

Communication Approach and Firms Performance: Appraisal of Nigerian Bottling Company (Coca cola), Ilorin-Nigeria

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Abstract

The promotion and improvement in the communication system of an organization is the sine qua non for its strength of character, ability to withstand competition, flexibility and profit maximization. The extent to which this is achieved in Nigerian Bottling Company (Ilorin Plant) as a typical manufacturing plant in Nigeria is what the study has set out to measure. This paper therefore examines the synergy between the communication approach and performance using the Nigerian Bottling Company (Coca Cola), Ilorin a case study. The researchers became participant observers in the plant for a period of two weeks. Questionnaires were also designed and administered on the workers who constitute the sampled population. The data collected were analyzed using simple percentage and Z- score statistics. The results of the data analysis and hypotheses tested revealed the significant relationship between communication approach and the performance of the Nigerian Bottling Company, Ilorin.

Keywords: Communication, Communication Approach, Performance, Nigerian Bottling Company, Ilorin

1. Introduction

The role of communication in every human organization cannot be over emphasized. It is reminiscent to the function of blood within the human physiology. This is because it is a process of creating, transmitting, disseminating and interpreting ideas, facts, messages, opinions, feelings and information between one person and the other. In fact, it is not an error of over claim to contend that the standard of an organization's productivity and efficiency is directly and indirectly related to the standard of the communication system and networks. According to Andersen (2001), enhancement of an organization's communication capabilities may influence performance through improved strategic decision making, better coordination of strategic actions and by facilitating learning from strategic initiatives. The power of communication approaches is further stressed by Juslin and Petri (2003) who studied the impact of communication of emotions in vocal expressions on music performance.

In other words, communication is a process that is essentially a sharing one - a mutual interchange between two or more persons that would ensure that the entire system functions as an organic whole (Hybel and Weaver II, 2001). It consists of the content which can be the factual information, discussion points, formal notices as well as the form of communication which are the memos, reports and bulletins, just to mention three. The media which can be face to face, written reports/memos, e-mail, fax, telephone, audio (radio) and audio-visual which is the TV sets are also crucial. In fact, in broadcasting, the medium is often said to be the message. This is to underlie the role and importance

of the medium in the effective dissemination of the message. Inclusive in this communication network is the skill which involves report writing, chairing meetings, interviewing and telephone selling. This can be through formal channels of communication, committee structures, authority levels, communication procedures and disciplinary issues all subsumed under the idea of communication organization (Cole, 2004).

A significant point about communication is that it always involves at least two parties: a sender and a receiver. One person alone cannot communicate, only the receiver can complete the act. Normally, the person also wants his receiver to understand or decode what is sent. Hence, understanding is the very essence of communication otherwise dissonance/distortion is said to have occurred. Or that noise has infiltrated the message and there is ineffective communication (Dale, 1972). Nevertheless, this process is now a highly specialized field involving a vast range of equipment and technology from the simple portable typewriter to computer terminals linked by satellites to computers thousands of miles away. However, whatever is the system installed in any organization, it should meet the specific need of management so as to give or enhance maximum effectiveness at minimum cost.

One of the major variables in communication is feedback. It is like a mirror, a parameter or yardstick for measuring the effectiveness of the message that is encoded by the sender to the receiver. In other words, communication as a two way process involving both the sender and the receiver. While the message flows from the sender to the receiver, feedback stems from the receiver to the sender. Its essence is in value added because without the feedback mechanism, there is no way of gauging the extent to which a message has effectively been disseminated. It is through feedback mechanisms that improvement can be brought to the quality of the message sent so that the possibility of distortion is totally controlled. Feedback is the response to the message sent and it indicates whether the communication is effective or not. This among others shall be thrust of this work.

2. Problem Statement

The promotion and improvement in the communication system of an organization is the sine qua non for its strength of character, ability to withstand competition, flexibility and profit maximization. Further to this is the observation of Andersen (2001) that enhancement of an organization's communication capabilities may influence performance through improved strategic decision making, better coordination of strategic actions and by facilitating learning from strategic initiatives. The extent to which this is achieved in Nigerian Bottling Company (Ilorin Plant) as a typical manufacturing plant in Nigeria is what the study has set out to measure. This paper therefore remains germane by examining the synergy between the communication approach and performance using the Nigerian Bottling Company (Coca Cola), Ilorin a case study.

The study is expected to provide answer to the following questions:

- What is the impact of communication approach on performance of Nigerian Bottling Company?

- How do the staffs of NBC perceive its communication approach?
- Is there any significant difference in the perception of the NBC approaches to communication?

3. **Study Hypothesis**

H0: There is no significant relationship between communication approach and the performance of Nigerian Bottling Company Ilorin Plant

4. **Conceptual Clarification and Literature Review**

Communication according to Randal (1990) is the enabling instrument for effective job performance. This is because it serves as an index of employee motivation and the resultant high productivity. He notes that industrial relations have perhaps collapsed in a good number of organizations due to the absence of effective communication between labour elite and that of management. This position does not capture the reason and aim of intention. If the aim deliberately is to exploit or cheat, the voice of communication might be muffled and incoherent. The aim at times colours the mode of expression. Nevertheless, in a depressing economy like that of Nigeria, communication remains a strong factor that can bring about hope and reassurance that are increasingly becoming elusive. Kimbleton and Schneider 1975 observed Computer communication networks as a subject of increasing interest. Although a variety of surveys have appeared which describe network alternatives and explain far-reaching technological possibilities achievable with networking, effective network utilization is facilitated with computer communication.

Katz (1982) investigated the communication behaviors and performances of 50 R&D project groups that varied in terms of group longevity, as measured by the average length of time project members had worked together. Analyses revealed that project groups became increasingly isolated from key information sources both within and outside their organizations with increasing stability in project membership. Such reductions in project communication were also shown to affect adversely the technical performance of project groups. Furthermore, variations in communication activities were more associated with the tenure composition of project groups than with the project tenures of individual engineers.

It is believed that the first executive function of management is to develop and maintain a system of communication that eliminates misunderstanding, friction, confusion and laziness. Suffice it to note that the low level of technological development of Africa in general and Nigeria in particular has compounded communication problems as a result of electricity failures and complex technologies. This is against the backdrop of the fact that nearly all of a typical manager's day is involved in communication. It is either he is listening or reading in order to gain knowledge or dishing out instructions to subordinates. Management it is often said is getting work done through others. Therefore, if management would get the work done through others, it must communicate effectively

with those whom the work is to be done (Ilesanmi, 1997).

In essence, communication skills are among the most important acumen that a person can bring to a career. Furthermore, communication has its limitations like all objectives. It is merely the process by which management takes action, rather than being the substance of sound management. In other words, technically conceptualised, it is the process of conducting the attention of another person for the purpose of replicating memories. However, the best communication will not compromise for poor plans and defective professional judgement. This is where the true colour of communication as garbage in garbage out is reflected. It will not substitute for good ideas. Therefore, efficient management is a function of the two dimensions: sound ideas and effective communication. Nevertheless, a manager who is a good communicator will naturally carry the day, while the one with poor communication skill and processes will automatically end up in failure. It is better imagined than expressed what fatality it would be for defective ideas to be reinforced by poor communication (Burton and Thakur, 2006).

Oakland (1993), Bowman and Asch (1987) emphasize on the concept of Total Quality Management (TQM) as a process of edification of the communication process. It is a way of planning, organising and understanding each activity, so that quality can be enhanced in everything; the people, process, products and services. In other words, TQM principles are anchored on customer satisfaction, management by facts (often referred to as speaking with facts) and mutual respect. It is the visceral commitment to and obsession for customers who may be both internal and external. It also contains the idea in strengthening the supplier-customer chain. The flaw of TQM is in the utopia pursuance of 100% excellence in every business endeavour. In both advanced countries as well as developing societies like Nigeria, the idea of an acceptable level of mistakes, error, waste and spoilage is not out of place. Its pursuance can also lure an otherwise well intended company into the kind of corporate inertia where size and strength become liability instead of an advantage. Moreover, TQM is a holistic business virtue which has gone beyond just an integral aspect which communication is aimed to capture.

Oakland (1993) perceives communication in terms of its application to Total Quality Management (TQM). The central concept of TQM is the achievement of quality standard in products and services. The error in Oakland's work is the implied notion that communication is an embodiment of all the virtues of business processes. TQM is essentially a way of planning, organizing and understanding of each activity. This depends on each individual at each level. Equating TQM to communication is academic reductionism because TQM goes beyond communication.

Mead (1990) contends that emphasis on communication business largely thrives from the Human Relations Approach of Management. The idea being that if workers know what is expected of them and are aware of the objectives of the feedback of their performance, they invariably will be more productive. Moreover, communication attempts to protect and promote the corporate image of an organization through an effective public relations system. This position is as relevant to the Scientific

School of Thought as it is to Human Relations Approach to Management. Timeliness in information dissemination or a rejoinder can save an organization a lot of embarrassment. As the saying goes “a stitch in time saves nine”.

Furthermore, communication does a wonderful job in conflict resolution, collective bargaining and in the area of change and relocation. It is an element that has one thing in common with involvement. It is pertinent to note that involvement leads to motivation. As Simmerman observes, motivation comes from perceiving one’s ideas being implemented and from seeing the leaders trying to improve the organization through corporate effort. Employees at every level have ideas for improving organizations, but they might not share them because of perceived risk or the feeling that nobody listened in the past. Organizational leaders must therefore generate opportunities for active involvement and improvement through effective communication.

Furthermore, as observed by Major (1990) miscommunication has contributed to the equivalence of cardiovascular damage in more than one organization. Communication is the essential precursor of levels of social interaction. Man’s ability to think and transmit these thoughts through the communication process provides the binding element for all social interaction. Effective communications suffice it to note is crucial to managerial success because:

- a. It provides a common thread for the management processes of planning, organizing, leading and controlling. In order words, all the key functions of an organization; planning, organizing, directing, execution and controlling depend on effective communication.
- b. The dimensions of communication satisfaction that involve relationships were positively correlated with job performance. Employee attitude and performance were found to be influenced mostly by the communication climate, personal feedback and supervisor communication. In essence, through effective communication, management is enabled to draw on the vast array of talents available in the multicultural world of organizations. Thus, management that wishes to have satisfied and productive subordinates needs to focus on effective organizational communication.

Suffice it to note that in a complex technological society, our quality of life and survival depend on countless successful interactions with other people, mediated through markets networks and various kinds of organization. Without these intricate and largely unseen webs of communication, our economic prosperity, social welfare and cultural life would be undermined. By its nature, communication seems time consuming and very demanding. This is because in order to be effective, communication requires each party involved to make some efforts to understand the other.

As a consequence, for Nigerian Bottling Company Ilorin Plant, effective communication can enhance

- ❖ A satisfied repeat customers, rather than unhappy ex- customers;
- ❖ A well motivated employees, rather than an expensive industrial dispute;
- ❖ A positive reputation in the wider community, rather than an international boycott of its products; and
- ❖ An innovative and creative strategies rather than inefficiency, indecision and resistance to change (Blundel, 2004).

In similar veins, the expediency of all these is more manifest when taken against the backdrop of the fact that as people begin to take the quantity of what they buy for granted, they become more interested in whom they are buying it from. The reputation behind the product or service is more and more important. This is only achievable and sustainable through effective communication. There is then a direct correlation between employees' communication and profitability. The best business plan is meaningless unless everyone is aware of it and consequently makes concerted effort to achieve its objectives (Stonner et al 2006).

In other words, management needs effective communication as the key to convince the customers to purchase a particular product or service. Without good communication skills, management will find it difficult to attract customers even if their company's products meet the customers' needs. Since management interact with people from all walks of life, to be effective, management must be able to understand and accept other people's view points. This must be persuasive in order to be accepted, because familiarity has been demonstrated to be closely correlated with favourable attitudes and virtues. An organization's identity or image will further be laundered by perfect and effective communication often through public enlightenment and through their brand names. If management is incapable of doing this, the organization eclipses and atrophies.

5. Methodology

Study Area

The entire Nigerian Bottling Company (Coca Cola) Plc which was first sited in Lagos in March 1953 is the Study Area. The Ilorin Plant which was mainly to meet the needs of customers in Bida, Jebba, Ogbomoso, Okene, Oshogbo, Kontagora, Igbaja, Offa, Lokoja and Ilorin metropolis, all within Nigeria as a country is the Study Population. 50 workers were purposively selected, out of which 10 were Senior staff and 40 Junior staff. The junior and senior staffs were to answer the Questions of Assessment of the Communication Network Effectiveness in Nigerian Bottling Company, Ilorin.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Questionnaire Analysis

Table 1 Preferred Communication Method by Staff:

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Written	28	56%
Intercom/Telephone	10	20%
Computer Network	12	24%
Total	50	100%

Source: Field Survey 2011

From the above, 56% of the respondent staff preferred Written Communication, 20% preferred Intercom while 24% preferred Computer Network. We uphold the majority view supporting Written Communication.

Table 2 Regularity of Management Meeting with Staff

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Monthly	30	60%
Quarterly	12	24%
Bi annually	6	12%
Annually	2	4%
Total	50	100%

Source: Field Survey 2011

From the above table, 60% of the respondents (majority) said Management had meeting with them monthly, 24% said it was regular on quarterly basis. Others i.e 12% and 4% said it was regular bi-annually and annually respectively.

We therefore uphold the majority view.

Table 3 Perceived Effectiveness of the Communication Approach of Nigerian Bottling Company

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
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Very effective	15	30%
Effective	20	40%
Undecided	5	10%
Ineffective	8	16%
Terribly Ineffective	2	4%
Total	50	100%

Source: Field Survey 2011

From the table 3 above, 70% of the respondents perceived the Communication Approach of NBC to be effective, while 20% believed it was not effective. 10% however could not decide.

The majority view is hereby upheld.

TEST OF HYPOTHESIS

H₀: There is no significant relationship between communication approach of NBC and its effective performance.

Testing the overall significance of Z-score implies testing the Null hypothesis **H₀** against the alternative hypothesis **H₁**. If the null hypothesis is true i.e. the zones and sample means do not lie within the population means at 0.05 significance level, we accept the null hypothesis i.e. that there is no significant relationship between the dependent and independent variables, but if it is otherwise, we will reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternate hypothesis.

Results from the hypothesis tested using question 3 as analyzed in table 3 showed the following:

Sample Mean = \bar{x} = 3.76

Standard Deviation = sd = 1.1485

Standard Error of the Mean = $sd\bar{x}$ = 0.1624

Population means ranges between 2.5366 and 4.9834. The Z-score calculated is 1.96. Z-score table value at 0.05 significance level is 1.96 for a two-tail test.

Therefore, the relationship between the dependent and independent variables is significant. We then reject the Null hypothesis and accept the alternate hypothesis that communication approach is

significant to performance of Nigerian Bottling Company. The above analysis is presented in the table below.

Sample Mean \bar{x}	3.74
Standard Deviation sd	1.1485
Standard Error of the Mean sdx	0.1624
Z-score Calculated Z_c	1.96
Z-score T-value Z_t 0.005	1.96
Population Mean μ	2.53 and 4.98
Decision	Reject H0 and Accept H1

Source: Researchers Findings 2011

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

The research findings no doubt have validated the synergistic relationship between communication approach and efficient performance of NBC, Ilorin Plant. This is one of the reasons behind the resilience of the company that has been established in Nigeria since 1953 in spite of the unfavourable Nigerian business environment. The human element in NBC has been an important factor in the enhancement of its sustainability. The interpersonal relationship of mutual understanding, cooperation and consensus building are factors responsible for its longevity and ability to weather the odd Nigerian business storm.

Nevertheless, there can still be more room for improvement and consequently better performance if management embraces the following recommendations

- i. More clarity of ideas before attempting to communicate;
- ii. Better understanding of the physical and human environment when communicating;
- iii. A thorough analysis of the purpose of communication;
- iv. In planning communication, consultation should both be top down and bottom up, while all facts are rendered implicit and explicit;
- v. Consideration should be given to the content and tone of the messages;

- vi. Whenever possible, the language or tone should not only be edifying and elegant, but must be messages the receiver would find valuable;
- vii. Communication messages that are precise and are of short run often possess long run importance;
- viii. All stake holders should be encouraged to be good listeners;
- ix. Immediate actions must be accompanied and accomplished with communications; and
- x. Communications that would be effective require a follow up and effective feedback mechanism process.

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