

PERSPECTIVES ON ORGANIZATIONAL COMMUNICATION STRUCTURE: A SEARCH FOR TRAJECTORY CONFLUENCE

Margaret Apine

Department of Political Science, Federal University Lokoja, Nigeria
(Corresponding contact) 07037694253, ochoga.ochoga@fulokoja.edu.ng

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Ejoha Richard Sunday

Department of Business Management, University of Nigeria, Nsuka

Abstract

Human resource management is a complex issues and every organization wish to maximize productivity through effective and efficient management of employees. One of such strategies is organizational communication structure. It is within this conceptual notion that this paper interrogated invested pyramid of literature on the importance of communication structure to organization. While the paper adopted interrogative technique of qualitative analysis, the thrust of the system theory provides theoretical framework for the argument of the paper. The paper sued to contend that the typology of communication structure is not linked to effective organizational communication and organizational productivity, efficiency and effectiveness. Rather communication structure is a determinant of choice, size, time and space.

Keywords: *communication, structure, organization, productivity and efficiency*

Introduction

Business all over the world today is very challenging. To stay profitable in the highly challenging and competitive global market economy, all factors of production, i.e. human resources, machine and materials, should be wisely managed. Among the factors of production, the human resources constitute the biggest challenge because unlike other inputs, employee management demands skilful handling of thoughts, feelings and emotions to secure highest productivity. It is on this premise that organisational communication plays an important role to reduce the negative effects of this challenge on employee productivity. Human resource managers often spend the majority of their time communicating in one form or another (meetings, face to face discussions, memos, letters, e-mails, reports etc.) to get the expected results. Today, however, it has become an indispensable part of their work. An effective management of production processes requires greater collaboration and team work among workers in different functional groups. Hence, to manage the existing performance of the employees and to motivate them for better performance, efficient communication practices have become more important in every organisation.

Communication plays a vital role in the working of any business. Organizations have to communicate to carry out their business activities. Scholars such as Kirti (2012) and Ahmad (2010) have indicated that organizations cannot meet their goals unless they have effective communication structure. In other words, in the triumph of any organization, the relationship between manager and his subordinates plays significant role in enhancing productivity. Kirti's (2012) study is of the view that communication is a ribbon, which binds the management and its official together, and is very obligatory for the success and

excellent performance of any organization. The central argument of Ahmad (2010) is that communication helps the organizational members to make both personal and organizational goals. In other words, Kirti (2012) and Ahmad (2010) focused on how communication structure could help them to co-ordinate on the internal activities of the organization with no emphasis on the choice or/and type of communication structure desirable for the actualization of the organizational goal.

This is gap in the literature requires to be interrogated because; it is often believed that ineffective communication of any organization is tantamount to ineffective performance among employees. In other words, new employee's orientation program is the first and most essential step for any organization towards efficient communication. Effective communication increases the efficiency and productivity of any business. And also make the employees more satisfied. No wonder, Harris and Nelson (2008) argued that effectual and well-organized communication positively relates to the job satisfaction, performance and positive attitudes of employees. Harris and Nelson's (2008) submission makes this paper to believe that communication is the key to bring people together at one place to make it a workplace. As a workplace is formed when people work together for a specific purpose and that work is impossible without having communication among working people. Such type of communication is known as organizational communication, and refers to the communications and interactions among organizational members: managers and non-managerial employees.

Harris and Nelson (2008) also avers that the organizational communication is crucial to get involved into better relationships within an organization, to transmit information, to have trust on and cooperation with each other. To them, communication makes one to understand and co-ordinate the work as well as to improve communication climate and learning. Hence to increase overall workplace satisfaction and also an individual's job satisfaction. While they submit that the organizational communication may be mostly effective or it can be mainly ineffective, and can definitely affect employee satisfaction, they are equally silent on the nexus between typology of communication structure and employee performance.

This gap in the literature implies that organizational communication is a dynamic process and involves complex communication techniques, networks and channels. It does not involve only upward and downward communication, but managers and employees communicate with each other in various ways at different levels. It may be the formal or informal, verbal or non-verbal, written or oral; and its levels include interpersonal (or face to face)-level communication between individuals, group-level communication among teams, groups and units, and organizational-level communications involves vision and mission, policies, new initiatives, and organizational knowledge and performance. All the directions and flows of organizational communications are combined into a variety of patterns called communication networks. Today, organizational communication is more complex due to communication media and high speed transmission.

No wonder, Downs and Adrian (2004) state that communication in an organization serves to establish managerial control, provide workers with job instruction, and enable managers gather information for planning. To them, it shows that communication is involved in all types of managerial functions. This implies Downs and Adrian (2004) are of the view that human resource managers and communication specialists first develop strategies to achieve goals, construct relevant messages and then transmit through different channels for conversations with employees and workers. While Downs and Adrian (2004) highlighted that poor planning may be the result of poor communication and it always results in the failure of the accomplishment of the goals which becomes the reason for dissatisfaction at

workplace, the study did not explain in detail what makes organizational structure poor, whether it is inherent in the typology or the implementers.

This gap in the literature needs to be filled because, if employees are not told about organizational strategies and their responsibilities, they cannot perform effectively. Employees need to understand and coordinate their work activities; but if information is poorly communicated to them or they lack to communicate themselves, they cannot understand the task which leads to the confusion and to the job not being done or not completed properly. If poor communication decreases their satisfaction with the work. This is why Toh (2008:7), the greatest continuing area of weakness in management practice is the human dimension. To Toh (2008), as people work together they develop some important formal and informal relationships with each other. He submits that all people are of different personalities and natures, their thinking, perception, and view points are also different. They cannot understand each other until and unless they effectively communicate. But Toh's (2008) study is not designed to interrogate whether in good times or bad, there seems to be little real understanding of the relationships between managers, among employees, and interactions between the two.

This gap needs to be filled because when there are problems, everyone acknowledges that the cause often is a communication problem. This is because little understanding of relationships leads to the little satisfaction. Based on the gaps in the aforementioned literatures, the typology of communication structure is not linked to effective organizational communication and employee performance, it is against this background that this paper will particularly interrogate the effects of communication structure on employees' performance particularly focus to its typology.

Conceptual and Theoretical Underpinnings

The essence of this conceptual framework is to conceptualize communication structure and employee performance to enhance coherent understanding of the paper. In many companies, organizational structure defines the modes and the tone of interpersonal communication. Highly stratified organizations may use more formal methods of communication between managers and employees. Meanwhile, smaller companies may leverage the relatively flat nature of their organization charts to keep communication relatively terse and informal. Effective leaders must learn how to match appropriate communication styles to company norms. Communication structure could be vertical, horizontal or diagonal. *Kim and Rhee, (2011) argued that effective business communication relies on a feedback cycle that involves listening, speaking and confirming what has been heard, according to Kim and Rhee, (2011:45) manager and employees may engage in highly interactive communication use the electronic cycle to reach mutually beneficial decisions. When communication happens across different levels within an organization, the type and time frame of the feedback cycle can determine that organization's overall effectiveness. For the Features of communication structure, Kim and Rhee, (2011:45) maintained the teams can blend various kinds of written and spoken communication to encourage change throughout a company's organizational chart. For instance, written memos denote less urgency, but sometimes more importance, than email. Email rarely takes precedence over direct spoken communication, except when a company's culture promotes continuous email monitoring and nearly instant replies. Speaking on the phone increases the urgency of communication, but a face-to-face meeting imbues a conversation with significance.*

As regards to the benefits of communication structure, *Kim and Rhee, (2011:47) asserted that company leaders who take the time to identify their most effective form of organizational communication*

often run some of the teams with the most impact. Likewise, team members that adapt their communication styles to fit those of their managers usually accomplish more than peers who mismatch modes of writing and speaking. The most effective organizations manage to balance communication with action to avoid the pitfalls of “analysis paralysis.” While *Paul, (1998)* caution business professionals to avoid communication cycles that emphasize speaking over listening. Email may have streamlined communication flow in many organizations, but it also provides some employees with a soapbox upon which to shout their opinions without an ample opportunity for feedback. Managers who make extra time to listen to the concerns and the ideas of their teams often succeed at meeting project goals while building highly collegial environments in which to operate.

It can be summarized that understanding how human resource managers and executives communicate within an organization can help entry level workers get ahead. Sincere, spontaneous and short messages tend to transcend organizational and cultural barriers, even in companies that seem to thrive on complex communication. Using email and voicemail as supplements to conversations can cement professional relationships. *Employee communication behaviors (ECB) refer to employees' interaction with their stakeholders in working environment (Kim and Rhee, 2011). The effects of ECBs have been studied in various fields. ECBs have been found to affect various aspects of employer and employee relation. For example, the quality of communication structure affected employee's satisfaction with the organization (Jung and Yoon, 2011; Wagenheim and Rood, 2010), which may further influences organizational performance (Schneider, 1998). Dozier (1986) reported that employees are able to conduct functions of collecting external information and distributing them internally. Based on such information, organizations should be able to take specific strategies to maintain the reputation of their products or services through their communication structure.*

A powerful transformation is underway is expected by every business organization. More successful small and mid-sized businesses are embracing "strategic HR" to drive higher employee performance outside the convention means of employee motivation. But you probably know it hasn't always been this way. Thus *Kim and Rhee,(2013:341)* contended that the success of any business is closely tied to the job performance of its employees. According to they, success at work will further the success of the organization for which you are employed. This implies that managers must first hire employees with the right skills and qualifications for the job. Once the hiring process is complete, managers seek to ensure that an employee's work is closely aligned with the organization's goals and objectives in line the organizational structure.

According to *Bakar and Mohammad (2009:45)*, to achieve strong employee performance, managers conduct employee performance appraisals, implement training and development programs, and decide when to promote and reassign employees. Let's look at each of these features of managing employee performance. To start with, *Bakar and Mohammad (2009:45)* maintained that for the purpose of Employee Performance Appraisals managers may have participated in a performance appraisal for a past or current job. A performance appraisal, also called a performance review, is an evaluation of an employee's work based on a set of specific criteria or standards. From this contention, the performance review generally looks back at an employee's performance over the past year and involves setting new plans and goals for the year ahead. When one accepts a new job, you will want to be sure to have a clear understanding of the performance standards for your position to avoid any surprises when you sit down

for your first performance review. It's always a good idea to prepare for a performance review by evaluating your own job performance ahead of time. To support this argument, *Kim and Rhee, (2011:7)* argued that *employee performance is crucial and such as a performance appraisal could a face-to-face meeting between a manager and an employee, or otherwise as institutionalized by the organizational structure.* The theoretical underpinnings of communication form the thrust of the next segment of the paper.

It is pertinent to carry this paper within a theoretical base; thus we have seen the relevance of using interdisciplinary approach to give this survey a theoretical posture. The System Theory will be analyzed and adopted. The introduction of the System Analysis in Social Sciences owes its genesis to the realization of some leading American writers like David Easton, Gabriel Almond and Morton Kplan. David Easton (1973) defined System Theory as a framework that has the capacity to analysis the interactions in any organization or society thorough which binding authoritative decisions are made and implemented. System in this regards can be political system, social system, biological system, economic system, corporate system etc. The main assumptions of the theory are summarized below:

1. Systems have boundaries within which there are functional interrelationship mainly based on some of communications;
2. System are divided into sub-systems, with exchanges of existing between the sub -systems (as, for example, nation and states or corporate headquarters and branch)
3. Systems have a capacity for coding that is, they take informational inputs; are able to learn from inputs, and translates inputs into some kind of output.
4. System has decisions and information control mechanisms for checking instruments, and outputs which generate capacity for supervision and system maintenance.
5. System has feedback and feedback process which communicate decisions and demands from one sub- system to another.
6. System has an inherent regulatory and preservative to ensure stability, equilibrium and homeostatic.
7. Systems function by getting inputs from its environment. The input could be demands that values be allocated in a particular a way or they could be supports, that is expression of approval for particular decisions
8. Finally, System has role that regulate the conduct of actors.

For the relevant of this theory to the paper, in as much as the System Theory emanated from the social sciences, particularly political science, its assumptions can be applicable to other disciplines especially the management sciences. As a phenomenon, corporate organizations can equally referred as a System having sub-systems, which is units, sections, departments or branches that are allegiance to the General System. The General System here could be the management at the headquarters. This is true because the proponent of the theory originally borrowed the concept from the biological sciences, where they talk of circulatory system, respiratory system, and physiological system etc that formed the general Human Body System. All these sub-systems function and communicate to keep the body live. Therefore, the employer and employee relation within context of communication structure which is necessary to survival of organization can find expression in using the System Theory to analysis.

Also, the theory believes that every System has feedback and feedback process which communicate decisions and demands from one sub- system to another. System has decisions and information control mechanisms for checking instruments, and outputs which generate capacity for supervision and system maintenance. Thus the purpose of having communication structure in organizations is to get feedback on every task assigned to subordinates and the activities of such subordinates, employees is checkmated by the regulatory mechanisms inherent in the system. In other words, employees are to give feedback or communicate to superior officers on a given schedule so as to keep the organization (system) informed of every development; of which the system theory strongly emphasized on feedback mechanism as a viable instrument for system stability.

For relevance, the theory also believes that system is hierarchical in decisions making and information dissemination within and out of the system. This is related because human resource managers always emphasis on the issue of adherence to hierarchical channel of communication for the purpose of protocol and organizational stability. Therefore, communication structure encourages system stability, equilibrium and homeostatic. Employees who are also part and parcel of the system will derive satisfaction from stable system, organization, which has the tendency to influence their performance and commitment to job. Because if the system is balanced to guarantee employee's job then the employees will be motivated to function effectively within the instrumentalities of the system to ensure the continuity of the system, organization.

The whole essence of communication structure is to create a channel to foster interaction among members of an organization for the purpose of feedback and supervision before decisions are taken and implemented. So if this premise is the main idea of communication structure then it is to some large extent related to the central message of system theory because it is all about interactions in any organization or society thorough which binding authoritative decisions are made and implemented. Therefore, the interactions in corporate organizations take place within the defined communication channel conceptualized by the stakeholders in the organization. Decisions are not authoritative in organizations until them undergo through the defined interaction channel, that is the communication structure we are talking about. From the foregoing analysis, the question still remains; what is different about communication structure to employee's satisfaction? Given the fact that communication structure is often conceptualized to enhance to attainment of aims and objectives organizations, is it capable of executing a disinterested policies and decisions for employees? Even though the System Theory emphasis on system stability and equilibrium. These are the issues this work will employ the System Theory to investigate analyze and explain.

Communication Structure: A Search for Trajectory Confluence

Haven conceptualized communication structure, Lawrence and Lorsch (1967) agreed the fact that in any organization, communication structure is a factor that can make or mar employee's performance and commitment to job, but they principally argued that the inquiry into the relationship between organizational communication structure and employee's productivity will be more meaningful only when the variable, communication structure is be conceptualized because scholars have many different perspectives about it. According to Lawrence and Lorsch (1967), communication structure is some aspects of behavior that are influenced by pre-existing programs and controls in organizations.

Similarly, he claimed that organizational structure consists of activities such as allocation, coordination and supervision that are geared toward organizational goals. Lawrence and Lorsch (1967) believed that structure is found in an interrelated set of events which return to complete and renew a cycle of activities. The paper intends to agree align with these authors on the ground that organizational structure represents the relationships among different roles played by units within an organization. These diverse points of views indicate that the term organizational structure is not necessarily concentrated on any univocal characteristic, but rather, more likely to contain various dimensions.

For the dimensions of organizational communication structure, there are a couple of notable claims about dimensions of organizational communication structure. Early on, Burns and Stalker (1961) introduced a popular method of examining the potential dimensions of organizational structure: mechanistic and organic systems of organization. According to their classification, a mechanical structure is an appropriate management system to stable conditions. It is characterized by:

- (a) The specialized differentiation of functional tasks into which the problems and tasks facing the concern as a whole are broken down;
- (b) The abstract nature of each individual task, which is pursued with techniques and purposed more or less distinct from those of the concern as a whole; i.e., the functionaries tend to pursue the technical improvement of means, rather than the accomplishment of the ends of the concern;
- (c) The reconciliation, for each level in the hierarchy, of those distinct performance by the immediate superiors, who are also, in turn, responsible for seeing that each is relevant in his own special part of the main task;
- (d) The precise definition of right and obligations and technical methods attached to each functional role;
- (e) The translation of rights and obligations and methods into the responsibilities of a functional role;
- (f) Hierarchic structure of control, authority, and communication;
- (g) A reinforcement of the hierarchic structure by the location of knowledge of actualities exclusively at the top of the hierarchy, where the final reconciliation of distinct tasks and assessment of relevance is made;
- (h) A tendency for interaction between members of the concern to be vertical, i.e., between superior and subordinate;
- (i) A tendency for operations and working behavior to be governed by the instructions and decisions issued superiors;
- (j) Insistence on loyalty to the concern and obedience to superiors as a condition of membership;
- (k) A greater importance and prestige attaching to internal (local) than to general (cosmopolitan) knowledge, experience, and the skill.

In contrast, Burns and Stalker (1961) did not look at the angle if organizations with communication structure are appropriate to changing conditions with fresh problems and unforeseen requirements for action that cannot be broken down or distributed automatically through the functional roles within a hierarchical structure. Thus, this line of thought remains a gap in literature of human resource management. Even Barkeke (1980) that argued that communication structure is characterized by a network structure of control, authority, and communication he is equally silent in that regards. He mainly contends that is the contributive nature of special knowledge and experience to the common task of the concern, and the realistic nature of the individual task, which is seen as set by the total situation of the concern. Barkeke's (1980) study was not structured to interrogate if the adjustment and continual re-definition of individual tasks through interaction with others. Also, the shedding of responsibility as a limited field of rights, obligations and methods is another conceptual premise that his study is silent

about. These gaps in the literature are pertinent for further interrogation hence the spread of commitment to the concern beyond any technical definition; and the sanctions which apply to the individual's conduct in a working role that employees could derive from presumed community of interest with the rest of the working organization. The conceptual utility of this premise seems to be pertinent for the survival and growth of the organization.

Deducing from submissions of Burns and Stalker (1961); Barkeke (1980), omniscience no longer imputed to the head of the concern; knowledge about the technical or commercial nature of the here and now task may be located anywhere in the network; this location becoming the ad hoc center of control authority and communication. This because a lateral rather than a vertical direction of communication through the organization, communication between people of different rank, also, resembles consultation rather than command. The works of Burns and Stalker (1961); Barkeke (1980) are no means designed to interrogate if a content of communication which consists of information and advice rather than instructions and decisions; and also if commitment to the concern's tasks and to the technological ethos of material progress and expansion is more highly valued than loyalty and obedience. This paper is critical to truism of the importance and prestige attach to affiliations and expertise valid in the industrial and technical and commercial milieu external to the organization.

Taking from the works by Burns and Stalker (1961), Barkeke (1980), Turner (1988), it as complex intellectual exercises that have the potentials to mislead beginners in the field of human resources management. Even though Turner (1988) went ahead and proposed some dimensions that can further distinguish different organizational structures. Turner (1988) defined and operationalized five dimensions of organizational structure: specialization, standardization, formalization, centralization, and configuration. Also, Jackson and Morgan's (1992) added a sixth dimension, traditionalism. By a way of reduction, Duncan (1971) proposed five primary features of communication structure: participation in work decisions, formalization, and hierarchy of authority, impersonality, and division of labor. Among these varied dimensions of communication structure, some dimensions are frequently discussed or described in more detail: formalization, centralization, hierarchy, and specialization. Formalization describes the extent to which rules, procedures, instructions, and communications are written down. The organization theory literatures primarily identify two levels of formalization: high and low. According to Nahm and Koufteros, (2003) a high level of formalization is related to a mechanistic structure, whereas a low level of formalization is related to an communication structure. They argued that centralization emphasizes the locus of decision making, when it determines the authority which makes legitimate decisions that affect the organization. The process of decision making characterized by a top-down mechanism and a wide discussion based on networking results in a mechanistic and communication structure of organization, respectively.

From the forgoing, it can be deduced that hierarchy represents a system in which people are organized into different levels of importance from highest to lowest. Researchers generally depend on the numbers of layers within the organization to indicate the levels of management. That is could be why Burns and Stalker (1961) stated that communication structure have few layers in their hierarchy. When Specialization is the extent of complexity an organization has educated, professionalized employees who fill specialist roles. According to them, one of the foundations of mechanistic/organic communication structure system is whether a whole task can be broken down or not. Burns and Stalker believed mechanistic structure is of highly divided tasks, whereas organic structure with integrated roles. The choice of each remain debatable among scholars of human resource management.

Conclusion

As already established, organizational communication is the process by which information is shared within organizations such as businesses. Outside of informal social interactions, individuals in an organization typically communicate with coworkers in their departments who have attained the same status they have, or they communicate with their direct superiors or subordinates. The problem with all major organisations and even small businesses are the communication structure they use and work with. How limited the resources are and even how employees are ranked and how they should work in teams and in what type of relationship they can work with the other employees. The study of how employees react towards these structures and how they perform under these structures can show how important it really is for organisations to implement the correct structure for their specific environment the organisation is working in and this is the premise that the conceptual thrust of this paper is different from the previous studies of Burns and Stalker (1961), Barkeke (1980), Turner (1988) and others.

When looking at factors such as the communication structure itself, employee performance and attitudes, productivity, the factors influencing the structures, decentralisation and centralisation, one can identify if there is any relationship between the structures chosen and employees performance and attitudes. Employee's attitudes and performance has an impact on how the organisation performs, and if every employee's work is done correctly and if employees enjoy their working conditions. Now if a communication structure has an influence on the performance and attitude of employee's organisations should study these problems and make use of new structures to improve employees, to give them a productive and innovative working team to achieve the competitive edge and advantage whereas Burns and Stalker (1961), Barkeke (1980), Turner (1988) hold a contrary view.

The question that if communication structure has an impact on employee attitude and performance has been answered by this paper. Organisations strive to be the best competitor in the environment they are competing in, now if the structure they are using can have an influence on how employees are productive, they should examine this fact, productivity must be high for any organisation to achieve the competitive advantage. But if low can take the organisation down the drain. The communication structure is the way of doing business, how each change is implemented and how each job description is made, how the communication of the organisation will work and the strategic plan to improve productivity. If one, then take the elements of communication structure and examine them to see if it can make a difference in how work is done and managed.

These elements are decentralisation, centralisation and levels of management, and these elements are the main foundation of any communication structure. For the basis of how can the structure have an influence on the attitude and performance of employees. The paper presents that employee's relationship with communication structure determinant of time, size and choice. This notion can be related with the Maslow's theory of needs identifies the security and safety needs, and is safe to say that all employees who had security and safety in their working environment will have a positive reaction towards the

management and communication structure if coordinated correctly. How do human resource managers give employees security and safety in a working environment, such manager needs to work on the attitude and performance of each employee of which it is a function of communication structure as well.

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