Communication Management Evaluation for Conflict Resolutions in an Organization

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Abstract

This study evaluates the role of communication management for conflict resolutions in an organization. The objective of the study amongst others are to evaluate the significance of managing communication for conflict resolution and to ascertain the essence of communication skill of the communicator in managing conflict resolutions. The study uses survey method with structured questionnaires distributed in a multinational organization – ISON BPO – in Ibadan, Nigeria. Findings show that there is great significance in managing communication for conflict resolutions and that the communication skill of the communicator is also of great essence to managing conflict resolutions in an organization. The study recommends the need for organizations to properly communicate their goals and objectives to staff concisely; incomplete communication must be eliminated; clear coherent, courteous communication must be adopted; and concrete flow of communication and where possible, multiple channels of communication must be employed amongst others.

Keywords: Communication, Conflict, Management, Organization, Resolutions

INTRODUCTION

Communication is the major means by which leading and controlling functions of management is accomplished primarily. Most top managers do not see communication as posting any challenge or problem in the management of their organisations or work place. Also, it may not be a communication problem but an issue with communicating with the right persons and how to manage information. Again, not having the right things to communicate with may be a problem since people often want to know what is expected of them, where the organization is heading to, why, and how they can get their goals achieved. Lack of planning and adequate control may cause the deficiency in communication. However, there is more to be appreciated about the nature of communication itself, the barriers that often exists, the principles to follow and the fact that communication represents a restricted network in a social system. Communication can help to reduce conflicts in the work place and also prevent unnecessary misunderstanding.

Effective communication is important in supervision because it promotes understanding between superiors and subordinates. Handling and managing conflicts that exists within the work place often has been great challenges for human resource managers and their subordinate world over. They are usually faced with whether

communication is necessary in managing conflicts in work place. A major challenge is the place of the skill possessed by the communicator [Robins 2011, P. 432], studies have existed on communication and conflicts management. Few of these studies locally, if any, have really attempted to investigate the managing communication for conflicts management in work place. This paper therefore intends to fill that intellectual gap.

Organisations operating today would at one time or the other witness instability in which the impacts of event(s) threaten its operations, survival and reputation. The ability of an organization to successfully craft strategies to manage conflicts is what differentiates an organization from horrible state that can dampen its strategic objectives [Macfarlane 2010]. Conflicts resolution is seen as the provision of an organisation's pre-planned, rapid response capability supported by leadership, information management and communications capacity in an integrated fashion to enable fast decision making at a strategic recovery and protecting an organisation's survival or reputation [Dominic Cockram 2012].

Communication is the process by which one person or a group share and impact information to another person or group so that either people or group clearly understands one another. In communication process, there must be a high degree of similarities of language, orientation, background, culture and other conveyors of meaning between two individuals or groups before they can understand each other. The concept of information flow in the communication process is the qualitative and the quantitative direction of information impact on the people. Effective communication is transfer of message followed by feedback from the receiver to the sender indicating the receiver's understanding of the messages.

TECHNIQUES OF COMMUNICATION

For media managers to play their decision-making, organizing, directing, coordinating and controlling roles effectively, appropriate communication techniques involving written, oral and mediated communication must be employed. In addition, efforts must be made to exploit directions of communication flow with forms of communication which include:

(a) Oral Communication: This can take place as formal and informal face-to-face interpersonal communication between the management and the subordinate on job-related matters, or other personal issues, other forms of it are: interviews, discussions, conversations with suppliers and customers and discussions between two or more employees on how work should be done.

It is ideal for the immediate feedback opportunity it offers and the for effective building of interpersonal relationships it allows. Superior officers commonly employ it to guide, commend or rebuke their subordinates.

Its drawbacks are: it allows for distortion of facts, and even denial, since there is no documentation; it is often impracticable since subordinates at times find it difficult to reach and discuss face-to-face with top officers; sensitive matters like termination of appointment, suspension and dismissal cannot be communicated orally, and finally, it allows inaccuracies in presentation of details.

(b) Written Communication: This technique is employed by managers to communicate with workers internally, and conduct business with the external public.

Written communication manifests in organizations through: Memos, Notice boards, House Journals, Queries, Handbook, Stylebook and Pay packet inserts.

Advantages of written communication are: it reduces the risk of distortion and denials; written messages carry more weight of authority than verbal ones; messages can be reproduced many times and disseminated extensively, and lastly, it serves as official confirmation of offers made, or that of business transactions done verbally.

Its drawbacks are: its feedback opportunity is not immediate; can be presented as evidence against individuals in case of litigations or violation of agreement; it is dependent on the manager's ability to produce good business correspondence and other technical reports, and the subordinate's ability to decode them; and lastly, it is often expensive to produce and dispatch to distant places.

(c) Mediated communication: These are messages disseminated within organisations through simple machines and other gadgets. Examples are telephone, radio phone, intercom facilities and computers, word processor, etc. They are used only in organizations where frequent face-to-face communication is impossible due to the large number of employees.

COMMUNICATION FLOWS

One of the best ways to understand the complexity of communication activity within any organization is it study the directions in which it flows.

Flows within organizations can therefore be examined along the following lines:

(a) Downward flow (i.e., top-down or superior-subordinate communication)

This flow of communication may originate from the managing director, general manager, directors, head of departments, unit head or any of those in the upper management levels to the appropriate lower levels staff.

Some problems associated with downward communication have been identified by Ikpe (1990), as information over-load as a result of excessive generation of messages by the upper level managers which often make subordinates to ignore them; possibility of misinterpretation of messages as they move down the organizational hierarchy; the use of Inappropriate channels, especially the neglect of oral face-to-face communication; wrong timing of message which often affects subordinates' processing and reaction and lack of accuracy due to omission; queuing and lack of precision.

(b) Upward flow (i.e., bottom-up or subordinate-superior communication)

It gives subordinates the opportunity to send messages about their attitudes, reactions or feelings to the upper-level managers. This flow of communication exemplifies industrial democracy since it provides employees the opportunity of two-way communication.

Some problems of upward communication are psychological barriers, like fear and lack of confidence, may prevent an employee from discussing his problems at meetings, through petitions, or personally with his boss; poor listening behaviour of superior officers; hypocrisy can prevent employees from telling their boss the truth

but only what he wants to hear; and the wrong thinking by certain managers that industrial democracy is a sign of weakness.

(c) Lateral flow (i.e., Horizontal communication)

This is communication flow between employees on the same hierarchical level in an organization or communication flow across departmental boundaries. It serves as a means of coordinating activities among the various departments performing different tasks, but nevertheless working towards the same goal. Lateral communication also allows for information sharing and conflict resolution, among employees in different departments.

These are formal channels enabling communication to flow according to the formal organizational structure, corresponding with the chain of command or line of authority. Both downward and upward flows of communication are vertical communication, while a lateral flow is horizontal.

BRIEF LITERATURE REVIEW

Communication is applicable to all aspects of management. It is essentially important in the functions of leading and controlling. There is the general agreement about the necessity of the essence of communication. Adter and Elmhurst (1996) asserted that "Communication is the exchange of information and the transmission of meanings is the very essence of a social system or an organization". Adeleke (2001) views communication as "the transfer of information from the sender to the receiver."

Over time, it has been a fundamental function of communication to be the means by which people are linked together in the work place to achieve a common purpose. Indeed, group activities are impossible without communication because coordination and change cannot be affected. People take communication for granted and only think of communication when it fails. A competent communicator in a work place needs to understand contemporary ideas about communication and to recognize how they relate to interact among co-members in work place.

"What we need is better communication". This phrase is often used every time in work place as an analysis and an offered solution for work place conflicts. Almost all superior and subordinates rightly believes communication would improve the functioning of their work place. Similarly, all professionals in a workplace usually encounter occasions when they would be individually more effective if they possess greater skill in communication.

Communication is a process of creating structure, relationship meaning through design and exchange of business message. Work place communication involves the exchange to facilitate structure, working relationships and shared meaning among members.

The word communication" has a rich and complex history. It first appeared in the English Language in the 14h Century taken from the Latin word communicare, which mean to impact, share or make common. Over the cause of the 20th century, the term has been used with a broad variety of meanings ranging from the simple transfer of information to the utopian idea of a place where "nothing is misunderstood, hearts are open and expression is uninhibited (Pamela and Taeanna, 2004).

TEN COMMANDMENTS OF GOOD COMMUNICATION

According to American Management Association (AMA), opines that for a desired result in business communication, the following ten commandments of good communication must be noted:

- ❖ Clarification of every idea before it is communicated

- ❖ Examination of the true purpose of every communication

- ❖ Consideration of the human and physical settings when communicating

- ❖ Being mindful of the basic content as well as the undertones of what is communicated

- ❖ Consultation with others in planning what should be communicated

- ❖ Taking opportunity at any available time to convey something of help or value to receivers

- ❖ Following up on communication

- ❖ Communicating for tomorrow and as well as today

- ❖ Being sure of actions which support your communication

- ❖ Seeking not to be understood alone but also understand how to be a good listener

CAUSES AND TYPES OF CONLICT

The assertions in this section are concerned with particular causes of conflicts amongst others in a work place. For example

- Control over resources
- Preferences and nuisances, where the taste or activities of one party Imping upon another;
- Values and where there is a claim that a value or set of values dominate;
- Beliefs, when there is a dispute over facts, information, reality etc.
- The nature of the relationship between the parties. (Daniel, Daniel and Charles (1989)).

Easterbook (1993) distinguishes the following Kinds of social conflicts considering the notion that the parties to a conflict may be of either the same structural type or different structural types as forms and levels of conflicts:

i. Conflicts between and among persons.
ii. Boundary conflicts between groups (specially segregated groups).
iii. Ecological conflicts between groups (specially intermingled groups).
iv. Homogenizing organization conflicts [e.g between unlike organisations, such as a state vs church, union vs corporation, university vs church or state]
v. Flamogenizing organization conflict e.g. (between organisations of like character and purpose, such as state vs state, sect vs sect, union vs union etc.).
vi. Conflicts between a person and a group (mainly socialization conflict, as person vs peer group, person vs hierarchical supervisor).
vii. Conflicts between a person and an organization (mainly role conflicts).

viii. Conflicts between a group and art organization.

We need to also take note of Karen (1997) that identifies the following major types of conflicts.

i. Interpersonal conflicts: - Between individuals based on differing goals or values.
ii. Intra group conflicts: Occurs within a group or team.
iii. Inter group conflicts: Occurs between two or more teams or groups. Managers play a key role in resolution of this conflict
iv. Interorganizational conflicts: - Occurs across organization. Managers in one firm may feel another is not behaving ethnically.

COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES FOR HANDLING CONFLICT.

Richardson (1991) identifies a number of communication strategies for handling conflict which is also supported by Kohn (2001), Michael and Mary (2001) and McShane & Glinow (2005). Which are that:

Do not push too close. There is no need to be too fast in offering a suggestion on the way to go most especially when it is the first instance with the person(s) involved. You may need to take the offer slow but steady.

Have a main spokesman to represent the interest being pushed. Too many people do not have to speak on the issue from the organisation. The interest of the organisation as an entity should be presented by one person even if you have more than one person that can speak. This does not mean that others cannot be present, but one person should take the lead in the discussion of the matter.

Do not assume they readily see the picture you are presenting, instead presume they cannot recognize the benefits regarding your proposition to them. Therefore, take time to properly discuss and enumerate such benefits regarding what you are proposing to them in their own terms.

Do not offer what you cannot accept. Whatsoever offer you are making, be sure to be able to live up with it and to time. Do not boast of what you cannot offer if eventually the offer is accepted. It is better to under promise and over deliver than over promise and under deliver.

Make the same offer in a different way by rearranging the same elements of an offer. To find a more mutually sensitizing compromise, you should rearrange the elements of the same offer in a different way that will be accepted to them.

Walk your talks; find ways to reflect your values. The way you approach your work and your personal life should reflect your values. Your integrity should be top notch. Your mission should determine your everyday content, context and boundaries.

Be present; keep grounded and involved in what is happening. You presence is quite important to be able to win and be abreast of the fact and figures of the happenings, the past and future glancing for context and balance.

Consider how you say what you say. Consider the other perspective on how you make any request by being pleasurable. For instance, you necessary does not have to say someone died, you could use an idiom like "he went to his resting place" which in effects may not raise any dust even as an obvious fact.

Make and Keep agreements. In an often unpredictable world, you build an "emotional deposit of trust when your roads and actions aren't contradictory. Then when you make mistakes, as you will, they have built up a level of trust to help them forgive your lapses.

Have larger visions of yourself as your reference point for making daily choices. : Establish your central life purpose and core values and let your actions reflect them. Your choices are much easier to make, you will inspire loyalty and attract others to act out their best side when around you.

Take your high road. Have a core set of values and a vision of your service and role in your life; relate your vision to the mission of your organization, your role among family and friends and your actions in reaching agreements.

Show them the positive longer view. Many seemingly foolish disagreements band negotiation are simply acting to prevent looking foolish later on. The best peacemakers work hardest to allay the other person's worries first.

Look for the real source of the anger. When someone is angry with you, consider that he might be upset with himself before you respond

CONCLUSION

The study investigated managing communication for conflict management in work place. Review of the literature provided strong evidence integrative communication management with conflict management in work place. The present study empirically reinforced the results of previous studies with regards to the link between managing communication and conflict management in work place. The study also highlighted the significance of managing communication for conflict management and the essence of the communicator's skill for conflict management in work place.

However, the present study is not without some limitations as the scope of the research centered mainly on the telecommunication industry [ISON BPO]. The restriction nature of the study to a single telecommunication firm [ISON BPO] and the small size of the sample used pose a threat to the generalizability of the findings and may make them not applicable to other sectoral industries. Despite the limitations, the study has made an important contribution to the understanding of the relationship between managing communication and conflict management in work place in the telecommunication firm [ISON BPO].

RECOMENDATION

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations have been found necessary.

i. Organizations must try to effectively communicate their goals and objectives to staffs concisely.

ii. Management organizations should try to eliminate an incomplete communication flow of information.

iii. Management of organizations should try to have a clear communication flow as vital for healthy work relationship.

iv. The communication must be coherent, courteous, correct and concrete with the flow of information.

v. Where possible, the communication must use multiple channels such as face to face, mails, memo, text messages, calls, bulletins etc.

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