



ORGANISATIONAL COMMUNICATION, THE PANACEA FOR IMPROVED LABOUR RELATIONS

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Abstract:

This paper examined the importance of organisational communication to overall effective labour relations. It looked at organisational communication and its role in labour relations between the parties involved in Labour relations for better business procedures and relationships. It explained the importance of organisational communication in enhancing better labour relations within the organisation and with people outside the organisation. It enumerated the various groups that are involved in industrial relations and how they could use organisational communication for better industrial relations. It established the importance of organisational communication to the overall success of any organisation. Communication is vital to all human relations including labour relations but it seems to have been taken for granted or treated as inconsequential. When good organisational communication is not given its pride of place in organisation, it would affect labour relations negatively. This paper looked at the importance of organisational communication to labour relations, its effects on organisational performance, and negative effects of lack of good communication between stakeholders in labour relations and concluded that organisational communication should be properly used by all concerned in industrial relation matters for better performance of the organisation and improved labour relations both within and outside the organisation.

Key words: Organisational communication, improved labour relations, organisational performance, relationship

1. Introduction

Communication has been with man from the inception of life. Whichever form it takes, man always expresses himself with the intention of being understood by his audience and he expects the audience to give him a feedback. Communication is a vital tool in any relationship. Without communication you cannot have relationship whether at work or in other spheres. Communication helps the parties concerned to understand each other for better performance and better relationship since communication enables the parties to have understanding of what each person is putting across.

Communication is an art of passing information from one person to the other or receiving information. According to Webb (1975), communication is the process of sending and receiving messages that inevitably brings about results whenever human beings or other animals are exposed to each other. The essence of Webb's definition is that human beings interact through communication, without communication therefore, there cannot be interaction. Communication is essential to our existence and through it we are able to get answers to our requests and expectations and this determines our reactions and performance. Hybels and Weaver (2001) explain that communication is any process in which people share information, ideas and feelings, that communication involves spoken and written words, that body language, personal mannerism and style give meanings to message.

In workplace, the basic components are purpose, people, structure, technology, external environment and the dominant value system of that organisation; all these components are understood through communication of various forms-oral, written, graphics, unwritten but implicit culture and work procedure. All the components are interrelated and a change in any of them brings serious repercussions on the others and gives room for mis-interpretation and mis-understanding which could be inimical to the system. Organisation itself is a system of behaviour and so communication is one of its main attribute. All the components of the organisation must work together to achieve the set goals of the organisation and the main tool for this is communication.

Conflict is part of human interaction as put forth by the pluralist perspective of industrial relations and we have conflict more often in workplaces as we see in recent times, but with organisational communication put into good use there might be fewer cases of conflicts. In view of the importance of communication in labour related matters as it is to other spheres of human relations, organisational communication must be properly planned out and properly used so that stakeholders will be well informed and have better understanding which will likely reduce incidences of conflict in the workplaces and also improve labour relations.

All of the five types of communication flow that must be present in an organisation are essential for the overall efficiency of the organisation and better labour relations with all the stakeholders but how well these are used in organisation is questionable because of many cases of conflicts in workplaces. The communication flow include: downward, upward, horizontal, diagonal and external. Absence of or poor use of anyone of these is likely to hinder good labour relations. Labour relations cut across a wide range of relationships: the government, the employer, the employees, the unions, the shareholders, the stakeholders and the general public. All these groups need good communication for the continuity of a well rounded relationship with the organisation. What the organisation does or does not do affects the various groups somewhat, hence the need for good and efficient communication to update the people for efficient relationship.

2. The concept of organisational communication

Organisations are set up either to render services or produce goods for people in the society and also to take care of the welfare of the employees and ensure their satisfaction. All the non-human resources that are needed for the smooth running of the organisation must be put to use by the humans and to do this, communication between the people is paramount. Communication within the organisation and with the people outside the organisation will lead to better understanding between the people. So, organisational communication is the communication that is done between the stakeholders for business purposes; to give appropriate information to people within and outside the organisation to ensure that work is done effectively and efficiently for the overall satisfaction of all.

Organisational communication according to Richmond et al (2005) is the process by which individuals stimulate meanings in the minds of other individuals through the means of verbal or non-verbal messages. Koschmann (2012) says that organisational communication is the communication that happens within organisation like sending emails, writing memos, talking on the phone, having meetings, teleconferencing, speeches and presentation. Business dictionary defines organisational communication as a process by which activities of a society are collected and coordinated to reach the goals of both individuals and the collective group. It is a subfield of general communications studies and it is often a component of effective management in a workplace environment. Organisational communication focuses on building relationships, or repeated interpersonal interactions, with internal organisational members and interested external publics; organisational communication is how organisations represent, present and constitute their organisational climate and culture – the attitude, values and goals that characterise the organisation and its members (Hahn et al, 2014). According to Hahn et al (2014) the U.S. Department of Labour reported that communication competency is the most vital skill necessary for 21st century workforce to achieve organisational success and that the Public Forum Institute (2001) maintained that employees need to be skilled in public presentation, listening, and interpersonal communication to flourish in an organisation (www.publicforuminstitute.org). All these point to the importance of organisational communication for effective and efficient business procedures.

If we limit organisational communication to the communication that takes place within organisation for the purpose of carrying out the various tasks within the organisation, it will only be a one side issue. The organisation is sub-system of the larger society and whatever happens in the organisation affects the larger society in a way. The organisation must communicate with the external environment, the stakeholders to have wholesome relationship.

3. The concept of labour relations

Labour relations as a concept in this paper could be seen as the relationship that exists between workers and the employers; and the relationship between the consumers, the general public and the organisation. Labour relations is more than the traditional relationship between the employees, their representatives and the employers but it is also the relationship between the employees, the employers and even the social environment which is affected directly and indirectly by the organisation.

Organisation is no more premised within its internal environment alone, it is now responsible to the larger society. A better labour relation between the groups that are involved in the organisation via effective organisation communication will lead to peaceful organisation and society. When the management is willing and able to be interested in the welfare and satisfaction of the employees, and the employees reciprocating with better behaviour and better performance at their jobs, then the labour relation is good. In the same vein, when the satisfactions of the consumers are important to the organisation and everything that is needed to be done is put in place to take care of this, then, the relationship is good especially when the communication between these groups is done at the right time and the right information is given.

Trebilcock (2011) says that labour relations is the system in which employers, workers and their representatives and directly or indirectly, the government interact to set the ground rules for the governance of work relationships; that labour relations system incorporates both societal values and techniques, both private and public interests are at stake in any labour relations system.

Workers and employers or management need to communicate well and see each other as partners in progress for better labour relations. Employee involvement is a sure way of doing this. The organisation owes the consumers the right to timely and factual information so that there will be better understanding and peaceful society. With well balanced and informative communication, the behaviour of the workers will improve, grievances will be easily resolved and there will be better labour relations.

4. Forms of organisational communication

Internal Operational: This is the communication that can easily be called procedural communication, it is done orally, electronically and in written form, it is used in conducting work within an organisation so as to implement the organisations' operating plans which include giving orders to subordinates on how and what to do, assembling reports, writing memorandums, and even communicating by computers. The weekly or monthly reports and records that workers prepare concerning sales, production, inventories, finance, maintenance and so on are done using internal operational form of organisational communication. Also, memorandums e-mail-messages and reports that workers write to carry out their assignments for better organisational performance are parts of internal operational communication. Internal

operational communication has formal channel for the flow of information, instructions and directives to workers which help to coordinate the activities of the workers so as to achieve the goals of the various departments/units and then the overall goal of the organisation. If this communication is not well channelled and not put to proper use it affects the relationship in the workplace negatively and work is not properly done and the parties concerned are not satisfied; it should be noted that job satisfaction is the first reward of people in workplace. Internal communication is an essential means of addressing organisational concerns—profits in the organisation, workers' appraisal, safety in the workplace, relationship among personnel on job matters, job satisfaction, productivity, reduction in conflicts and employee turnover.

External – Operational Communication: As the name suggests, this type of communication is done in the organisation for work purpose but it is meant to be used in relating with the public. External operational communication is business communication that an organisation is always or expected to have with its public, that is, suppliers, service companies, customers, and the general public. It could be to let the public know what the organisation is producing or the services it is rendering, giving information to the public and stakeholders on the activities of the organisation that could affect the people either positively or negatively. The information given at the right time and effectively will lead to harmonious labour relations between all concerned. A well informed public will show understanding and as such cooperate with the organisation for better labour relation and peaceful society. Some of the means by which the appropriate information is given could be via telephoning, on the spot point of sale, flyers, bill-board means of advertising, letter writing, company journals, magazines, annual reports and so on. Again, external operational communication is the effort of the organisation at direct selling, giving right information to the public, descriptive brochures, telephone call-back, follow-up service calls, and door to door sales of products and so on; advertising by means of radio and television messages, information to the public about the activities of the organisation for better labour relations, newspaper and magazine advertising, and point-of-purchase display of materials are all external communication for better labour relations. All these obviously play major role in the business plan to achieve its work objective and ensure good labour relations with the parties concerned. All that the organisation or business does to improve its public relations can be categorised as external operational communication.

The messages that are sent to the external stakeholders should be highly informative, clear and warm; this will lead to better understanding and better relationship between the organisation and the public. This message can be called good business etiquette; this contributes greatly to the organisation's good image with the intention to establish good labour relations. External organisational communication enables the organisation to give information to its customers and stakeholders about the organisation thereby the organisation is able to receive information (feedback) from the consumers concerning the goods or services it is providing for the public with the aim of improving. This is a good way of knowing the state of the organisation in relation

to the public and thereby the management is able to improve on the running of the organisation and improve on its goods and services so that the organisation will continue to be relevant in the global market. External communication will enable the organisation to know what the customer and the general public want and help the organisation to have better sales volume, improve on its service, enhance organisation's public credibility, profit for the organisation and better overall operational efficiency. External organisational communication keeps the stakeholders and the public informed of the activities of the organisation, it aids the organisation's goodwill when properly used by the management.

Every business is dependent on internal members, people outside the organisation and other interest groups for its success. The success of an organisation depends on its ability to satisfy customers' needs. Therefore, it must communicate effectively with its customers one of which is to keep the people informed concerning the things they should know for better understanding and improved relationship. This will reduce the incidences of stakeholders' reacting negatively against the organisation. Businesses depend on each other in the production and distribution of goods and services. This interdependence requires communication.

Personal Communication: This is non-business communication that is done within business premises yet it has a way of affecting the organisation because it has to do with the wellbeing of the workers. It is non-business-related exchanges of information and feelings among workers where they are able to talk about their personal matters with their friends in the workplace and thereby let out steam. Personal communication enhances social interaction and networking between workers where they are able to satisfy their emotional needs. Personal communication affects workers' attitude and attitudes affects workers performance. Managers must take cognisance of this type of communication and allow it in the workplace but it must be done with caution so that it does not affect the main job of the workers negatively. There must not be hot argument or noisy jokes that could turn the workplace to a noisy market place and thereby slow down the work. If workers are not able to relate with one another in personal communication wherein they are able to let out their burdens with their colleagues it affects their productivity, their relationship with other stakeholders and the organisation negatively.

5. Role of organisational communication

Communication helps to paint pictures of intents of the organisation by the appropriate individuals through proper channels for the attainment of goals and satisfactions of all concerned. But when it is done improperly and the picture is blurred, gloomy or totally distorted so much that others cannot make out what it is all about, or the communication does not get to the right people or the information is hoarded; then there is communication breakdown. In this wise, frustration sets in, there is miss-trust and fear and the defence mechanism that follows is conflict which if not handled properly can halt the entire system. The consumers that are outside the organisation

too will get wrong signals for lack of right information at the right time and they too could revolt depending on the importance of the services or products of the organisation to the consumers.

Some of the means of communication that enhance labour relations within and outside the organisation and enhance better performance include: employee handbook, employee report, memos, notice boards, billboards, jingles on radio, announcement on radio and television, journals, flyers, handbills, letters, bulletins, briefing notes, newsletters, house journals, meetings and team briefings.

Charles (2011) explains that communication and business are intimately and inseparably linked, that no business can survive without proper communication and that communication makes or breaks business. He further stresses that sender orientated approach seems to reflect the belief that a well structured communication product, where precise and correct terminology was used would automatically achieve what it was meant to achieve. For organisation to function effectively it must make use of the various flows of communication which include: downward, upward, horizontal and diagonal communication (Miljkovic, Rijavec, 2008).

Communication in organisation includes sharing of information, sharing and clarifying organisational goals, controlling and motivating others in the workplace. Information sharing and consultation are important to enterprise performance, productivity and employee motivation, communication is an essential attribute of leadership, it is essential for effective enterprise policy, and it is used to install procedures and mechanisms to promote sound labour relations. Communication plays vital role in joint consultation, performance appraisals and over organisational performance; two-way communication enhances understanding and cooperation and influence behaviour in desired direction (de Silva www.ilo.org/public/). Making good use of communication will get the parties concerned to be committed. When employees enjoy good communication in the workplace whereby they are able to participate by contributing to discussions and decisions that are related to their work, they tend to be committed to the organisation. The essence of communication in organisation must be to achieve better behaviour of the people concerned for effective performance of the organisation. Schwella et al (1996) explain that communication is the process through which the receiver's knowledge, attitude or behaviour are either changed or confirmed in some predetermined manner. Therefore, communication in organisation enables the stakeholders to be better informed and change their initial attitude or behaviour if communication is put into proper use for good labour relations. In unionised organisation, giving the members the right information and letting them know the real situation of things in the organisation will lead to industrial harmony.

Organisation communication should not be taken for granted in labour relations because it is the main wheel for effective labour relations. When communication is not properly used in an organisation it leads to conflicts and labour unrest, this could be both within and outside the organisation where the public is negatively affected. It leads to low morale in employees, lack of job satisfaction and high labour turnover. The employees that do not enjoy good organisational communication could get frustrated

because they would not know most of the things they are expected to do, there will not be enough information about the job and related matters. Through downward and upward communication and the proper use of employees' handbook and other means of communication in organisation, labour relations in the workplace will be better and the parties will be satisfied.

Communication reduces conflicts once the supervisors and the subordinates are able to communicate well on the running of the organisation, and other information about the organisation through downward and upward flow of communication. It enables the personnel to be involved in decision making in the workplace which gives the workers the sense of belonging as stakeholders in the organisation. Upward communication gives the manager the necessary information about the organisation through the subordinates for effective management of the organisation and it gives room for useful feedback. If the manager is able to communicate freely with the workers and the supervisor is able to give instructions on how job should be done; and the subordinate is able to communicate well with the superior, this process can easily be called a good management style on its own.

Upward communication which is the communication from the subordinate officers to the superior officers and the management allows the staff to offer ideas and make contributions to decision making in the organisation. Downward communication is from the supervisors to the subordinates to give instruction on how job should be done. It is used to announce organisation's decisions and it is used to inform the employees of the policies and procedures of the organisation. Through it, the manager is able to point out problems that need attention and give the employees feedback about performance generally. Upward communication helps the management or the manager to get feedback from the employees; it enhances good exchange of information. It helps practitioners in industrial relations to achieve job satisfaction.

Downward communication in the workplace helps to transmit vital information to the employees, through it, decisions are announced and it could boost the morale of the employees when properly used. Horizontal communication is good in problem solving in organisation; it aids task accomplishment and boost efficiency

Vital as communication is to better employee and management relations, Flood and Toner (1997) say that the presence of unions in workplace makes communication between these people more difficult; that the presence of unions impedes personal contacts and the outcome is bureaucracy in the workplace which slows down better labour relations and organisation performance.

For better labour relations in the workplace there is the need for employee participation which can simply be seen as the collective representation of employees in joint decision making. In the same vein, employee involvement is also vital though it has an individualist focus but it is an essential ingredient in employment relations and like employee participation, the wheel for the two of them is communication. According to Hyman and Mason (1995) there are four categories of employee involvement (EI), they are; downward communication to individual employees, downward communication to groups of employees, upward communication for individual employees and upward

communication for groups of employees. These levels of communication enhance better labour relations.

Gale (2012) explained that the general strike that started on 1st January 2012 in Nigeria after President Goodluck Jonathan announced the removal of petrol subsidy would not have been necessary if the parties concerned had made use of good communication in their labour relations. The government ought to have been clearer about its intention so that the organised labour would not have felt cornered as the union felt which brought about the strike that affected every area of the economy negatively as long as the strike lasted. He explained that there were increased labour disputes due to public spending cuts and other economic situations in the United Kingdom in 2012 as a result of poor communication in labour relations. He therefore suggested that line of communication should be left open because communication is of great value in labour relations.

Organisational communication must take into cognisance other people outside the workplace, it includes communicating with the intention to take care of public relations, public affairs, relating with the investors, the environment, consumers and the market in general. To successfully manage the organisation, good and effective communication with all the parties concerned is essential. Sharing information with the workers and giving the public the right information at the right time will enable them to handle whatever changes that are taking place in the organisation.

6. Organisational communication and employee performance

Charles (2011) citing Marschan et al (1997) say that researchers see language and communication as important factors in management process. Smidits et al (2001) explain that employee communication may facilitate identification process because communication discloses the goals, values and achievement of an organisation. They observe that a positive communication climate is not just rewarding but that it could provide information about the acceptance of an employee as a valued member of the organisation. Spaho (2013) explains that lack of internal and external communication in organisation results in inadequate performance

Campbell (2012) says that mutual trust and respect between managers and employees are vital components in creating good industrial relations and that there is need for two-way dialogue. Campbell (2012) stresses that learning how to create open lines of communication in an organisation could easily be critical to the future survival of a business; openness and sharing between management and staff are key drivers of successful teamwork in business. Workers should be well informed about the happenings in the workplace- financial situation, need for pay cut, market share, growth, opportunities and competition strategies. Decision making in the workplace was traditionally the role of the managers/management but in the present dispensation and with the intention for better performance, there is the need for managers to be open and involve the employees in decision making. Almost all decisions that are

made in the organisation affect the employees and involving them in such will reduce incidences of conflicts and increase workers' performance.

Good organisational communication aids the clarity of employee role. Once the downward communication is clear and the employee understands what is expected of him without any ambiguity, the task is likely to be performed efficiently for the overall achievement of organisational goal and the satisfaction of the employee. When there is poor communication in an organisation, it affects all the people that are involved in the organisation. Poor communication could lead to isolation, depression and a sense of not belonging. Robbins et al (2008) say that poor communication is probably the most frequent source of interpersonal conflict. Therefore, communication performs these four major functions in organisation: control, motivation, emotional expression and information. Postmes et al (2001) say that communication creates the condition for employee commitment to the organisation. The purpose of managerial communication is to achieve correct and effective information both vertically and horizontally so as to accomplish in good conditions the internal and external requests according to the managerial and organisational objectives (Niculae, et al 2006)

If manager communicates closely and effectively with the employees, he will be able to understand them, their needs, enhance their better performance and at the same time he will be able to evaluate their performance. Good leader communication will lead to employee loyalty and commitment for better organisational performance. Mayfield (2000) says that high levels of employee loyalty have been linked to an estimated 11 percent boost in productivity. Loyal workers enhance an organisation's reputation in the job market (Goman, 1991). Some researchers (Goman, 1991; Graen & Bien Uhl- 1995; Robbins, 2001) have concluded that workers' performance, job satisfaction and retention are strongly influenced by relations with the immediate supervisor and of course through communication. Robbins, (2001); Young & Post, (1993) explain that managers must explain to employees why decisions are made, that communication must occur in timely manners, that important information must flow continuously, that direct supervisors and other leaders must explain the specific implications of environmental and organisational changes to each level of worker; that employees responses to leader communications are validated. Employees that are well informed in the workplace and seen and treated as important members of the organisation because they are involved on decision making are likely to be satisfied with their work and perform efficiently. Organisational communication is essential for successful performance of any group, work team, unit or the entire organisation. In view of the present day globalisation, effective organisational communication is essential to keep any organisation functioning and the employees performing excellently in the present global market.

7. Conclusion

This paper establishes that improved use of organisational communication will reduce conflicts. Workers would know what they are expected to do work procedures

would be faster and easier. Employees would know the duties and obligations of the management towards them. The paper establishes that by communicating with the employees, they would feel belonged and this is a sure way of enhancing better relationship. Also, the public would be better informed and be able to understand issues that the organisation is dealing with, and such there would be peace between the public and the organisation. This paper shows that organisational communication transcends the communication within the walls of the organisation, but incorporates communicating effectively with the public. It shows that what goes on within the walls of the organisation affects the public somewhat hence, the need to give the public timely and accurate information by the organisation. It also establishes that the success of the organisation could be dependent on its ability to communicate well both internally (within) and externally (without). It shows that communication is a vital tool in management function.

It is evident that communication is the main tool for every type of relationship. Organisational communication must be taken seriously by the practitioners in industrial relations with the aim of having the goals of the organisation achieved, the employees satisfied, the consumers and other stakeholders satisfied and to avoid as much as possible unnecessary labour unrest. Managers and other officers that are responsible for the running of the organisation must know this all important aspect of organisation functionality.

Since communication is so important to the success of the organisation, training of the officers, union members and even the employees in the area of better labour relations is essential. Communication can be employed to make labour relations smooth and limit conflicts and misunderstanding to the lowest level. All the necessary methods of communication must be made use of so as to have harmonious labour relations where everyone involved in the organisation directly and indirectly will be properly informed. With proper and timely information, unpleasant situations in labour relations will be reduced giving rise to timely solutions to whatever seems not to be quite clear. Where the management gives the employees and other stakeholders timely and adequate information, agitators will be kept off and unions will not be misinformed and this will lead to harmonious labour relations.

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