

COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES AND THEIR IMPACT ON EMPLOYEE COMMITMENT IN IGBINEDION UNIVERSITY

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Abstract

Communication is a major shaping force in life generally and in organizations in particular. This study aimed to: (a) identify communication activities and practices at Igbinedion University, Okada (IUO); (b) examine how management utilizes communication to promote employee commitment; and (c) assess the influence of prevailing organizational communication on employee commitment. From a population of 474, a sample of 200 respondents was drawn, with 193 usable questionnaire responses retrieved. Additionally, two principal officers of the university were interviewed. Findings revealed that (a) IUO management deliberately employs communication activities to positively influence employee commitment, and (b) respondents confirmed that organizational communication influenced their commitment, although some indicated occasional discouragement from prioritizing the university over personal alternatives. Consequently, a communication audit is recommended to identify additional factors that may enhance employee morale and commitment.

Keywords: *Communication, Organization, Organizational Communication, Employee Commitment, Communication Activities*

INTRODUCTION

Every organization is different in terms of structure and system, policies, rules and regulations, ways of doing things, the organisational climate, the levels of energy and of individual freedom, as well as the different kinds/classes of people who work therein. There are still some variations and differences even in same organisation (by name) in different geographical location. It is therefore assumed that the proper and more complex an organisation is, the more the need to coordinate it for optimum employee commitment, in terms of its activities, hopes and aspirations. For the coordination to be sound and well, communication is a necessary factor. Communication here would be taken to mean a two-way sharing of information. It requires the freedom and opportunity to ask questions, get answers and exchange ideas in the process.

Communication is a function of both the organisation as well as individual's skill. In other words, the organisation itself must be structured as a network for the sending and receiving of information. Following this, it is obvious that communication is the pivot of any organisational activity. Therefore, organisations that desire high employee commitment should have some communication activities that will aid that achievement, as they depend on their employees' interactions one with another for insights and knowledge about the background, experience, attitudes and behaviour of the other people. Based on these inputs,

relationships among the people in the organisation become established and such relationships may be friendly and affect employees commitment to the organisation positively or they may be hostile and affect both the employees and the organisation negatively. On the other hand, relationships may have no effect on the employees and the organisation. (Goldhaber,1993 in Ndada, 2000,p.25)

1.2 Statement of the Problem A close look at individuals' experience of work within an organisation begins with a discussion of how people come to organisations initially, and how they learn to make sense of the organisation's values and goals in line with their own belief systems, and get committed to them. The experience of work within organisations, from participant observation, is marked by indicators of cooperation and resistance to stress. Employees learn the rules, norms, values, ethics, culture and expectations of the organisation. This learning process leads to assimilation – a process that involves learning the rules that guide what members of an organisation think, do and say. Through this, new employees are made to learn about and make sense of the organization's culture; that is, learning the requirements of his role and what the organisation and its members consider to be "normal patterns of behaviour and thoughts" (Jablin 2001 in Eisenberg and Goodal, 2001, p. 194), which, invariably, may or may not lead to their commitment to the organisation. All these are about human communication in organisation.

With this in mind, the study sought to answer the question: to what extent have the organisational communication activities in an organisation such as Igbinedion University, Okada, promoted its employee commitment?

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study were to:

- (1) Ascertain the communication activities and practices in Igbinedion University, Okada (IUO).
- (2) find out whether the prevailing organisational communication in Igbinedion University, Okada, (IUO) influences employee commitment
- (3) Find out how the management of Igbinedion University, Okada,(IUO) utilises communication activities to promote employee commitment.

1.4 Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study.

- (1) What are the communication activities in Igbinedion University, Okada?
- (2) How does the prevailing organisational communication of the university influence employee commitment?
- (3) How does the management of the university utilise communication activities in promoting employee commitment?

Definition of Terms

Communication Activities: These are activities carried out by Igbinedion University, Okada, with the intention of disseminating vital information to the employees as well as create opportunities for

interactions. For example, orientation programmes for new staff, congregation, and matriculation/convocation.

Employee Affective Commitment: This refers to the willingness of employees of Igbinedion University, Okada, to persist in a course of action, reluctance to change plans, dedication and support for the goals and values of the university they work in.

Organisation: It is a dynamic open system that creates and exchanges messages among its members and its environment. For example, the universities in South-South, Nigeria.

Organisational Communication: This is the flow of message (upward, downward, horizontal) in and out of the university as an organisation and the purpose, direction and media used; the people, their attitude, feelings, relationships and skills critical to its success.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Communication.

Even though communication could be seen as the major shaping force in any organisation, each attempt at defining it brings out some unique attributes in its relation to man. A number of definitions emphasize the idea of sharing. Such definitions include that of Luthans (1985), Akpan (1987), and Unoh (1987) (Quoted in Ndada, 2000) in which they see it as the sharing of an orientation toward a set of informational signs and that communication "is the sharing of meaning with oneself or with others" (p.25). Thus, communication is a sharing of information, ideas, thoughts and emotions between a source and a receiver for mutual understanding, the reduction of uncertainties or for appropriate action.

The need for communication pervades all organisations. Jobs cannot be adequately accomplished, goals cannot be met and problems cannot be solved without adequate and effective communication. This all-embracing concept, communication, may take many forms: face-to-face discussions, letters, memos, phone calls, notices posted on bulletin boards and presentations to groups of people etc.

The information-transfer approach views communication as a metaphoric pipeline through which information is transferred from one person to another and theorizing that, managers thus communicate well when they transfer their knowledge to subordinates and others with minimal spillage. This version of communication theory, according to Axley (1984) (in Eisenberg and Goodal 2001, p. 21), rests on the following assumptions:

- a) Language is capable of transferring thoughts and feelings from one person to another.
- b) Speakers and writers insert thoughts and feelings into words
- c) Words contain these thoughts and feelings
- d) Listeners or readers extract those thoughts and feelings from the words.

It also views communication as a tool that people use to accomplish their goals and objectives. This view was popularized in the early 1990s with a comparison of human communication to the flow of information over a telegraph or telephone wire. According to this perspective, miscommunication occurs only when no message is received or when the message that is received is not what the sender intended. Typical

communication problems include information over-load, (when the receiver becomes overwhelmed by the information that must be processed); distortion (the effects of noise on the receiver's ability to process the message); and ambiguity (when multiple interpretations of a message cloud the sender's intended meaning).

Communication is also viewed as a balance of creativity and constraint. This approach according to Eisenberg and Goodal, (2001) views communication as a balancing act between creativity and constraint. It is closely linked to sociological theories concerning individual and society translated to the relationship between employees and organisations. This relationship is examined in two perspectives; (a) the macro and (b) the micro.

The macro perspective sees individuals as being molded, controlled, ordered, and constrained by the society and by social institutions. Contrastingly, the micro perspective sees individuals as creating society and its social systems. This is particularly useful for organisational communication, depending on whether the emphasis is on how employees communicate to create and shape organisations or on the constraints organisations place on that communication.

Organisational Communication and Employee Commitment

Despite the many definitions of communication, the main point in communication lies within sharing. It is therefore, the process of sharing emotions, thoughts and information between two or more parties and thus, uncovering common meanings Karakütük, (2011). The purposes of communication in organisations include for, (a) controlling the behavior of the employees, communicating task-related challenges, harassing and/or teasing members whose productivity seems threatening as perceived by other members (Robbins and Judge, 2013); (b) information needed by members of the organisation to understand the world around them in terms of the set rules and regulations designed and implemented to help manage the organisation, (c) emotional expressions as members form groups where inclusion and affection are experienced, and (d) fostering motivation by clarifying to the employees what they must do, how it should be done and how they can improve if performance seems subpar. Communication in organisation comes either in a downward, upward, and/or lateral direction. The modes of the communication activity could be oral, written, and /or non-verbal-that is 'all aspects of communication other than words themselves' (Wood, 2002, p161). In line with the above, the axiom by Watzlawick (1978), (in Griffin 2000) "we cannot not communicate" becomes very meaningful, though we could be misunderstood sometimes. Others still respond to what we do and say as well as to what we do not do and do not say. Even when silent, we are still communicating, though, the interpretation is culture-based.

In organisations, the number of members could be as few as half a dozen or as many as a hundred and more. The more the number, the more complicated communication interaction. Communication helps people explore new opportunities for better motivation and coordination while making them more informed and directed in a unique and responsible way. Via communications, creative problem solving techniques can be used ultimately. Future unity and cooperation of organisation can only be made possible

when all of these processes of communication are applied properly. Organisation interaction becomes broader and larger during the communication process, and it spreads over among the members of the organisation. As a result, organisational communication is the major source of life for the companies. An inactive and undeveloped organisational communication can bring a lot of harm to the company itself. When there is an advanced organisational communication system within the organisation, employees have high-level morale and motivation and this leads to high-quality commitment and productivity, as they are properly and correctly informed. This, also, increases the speed of getting things done, thereby saving time. As the participation becomes faster and the feedback mechanism works more quickly, the number of mistakes decreases (Misirli, 2011).

Yüksel (2005), found that factors such as openness in communication, receiving feedback and constructive criticism have a direct positive effect on the job satisfaction and eventually, commitment.. Carrier and Bourque 2009 (in Guney, Diker, Ayranci and Solmaz 2012) state that satisfaction from organisational communication is an intermediate variable in influencing work commitment. Chen, Silverthorne and Hung (2006) find that in organizations where organisational communication is more continuous and open, work commitment is higher. "High commitment and satisfaction among employees are a result of the person-organisation fit." (Nazir 2005, p. 47). To this, Hult (2005) agrees and suggests that any employee who enters into an organisation and fits in with their surrounding organisation environment will show high level of commitment. It is important to determine the significance of communication in establishing a relation with employee commitment

Leiter and Maslach 1988 (in Guney *et al*, 2012), who consider organisational communication in the form of communication networks, find that subordinates who show a similar degree of work commitment, tend to establish communication networks among themselves and that negative superiorsubordinate relationship reduces work commitment seriously. There are, however, some studies that cannot find a relationship between organisational communication and commitment. An example is the one that belongs to Trombetta and Rogers 1988 (in Guney *et al*, 2012), revealing that organisational communication affects job satisfaction but has no influence on work commitment.

Theoretical Framework

This study was anchored on the following theories:

Adaptive Structuration Theory

The Adaptive Structuration Theory was propounded by a sociologist Giddens (1976), but adapted by Marshall Scott Poole. It is one of the small group theories of social action. It states that human action is a process of producing and reproducing various social systems, through the use of rules and resources. In organisations, there are rules for actions as well as recipes for how to get things done and get along with life, in them. These rules are neither societal nor scientific laws but rather they are participants' sense of how to play the game acceptably, as a member of the organisation. In line with these (rules and resources), members' personal traits, abilities, knowledge and possessions are brought into their interactions one with

another. These, (rules and resources) form the structure of an organisation, help to identify the particular culture of the organisation; are the medium and the outcome of interaction – meaning that the decisions are affected by the rules and resources of the organisation, but at the same time, it has an effect on those same structures.

In organisations, there are various divergent groups and these groups act according to rules to achieve their goals and in so doing create structures that come back to affect future actions. These structures include relational expectations, group roles and norms, communication networks and societal institutions. They affect and are affected by social action. They provide individuals with rules that guide their actions and their actions in turn create new rules and reproduce old ones. In a sense, rules are participants' sense of how to play the game in line with the culture of the organisation.

Giddens (1984) holds the opinion that both human actions caused by outside forces and those that are intentional, are right because social life is a two-sided coin. He further believes that structuration always involves three major modalities. These are: (1) interpreting or understanding (2) a sense of morality or proper conduct and (3) a sense of power in action. In other words, rules tell us how something should be understood (interpretation), what should be done (morality), and how to get things accomplished (power). Group members make use of elements of action in an attempt to achieve convergence, or agreement, on a final decision.

The structuration theory also recognises that outside factors influence the group's actions. Outside factors have meaning only insofar as they are understood, and interaction is, within the group. The use of interaction is a reflection of Giddens' (1984) conviction that people are not merely pawns, but they are free to act as they will in the game of life. Furthermore, we act towards others in a way that reflect our views of their place in the group and in time a "group" definition of each person emerges. In turn, our actions reinforce these very structures of interpretation, morality and power. Like all structuration, this was not planned, but emerged as an unintended consequence of the action of group members over time.

Poole's faithful adaptation of Giddens' ideas and terminology comes at a cost. Poole's writing is more accessible, yet, Giddens' heaviness still comes through. He sees sedimented structures buildings across an entire organisation over decades, rather than layers of rules and resources forming within the group after a few meetings. Although structuration theory takes communication seriously and claims that morality is an issue in all interaction, neither Giddens nor Poole provides what that moral stance should be, or a steady moral compass for ethical communication.

Even at that, this theory is of relevance to this study in the sense that every organisation desires meaningful achievement of her goals and objectives; and as such, group members who can play roles in such achievements are considered effective and efficient.

These group members in this case, the employees of Igbinedion University, Okada, through their performances, can (a) constitute and reveal to themselves and others, their understanding of issues, of interpretation, morality and power in the University life, and (b) also be examined using various

communication activities. In the process, it is assumed that understanding could be produced and reproduced. Where this happens, it is expected that the employees will be committed to their university's goals and objectives.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In order to determine whether communication has a statistically significant influence on employee commitment in Igbinedion University, Okada, the research was done using both quantitative and qualitative methods, for according to Creswell (2012), the use of both methods provides a better understanding of the research problem and question(s) than either method by itself (p.535). Therefore, the descriptive survey design (the questionnaire) and structured interview were used in this research in trying to establish what influence communication has on the commitment level of the employees of Igbinedion University, Okada (IUO). The population for this study comprised teaching staff (including those who are also involved in administration), senior non-teaching and junior non-teaching staff of Igbinedion University, Okada (IUO) with a population of Four Hundred and Seventy-four (474), of which 200 were sampled using the proportionate stratified sampling technique. One hundred and Ninety-three copies of the questionnaire were found useable. Two (2) principal officers of IUO -- the Registrar; and Director of Information and Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) were interviewed. Furthermore, responses from the respondents were tabulated based on the frequency of the different items and expressed in simple percentages. Also, the data collected from the personal interviews were analysed qualitatively, using explanation building method.

Data Presentation and Analysis

This study was aimed at finding out the influence of communication on the employee commitment in Igbinedion University, Okada. The quantitative and qualitative methods of analysis were used. Here presented are the analysis of the research questions, as well as the discussion of the findings based on data from the useful copies of the questionnaire retrieved from 193 respondents, and personal interview of two of the principal officers of Igbinedion University, Okada. IUO.

Tables of Data and Analysis

Table 1: Respondents' Perception of management's communication activities geared towards employee commitment

	A	D	N	Total
Regular informal meetings with superiors	166 (86%)	19 (10%)	8 (4%)	193

Annual get together	87 (45%)	73 (38%)	33 (17%)	193
Brainstorming sessions with superiors	179 (93%)	14 (7%)	0 (0%)	193
Seminars	179 (93%)	14 (7%)	0 (0%)	193
Inaugural lectures	69 (69%)	31 (31%)	0 (0%)	193
Workshops	73 (38%)	60 (31%)	60 (31%)	193
Productivity walk	87 (45%)	60 (31%)	46 (24%)	193

Key: A = Agree, D = Disagree, N = Neutral i.e. can't tell

The table above shows that a larger percentage of respondents in IUO, 179 (93%) agreed to brainstorming sessions with supervisors and seminars being some of the communication activities by the management geared towards employee commitment. This was followed closely by regular informal meetings with superiors.

In organisations such as Igbinedion University, Okada, it is expected that communication activities such as seminars, inaugural lectures, regular informal meetings, brainstorming sessions, workshops, annual get-together and productivity walk for fitness should promote employee commitment. Data in the Table above show that 86% of the respondents in IUO perceived and agreed to the existence of regular informal meetings with immediate superior; 93% attested to brainstorming sessions between staff and superiors, and seminar, respectively; as part of the managements communication activities geared towards the promotion of employee commitment. The responses from the interview clearly indicate that regular informal chats with superiors, brainstorming sessions with superiors and seminars are organized regularly in the university, and they have some levels of influence on the commitment of the employees in the processes for organizations to operate efficiently and effectively (Ataman, **2002**). Based on this finding, it can be deduced that the aforementioned communication activities enhance enough qualitative relationship between the superior and subordinate in IUO, thereby influencing employee commitment. Meyer and Allen in Meijen (2007) believe that it is the relationship of the employee with the organisation that determines how committed the employee can be to the organisation. Therefore, affective commitment

of staff in IUO is significantly affected by the quality of superior-subordinate relationships, though much is left to be desired in terms of annual get-together ceremonies, as only 45% of the respondents agreed to its being a communication activity by management for the promotion of employee commitment.

Table2: Respondents' perception of the influence of prevalent organisational communication on the commitment of employees in Igbinedion University, Okada, (IUO).

	A	D	N	Total
Stories aimed at guiding my perception and behaviour actually influence my commitment to the university	133 (69%)	0 (0%)	60 (31%)	193
The communication activities in the university contribute to my commitment to the university	139 (72%)	39 (20%)	15 (8%)	193
The consistency of interaction between management and employees influence my commitment to the university	106 (55%)	54 (28%)	33 (17%)	193
I am encouraged to forego personal alternative because of opportunities to contribute to the success of the university	19 (10%)	115 (59%)	58 (30%)	193
The flexible resumption and closing times influence my commitment	33 (17%)	106 (55%)	54 (28%)	193

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Key: A = Agree, D = Disagree, N = Neutral i.e. can't tell

Table 2 is a summary of the influence of the prevalent communication, within the university, on employee commitment. The Majority of the respondents (69%) agreed that stories aimed at guiding their perceptions and behavior actually influence their commitment to the University. The next item on the table sought to find answers to whether the communication activities (see table 1) in the university influenced the commitment of the employees positively. Findings reveal 139 (72%) respondents in IUO agreed. This corresponds with the responses from the Registrar, and the Director of Information which stated that communication activities are organised by the management with the intention of promoting employee commitment, , Also on the influence of the consistent interaction between the management and the employees on the commitment of the employees 106 (55%) in IUO. The above findings support scholars such as Guney *et al* (2012), Nazir 2005, and Hult 2005, among others, who hold the opinion that organisational communication influences employee commitment. Meanwhile, 87(45%) of the respondents claimed that mere communication within the university does not encourage them to forgo personal alternatives. This percentage is high and the other factors as incentives and remuneration should be researched into and need not be taken for granted. Carrier and Bourque 2009 (in Guney *et al* 2012) state that satisfaction from organisational communication is an intermediate variable in influencing work commitment. Chen, Silverthorne and Hung (2006) find that in organisations where communication is more continuous and open, work commitment is higher. "High commitment and satisfaction among employees are a result of the person-organisation fit." (Nazir 2005, p. 47). To this, Hult (2005) agrees and suggests that any employee who enters into an organisation and fits in with their surrounding organisation environment will show high level of commitment. It can be asserted that if employees are committed, they will offer something more.

Table 3: Respondents' perception of management's utilisation of communication for promotion of commitment in Igbinedion University, Okada, (IUO).

	A	D	N	Total
The regular publication and circulation of information materials encourages me to stay on in university	165 (86%)	14 (7%)	14 (7%)	193

Persuasive communication from management motivates me to be involved in the university	106 (55%)	54 (28%)	33 (17%)	193
What the university believes and values are adequately made known in the day to day transmission of information for commitment.	133 (69%)	46 (24%)	14 (7%)	193
Communication activities in the university contribute to my willingness to give my best to the university	154 (79%)	19 (10%)	19 (10%)	193
Management's inconsistency in giving information (both in language and behaviour) can encourage my desire to leave the university	174 (90%)	19 (10%)	0 s (0%)	193

Key: A = Agree, D = Disagree, N = Neutral i.e. can't tell

Utilisation of communication by the management to promote employee commitment is very necessary. Findings as shown in the above Table reveal the respondents agreed to the following factors as agents of influence for commitment : (a) regular publication and circulation of information materials such as the memos, news bulletin etc. (86%); (b) persuasive communication from management (55%); (c) adequate and regular communication of what the university believes and values; (d) communication activities (see Table 1) (79%);(e) management's inconsistency in giving information (both in language and behavior) can encourage their desire to leave the university (90%),. Results from the interview show that the management of the university attested to the publication and circulation of information materials such as internal memos, news bulletins etc. as communication practices aimed at promoting employee commitment in the sense that the employees are expected to be persuaded by regular and adequate information on the values and beliefs of the university, leading to the enactment of appropriate behaviours by their employees (Chong, 2009). communication activities that are carried out in the university. information or commitment, the employees' levels of commitment seem not to be influenced as expected by the management. This is supported by Ogaard, et al. (2005) who believe that it is the degree of fit between employees and their organization that affects the commitment of the employees.

Conclusion

Communication has been and will remain the “oil” that greases the wheels of life generally and organisations in particular. It is one of the things that the management of organisations including Igbinedion University Okada (IUO) must consider and give serious attention to. This is because organisations such as IUO have to deal with situations in which major forces and influences are simultaneously at work in complex interrelationship. The findings of this empirical study show a positive relationship between the provision of adequate and timely information and the commitment of the employees in Igbinedion University, Okada (IUO), which is assumed to be as a result of the management’s efforts at utilising communication in the university to promote employee commitment

Recommendations

1. Communication audit should be carried out periodically in the university (IUO) to evaluate the current communication activities of the management and their influences on the affective commitment of the employees.
2. As a direct outcome of communication audit, purposeful efforts should be made by the management of IUO in order to identify why the employees were not encouraged to forgo personal alternatives for the sake of the univer

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