

Counselling for Effective Communication: A Tool for National Security

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Abstract

Whatever security developments Nigeria is witnessing today, be it in the area of technology, religion, economics, politics, etc is essentially due to one major factor: Ineffective communication. Effective communication makes interaction possible among ethnic groups, governments, communities, families, etc. Through interactions, ideas and ideals are transferred from one system to another and are often used as bases for innovations and development and to foster peace. Effective communication ensures easy correspondence, it forms a link between the past, present and the future, it is an important tool for security. This paper explains what communication is and communication models that can enhance peace and security; functions of effective communication, national security, counselling implications of effective communication for national security.

Introduction

Counselling in a nutshell is a process whereby a professional trained counsellor helps an individual or a group of persons who need assistance to gain greater self understanding, greater understanding of the environment around him; to gain improved decision making and behavioural skills for problem solving; behave in a more satisfying manner in order to establish a perfect relationship with the people around him.

Every human activity involves one form of communication or the other. Communication is tied to human existence so much that not much can be achieved without communication. It touches every sphere of human activity and informs all of man's action because it is occasioned by his need to interact with his fellowman.

Communication manifest itself in symbolic and verbal forms. It is an instrument of social interaction. It helps individuals to understand one another, keep in touch with other people, to predict people responses to situations, establish relationship with others, etc. James, Ode & Soola (1990) gave a summary of the meaning of communication as:

- a process of transmitting thoughts;
- the sharing and imparting of information
- the giving of understandable information and the receiving and understanding of the message;
- the transmitting of messages and the linking of people;
- the conveying of attitudes, ideas and feelings;
- the creating and exchanging of messages within a network of interdependent relationships.

This therefore implies that no nation can enjoy peace and security where there is a breach in communication or where there is no effective communication. Effective communication enhances peace and security while communication breakdown results in chaos and insecurity as is the case with Nigeria. This paper explains the functions of effective communication, selected communication models for security, definition of national security and counselling implications of effective communication for security.

Functions of effective communication

Communication, whether verbal or non-verbal if effectively used, expresses the following purposes. It is used:

- To express thoughts, ideas, plans and knowledge. How an individual feels and thinks about any issue is expressed through communication. Similarly, what an individual knows is also expressed through communication.
- To gain pleasure. Pleasure expresses peace and security. Through communication, the individual, family, community, society and the nation expresses the feeling of happiness, satisfaction received from an experience.

- To motivate or convince others. Through communication, man is either motivated towards positive or negative ventures.
- To establish and improve relationships among people. Easy flow of communication creates harmonious relationships among people.
- To develop policies, pursue and achieve them.
- To foster love and understanding among family members, communities, peers, ethnic groups, etc.
- To share and understand values
- To enhance development
- To interact with one another
- To enhance imaginations
- To reduce difficulties
- To settle disputes
- To transact business
- To create excitement and variety
- To improve society
- To reduce friction in the society.

Selected models of communication

This is the form of exchange, the flow of information desired, the satisfaction that can characterize a smooth flow of communication. This flow is called model of communication (James et al, 1990). Communication models describe how transmitted messages or information can make or mar a relationship, depending on how the receiver perceives it.

There are several communication models but the following two models explain effectiveness and ineffectiveness of communication and its consequences.

Fig 1: Shannon and Weavers' Model of communication

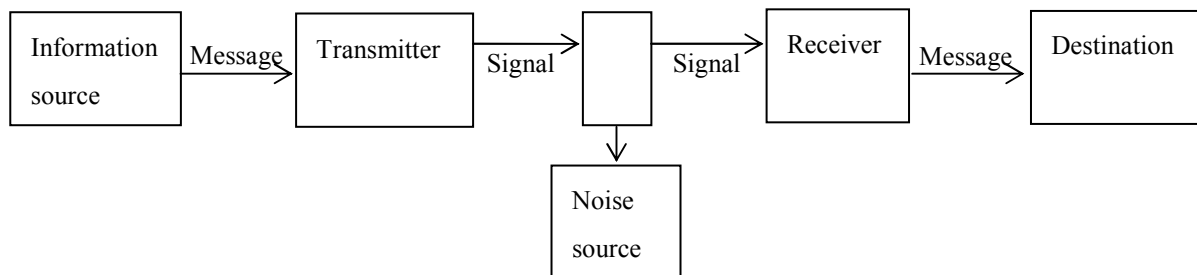
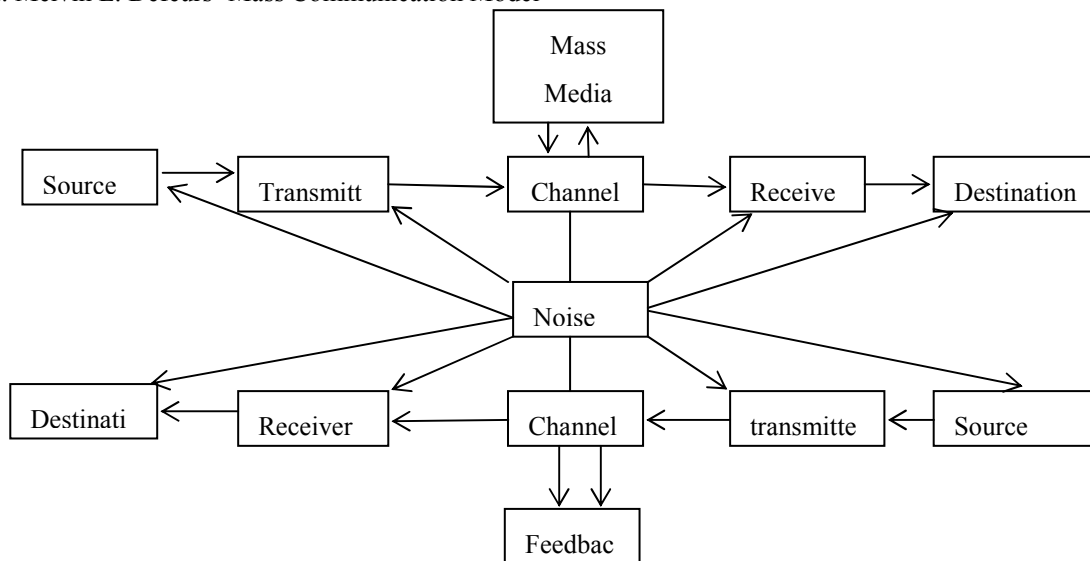


Fig II: Melvin L. Deffours' Mass Communication Model



The source is the communicator while the message is the central element in the communication process. The message gives birth to communication. The audience is the receiver and the destination for the targeted message. The process of communication cannot be complete without the feedback. Feedback is the response from the receiver to the sender and vis versa. For the sender to know the reactions of the receiver, there must be feedback. For the sender to know whether his message has been well interpreted and understood, there must also be a feedback. Messages without a feedback as indicated in Shannon and Weavers' model explains the linear nature of communication. They are authoritarian to the receiver. This model indicates that communication is one dimensional process, from the sender to the receiver only. Such messages creates no room for dialogue. Feedbacks provide opportunities for dialogue and peaceful co-existence. For example, the Boko Haram bombing in the nation creates no opportunity for dialogue. Their messages have been received by the nation (from their incessant killings). The fact that they have refused to come out for dialogue poses a big threat to the nation. The Shannon Weavers' model of communication shows how ineffective communication can cause chaos and insecurity. Even within families, when parents pass on information to family members and creates no room for feedback to indicate the feelings of the family members, it can create problem and insecurity within the family.

Similarly, when the government of the nation rules without giving a listening ear to the yearnings of the people under their rulership, there is bound to be problem. This problem is the result of the spate of insecurity experienced in the nation. Citizens are bound to go to any length as is the case with kidnapers, Boko Haram, etc to get their needs met.

The Melvin L. Deffers' mass communication model explains that effective nature of any communication process. It is a two-way process of communication, from the sender to the receiver and from the receiver back to the sender. The first message from the sender to the receiver is meant to pass on an information. The second message indicates that the information has reached its destination and a reaction to the information is being passed back to the sender as a feedback.

The nature of the feedback also determines the receivers' level of understanding of the information passed on to him. Melvins' mass communication model does not only indicates the source of information but also the channel through which the message can be passed on to the target audience. This channel of communication include: newspapers, magazines, radio, television, internets, telephone, drawings, cartoons, painting, carving, sculpture, etc.

The purpose of communication is to meet the needs of the audience at any given time. If effectively carried out, communication should meet the following needs of the target audience

- To be healthy;
- To save;
- To gain knowledge;
- To avoid pain and trouble;
- To avoid criticism;
- To win praise;
- To be independent;
- To express appreciation;
- To express love, etc (Adelstein & Davis, 1988). These, are all traces of harmonious living, peace and security.

Security

Security refers to a state of being safe from danger or criminal activities such as terrorism, fraud, theft, rape, etc. Human beings are vulnerable to insecurity through many ways such as work and livelihood, living in a secure environment, etc. Kunfa, Doghe, Mackay & Marshall (2000) defines security as protection against all forms of harm from both physical and spiritual forces. Security is also viewed by Zacha et al (2000) as being protected and safe, healthiness, being alive, lack of fear and lack of hunger. They added that events such as unemployment, natural disaster, increasing crime, lack of social and external support, lack of tolerance, insincerity, no bargaining power, denial of information, marginalization, drug abuse, drug trafficking, child trafficking, unjust persecution, lack of information network, denies any nation and its citizens desired security.

James (2003), examined security in terms of stability and continuity of livelihood, predictability of relationships, feeling safe and belonging to a social group which he summarized into the following four dimensions: stability of income; predictability of ones' daily life; protection from crime; and psychological security. Security offers peace of mind, social harmony. It offers food and helps an individual to become more resilient and able to cope with life.

National security refers to those characteristics which guarantee security to all the citizens of any nation. These include: peace, food, employment, migration, work and livelihood, living in secured areas, social safety, etc. A comprehensive definition of the term national security entails guarantee of protection of political, social,

family, infrastructural, technological, lives and property of citizens. When any of these is lacking, the citizens feel threatened and need help.

The behavioural criteria for national security include:

- Honesty and fairness on the part of both the governments and the citizens towards each other. It explains the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of the communication process. Behaviour that will not give rise to criticism enhances national security.
- Listening, caring, love and compassion: These requires a two way process of communication. Information or messages from the government must be such that carries love, care and compassion for her citizens. Feedback from the citizens to the government must also connote love, care and compassion for the government. Both parties must learn to give listening ear to each other in order to enforce peace and security.
- Hardworking, problem solvers: There must be collaborative effort between government and her citizens to provide effective welfare for all. Situations where only the citizens work while the national cake is enjoyed by those who occupy positions in government will not foster security. Government must ensure that problems experienced by her citizens are resolved in order that both the government and her citizens can enjoy peace and security.
- Timely, responsive and care support; There must be timely interventions towards resolving problems caused through any communication defect. Government must also be responsive towards the yearnings of her citizens in order to enforce peace and security in the nation.
- Access closeness and contact: A nation is like a family in this case can be likened to parenthood. The citizens can be also be likened to the children in the family. Where parents detach themselves from the children, there is bound to be chaos and lack of understanding. When communication breach exists, there is bound to be insecurity. Access, closeness and contact between parents and children fosters trust and security within the family.

Similarly, government should open its doors to her citizens to access, closeness and contact through effective communication. This is the only way that both the government and the citizens can enjoy security which is most sort for.

Counselling implications of effective communication for national security

- The role of counselling is to provide a conducive psychological environment that will ensure perfect communication. Most human conflicts arise out of lack of effective communication. Where there is conflict, there is bound to be insecurity. Professional counselors should help people remedy misunderstanding through clarification feedback and restatements (Kaduruma, 2006).
- Dialogue remains a strong tool for peace and security. The government as well as the citizens must be counseled in this direction. During conflict resolutions, counselors should advice for more clarifying issues from both parties on issues that are assumed to be misunderstood. Counselors should ensure that those involved in the communication process (both the communicator and the receiver) increase their chances of getting the desired response. This can be achieved only if the communicator can facilitate the understanding of the information passed across which can be done through both verbal and non verbal clues such as pictures, cartoons, symbols, radio and television broadcast, etc.
- Language and communication share a symbiotic relationship: In as much as communication is possible without language, language is seen as a vehicle for thoughts and as a means which facilitates the end-communication. One yields the other and the two are closely related. In order to communicate effectively, an individual must select the right words and express it in a language which the receiver can easily understand. Counselling in this case should be channeled through the right choice of words which can foster positive, trusting and psychologically conducive environment for communication.
- Counselling should also be geared towards sincerity of purpose. When an individual is not, groups and the nation are not sincere, frustration, anger or confusion steps in. This can cause insecurity among the communicators. Counselors should note that the bane of counselling in this case should dwell on tolerance.

Counselling strategies

Some counselling strategies applicable which can be used to enhance effective communication for national security include:

1. Individual counselling: Individuals can be counseled on the importance or need for effective communication.
2. Group counselling: Groups such as families, schools, industries, hospitals, communities, etc can be counseled together on the usefulness of effective communication.
3. Media counselling: Interface nationwide for national public interaction and enlightenment in terms of

- communication for peaceful co-existence and security.
4. Information giving procedure: Individuals are given information that can enhance their communication relationship. They are sometimes introduced to books, pamphlets and manuals.
 5. Holistic counselling for inculcation of free tenets of religious therapies to appeal to the conscience of those who perpetrate security problems in the name of religion. Effective communication enhances perfect understanding of religious practices.
 6. Youths are trained and oriented with particular focus on Nigerian character development and appropriate communication skills for self and national development.
 7. Assertive training: This behaviour modification package is designed to increase individual's skills and confidence in communicating honestly, directly and spontaneously. The individual talks in a strong and steady voice, giving clear messages and responding actively to the other person.
 8. Use of psychological tests to help individuals or groups in their self-evaluation of communication effectiveness.
 9. Cognitive behaviour modification strategies: Some persons thought process and cultural beliefs hinders their communication process and contribute to their maladaptive behaviours. Such persons are taught.
 10. Psycho-educational technique: This technique educates individuals on how to maintain good relationships through effective communication.
 11. Direct observation technique: The counsellor watches for behaviours that can hinder communication and handles it effectively.
 12. Prompting technique: A behaviour change strategy involving the use of cues. Cues are stimulus that precedes a response in communication and helps to stimulate it. Prompts are used in radio and television programmes to enhance effective communication.
 13. Legal rights of individuals to information and communication can also be dealt with as an intervention strategy.
 14. Leadership development and interface counselling for prompting the culture of servant leadership in Nigeria.

Summary and conclusion

Communication is the desire to get information or message passed across from the sender to a particular destination (the receiver). Effective communication is intended to achieve a harmonious relationship and to boost national security. Most human conflicts are as a result of ineffective communication. Ineffective communication creates misunderstanding via insecurity. Communicators can achieve peace and security through the following:

- By giving attention and listening those involved in the communication process irrespective of their social standing.
- There should be consistency in the use of words by both the government and the citizens.
- Avoid what will cause the lives of others. Everybody values life, whether poor or rich, small or big, literate or illiterate etc.
- Corruption creates problems and causes insecurity.
- Both the government and the citizens should be fair and honest in their contribution to nation building.
- Favouritism breeds problems and can cause insecurity.

Based on the above therefore, the writer is of the opinion that counselors have a great role to play in enhancing national security. If Nigerian leaders and the populace must enjoy peace and security, then counselors in Nigeria should be given the opportunity to counsel the nation in the right direction.

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