

Strategies for Promoting Communication in Administrative Office Management in Recessed Economies

Joseph C. Ezemma¹ & Vincent O. Udokwu

Abstract

Strategies for Promoting Communication in Administrative Office Management that would ensure global competitiveness of secretaries in recessed economies is the aim of this paper. Two research questions guided the study. The study adopted descriptive survey design. The population for the study was 120 secretarial Staff and Heads of Unit (Deans, Heads, Directors and Coordinators) of University of Nigeria, and Enugu State University of Science and Technology. There is no sampling because the number is manageable. For successful investigation, four-point scaled 21 items questionnaire was content validated by three lecturers from Department of Business Education, University of Nigeria, Nsukka. Mean and Standard Deviation were used to answer the research questions. The researchers found that clarity of idea, examination of the real purpose, consideration of physical and human setting; being mindful of over-tones and contents, conveying something helpful and of value were strategies for promoting communication in administrative office management. The researchers also found that ability to access and transfer records, apply microfilms and other organic media, construct suitable body language and apply language appropriately were fundamental communication skills needed in administrative office management for recession towards secretary empowerment.

Key Words: *Communication, Administrative Office Management, Recession, Secretary*

Introduction

In any organisation, formal or informal, effective communication leads to effective management which helps the organisation to achieve its aims or goals. Communication is a process of exchanging information between individuals through a familiar system of symbols, sign or behaviour. Communication is sending or receiving of messages containing meaning. The messages usually contain thoughts, ideas, opinions, teachings and information. It is a transaction between two or more people in an attempt to create shared understanding, with all participants having an active role in the process (Frank & Cephas, 1999).

Communication is from the Latin word ‘communicare’ which means ‘to put in common’ and ‘to share’. It is sharing of ideas, facts, thoughts and feelings for coexistence. It is a two-way process which involves the sender and receiver. It is, therefore, concerned with transmitting and receiving information which is the key to all aspects of organisational life, whether at the stage

¹Corresponding author: Joseph C. Ezemma Department of Business Education Faculty of Vocational and Technical Education University of Nigeria, Nsukka. Joseph.ezemma@unn.edu.ng

of planning, controlling, problem-solving, decision-making, motivating, interviewing and other management activities.

Effective personnel management is a function of effective communication as management involves working with and through others to achieve corporate goals. The realisation of the goals of the university as an educational organisation hinges on effective communication among various operations, faculties, departments, institute, or schools, units and staff and students. The Vice-Chancellor who is the Chief Executive and Manager cannot organise his workers, coordinate and control their activities as well as delegate responsibilities without effective communication (Agomuo, 2002). In the University or Institution, the Vice-Chancellor would create a message in the form of objects, transmit the message through the Deputy Vice-Chancellors, Deans of Faculty, Heads of Department and so on to staff and students. These objects are translated and interpreted, based on the facts and ideas (Ezugwu, 2004). Communication within an organisation is only successful when the sender and receiver have a similar comprehension of the content of the message. Okoroafor (2002) considered communication as an event that occurs whenever people assign meaning to each other's behaviours. In University or Institution, the Vice-Chancellor, however, needs to take control and ensure that information on behaviors of employees is not wrongly interpreted. Communication is an active task, and a purposeful shared experience involving two or more people and the Chief Executive or any administrator should see it as such. The Vice-Chancellor in university or institution and secretaries interact with many different people during the day, including the principal officers, Deans of Faculty, Heads of Department, Directors of Institute and School, Coordinators of Units, Professors, Staff, Students and Visitors. The ability of the Vice-Chancellor and secretaries in the university or institution to contribute to the improvement of the university system should depend on their communication skills. For example, communication enables those in the organisation to understand the roles and assignments, the planning and learning activities, coordinating approaches to students, the way information is provided to staff. Therefore, communication is a tool through which a good administrator and manager should not handle carelessly.

Administrative management is getting things done through others. Others are involved in communication. It is coordination of all the resources of an organisation through the process of planning, organising, directing, and controlling to attain organisational objectives (Chuke, 2002). Management is the guidance or direction of people towards organisational goals or objectives. It is seen as supervising, controlling and coordinating organisational or institutional activities to attain optimum results with organisational resources (Gupta, 2003). As secretaries who operate in the universities they perform the managerial or management functions and efficiently utilise the available source to maximally achieve institution's goals at different stages and in diverse offices especially in a time of recession.

An office is a place or room where management functions are carried out. Office management is the art of guiding the personnel of the office in the use of means appropriate to its environments to achieve its specified objectives. The elements of office management include the workers, means, or tools used in performing various office functions, environment under which different jobs are done and the purpose. The works are either performed directly or under the supervision of a secretary.

A secretary in most cases is the personal assistant to an administrator or manager called the boss. The secretary possesses qualifications and knowledge in the field in which he works. The secretary ought to have good human relation and gets along with people without difficulty.

The secretary can work accurately, do a neat and tidy job and have good skills. The secretary is such that must understand that sometimes when the boss has a lot of work, the boss might become emotional. The secretary should be courteous, respectful, accepting, compromising, demanding strict and a stickler for details (Personal experience as Secretary from 1986 - 2016). Sometimes, a secretary cannot understand the boss style because different types of bosses and jobs should have different roles. For example, a consumer product company and an institution or a services firm should have different communication and requirements and terms to solve their problems (IFT, 2008). To solve the problems of the organisation especially the time of recession requires the empowered secretary.

A recession is a moment in economic experiences of nation or nations where growth in the gross domestic product (GDP) is stalled for two consecutive quarters, calculated to be six months at a stretch (Lekwa & Anyaogu, 2016; Zvonkovic, Lee, Brooks-Hurst & Lee, 2014). In such situation, the monetary worth of goods and services provided in a country's border is always low. The outstanding signs of recession are; low patronage of non-essential commodities, depreciated foreign exchange, increased unemployment due to institutional adjustments, high rate of inflation, high-interest rates on bank service and perceived poor incomes (Hines, Ross, Youngblood and Faulkner, 2010; Afifi, Davis, Merrill, Coveleski, Denes & Afifi, 2014). The ugly circumstances associated with recession bring about financial inadequacies and these results that organisation resorts to the best way to cope in managing its affairs.

To cope with such prevailing situation means a departure from the traditional method of working in an office. Traditionally, documents are being typed with manual typewriter and copies produced with duplicating and photocopying machines only. Information is 'disseminated' through messengers. This strategy is not fine and gives room for more expenses. It does not provide for efficient and speedy communication in an organisation. The strategy that is committed to eliminate cost, encourage neat and speed spread of information in the practices of office procedures is needed. Good strategy according to Pisano (2015) Promotes efficiency in communication in the administrative office. The secretaries should be efficient in communication in the administrative office if in-service training is organised for them which would expose them to modern communication technologies and equipment like reprographic technology skills. Such skills give the secretary the ability to select appropriate production process, ability to use electronic scanning facilities; ability to programme and operate reprographic equipment. Micrographic technology skills help the secretary. These skills give secretary the ability to select appropriate micrographics technique in loading, storing destroying, retaining, transforming and copying documents; ability to save, code, index and retrieve papers on disks, microfilms and organic media and many others (Ojokwu, Ojokwu & Nwosu, 2002; Gupta, 2003).

Statement of the Problem

These days, the university managements do not usually send secretaries for in-service training. The problem is that the university administrations do not seem to value the work of secretaries and few who are professional secretaries are not encouraged. Many of them, because of the neglect of the profession have changed to either administrative cadre or academic. The typists and executive officers or clerks which the administration are using as secretaries cannot efficiently function as secretaries hence the secretaries functions in every office in the institution are suffering. Those who are encouraged are administrative and academic staff. For professional development and competence, the management should give every category of staff the opportunity through in-service training to update their skills to ensure that all categories of

workers are equally encouraged. Incidentally, few secretaries today renew their skills through self-sponsor. This idea does not help to efficiently prepare and develop secretaries with relevant communication skills that are needed to promote communication in the administrative office in the recessed economy. The management or style of selecting staff for in-service training is not generally accepted method in a civilized setting like university. A situation where only a few categories of staff are encouraged by sending them for in-service training is not fair. This unfair selection of workers for in-service training demands proactive attention and solution through strategies that should promote communication. Therefore, the broad purpose of this study is to explore the strategies for promoting communication in administrative office management for recession economy. Specifically, the paper sought to:

1. Ascertain strategies for promoting communication in administrative office management for recession economy towards secretary empowerment
2. Identify basic communication skills needed in administrative office management for recession economy towards secretary empowerment

Research Questions

This paper sought to answer the following questions.

1. What are the strategies for promoting communication in administrative office management for recession economy towards secretary empowerment?
2. What are the basic communication skills needed in administrative office management for recession economy towards secretary empowerment?

Theoretical Framework

A theory is a model or framework for observation and understanding, which shapes both what we see and how we see it (Christopher, 2012). He further stated that theory allows the researchers to make link between the abstract and the concrete; the theoretical and the empirical; thought statements and observational statements and so on. A theory is also a set of tested ideas from which one can draw an inspiration. For the purpose of this work, the two factor theory of job factors and expectancy disconfirmation theory worker satisfaction will be used.

Two Factor Theory of worker service

The two-factor theory or the motivator-hygiene was propounded by a behavioural scientist named Frederick Herzberg, in 1959. The theory states that there are some job factors that result in satisfaction while there are other job factors that prevent dissatisfaction. Herzberg introduced two separate scales measuring employee satisfaction. There is one scale that measures satisfaction, and the other scale measures dissatisfaction. Theory does not identify them on the same scale. The opposite of 'Satisfaction' according to Herzberg is 'No satisfaction' and the opposite of 'Dissatisfaction' is 'No dissatisfaction'. This means satisfaction and dissatisfaction are not co-dependent opposites, but rather separate measurements all together. The two factors that comprise the theory are motivators and hygiene factors.

Hygiene factors are those factors which when adequate/reasonable in a job, pacify the employees and do not make them dissatisfied. These factors are extrinsic to work. Hygiene factors are also called dissatisfiers or maintenance factors as they are required to

avoid dissatisfaction. These factors describe the job environment/scenario. The hygiene factors symbolized the physiological needs which the individuals wanted and expected to be fulfilled. Hygiene factors include: remuneration, fringe benefits, staff development, flexibility of institution's policies and administrative policies, good physical working conditions, status, interpersonal relations, communication and job security.

Motivational factors yield positive satisfaction. These factors are inherent to work and motivate the employees for a superior performance. These factors are called satisfiers because employees find them intrinsically rewarding. The motivators symbolized the psychological needs that were perceived as an additional benefit. Motivational factors include: recognition, sense of achievement, growth and promotional opportunities, responsibility and meaningfulness of the work.

This theory is related to this paper in the sense that both hygiene factors and motivational factors are essential for existence of motivation at workplace. Secretaries need to be motivated by the universities through granting them in-service training that should expose them to basic communication skills. When secretaries are motivated they should then be zealous to engage in secretarial management skills course that would enable them to apply data capturing and report writing. When the secretaries are motivated they should also put in their best toward achieving the universities goals.

Methodology

The study adopted descriptive survey design to ascertain strategies for promoting communication in administrative office management for recession economy towards secretary empowerment and to identify basic communication skills needed in administrative office management for recession economy towards secretary empowerment. The population for the study comprised 70 secretarial staff and 50 Heads of Unit (Deans, Heads, Directors, Coordinators) of University of Nigeria and Enugu State University of Science and Technology, Enugu. The researchers used University of Nigeria and Enugu State University of Science and Technology because the two universities have enough categories of secretarial staff and Heads of Unit. The instrument used for data collection for the study was structured questionnaire. A structured questionnaire title “Strategies for Promoting Communication in Administrative Office Management for Recession Economy towards Secretary Empowerment” (SPCAOMRESE) was developed by researchers based on the literature review. The instrument was sub-divided into part I and part II. Part I is on general information about the respondents. Part II was divided into section A and B. Section A is a 10-item statement that sought information on the ‘strategies for promoting communication in administrative office management for recession economy towards secretary empowerment’. Section B is 11-item statement and sought information on the ‘basic communication skills needed in administrative office management for recession economy towards secretary empowerment’. The response categories for the two sections was 4-point ratings scale which ranges from 4 – 1 (Strongly Agree = 4; Agree = 3; Disagree = 2; Strongly Disagree = 1). Three lecturers from Department of Business Education, University of Nigeria, Nsukka validated the questionnaire. The validators were requested to vet the content of the instrument, and their corrections were used to modify the questionnaire. The questionnaire was administered to the respondents by the researchers. The researchers administered one hundred and twenty copies, and retrieved one hundred and twenty. The two research questions were analysed using mean and standard deviation. The researchers accepted mean scores of 2.50 and above and rejected mean scores of 2.49 and below.

Research Question 1

What are the strategies for promoting communication in administrative office management for recession economy towards secretary empowerment?

Table 1**Mean responses on Strategies for Promoting Communication in Administrative Office Management for Recession Economy towards Secretary Empowerment**

S/No.	Items Statement	Secretarial Staff (70)		Heads of Unit (50)		Overall (120)	
		\bar{X}	SD	\bar{X}	SD	\bar{X}	SD
1	Clarify your idea	3.0	.61	3.3	.59	3.2	.60
2	Examine the true purpose	3.1	.60	3.2	.58	3.2	.59
3	Consider physical and human setting	3.2	.59	3.1	.60	3.2	.60
4	Consult with others where appropriate in planning	3.1	.60	3.0	.59	3.1	.61
5	Be mindful of over-tones and content	3.0	.74	3.4	.81	3.2	.78
6	Convey something of help or value	3.4	.58	3.1	.65	3.3	.62
7	Follow-up your communication	3.1	.59	3.3	.59	3.2	.59
8	Communicate for tomorrow and today	2.8	.96	3.0	.93	2.9	.95
9	Be sure your action supports your message	3.5	.62	3.2	.70	3.4	.66
10	See not only to understand but be a good listener	3.2	.63	3.1	.60	3.2	.62

In table 1 all the items had mean scores ranging from 2.9 - 3.4 which were within the boundary limit of 2.50 – 4.00. The item statements implied that the respondents accepted that all the item statements were strategies for promoting communication in administrative office management for recession economy towards secretary empowerment. The Standard Deviation of items 1- 10 in table 1 ranged from 0.59 -0.95. The range of the responses of respondents was not far from the mean. The items 1 – 10 implied that the opinions of respondents were close to each other.

Research Question 2

What are the basic communication skills needed in administrative office management for recession economy towards secretary empowerment?

Table 2**Mean responses on Basic Communication Skills Needed in Administrative Office Management for Recession Economy towards Secretary Empowerment**

S/No.	Items Statement	Secretarial Staff (70)		Heads of Unit (50)		Overall (120)	
		\bar{X}	SD	\bar{X}	SD	\bar{X}	SD
1	Ability to reference electronically	3.4	0.61	3.7	0.72	3.6	0.67
2	Ability to access and transfer records	3.5	.53	3.6	0.60	3.6	0.57
3	Electronically operate filing and indexing	3.1	0.58	3.2	0.76	3.2	0.67

4	Ability to apply data capturing and report writing	3.2	0.71	3.1	0.81	3.2	0.76
5	Ability to save and retrieve documents on disks	3.3	0.65	3.4	0.76	3.4	0.71
6	Ability to apply microfilms and other organic media	3.2	0.82	3.3	0.81	3.3	0.82
7	Ability to copy documents and transfer them	3.1	0.76	3.5	0.82	3.3	0.79
8	Ability to construct high-quality body language	3.5	0.82	3.2	0.72	3.4	0.77
9	Ability to make concise sentence	3.6	0.59	3.4	0.61	3.5	0.60
10	Ability to be a wordsmith	3.9	0.57	3.3	0.60	3.6	0.59
11	Ability to apply language appropriately	3.5	0.61	3.0	0.82	3.3	0.72

The mean scores of all the items in table 2 ranged from 3.2 – 3.6. The item statements in table 2 implied that the respondents accepted that all the eleven-item statements were basic communication skills needed in the administrative office. The Standard Deviation of the eleven items which ranged from 0.57 -0.82 showed that the opinions of the respondents were not far from the mean.

Discussion of Findings

The Researchers found that clarity, examination of the right purpose, mindful for over-tones and content were strategies for promoting communication. These findings are in agreement with the Industrial Training Fund (2008). The ITF strategic training on quality services for human capital development stated that examining the true purpose of each communication promotes communication. The researchers also found that strategies do not only require speaking and understanding but include listening. The finding of the researchers agreed with the statement of Okoroafor (2002). The author stated that listening is just as vital as speaking so that the process can achieve the desired results.

The researchers found that ability to access and transfer records, apply microfilms and other organic media, copy documents and transform them were basic communication skills needed in administrative office management for recession economy towards secretary empowerments. The finding of the researchers is in line with the statement of Ojokwu, Ojokwu & Nwasu, (2002). The authors stated that secretary needs in-service training in micrographic skills. The researchers also found that ability to construct high-quality body language, make a concise sentence and apply word appropriately were basic communication skills needed in the administrative office. The finding of the researchers agreed with the statement of Palela and Taeanna (2004). The authors stated that communicators should use language that would be understood by those involved in the communication process. It is necessary to pay attention to what others are saying to improve the communication.

Recommendation

Based on the findings, this study recommend as follows:

1. Communicators should seek to clarify their ideas, examine the exact purpose of each communication, consider physical and human setting and be mindful of over-tones and content of message before communicating.

2. Communicators should convey something helpful and of value, follow-up what they commune and seek not only to be understood but be good listeners.
3. The University Administration should frequently send secretaries for in-service training to expose them to basic communication skills
4. Secretaries should endeavour to engage in secretarial management skills course that would enable them to apply data capturing and report writing; microfilms and other organic media, construct excellent body language and relate language appropriately.

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