

Importance of Communication to Stakeholders in all Organisations

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Date of publication (dd/mm/yyyy): 02/10/2018

Abstract – Communication is a unique and distinct activity that all human beings are involved in. We use 'languages' as the principal tool of communication. However, even without the use of languages human beings may communicate by using gestures, symbols, visual forms, written messages, electronic devices, body movements, manner of dressing as well as remaining silent or mute. Human communication involves people and therefore it tries to understand how people relate to each other. This is what is called interpersonal and intrapersonal communication. In particular, communication involves trying to share meaning in the communication process. This is also called mutuality of meanings. For communication to be effective there must be mutual agreement in terms of words, symbols, signs and uncoded messages.

This paper attempts to highlight the various definitions of communication, focuses on the main roles or functions of human communication, forms of communication, patterns or networks of communication as well as the process or model of the communication process. The paper identifies various barriers or obstacles to effective communication as well as suggesting strategies that may lead to effective communication. It concludes by noting that effective communication leads to effective management which in turn leads to effective accomplishment of the goals and objectives of the organization.

Keywords – Communication People, Languages, Messages, Shared Meanings, Strategies, Barriers, Goals and Objectives, Social Organizations: Family, Church, Schools, Workplace, Nation and Society.

I. INTRODUCTION

Communication is a human activity that we are all involved in. Human beings live socially because of their ability to communicate. In any organization including the family, church, schools, farmer-groups, communities and nations such as the Kenyan or East African, Communication is the **life-blood** of such organization. Lack of communication is like the Cardio-vascular disease or the HIV/Aids of our times.

II. DEFINITION (WHAT IS COMMUNICATION?)

There are many definitions of communication depending on the context and aspects referred in that definition. For example (Little Peter: 1965 in a book called 'Communication for Business) says that communication is a chameleon word in that it changes meaning according to the user and the context it's being used. Historians, Sociologists, Engineers, Technologist all have different meanings for Communication.

For our purpose, Communication will refer to passing messages or information from one person to another. In

other words, 'Communication may be defined as an exchange or interchange of ideas, thoughts, feelings, attitudes, behaviour, activities or objects between **two** or more people. Other definitions include 'Communication as the art or instance of transmitting or a process by which information is exchanged between individuals, through a common system of symbols, signs or behaviour (Cf. Wilkinson: 1974)

Similarly, Stone (1990) defines communication as the process by which people attempts to share meaning through transmission of symbolic messages. Simply, communication means making oneself understood. In organizations, 'communication is the process by which managers accomplish the functions of planning, organizing, leading and controlling their organizations'. Communication is the activity to which managers devote a large proportion of their time either in face to face, electronic, or telephone conversation with individuals, peers, suppliers or customers. When not in face to face or telephone conversation the manager may be writing or dictating memos, letters, reports, or reading these documents. All these are part of the manager's role in communication.

III. THE ROLES (FUNCTIONS) OF COMMUNICATION

There are many roles of communication such as interpersonal, intra-personal, interactional, social informational, decisional etc. However, in management the role of communication to managerial duties and responsibilities include the three (3) aspects comprising :-

(i) *Interpersonal Roles:*

Managers as figureheads, and leaders have to interact with their subordinates, customers, suppliers and peers within and outside their organizations.

(ii) *Informational Roles:*

This involves seeking and giving information from peers, subordinates, superiors and others about anything that may affect their job and their responsibilities. They may disseminate interesting and important information. They provide information to suppliers, customers, clients and peers about their units, departments and divisions.

(iii) *Decisional Roles:*

Managers may make decisions in various aspects of their work. They make decisions about implementing projects, handling disturbances and grievances, in allocating resources and in evaluating the effects of their earlier decisions. Managers have to make decisions either individually or collectively. Information and decisions are communicated to **seniors** then to **juniors** and from the **junior managers** to those below them.

IV. INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION

This is the communication that concerns most of us as Heads of Units, Divisions, Departments etc. Three (3) aspects in this communication comprise.

- (i) That Communication involves 'people' and thus understanding. Communication involves trying to understand how people relate to each other.
- (ii) That communication involves shared 'meaning' which suggests that in order to communicate people must agree on definition of terms they are trying to use.
- (iii) That communication could be symbolic, gestures, sounds, letters, numbers and words that represent or approximate ideas that are meant to be communicated.

V. FORMS OR TYPES OF COMMUNICATION

Communication in the sense of transmitting messages from one person to another may be effected in:-

- (i) Written form.
- (ii) Oral (verbal) form.
- (iii) Pictorial (visual) form.
- (iv) Gesture, body movement, hands, face, mouth, eyes, feet or body posture.
- (v) Manner of dress.
- (vi) Silence.

VI. CATEGORIZATION OF COMMUNICATION

The various forms of communication may be categorized into:-

- (i) *Formal Communication*: -

Including official circulars, memos, letters etc. Minutes of staff meetings fall in this category of communication.

NB : - Managers should write only what is appropriate for written messages.

- (ii) *Informal Communication*: -

This is mainly oral communication. It is used for urgent and simple messages or information. Unrecorded information including rumours or 'grapevine' communication include:-

- a) What is collected from 'suggestion Box'.
- b) Get-together discussion.
- c) Tea-Break discussion.
- d) Personal / confidential discussion.
- e) Gestures and personal impressions.

VII. PATTERNS (NETWORK) OF COMMUNICATION

These Include:-

- (i) *Vertical Communication*:

The trend is up and down the chain of command. The Head of Department is at the top and below are the deputy, sectional heads, and units Supervisors (Top-Bottom Communication).

- (ii) *Downward Communication*.

Starts from Head of Dept. and flows through the lower levels. The purpose is to inform, instruct, and even evaluate performance of all those in the dept.

- (iii) *Upward Communication*.

Starts with Subordinates and flows through to the Head of Dept. The Head of Dept. gets ideas, suggestions, views, grievances and problems from subordinates (junior officers). The Head of Dept. should note that in either upward or downward communication information may be diluted, distorted or halted depending on the nature of the information.

- (iv) *Horizontal Communication*:

Takes place between parallel groups in the organization. The interaction may be:

- a) Subordinates and subordinates.
- b) Head of Dept. and another.
- c) Supervisors and Managers.
- d) Managing Director and Departmental Heads Consultations, discussions, sharing ideas and experience.

NB: All Departmental Heads must ensure that information travels upwards, downwards and sideways in order to have effective communication.

VIII. THE PROCESS OF COMMUNICATION

Kotter defines communication as a process consisting of **Sender**, transmitting **Message** through media to a **Receiver** who responds.

The Model

Sender → **Message** → **Receiver**

If any of the above components (element) is missing then there is no communication. But this is a simple model that may be called 'ideal'. Communication is not an end in itself but a process by which 'ends' are accomplished. The process involves six (6) steps / stages forming a complete sequence. These are:-

- (i) *Sender*:

Initiates the message he/she wishes to transmit. Sender is the person with Information, needs, desires and purpose for communicating.

- (ii) *Encoding*:

Takes place when the sender formulates the information to be transmitted. Information can only be transmitted through representations or symbols. Ideas / message is put into words (oral) or sentences (written). Sender attempts to establish '**mutuality**' of meaning with the receiver by choosing symbols (words or gestures) that sender believes have the same meaning for the receiver. Lack of **mutuality** will cause misunderstanding or lack of communication. E.g. in India 'Yes' for head from side to side and 'No' for nodding. Differences in mutuality of meaning e.g. the word late may lead to misunderstanding. Gestures may also lead to different interpretation. E.g. 'cutthroat' gesture in a 'police station'.

- (iii) *Message*:

Physical form in which the sender encodes information. It may be in any form to be experienced and understood by

one or more of the **senses** of the receiver. Speech to be heard; written words to be read; gestures to be seen or felt; touch of hand to communicate messages ranging from '**comfort**' to '**discomfort**'.

(iv) *Channel*:

Method of transmission from one person to another. E.g. air or paper for spoken or written message.

(v) *Receiver*:

Person who senses or perceives e.g. memo sent to all members of a department.

(vi) *Decoding*:

Is the process by which the receiver interprets the message and translates it into meaningful information. It's a two-step process comprising:

a) Receiver must first perceive the message then.

b) Receiver interprets the message.

NB: Decoding is affected by receiver's experience, personal assessment, symbols and gestures, expectations and mutuality of meaning with the sender.

(vii) *Noise*:

Any factor that disturbs, confuses or interferes with communication.

(viii) *Feedback*:

Reversal of communication process. Reaction to sender's communication is expressed. The receiver becomes the sender. The greater the feedback the more effective the communication process is likely to be.

IX. BARRIERS TO COMMUNICATION

This refers to communication break - down. Examples includes:-

1. Language differences.
2. Time
3. Lack of feedback
4. Lack of trust
5. Social distance or status
6. Complexity of information
7. Quantity of information
8. Fear and anxiety
9. Lack of commonness of experience
10. Physical distance between sender and receiver
11. Psychological e.g. attitude of listener
12. Physiological state — sickness, hunger, tiredness
13. Gestures
14. Posture of speaker (Sender)
15. Prosodic features e.g. stress, intonation of speaker.
16. Differing perceptions — different background of knowledge and experience. Make people perceive same phenomenon from different perspectives.
17. Emotionality: Emotional reaction e.g. anger, love, defensiveness, hate, jealousy, fear, embarrassment.
18. Other barriers — lack of sound objectives, written instructions, formal and informal opportunities.
19. Noise — any factor that disturbs, confuses or interferes with communication. However, little communication occurs in noise free environment.
20. Technical Jargon. Too many assumptions, lack of definition of responsibilities, too long chain of

command, too wide span of control, inaccurate judgement, failure to communicate at all.

X. EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

- (1) **Trust** is an important factor in effective communication and in turn effective management.
- (2) **Active Listening**. Everybody in the organization has a right to be listened to. Good and active listening demands 'Paying attention' to the person talking and allowing time for explanation before responding and giving feedback.
- (3) **Feedback** — without feedback communication is incomplete.
- (4) The **right message** get to the **right people** at the **right time**.
- (5) There are clearly understood **channels** of communication **upwards**, **downwards** and **sideways**. These channels should be used for effective communication.

XI. CONCLUSION

Communication permeates all aspects of the organization's life. It is through communication that work gets done. We must communicate by:

1. Seeing and talking to our seniors and juniors
2. Making them aware of our positive attitude towards them. Let them know you as one of them.
3. Communication is a two way process. It involves receiving as well as giving.
4. Get members to talk to you and 'listen' to them patiently and attentively. Know your members as people.
5. Keep all relevant groups and individuals informed on matters relating to your organization.
6. **Effective communication** will lead to **effective management** which will in turn lead to **effective accomplishment** of goals and objectives of the organization. This is the 'means' and 'end' to effective communication in all organizations.

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