrong. It is now known that information flow below the power ladder is as important and as successful to the organisation as those from above.

Horizontal or lateral communication: is the communication that exists between people or officers that are equal in status or rank within an organisation. It enables people on the same level of an organisation's hierarchy to engage in useful interaction in order to share views and discuss common problems.

Diagonal communication: is the communication that deviates from being vertically or horizontally channeled within an organisation's hierarchy which entails information sharing among people at different levels in an organisation in form of dialogue to achieve set objectives or the communication that flows from an organisation to the outside world and vice versa. Diagonal communication is helpful in facilitating the achievement of goals but must be skillfully and efficiently managed.

1.4 *Common Pitfalls in Organizational Communication by Managers.*

Communication is no doubt a very broad topic that relates to many things and although people have been engaging in it for a life time, they still may not have mastered it because every communication act is peculiar depending on prevailing circumstances and only experienced communicators are capable of adapting to every situation for effective communication. Hence, this paper continues by looking at some barriers to organisational communication on the part of managers.

- * Some managers assume that because they are aware of an information, then everyone else in the organisation is also aware of it, whereas, other staff members may not know about certain things until a deliberate attempt is made to inform them.
- * Similarly, some managers do not really value communication and assume that it just happens. As a result, they may not be critical enough to view every communication act as unique thereby giving each one the attention it deserves. Also, they may not take note of who told them what or tell the people who need to know things promptly even when they intend for everyone to know an information.
- * Nowadays, because of the diversity of people's interests in the same organisation, it is easy for management to believe that they have conveyed information to someone without being aware that they were wrongly interpreted. Unfortunately, management won't be aware of a subsequent problem until a major issue arises from the confusion.
- * Sometimes, inexperienced managers could interpret their jobs to be mainly problem solving and if there is no problem/crises, then there is nothing that needs to be communicated.
- * Communication problems can arise when management simply sees no value whatsoever in communicating with subordinates, believing that the subordinate should simply shut up and do their jobs.

1.5 Conclusion and recommendations.

Organisations are mechanical things in which divisions or departments including the employees function in defined communicative roles. What works in one organisation will work in another similar organisation but little or major adjustments is necessary when the difference is significant. The primary aim of organisations is to achieve optimal results and this could only be made possible where there exists a suitable communication climate that allows for a free flow of communication within organisations for which the following recommendations suggested by McNamara (1997), advises management to:

- Ensure that every employee receives a copy of the strategic plan, which includes an organisation's mission, vision, values, statement, strategic goals and strategies about how the goals will be reached. Ensure every employee receives an employee handbook that contains all up to date personnel policies.
- Develop a basic set of procedures for how routine tasks are conducted and include them in a standard operating manual.
- Ensure that every employee has a copy of their job description and the organisation chart.

- Regularly hold management meetings even if there's nothing pressing to report. If meetings are held only when there's something to report, then communication will occur only when management has something to report, then communication will occur only then thereby making communication a one way process and the organisation will suffer. Have meetings anyway, if only to establish and affirm the status of things and that there are not immediate problems.
- Hold full staff every month to report how the organisation is doing, major accomplishments, concerns, and announcement about staff, etc.
- Leaders and managers should have face-to-face contact with employee regularly. Even if the organisation is large, management should stroll by once in a while.
- Regularly hold meetings to celebrate major accomplishments. This helps employees perceive what's important, gives them a sense of direction and fulfilment, and let them know that leadership is on top of things.
- Ensure that all employees receive yearly performance review, including their goals for the year, updated job descriptions, accomplishments, need for improvement, and plans to help employees accomplish the improvements.
- Ensure that all employees give regular status reports to their supervisors. Include a section for what they did last week, will do next week and any actions/issues to address.
- Ensure that all supervisors meet one-on-one at least once a month with their employees to discuss how it's going, hear any current concerns from the employee, etc. Even if the meeting is chit-chat, it cultivates an important relationship between supervisors and employees.
- Use management and staff meetings to solicit feedback. Ask how it's going. Do a round table approach to hear from each person.
- Act on feedback from others. Write it down. Get back to it even if all you can say is that you can't do anything about the reported problem or suggestion, etc.
- Respect the "grapevine." It's probably one of the most prevalent and reliable forms of communications. Major "movements" in the organisation usually first appear when employees feel it safe to venture their feelings or opinions to peers.

Additionally, there are several basic communication activities which provide a solid foundation for effective supervision. Such basics ensure that everyone is working together towards a common cause. Ironically the basics are generally the first activities that stop when an organisation is in a crisis. Consequently, an

organisation development specialist, when "diagnosing" an organisation, often first looks to see if the basics are ongoing. The following actions should therefore be piloted by managers.

I. Have all employees provide weekly written status reports to their supervisors.

The report should include what tasks were done last week, what tasks are planned next week, any pending issues and date the report. Reports writing is a tedious task but reports are precious in ensuring that employees and their supervisors have mutual understanding of what is going on; staff and managers through them could stand back and reflect on what they are doing.

II. Hold monthly meetings with all staff together.

Review the overall conditions of the organisation and review recent successes. Consider conducting "in service" training where employees take turns describing their roles to the rest of the staff. For clarity, focus and to boost morale, be sure to use an agenda and ensure follow-up minutes. Consider bringing in a client to tell their story of how the organisation helped them. Such meetings could go a long way towards building a feeling of teamwork among staff.

III. Hold weekly or bi-weekly meetings with all staff together if the organisation is small otherwise with all managers together.

Hold these meetings even if there is not a specific problem to solve – just make them shorter. (Holding meetings only when there are problems to solve cultivate a crisis-oriented environment where managers believe their only job is to solve problems.) Use such meetings for each person to briefly give an overview of what they are doing that week. Facilitate the meetings to support exchange of ideas and questions. Also, for clarity, focus and morale, be sure to use an agenda, take minutes and ensure follow-up minutes. Have each person bring their calendar to make sure that scheduling of future meetings accommodates each person's calendar.

IV. Have supervisors meet with their direct reports in a one - on - one meeting every month.

This ultimately produces more efficient time management and supervision. Review overall status of work activities, hear how it's going with both the supervisors and the employees, exchange feedback and questions about current programs and services, and discuss career planning, etc. Consider such meetings as interim meetings between the more formal, yearly performance review meetings.

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