Communication Climate and Employee Identification with Organizational Goals

Dr Grace U Nwagbara
Department of Communication Arts, University of Uyo, Uyo, Akwa Ibom State

Dr Ngozi E Uduma
Michael Okpara University of Agriculture Umudike, Abia State

Abstract
The study examined the role communication climate plays in ensuring employees identify with the goals of their organisations. The target population of the study consisted of 1,782 employees in a tertiary institution. A sample of 327 employees was derived using the Taro Yamane Formula. The study adopted the descriptive survey design. Two sets of questionnaires were used for data collection. Frequency tables, simple percentage, Pearson Correlation and multiple linear regressions were used to analyse the data generated from the questionnaires. Results show that good communication climate fostered stronger identification with organisational goals. Results also reveal that good communication climate had a positive influence on employees' identification with organisational goals. Communication is undoubtedly crucial in enhancing the overall activities of an organisation. The study recommends that institutions of higher learning should maintain a favourable communication climate so as to enhance employees' identification with organisational goals. It is also very important that institutions of higher learning should deliberately include their mission and vision statements and all schools objectives in all their publications.
Keywords:Communication climate, Employee identification, Organisational goals, Mission and Vision statement, Institutions of higher learning.

Introduction

Every organisation, at inception, sets goals for itself which are sometimes expressed in its vision and mission statements. Goals are targets that every organisation strives to achieve by its existence and operations. These goals focus on an organisation's long term intentions and describe future results towards which the organisation focuses its efforts and operational energy. Ultimately, an organisation's image, as perceived by its various publics, is largely dependent on the extent to which the organisation's goals are actualised. Without clearly spelt out goals, organisations will have no defined purpose, nothing to strive for, and consequently may not make meaningful accomplishments. Goals are, therefore, stepping stones for meaningful accomplishments. Drucker (2006) identifies eight key areas in which organisations should establish result-oriented goals viz: market share, innovation, productivity, physical and financial resource, profitability, management performance and development, employees' performance and attitude goals and social responsibility.

Wiley (2008) separates goals into four major groups. These are societal goals (organisation's intended contribution to the broader society), mission statement (a written statement of organisational purpose which defines a firm's target audience, and how it intends to accomplish its societal purpose), output goals (the type of business the organisation is pursuing and systems goals (the conditions within the organisation that are expected to increase the organisation's survival potential). Generally, organisational goals differ according to the type of organisation involved. Like any other organisation, tertiary institutions also do set goals.

Tertiary education in Nigeria, as in other countries of the world, contributes in various ways to the social and economic development of the nation. It is expected to raise human capital development to global standards as well as encourage innovation and inventions through research. The tertiary education sector is therefore expected to ensure quality and efficient operations. Consequently visions and missions are designed to be in line with global/societal expectations. The extent to which an employee will work for the attainment of organisational goals will be largely dependent on how well and how strongly he identifies with the organisation. This will in turn be determined by how well the goals have been communicated to him.

The objectives of the study

The objectives of the study were to examine how the employees of the institution perceive the communication climate in the institution, determine the level of identification with organisational goals in the school, examine the relationship between communication climate and employees' identification with organisational goals as well as determine the impact of communication climate on employees' identification with organisational goals.

Research Questions

1. How do the employees' perceive the communication climate in the institution?

2. What is the level of identification with organisational goals among the employees' of the school?
3. What impact does communication climate have on employees' identification with organisational goals?

Hypothesis
A good communication climate will foster strong employee identification with   organisational   goals

Review of Literature
According to Mael and Ashforth (1992) in Bartels (2006, p. 1), organisational identification is "the perception of oneness with or belongingness to an organisation, where the individual defines him or herself in terms of the organisation(s) of which he or she is a member" and the experience of the organisation's successes and failures as one's own. Hall, Schneider and Nygren (1970) in van Loo, (2010, p.9) define organisational identification as "the process by which the goals of the organisation and those of the individual become increasingly integrated and congruent". Ashforth and Mael (1989) in Smidts, Pruyn and Van Riel (2001, p.1) argue that "employees who identify strongly with their organisations are more likely to show a supportive attitude towards them". Organisational identification is therefore the degree to which a person shares the same values, desires, and goals with the organisation he belongs to. Such employees are also likely to make decisions that are consistent with organisational objectives (Simon, 1977).

Smidts et al (2001), observe that a neglected management instrument for engendering identification is organisational communication to employees. Scot (2007) in Haugen (2009, p.4) notes that "when an organisation specifically targets a goal.... and communicates that goal to its workers through the use of a mission statement, with language targeted at goal or with logos representative of the organisation's mission, employees are more likely to identify with the organisation and behave in ways that match the organisation's mission". The ability of an organisation to communicate with its various publics using a coherent communication strategy is critical (Argenti, 2012).

Cheney (1983) observes that the content of employee communication may facilitate the identification process because it discloses the goals, values and achievements of an organisation. Dutton, Duckerich, Harquail (1994) as cited by Smidts et al, (2001) further note that "being well informed about organisational issues (such as goals and objectives, new developments, activities and achievements will enable an organisation's members to discover the salient characteristics that distinguish the organisation from others". It is only in transmitting meaning from one person to another that information and ideas can be conveyed (Robbins and Judge, 2013). In other words, "Communication is more than merely imparting meaning." Such meaning must also be understood (Robbins and Judge, 2013, p. 370). An organisation must therefore "decide how it wants to deliver the messages and what approach to take in structuring the message" (Argenti 2012, p. 30).

Effective communication in an organisation is therefore, critical to the realisation of organisational goals and objectives. From the vantage point of communication, relevant information, messages, ideas and developments can be transmitted within and outside an organisation. It is on this premise that a formidable communication climate is imperative.

Robbins, Judge, Millet, and Walters-Marsh, (2008, p. 364) identify four major functions of communication within an organisation to include "control, motivation, emotional expression and information". They argue that "communication fosters motivation by clarifying to employees what is to be done, how well they are doing, and what can be done to improve performance". Motivation, according to Robbins and Judge (2013, p.236) describes "the processes that account for an individual's intensity, direction and persistence of efforts towards attaining a goal".

Martins (2005, p. 674) lists the following four functions of communication in organisation: information processing, coordination, visioning and personal expression. In information processing, data are collected and turned into information that has meaning and purpose. Coordination means the integration of activity within the organisation while visioning is the exchange of thoughts and ideas through which the communication process can develop and convey the vision, mission and strategies to employees throughout the organisation; personal expression on the other hand means that everyone in the organisation has his opinion about work and non-work issues. It is only when there is a reliable communication climate that an organistion is free from communication breakdown which has the possible fallout of gossip, rumour, misinformation and misconception, all capable of shaking the fabrics, structure and performance of an organisation. In contemporary times, ineffective communication climate is the bane of many organisations with apparent distortions, distractions and crisis to contend with. Almost always, depending on the way it is managed, the fallout of communication failures may be disastrous and destabilising to an organisation. As part of the measures to forestall a breakdown of law and order, appropriate measures are taken to adequately and accurately, as well as, promptly and regularly inform, educate and orientate management, staff members and the public on the activities, programmes and policies of an organisation. Effective communication is most imperative for any organisation with a success agenda.

Buchholz (2001) summarises the place of communication in organisations thus:

Communication is the life blood of any organisation. At the centre of every organisation are people held together by slender threads of cooperation. These threads are maintained by people sharing information with each other. The result is a delicate network of human relationships lined through communication ... In these networks; information is crucial, valuable to the success of organisational goals... When information is not exchanged, barriers are erected. This results in communication mishaps. When information is impeded, it disrupts the orderly flow of activity.

O'Really and Chatman (1986) in Robbins and Judge (2013) assert that when an organisation is desirous of enhancing employee commitment, it should first focus on having employees who can identify with the organisation, and become subject to its values.

It is pertinent to note that the communication climate that exists in an organisation is vital in determining the extent to which employees will understand, appreciate and identify with organisational goals. Goldhaber (1993) in Bartels (2006) sees communication climate as the perceptions employees have of the quality of relationship and communications within the organisation. Dennis (1974) in Bartels (2006) classifies communication climate into nine dimensions: supportiveness, openness and candour, participative decision making, trust, confidence and credibility, high performance goals, information adequacy, semantic information difference and communication satisfaction. Open communication in an organisation serves as an effective method to give employees information with which to identify (Bartels, Peter, de Jong, Pruyn, and Van der Molen, 2010). A positive communication climate will "strengthen organisational identification, because it is rewarding and thus serves a member's self-enhancement" (Smidts et al, 2001).

Theoretical and empirical reasons exist to prove the existence of a relationship between employee perception of communication climate/quality and employee identification with organisational goals. Argenti's (2012) Strategic Communication Framework suggests that the purpose of corporate communication is to expedite certain responses in stakeholders, such as employees, which are themselves intended to bolster the organisation. Based on this, the importance of communication in employee identification with organisation's goals is that, it motivates employees to commit to behaviours, cognitions and feelings that are of benefit to the organisation. In Gilles' (2010) discussion of game theory, corporate relationships (that is, relationships between corporate leaders and employees) can be understood as either cooperative or non-cooperative. Bion's (2013) theory of group psychology further suggests that people have an innate desire to belong to collectives, and that followers tend to identify closely with powerful leaders and organisations. The concept of employee identification with organisations thus seems to have two theoretical roots. One root is in power/ coercion dynamic as noted by Bion. In the presence of powerful leaders and organisational leadership structures, many employees lose or partially surrender some aspects of their own identities and identify with the more powerful leader or unit. Another root is in Gilles' cooperative game structure, which notes that when employees genuinely feel as if they are part of the same team as their corporate leaders, and that they are working for the same reasons and goals, then identification with the corporation does not take place as the result of the power dynamics noted by Bion but rather as the result of voluntary identification with an aggregate assumed to be working for the individual employee's benefit.

Empirically, the business literature contains numerous examples of both kinds of employee identification and outlines distinctly the relationship between such identification and communication quality. Liker and Hoseus (2004) observe that corporations in Japan are essentially cooperative entities where workers are treated with more equity and fairness. Lifetime employment contracts, worker empowerment opportunities, and the reduction of salary disparity between leaders and workers all have the effect of bringing about a form of employee identification rooted in voluntary identification with the corporation and its goals. Gopinath and Siciliano's (2010) case study of the NUMMI factory in California suggests that it is possible to have such an effect in the United States as well. One way to understand this form of employee identification is to see it as the end result of communication (direct communication as well as the kind of indirect communication represented by salary levels, workplace democracy etc) that closes the gap between workers and leaders and influences all stakeholders to identify with the corporation.

On the other hand, Bion's (2013) work contains diverse examples of identification due to coercion and power dynamics. Miller (2011) suggests that hierarchical organisations use communication to send workers the message that they are inferior and count for less than other stakeholders. This kind of communication alienates certain workers but brings about corporate identification for others. There are thus numerous theoretical and empirical reasons to believe that (a) employee identification with organisations as well as the organisation's goals is a common phenomenon and (b) such identification can come about as a result of cooperative and equitable behaviour or because of coercion and power inequalities. Since different dynamics are likely to show themselves in different kinds of corporate environments. There is ample opportunity for researchers to study the link between communication flow/quality and employee identification in case study formats.

Theoretical Framework: Social Identity Theory

This study was based on the Social identity theory. Social identity is a person's sense of who he is based on group membership. In other words, peoples' identities are derived from the groups to which they belong. As a result people are motivated to improve the image of and status of their group in comparison to others. Tajfel and Turner (1979) argue that the groups we belong to are an important source of pride and self-esteem and we tend to build our identities from these groups membership. Since our identities are derived from these groups, the natural tendency is the desire to want to belong to groups that are high status with a positive image.

Research Methodology

The study made use of descriptive survey design. The survey design was used to examine the relationship between communication climate and employees' identification with organisational goals. The population of the study comprised employees both teaching and non-teaching staff of the university. The total staff strength of the school at the time of this study was one thousand seven hundred and eighty two (1,782) comprising 1000 males and 782 females. Five hundred and thirty five were teaching staff while 1,245 were non-teaching staff. A sample of 327 employees representing 18.35 percent of the total population was chosen using the Taro Yamane Formula. The proportionate stratified random sampling was used to select samples of respondents across the 36 colleges and administrative units of the institution. For the content analysis, samples of memoranda, bulletins, letters and journals of the University were examined while 50 employees and 10 principal officers were interviewed. The Communication Climate and Employees Identification with Organisational Goal Questionnaire (CCEIOGQ) which was made up of 19 items: six items on demographic characteristics, seven items on communication climate and six items on employee identification with organisational goals was used for data collection. Data were analysed using simple percentages, Pearson Product Moment Correlation and multiple linear regression. The significance of the hypothesis was established at the 0.05 level of significance.
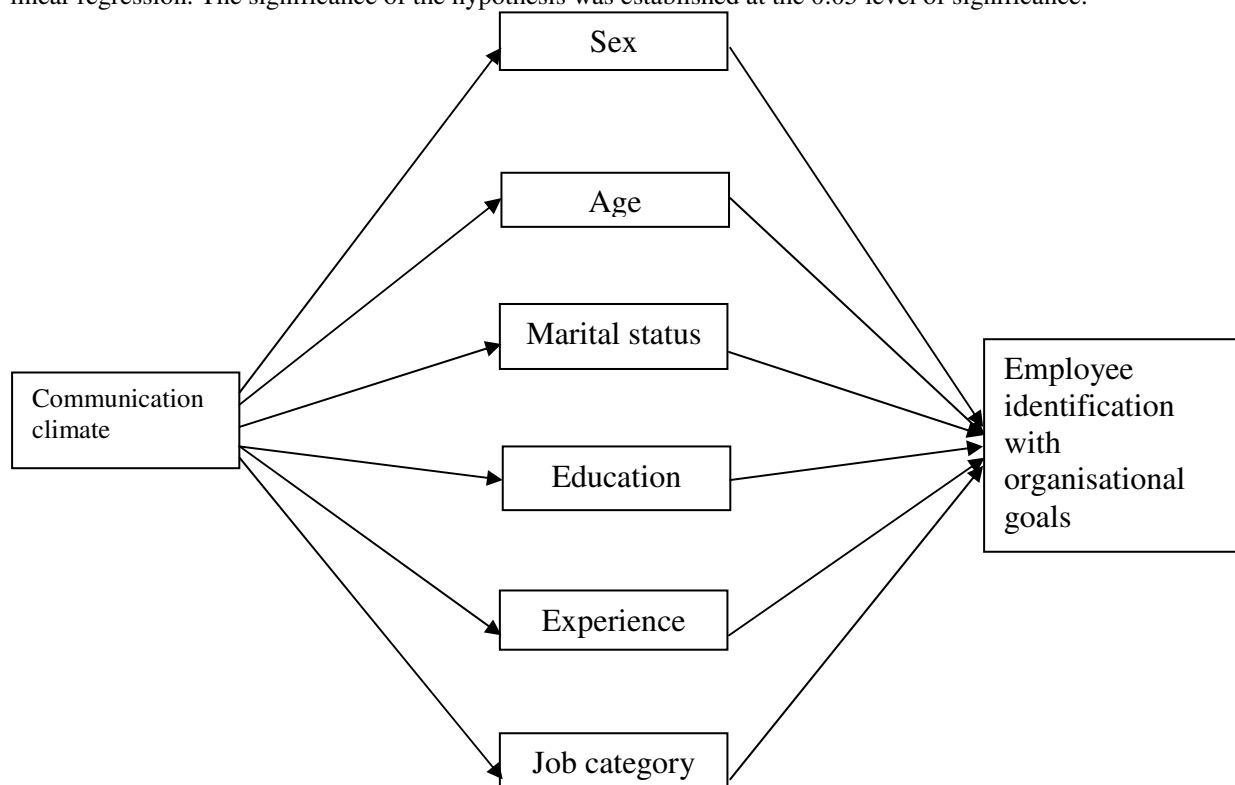

Fig 1: Research Model of Relationship between Communication Climate and Employees' Identification with organisational goals.

RESULT
Table 1: Demographics of respondents

Demographic variables	No of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Sex		
Male	144	44
Female	183	56
Age (years)		
16 – 20	0	0
21 – 39	89	27
40 and above	238	73
Marital status		
Single	64	19
Married	252	77
Widowed	9	3
Separated	2	1
Educational qualification		
Primary	12	4
SSCE/Equivalent	40	12
OND/NCE	30	9
First degree	140	43
Postgraduate	105	32
Years of Experience (years)		
1 – 5	81	25
>5	246	75
Job category		
Teaching staff	106	32
Non-teaching staff	221	68

Table 1 shows that out of 327 employees, 144 (44 percent) were male and 56 percent were female. None of the respondents was between 16 – 20 while 27 percent and 73 percent of the employees were between ages 21 – 30 years and 40 and above years respectively. The result also shows that 19 percent were single, 77 percent of the respondents were married while 3 percent and 1 percent were widowed and separated respectively. Twelve respondents (4 percent) were primary school certificate holders, 12 percent, 9 percent, 43 percent and 32 percent of the sampled employees were secondary school certificate holders, OND/NCE holders, First degree and Postgraduate degree holders. Most of the respondents (75 percent) had more than 5 years of experience and 68 percent of the respondents were non-teaching staff.

Research Question 1
Table 2: Communication Climate in the Institution

Items	SA N (%)	A N (%)	N N (%)	D N (%)	SD N (%)	No Response N (%)	Total N(%)
Management communicates well with the employees by sharing information.	147 (45%)	148 (45%)	10 (3%)	5 (2%)	5 (2%)	12 (3%)	327 (100%)
Most of the information I get about the institution are through rumors and gossip.	12 (4%)	20 (6%)	42 (13%)	143 (44%)	96 (29%)	14 (4%)	327 (100%)
I receive feedback that helps me improve my performance	34 (11%)	197 (60%)	63 (19%)	9 (3%)	4 (1%)	20 (6%)	327 (100%)
Open communication and information flow in my school motivate me to work towards realization of the goals	78 (24%)	201 (61%)	16 (5%)	17 (5%)	3 (1%)	12 (6%)	327 (100%)
I can voice my opinion without fear.	29 (9%)	71 (22%)	95 (29%)	99 (31%)	14 (4%)	19 (4%)	327 (100%)
The information I receive is timely and accurate.	22 (7%)	142 (43%)	111 (34%)	33 (10%)	7 (2%)	12 (4%)	327 (100%)
I have an opportunity to participate in the goal setting process of my department.	38 (12%)	155 (47%)	35 (11%)	13 (4%)	14 (4%)	72 (22%)	327 (100%)

Source: *Field Survey, 2014, SA = Strongly Agree, A = Agree, N = Neutral, D = Disagree and SD = Strongly Disagree.*

Table 2 shows that the management of MOUAU communicates well with the employees by sharing

information, 90 percent of the respondents confirmed this. Information was not got through rumours and gossip as indicated by 73 percent of the respondents. Most of the employees agreed they received feedbacks that helped them improve their performance (71 percent). The institution also encouraged open communication (85 percent) but only (31 percent) of the respondents had freedom of expression. Fifty percent (50 percent) of the respondents also judged the information they received to be accurate and timely. The interpretation could be that there is a positive communication climate in the organization.

Research Question 2:

Table 3: Level of organisational identification among employees

Items	SA N (%)	A N (%)	N N (%)	D N (%)	SD N (%)	No Response N (%)	Total N(%)
Working here gives me satisfaction and I am very proud to be an employee of my institution.	140 (42%)	171 (51%)	7 (3%)	3 (1%)	1 (1%)	5 (2%)	327 (100%)
I feel personally driven to help the school succeed and actualise its goals and I will go beyond what is expected of me to ensure the organisation achieves its set goals.	171 (51%)	146 (43%)	2 (2%)	1 (1%)	1 (1%)	6 (3%)	327 (100%)
I have applied for another job outside this institution in the past six (6) months.	5 (2%)	10 (3%)	24 (7%)	147 (45%)	130 (40%)	11 (3%)	327 (100%)
I find that my values and the values of the school are similar.	53 (16%)	157 (48%)	90 (28%)	14 (4%)	3 (1%)	10 (3%)	327 (100%)
Getting my monthly pay is of priority to me.	98 (30%)	156 (48%)	30 (9%)	15 (5%)	14 (4%)	14 (4%)	327 (100%)
I am confident to say that the goals of the institution are being realized	115 (34%)	182 (55%)	18 (5%)	2 (1%)	3 (2%)	7 (3%)	327 (100%)

Source: *Field Survey, 2014, SA = Strongly Agree, A = Agree, N = Neutral, D = Disagree and SD = Strongly Disagree.*

Research Question 3:

Based on the findings presented in table 2 above, organisational communication climate significantly contributed to employee performance at the institution. Effective communication and relay of information played a significant role in boosting employee morale and effectiveness in the organisation.

Table 4: Relationship between good Communication climate and Employee Identification with the University goals

Variable	$\sum X$ $\sum Y$	$\sum X^2$ $\sum Y^2$	$\sum XY$	r-value	r -crit.	Remark
Communication climate (X)	7504	178810	168794	0.41	0.139	Significant
Employee identification	7284	164644				

n = 327, df = 325, significant at 5% (p<0.05)

Result in Table 4 shows positive relationship between good communication climate and employee identification with organisational goals. The calculated r (0.413) is greater than the critical r (0.139) at 0.5 level of significance. Therefore, the hypothesis that good communication climate will foster strong employee identification with the University goals is upheld.

Table 5: Correlation between the Research Variables

	Sex	Age	MS	Education	Experience	Category	CC	EI
Sex	1							
Age	-0.114*	1						
MS	0.082	0.412**	1					
Education	-0.053	0.157*	-0.090	1				
Experience	-0.037	0.580**	0.342**	0.061	1			
Category	0.198*	-0.174**	0.041	-0.507**	1-0.115*	1		
CC	-0.051	-0.062	-0.053	0.001	-0.085	0.106	1	
EI	-0.038	0.048	-0.058	0.056	0.007	0.0004	0.538*	1

MS= marital status, CC = communication climate, EI = employees' identification.

Table 5 shows that there is a significant positive relationship between marital status and age(r =0.412, p<0.05). Experience and age was also found to be significantly related(r =0.538, p<0.05). Of the seven independent variables, it was only communication climate that had a positive relationship with employee identification with organisational goals(r =0.538, p<0.05).

Table 6:   Multiple Regression Result Showing the Impact of Communication Climate on Employee Identification with Organisational Goals for other covariables

Variables	Coefficient	SE	t-value	p-value	Remarks
Constant	18.166	1.557	11.670	0.000	S
Communication Climate	0.208	0.034	6.13	0.000	S
Sex	0.136	0.314	0.44	0.664	NS
Age	0.277	0.248	1.12	0.265	NS
Marital status	-0.360	0.359	-1.00	0.317	NS
Education	-0.167	0.168	-0.10	0.319	NS
Experience	0.090	0.143	0.627	0.531	NS
Job category	-0.381	0.382	-0.999	0.319	NS

SE = Standard error, S = significant, NS = not significant. Adjusted for Sex, Age, Marital Status, Education, Experience and Job category

Table 6 reveals that while adjusting for sex, age, marital status, education, and experience and job category, communication climate shows significant positive impact on employees' identification with organisational goals($\beta = 0.208$, t calc.= 6.13, p<0.05). This result indicates that where there was a good communication climate, that enhanced level of employee identification with organisational goals irrespective of the employees' sex, age, marital status, education, and experience and job category.

Discussion of Findings

This study examined the communication climate in a tertiary institution and found that the employees of the institution valued feedback as a way of improving their performance. This is in agreement with Csikszentmihalyi (1990) and Garfield (1992) in Eisenberg and Goodall, Jr. (2001)) which links employee performance with certain social and psychological conditions such as clear goals, regular feedback and sense of confidence.

The study also found that there was a clear flow of information in the organisation. This served as a source of motivation for the employees to identify with the goals of the organisation. Furthermore, on their level of identification with those goals, responses from the questionnaire indicate that the employees did not only identify with the goals but the level of pride and satisfaction expressed by them could be tied directly to the level of trust they had for the University. This finding is also similar to that of Sun and Wang (2009) who found identification in the Chinese context to mean that employees took the organisation as their family rather than just a place where they work. The emotion of family, in their view, is what encourages individual members to sacrifice personal interest for organisational interest. The positive relationship obtained between good communication climate and employees' identification means that good communication climate strengthens identification. The result of this study builds on Smidts *et al* (2001) that when communication climate is positively evaluated by the employee, it has a positive effect on their organisational identification. This finding also aligns with Bartels et al (2006) that communication climate about the merger process of three regional police divisions had a positive effect on expected organisational identification. The feeling of pride and belongingness to an organisation which results from clear and timely information release is summed up by Haugen's (2009) finding that when organisational mission statement is clearly communicated to employees by top management, employees are likely to form a favourable opinion of the organisation and a sense of pride and in turn feel a greater level of self esteem for being a part of the organisation.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Communication is undoubtedly paramount in enhancing employees' identification with organisational goals. This is because effective communication establishes clear expectations for employees by setting out clear objectives and on how employee action will impact the organisation. The study has found that organisational communication climate significantly contributed to employee identification at the institution. Therefore, institutions of higher learning should improve the communication in their organisations, thus stimulating employees to achieve organisational goals. This will equally enable them create a healthy communication environment in such an organisation and strengthen the identification process.

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