

Exploring Communication Strategies in Human Resource Management: Implications on Employee Productivity in Organisations

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Abstract

In many organisations, the leaders' view of communication is almost limited to the design and structure of the organisation, not people. Consequently, dissatisfaction, mistrust, lack of motivation and collaboration become widespread. Since the Industrial Revolution, different communication approaches have been developed for human resource management to boost employee productivity and business success. Yet, many leaders still lack the essential communication skills and competences to influence their employees' positive work behaviours. Against this premise, the study examines the relationship between communication strategies in human resource management and employee productivity in organisations within the framework of McGregor's theory Y. Findings indicate that the creation of a climate of open communication is critical for the development of organisational citizenship behaviour. It is also found that positive behaviours have the propensity to drive employee productivity and organisational performance. Therefore, it is concluded in the study that effective communication strategies foster emotional involvement, commitment, a productive work environment devoid of negative work behaviours and high labour turnover. The study recommends that effective communication should be among the most significant aspects of human resource management to enhance employees' motivation for productive work.

Keywords: communication strategies, human resource management, employee productivity and organisation

Introduction

The ability to influence employees to behave in desired ways that an organisation can achieve its goals is dependent on competent management of personnel. This encompasses a wide range of issues including the ability to organise, coordinate and manage the organisation's employees to carry out an organisation's mission, vision and goals. Investing in communication competence, employees training and development, ensuring their safety and motivation are crucial to the development of trust, honesty, employees' emotional involvement in the organisation and high job performance.

Kreitner and Kinicki (2001, p. 478) posit that "Management is communication". Therefore, whether planning, organising, directing and controlling, managers find themselves communicating with and through others. On this premise, effective personnel management requires effective communication with employees. In today's highly sophisticated workforce, organisations must maintain adequate level of communication effectiveness. It is through adequate communication that employees obtain information, make sense of the situations they encounter and decide how to act. Straz (2015) asserts that effective communication between the managers and subordinates is critical otherwise complex problems like mistrust, hatred and ill-will arise which in turn can affect interpersonal relationship and limit cooperation.

In human resource management, communication is one of the most essential factors influencing employees' behaviour. Employees' perception about communication sources and relationships in the organisation determine their behaviour. The manager's positive communication behaviour enables employees to know what their organisation wants them to do, how to do it and how well they are doing. Soola and Ayoade (2000, p.13) are emphatic about the necessity of effective communication in personnel management, asserting that "Communication is the essence of executive function and personnel management. It is vital to all strata of human relationships and interactions. Without effective communication, there can be no effective cooperation and coordination of organisational activities".

It is not an overstatement to say that effective communication flow in the workplace is the means of facilitating employees' motivation. The organisational climate that permits the employees to communicate upward, encourages the employees' inputs in decisions that affect their career. This can motivate them to contribute their full range of talents to the accomplishment of organisational goals. Peterfreund (1980) cited in Udofia (2008) notes that motivation of workers through extrinsic rewards alone is destined to fail unless communication is also improved. It is contended that having employees who feel that

they are well informed pays dividends in improved commitment to the organisation and more productive work.

Employees' success or failure in a job could be hinged on how well they communicate with peers. Human relations theorists believe that an important aspect of need satisfaction is communication among employees, so interaction that flows horizontally among employees is just as important as downward communication in the accomplishment of organisational goals (Miller 2009). This direction of communication flow according to Goldhaber (1993) cited in Udofia (2008) is helpful in task coordination, problem solving, information sharing and conflict resolution. In this perspective, effective communication with peers can have a great impact on the organisation, individuals and productivity.

People are social creatures by nature, and so they are prone to be more anxious and stressed in an isolated environment. With the right kind of communicative relationships, employees can even end up being more productive than they would be if they worked alone because of the synergy that comes with teamwork. In support of this notion, Lamarco, (2019) states that when communication in the workplace is effective, it makes operations more effective and teamwork not only possible, but also, easier.

As fascinating as the values of communication may be, effective communication may not occur if employees lack the competence to communicate with others to foster quality relationships. It is imperative for human resource managers in collaboration with the general management to train the employees to acquire the basic communication skills as this is an essential requirement for effective communication which can contribute to higher productivity.

Theoretical Framework

This paper is anchored on the framework of McGregor's Theory Y (1960) cited in Miller (2009). McGregor's Theory Y is a variant of McGregor's Theory X. It represents a divergent organisational functioning. McGregor's theory Y is based on Maslow's higher levels of needs which provide incentives to employees for reaching or exceeding organisational goals. McGregor believes that there is more to job motivation than were reward of salary. Against the traditional structure of organisations characterised by centralised decision making, hierarchical structure and control of employee efficiency, McGregor views employees as possessing a high capacity for autonomy, responsibility and innovation. Optimistic about incorporating the individual's desires in organisational framework, McGregor believes that behaviours stemming from these managerial assumptions such as self-control, self-direction and participation in decisions that affect

workers, would lead to a more satisfied and more productive workforce. Thus, the essential task of managers is to create conditions such that members of the organisation can best achieve their own goals and those of the organisation.

As a motivational tool to get the best from the employees, the theory provides valuable insights into how managers should view and treat their employees. It also highlights the importance of understanding employee motivation and how management styles can impact employee productivity. These critical views on managing employees in ways that move an organisation forward, makes the theory highly significant to this study.

Concept of Human Resource Management

The emergence of today's human resource management could be traced back to 18th century. The British Industrial Revolution led to large factories and created a sharp increase in demand for workers (Hofstede, 2006). As many of the workers were eager to put in long hours, it became apparent that worker satisfaction and happiness had a positive correlation with productivity. In an effort to raise the net profit generated by employees, worker satisfaction programmes were introduced. Towards late 19th and early 20th century, attention was directed at factory conditions, safety concerns and workers' rights also began getting a serious focus.

Human resource management is workforce centred and a significant part of management concerned with employees at work and with relationship within the organisation. Barcenas, (2021, p. 431) defines it as "The strategic and coherent approach to the effective and efficient management of people in an organisation so that they help their business gain a competitive advantage." In any organisation, the improvement of the quality of employee performance, increased motivation and commitment to organisational objectives depends on the means by which they can be achieved. According to Flipppo (2019), compensation, integration and maintenance of employees are some of the fundamental means an organisation can achieve the desirable outcomes.

Effective human resource management is the cornerstone of a successful general management of an organisation. This however, depends to a large extent, on the efficiency and effectiveness with which the management discharges its duties and functions. Although most organisations have a separate department whose main job is to coordinate all personnel activities, yet there is need for a close interaction between the personnel department which has the responsibility for the administration of personnel and line managers who have responsibility for optimising the use of their physical, financial and human resources.

The effectiveness of human resource management can be gauged by the degree to which issues concerning development and motivation are approached (Armstrong, 2009). Whether in profit or non-profit organisations, these issues constitute the primary task of human resource department to deal with in consultation with the general management of the organisation. As an extension of general management, the promotion and stimulation of competent workforce to make the fullest contribution to the organisation are crucial tasks of the human resource management. Personnel managers should understand the preferences of all the employees so that all the employees work according to their choices in order to promote job satisfaction and productivity.

For sound human resource management to thrive, Cross and Gabery (2016) have identified some essential skills that managers should possess. These include: Communication, employee relations and conflict management and resolutions.

- **Communication:** A high level of verbal and written capabilities is required in most human resource management jobs. Evidently, communication as a tool of human resource management is that interchange of fact, viewpoints and ideas which bring about unity of interest, clarity of purpose and integration of efforts in a group of individuals organised to achieve a specific mission. As an integral part of the motivating process, communication is essential in helping people work to satisfy the needs identified by Abraham Maslow. Therefore, satisfying these needs is fundamental to employees' high performance.
- **Employee relations:** The relationship between an employer and their employees is an integral part to the longevity of any successful organisation. According to Crail, (2024) employee relations concern the building of positive relationships and interactions among employers and employees, and at a broader level, helps foster a sense of community within an organisation. Mullins (2002) argues that positive experience in organisational environment could entail initiating transparent workplace communication or supporting the emotional, physical and psychological health of employees. Ultimately, the goal of employee relations is to create a positive relationship between employers and employees that leads to an increase in employee retention, happiness and productivity.
- **Conflict management and resolution:** In any conflict situation, mediation capabilities help human resource managers resolve conflicts and other difficult situations. Wilmot and Hocker, (2010) argue that conflict management is the use of processes, tools and skills to find creative and respectful ways to manage disagreements and disputes. It includes the ability to resolve conflict collaboratively through effective communication skills, such as active listening and assertive speaking. By meeting

these requirements and improving the opportunity for employees to share information, the parties in a conflict are more likely to develop fewer negative perceptions of each other. Gladwell (2005) posits that when the parties in a relationship openly trust and have confidence in one another's communicative behaviour, then destructive conflict is less likely to occur.

Employee Productivity

In organisations, particularly, the profit-making organisations, managers are required to boost productivity, quality and customer satisfaction while also reducing costs. These goals can only be met, however, through the cooperation and effort of all employees. By creating positive work environments where employees feel valued and appreciated, organisations are more likely to foster the employees' commitment and performance needed for organisational success.

Productivity in the workplace is an important aspect of every organisation and when top management understands this concept, success is just around the corner. Not only will employee productivity translate into good customer service, it will also lead to healthier work relationships and motivated employees. From the organisation's viewpoint, Eisenberg and Goodall Jr, (2001) assert that the most important indicator of cooperation is worker productivity. Campbell (2006, p. 426) defines productivity "As the relationship between the outputs generated by a system and the inputs required to create those outputs."

When productivity is considered from the perspective of the individual employee, it can be measured by the amount of time an employee takes to perform a task as well as, by the amount of effort required to make a product acceptable to customers. Gallo (2015) also states that employee productivity can be gauged by setting goals; pointing out that goal setting is particularly important as a mechanism for providing feedback. Indeed, by establishing and monitoring targets, managers can give the employees real-time input on their performance while motivating them to achieve more. In corroborating Gallo's argument, Core (2016) asserts that one key way to measure employee productivity is to set clear and specific goals and monitor employees' progress in order to know whether their effort is channelled toward behaviours that will improve work performance.

Increasing Employee Productivity

Employee training which is usually directed at upgrading and improving the employee's skills, can significantly increase employee skills and productivity. Although employee training programmes may disrupt the workplace and attract huge spending,

nevertheless, training has become increasingly important because of new information technologies and changes in the organisation's design.

Employee training can affect employees work behaviour in many positive ways. According to James and Udofia (2022), sustained employee training can improve the skills necessary for the employees to successfully complete their jobs. Therefore, an employee who receives training from time to time is in a better position to improve his works skills and increase productivity. Another gain is that every employee will be well versed with safety practices and paper procedures to follow when carrying out basic tasks.

On another level, employee training is seen to be a confidence booster. Training increases an employee's self-efficacy, thus contributing to an employee's expectation that he or she can successfully exhibit the behaviours required to produce an outcome. Employees with high self-efficacy is likely to have strong expectations about their ability to perform successfully in new situations. Training, then, is a means to help in building an employee's confidence since he or she would be given a better understanding of the organisation and responsibilities of his role. Moreover, training as a confidence booster will facilitate employee's willingness to undertake job tasks and exert a high level of effort. It is also equally important to note that employee training is not only good for the employees but also for the firm. Conducting frequent training and development programmes is one way of boosting the organisation's profile and reputation. A company that trains its employees will be more attractive to potential new employees, particularly those looking to advance their skills.

Placing emphasis on monetary compensation does not account for employee total motivation. But according to Mullins (2002), employee training is also a potential factor to their motivation. Peterfreund (1980) cited in Udofia (2008) contends that an employee who is thoroughly trained for the job will be more highly motivated than one who lacks basic training. Employee training produces dual benefits - a more competent performance of duties and an informed employee who recognises the employer's investment in the workers as evidence of their own worth. Many forward- looking organisations are striving for more innovative workforce. Therefore, when employees receive consistent training, it fosters their creativity and helps them to be more independent and creative when they encounter challenges in their work.

Effective Human Resource Management Communication and Employee Productivity

In any organisation, employees can perform better when the communication climate fosters a positive work environment. This perspective is controlled by or lies in the

strength of communication strategies that create a sense of belonging and value among employees, help build trust, engagement and collaboration within organisations. Good organisational leaders today, are communicatively adept. This is so because they recognise the value of effective communication as a means of promoting quality interactions, clarifying unclear objectives and ambiguous roles in the organisation.

Koontz, and Weihvich cited in Eisenberg and Goodall Jr. (2010) are of the opinion that for employees to perform enthusiastically and be committed to organisational goals, there must exist enduring communication strategies to elicit desirable outcomes. Aligning to this argument, Trethewey (2009) outlines some of the essential aspects of communication strategies for human resource management that must be incorporated in the organisational communication structure to help the employees unleash their potential and drive organisational success. These include:

- Clearly communicating expectations, goals, and fostering open communication channels and encouraging employees to share concerns and ideas.
- Providing regular and constructive feedback to help employees identify areas for improvement.
- Encouraging employee participation, facilitating teamwork, and overall engagement.
- Actively listening attentively to employees, addressing their concerns and suggestions.
- Promoting transparency, trust, and sharing company vision, mission, and progress with employees.
- Recognising and rewarding employees' contributions and achievements to be more productive.

Apparently, according to Tubbs and Hain (2010), organisations that prioritise these aspects of communication strategies are likely to reap benefits in terms of:

- Gaining a competitive advantage by adapting quickly to changes, staying ahead of competitors;
- Helping the organisation manage crises, minimising damage and maintaining stakeholder trust.
- Ensuring customers' consistent reception of accurate information, and boosting satisfaction.

- Encouraging idea-sharing, driving innovation and growth.

These benefits are consistent with the managerial assumption of McGregor's theory Y that management styles can impact both employee productivity and effective organisational functioning.

Communication is a keystone of organisational success. Conrad Poole (2005, p. 386) emphasises that "If the importance of communication is overlooked, then the managers are really overlooking communication's ability to promote desirable behaviours that can boost organisational success." Communication is essential to the employees since it can be used to satisfy their basic needs in the organisation. Therefore, inadequate and ineffective communication flow can be the major barriers to employees' job satisfaction.

In all aspects of organisational life, the roles that communication plays in effective functioning of an organisation are incontrovertible. Goldhaber (1993) cited in Udofia (2018) states that as evidence of the importance of communication in organisations, it is described as the life blood of the organisation, the glue that binds the organisation and the oil that lubricates organisations' functions. Thus, in human resource management, the employees' positive perception of communication climate in the organisation will foster positive employees' behaviours and lead to overall employee's performance. The human resource manager has a duty to ensure that inadequate and ineffective communication flow are minimised as these could be major barriers to employees' attainment of individual goals.

No organisation can function maximally without effective communication. Several functions of communication within organisations correlate with employee productivity. Robbins (2003) argues that communication acts to control members' behaviours in several ways. The author explains that organisations have authority hierarchies and formal guidelines that employees are required to follow. When employees, for instance, are required to first communicate any job-related grievance to their immediate boss, to follow their job description or to comply with the company policies, communication is performing a control function which is vital for employee's efficient performance of their duties.

Motivation is a fundamental element in employee productivity. Sullivan cited (2001) in Eisenberg, et al. (2009) opines that communication can motivate employees to accomplish a specific activity or goal at a lower cost when managers provide information and feedback about employees' task, goals, performance and future directions.

Employee productivity cannot be isolated from the content of communication in the workplace. According to Farace, et al., (1977) cited in Miller (2009), maintenance related communication (communication on social topics that maintains human relations) is a factor in increased employee productivity. Thus, a climate of social interactions within an organisation can increase employees' efficiency and effectiveness. LaMarco (2019) asserts that work group is a primary source of social interactions for many employees. Apparently, 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 fulfilment of social needs. When social needs are met employee's productivity is likely to increase. Another important function that communication performs relates to its role in facilitating participation in decision making. It provides the information that individuals and organisations need to make decision by transmitting the data to identify and evaluate alternative choices. According to Kreitner and Kinicki (2001, p. 229), this role of communication fosters "Employee's higher commitment to organisational goal and facilitates higher productivity."

Conclusion

The study examines the linkages between communication strategies in human resource management in enhancing effective employee productivity. In exploring the impact of communication strategies in human resource management, the study notes that skilful management and effective motivation of employees are predicated on the assumption that a manager's acquisition of the most essential communication skills is necessary for creating a positive relationship among employees. This is the right approach to boost employee happiness and productivity.

The study further explores a theoretical framework of McGregor's Theory Y that conceptualises employees as individuals characterised by needs. McGregor shares an allegiance to the principles of human relations that highlight human needs and the satisfaction of those needs through effective management practices. It is argued that employees, whose needs are met, are likely to be more effective and productive.

Today's highly competitive business environment requires human resource managers to search for innovative ways to boost employee productivity and organisational success. It is obvious that the improvement of communication flow, the building of positive relationships and interactions among employees and the development of the skill to find creative and respectful ways to manage disagreements and disputes in the organisation are some of the keystones of a successful resource management.

The promotion and stimulation of competent workforce to make fullest contribution to the organisation are the crucial tasks of human resource managers. These imply the investment in employees' communication competence, training and development, ensuring their safety, and increased intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. These organisational factors among others, are the driving force to the development of employees' trust, honesty, and emotional involvement in the organisation. Ultimately, employees' positive perceptions of the quality of the internal environment of the organisation will encourage them to stay focused on their tasks and massively boost productivity.

Recommendations

In the light of the foregoing, the study recommends as follows:

- That communication as a potent instrument for employee productivity should be among the most important aspects of human resource management to enhance employees' motivation for high productive work behaviour.
- All skills necessary for human resource management should be employed in the management of employees for effective functioning and prosperity of the organisation.
- Managers should create positive work environments where employees feel valued and appreciated. Such feelings will promote job satisfaction, foster commitment, and boost productivity.

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