

Influence of Communication on Industrial Harmony in the Civil Service of Delta State Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

The issue of communication, especially effective communication is very important in any organization. For any organization to succeed, there must be effective communication – either between top-down (from management to subordinate) or bottom-up (from subordinate to their superior officers). The study tries to establish a link between communication and good industrial relations and industrial peace. The study focused on the Delta State Civil Service and attempted to find out the role that effective communication had played in ensuring industrial peace since the advent of the state. Questionnaires were administered to 325 civil servants out of which only 299 were useful. One of the research questions was whether there is any relationship between industrial harmony and effective communication. The study showed that while effective communication may not necessarily lead to good industrial relations but it may engender industrial peace.

Keywords: Communication, Industrial Relations, Industrial Peace.

INTRODUCTION

In every human setting, there is the need to be able to communicate freely without inhibitions to make for peaceful co-existence. Even animals have their ways of expressing themselves in “languages” (for want of an apt word) they understand. In industry, it is only imperative that there should be communication flow from management to the workforce and from the workforce back to management. Indeed, it is believed that no company will perform optimally if there is faulty communication process. In essence, it is difficult for any individual, group or organization to exist without communication – which actually is the transfer of meaning among its members. It is only through transmitting of meaning from one person to another that information and ideas can be conveyed.

However, as vital as communication is to the long-run survival of any group or organization, there are still cases of poor communication, communication breakdown, distortion of communication and even unwillingness on the part of some managers to pass certain relevant information which concerns the welfare of employees to them.

In a cross cultural study on communication involving the USA, Japan and Britain, it was discovered that communication breakdown was the single greatest barrier to corporate excellence (Nwachukwu, 2006). Nwachukwu explains that inefficient communication in an organization is symptomatic of a faulty corporate chain. When the managers in an organization are friendly and have a good working rapport, communication tends to be very good. When the members of the organization engage in mutual distrust, resentment, gossips or when there is a feeling of incompetence and insecurity, there is bound to be communication breakdown.

Robbins and Judge (2008), reveals that researches have shown that poor communication is probably the most frequently cited source of interpersonal conflict. According to them, individuals spend nearly 70 percent of their waking hours communicating – writing, reading, speaking, listening – it seems reasonable to conclude that one of the most inhibiting forces to successful group performance is a lack of effective communication.

Onasanya (1999), observes that it is necessary for the employer to communicate with the workers so that they may know what functions to perform and how to perform them, what rules to obey, why management requires certain actions or has taken certain actions, what difficulties or prospects the employer is facing and why workers' demand cannot be met.

All good leaders encourage effective communication by having established channels (formal and informal) of transmitting information to people. When the leader sets the pace for open communication by encouraging subordinates to be frank, by soliciting information and sending out feedback, he sets a good organizational climate. In all enterprises, effective organization channel is required to transmit company policies, programmes, rules and regulations. It is also required in dealing with customers, regulatory agencies and the general public. It is through good communication with business owners (shareholders), board of directors, management, peers and subordinates that an organization maintains goodwill, grows and waxes (Nwachukwu, 2006).

Nwachukwu (2006) also explains that the effect of communication in an organization can be measured

in terms of attitude and performance for it affects the morale of the employees, and their attitude towards the organizational leadership and consequently productivity. He notes that good management recognizes the fact that it has to transmit skills and knowledge to those in the organization through its direction, control, organizing ability, decision making and coordinating techniques. The quality of communication skill possessed by a manager determines his degree of accomplishment.

One of the reasons usually given for the lackluster performance and low productivity in the Nigerian civil service is poor industrial relations. This has led to incessant strikes in this sector over the years. Meanwhile, in Delta Civil Service, there have been a remarkable industrial peace. This paper tries to look at the role that communication has played in engendering that peace and to find out whether the absence of peace is tantamount to good industrial relations.

What is Communication?

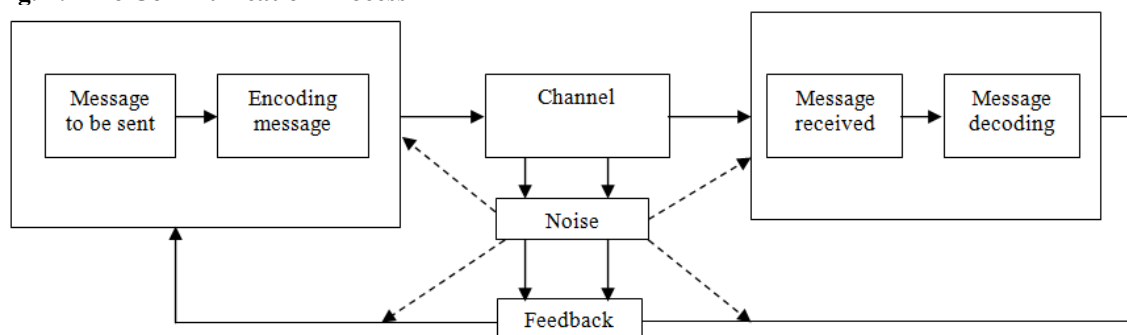
Davis (1981) has defined communication as “the transfer of information and understanding from one person to another person”. An earlier definition of communication was given by Bangs (1968) who defined communication as the act or acts which produce some kind of response between two or more persons. It takes place through a system of arbitrary signs. Onasanya (1999) sees communication “as the passing of information from one person (or group) to another person (or group) so that both sides understand the message or information being passed. The same way, it is the process of transmitting a message in order to evoke a specific and discriminating response or feedback from the receiver – it must either influence an action or another communication and is meant to induce a reaction.

The Communication Process

Communication is inherently a social process. Whether one communicates face to face with a single person or with a group of people via television, it is still a social activity involving two or more people. By analyzing the communication process, one discovers that it is a chain made up of identifiable links (Kreitner, 1995).

Before communication can take place, a purpose expressed as a message to be conveyed, is needed. It passes between a sender and a receiver. The message is encoded (converted to a symbolic form) and passed by way of some medium (channel) to the receiver, who retranslates (decodes) the message initiated by the sender. The result is transfer of meaning from one person to another (Berlo, 1960).

Fig. 1: The Communication Process



Source: Robbins S.P. and Judge T.A. (2008). *Organizational Behaviour*. New Delhi: PHI Private Limited.

Figure 1 shows the communication process. The key parts of this model are (1) the sender (2) encoding (3) the message, (4) the channel (5) decoding (6) the receiver (7) Noise and (8) feedback.

Functions of Communication

Communication serves four major functions within a group or organization: Control, motivation, emotional expression and information (Scott and Mitchell, 1976).

- i. Communication acts to control member behaviour in several ways. Organizations have authority hierarchies and formal guidelines that employees are required to follow. For instance, when employees are required to communicate any job-related grievance to their immediate boss, to follow their job description, or to comply with company policies, communication is performing a control function. But informal communication also controls behaviour. When work groups tease or harass a member who produces too much (and makes the rest of the group look bad), they are informally communicating with and controlling the member's behaviour.
- ii. 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 if it is sub par. The formation of specific goals, feedback on progress toward the goals, and reinforcement of desired behaviour all stimulate motivation

- and require communication.
- iii. For many employees, their work group is a primary source for social interaction. The communication that takes place within the group is a fundamental mechanism by which members show their frustrations and feelings of satisfaction. Communication, therefore, provides a release for the emotional expression of feelings and for fulfillment of social needs.
 - iv. The final function that communication performs relates to its role in facilitating decision making. It provides the information that individuals and groups need to make decisions by transmitting the data to identify and evaluate alternative choices.

No one of these four functions should be seen as being more important than the others. For groups to perform effectively, they need to maintain some form of control over members, stimulate members to perform, provide a means for emotional expression and make decision choices (Robbins and Judge, 2008).

What Do We Communicate? To the Workers (Downwards)

According to Onasanya (1999), it is necessary for management to communicate to the workers everything that affects or is likely to affect their employment or work. These will include his contract of employment to give details of the conditions under which he is employed; conditions of service and changes therein; especially a change in rate of pay and promotion; the company policies and changes; details of his job to enable him know what job he is to perform. This may take the form of job description or operating manuals and should clearly state the responsibility of the worker, why he has to perform that responsibility, his job in relation to others, the expected standard and production levels, accident prevention on the job and the like; proposed organizational changes and how it will affect the worker. It is also necessary to inform the worker of his progress, to recognize his achievement, to encourage him to do better and to let him know what prospects await him. All these should be fully discussed during the appraisal interview. It is necessary to communicate to the worker whatever his shortcomings are to enable him amend his ways and improve.

He further observed, "once the workers know their chief executive to be honest with his information, this will assist his industrial relations practice" (emphasis mine).

To Management (Upwards)

The type of information management would need from the workforce would relate to information relating to the workers reaction to management decisions and policies, their feelings, problems on the job, ideas, suggestions for improvement and increased productivity. It may also relate to their welfare in form of problems confronting them in their private capacity, grievances or even negotiations expected with management.

Management needs information that will enable it exercise necessary control; for feedback in form of statistics, reports and so on; for decision-making purpose relating to production and sales achieved, target or deviation from the plan; and on work methods and possible changes and improvement in production plans and methods, factory layout and the product (Onasanya, 1999).

Inter-Departmental (Horizontal)

Inter-departmental exchange of information is essential so that each department knows what goes on in other departments. The departments must share information especially those that are dependent on each other. In some organizations, copies of all letters written by all departments are sent to the office of the chief executive to be circulated to all heads of departments on a daily basis (Onasanya, 1999).

Communication and Industrial Relations

Communication has been identified as one of the aids to good industrial relations. Nwachukwu (2006) observes that upward communication is very necessary in order to promote good human relations. It is through this means that management monitors the feeling of employees and takes appropriate action to arrest what would otherwise lead to costly labour-management dispute. Employees who believe that management maintains an open door policy tend to have the feeling of belonging and of being appreciated. Where this is not the case, employees believe that they are mere numbers, a cost of production and a square peg in a round hole. They often seek for the opportunity to give vent to their pent-up emotion by frequent complaints thus promoting labour-management conflicts.

It must be emphasized that because industrial relations is practiced by human beings; poor human relations can adversely affect otherwise good industrial relations. It is therefore important that good industrial relations should start from good human relations by managers and supervisors who represent the management of the enterprise. Where good human relations exist, it will be easy to organize and receive the cooperation of the workers for productive purposes.

Good industrial relations and understanding and mutual trust through effective communication are therefore necessary to promote industrial peace.

Industrial Relations

Richardson (1970) sees industrial relations as being as “old as industry” and that it is concerned with “how people get on together at their work, what difficulties arise between them, how their relations, including wages and working conditions are regulated and what organizations are set up for the protection of different interests”.

Bain and Clegg (1974) defines industrial relations as the study of all aspects of job regulation – the making and administering of the rules whether these are seen as being formal or informal. Damachi (1992) describes it as “social relations in the production process”.

Flanders (1965) describes industrial relations as a study of the institutions of job regulation. According to Yesufu (1984), “industrial relations is the whole web of human interactions at work which is predicated upon and arises out of the employment contract. While Dedekuma (2011) sees industrial relations “as the relationship that exists between employer and employees or union and management and the formulation of rules for managing the conflict arising from the interaction of the two parties, owing to different interests and values with the ultimate purpose of achieving industrial peace”.

Methodology

This paper looks at the influence of communication on good industrial relations and industrial peace in the civil service of Delta State. The study is concerned with the mainstream or core civil service which does not include the entire state public service.

A sample of 325 respondents from the various strata of the civil service and the respective unions representing the interests of civil servants in the Delta State Civil

Service was surveyed. Of the total 325 copies of questionnaire administered, 313 were recovered – showing a response rate of 96.3 percent. However, out of these 313 copies of recovered questionnaire only 299 were useful. Descriptive statistics and statistical inferences were used. In particular, analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used in testing the first hypothesis for this study while T-test was used in testing the second hypothesis at 95% confidence level.

Research Questions

For the purpose of this study, the following research questions were asked amongst others.

- i. What is the nature of the industrial relations between civil servants and the state?
- ii. Is there any relationship between effective communication and good industrial relations in Delta State Civil Service?
- iii. Is there any relationship between industrial harmony and effective communication?

In answer to these questions, some relevant statements posed in the questionnaire were analyzed as can be seen in the findings.

Findings

From the data gathered from the survey\ using the questionnaire, the following descriptive statistics can be deduced.

1. The Relationship between Civil Servants and the State has been cordial

Table 1:

Option	Response Rate	Percentage Response
Strongly Agree	51	17%
Agree	224	75%
Undecided	10	3%
Disagree	7	2%
Strongly Disagree	7	2%
Total	299	100%

It can be observed from the table that for the statement which was meant to find out whether “The relationship between civil servants and the state government has been cordial”, more than 90 percent of the 299 respondents believed that the relationship between the Delta State Government and the Civil Servants has been cordial. Only less than five percent felt otherwise, while three percent were undecided.

2. Test of Hypotheses

“There can be no good industrial relations when there is no effective communication between the workers/unions and the state: for this statement the following hypothesis was formulated. “There is no significant relationship between effective communication and good industrial relations in Delta State Civil Service.

To test this hypothesis, regression analysis was used and analysis of variance ANOVA. The table below shows the ANOVA computation.

Table 2: ANOVA

Model	Squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig
Regression	27.576	9	3.064	2.331	0.15
Residual	378.602	288	1.315		
Total	406.178	297			

The F-table value is 2.331 and the significant value is 0.15 showing that the table value is greater than the significant value. The decision rule is to reject H_0 if the computed value of F exceeds the significant value. From the above result, since the significant value is less than the table value, we accept the null hypothesis H_0 that there is no significant relationship between effective communication and good industrial relations in Delta State Civil Service. This presupposes that there is much more to good industrial relations than effective communication. Sometimes, the issue of what constitutes effective communication may be relative. According to Farnham and Pimlott (1995), “a number of surveys shows that information about the individual employee’s job and job task is what many employees consider to be their most important priority”.

As it is pointed out by Armstrong (2004), above all good two-way communications are required so that management can keep employees informed of the policies and plans affecting them and employees can react promptly with their views about management’s proposals and actions. Change cannot be managed properly without an understanding of the feelings of those affected by it and an efficient system of communication is needed to understand and influence these feelings. But the extent to which good communications create satisfactory relationship rather than simply reducing unsatisfactory ones can be exaggerated. He further argued that ‘management’ and the ‘union’ as well as our family, our ethnic background, our political party and our religious beliefs (if any) constitute a reference group and colour our reactions to information. What each group ‘hears’ depends on its own interests, shared experiences and common frames of references have much more influence than exhortations from management. Employees may feel they have nothing to do with them because it conflicts with what they already believe. The result of this study indicates that good communication does not necessarily engender good industrial relations. This seems to corroborate Armstrong’s (2004) argument that “the good communications theory, like paternalism, seems to imply that company can develop loyalty by keeping people informed and treating them well. But people working in organizations have other and to them, more important loyalties elsewhere”.

Communication and Industrial Peace

One striking feature of this study is the finding that there had been industrial peace in the Delta State Civil Service. This is the more surprising if we regard the incessant strikes of teachers and doctors at different times since the creation of Delta State. But in the case of the civil service there had been little or no crisis between the government and the civil servants. One major factor that was identified as critical to the industrial peace in Delta State Civil Service is communication.

One of the statements in the questionnaire reads, “There has been industrial peace in the Delta State Civil Service since 1992”.

Table 3:

Option	Response Rate	Percentage Response
Strongly Agree	69	23
Agree	181	60
Undecided	11	4
Disagree	18	6
Strongly Disagree	20	7
Total	299	100%

Source: Field Survey 2011

The statement was meant to elicit information from the civil servants whether there had been industrial peace in the Delta State Civil Service since 1992. The response shows that an overwhelming majority of 83 percent of the respondents are of the opinion that there had been remarkable industrial peace in the Delta State Civil Service.

To test the second hypothesis, the following statement from the questionnaire which states:

Effective communication between the unions in the civil service and the state is responsible for the “industrial peace” was meant to find out the impact of communication on industrial peace in the civil service of Delta State.

Response	Response Rate	Percentage Response
Strongly Agree	85	29
Agree	165	55.8
Undecided	14	5
Disagree	19	6
Strongly Disagree	16	5
Total	299	100%

Source: Field Survey 2011

It can be observed from Table 4, that the civil servants adjudged effective communication as a very vital contributory factor to industrial peace in the Delta State Civil Service. Up to 84 percent of the respondents believe that effective communication is a critical factor in ensuring industrial peace while 11 percent disagreed and only 5 percent were undecided.

Using spearman coefficient of correlation, it was revealed that there was a positive correlation between effective communication and industrial peace which is 0.359 at 0.01 level of significance.

In the bid to ascertain consistency in the response of the respondents, the following statement was deliberately made to the respondents to elicit more information.

“The willingness of the state to dialogue with the workers/unions on important labour issues has contributed to the industrial peace in the civil service”.

The following hypotheses was formulated

Ho: The willingness of the state to dialogue with the workers/unions on important labour issues is not a determinant of industrial peace. To test this hypothesis, the T-test was used.

Table 5: Sampled Statistics

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std Error Mean
The willingness of the state to dialogue with the workers/unions on important labour issues has not contributed to the industrial peace in Delta State Civil Service	299	3.7391	1.07699	0.6228

One Sample Test

	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean differences	95% confidence interval of the difference	
					Lower	Upper
The willingness of the state to dialogue with the workers/unions on important labour issues has not contributed to the industrial peace in Delta State Civil Service	43.978	298	.000	2.73913	2.6166	2.8617

A two-tailed test with a 95 percent confidence level was employed in the analysis of data. From the computation in the table, calculated t-value is 43.978 but the critical or significant value is .000 showing that there is no significant value. Based on this, the null hypothesis is rejected while the alternative is accepted. This suggests that the willingness of the state to dialogue with the workers/unions on important labour issues is a strong determinant of industrial peace in Delta State Civil Service. This boils down to the issue of communication and industrial peace again.

Conclusion

Although the findings revealed that effective communication between the state government and the workers/union was a critical factor that was responsible for industrial peace in Delta State Civil Service, our hypothesis one however showed that there is no significant relationship between effective communication and good industrial relations. So while effective communication may be responsible for industrial peace. This does not necessarily engender good industrial relations. Absence of conflict is not a good measure of good industrial relations although it reflects industrial peace. Also, there is a note of caution, not all absence of conflict shows that the peace is genuine. It could be superficial, mere cosmetics.

Nonetheless, it must be realized that for there to be industrial harmony in any organization, there should

be effective communication. Barriers to effective communication could lead to breakdown of law and order and hence to industrial unrest. It is safe to say that any organization that wants to enjoy relative industrial peace with its employees must ensure that free flow of communication is fully encouraged.

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