Organisational Communication Channels and Optimal Employee Performance in Ibom Multi-Specialty Hospital

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Abstract

The study examines the influence of communication channels on optimum employee performance of Staff of Ibom Multi Specialty Hospital, Uyo, Akwa Ibom State of Nigeria. The descriptive survey method was adopted to gather data from 174 staff of the hospital. The instrument was validated by three experts from the Department of Strategic and Corporate Communications, Faculty of Communication and Media Studies, University of Uyo. The reliability of the instrument was tested on 30 staff of the University of Uyo Teaching Hospital who share similar characteristics with those understudied and a reliability coefficient of.86 was realized. The quantitative analysis of simple percentages was deployed. The findings revealed that memos were the most preferred channel of communication by staff of Ibom Multi-specialty hospital, followed by face to face and social media channels specifically the WhatsApp. Further findings revealed that Staff of Ibom Specialty hospital perceived memos, social media and phone calls/ short messaging services (SMS) as being very effective in enhancing optimal employee performance. The management of Ibom Multi-Specialty Hospital should encourage the use of the face-to-face channels as this poses the least challenge to employees.

Key Words: Communication, organisational communication, communication channels, employee performance, effective communication

Introduction

Organisational communication refers to the role of communication in organisation. Scholars agree with the fact that organisational communication plays a crucial role in the success of businesses/organisations and that interactions among employees and management of an organization are of utmost importance as it creates impact on organisational outcomes and performances. Kaloglannidis and Papaevangelou (2020) opined that if team mates (and indeed other members of staff) are aware of their tasks and roles and the expected outcome from them, they could focus on their effort and consequently improve their performance.

Communication helps individuals and groups carry out activities to achieve goals presupposing that effective communication is mandatory for achieving intended performances in businesses organizations. Thus, efficient and effective organizational communication

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practices should be seen as very important in all business organizations for greater employee's performance. Nwata, Umoh and Amah (2016) posited that employee's performance is dependent upon communication with one another because communication permits employees in an organization to give and receive information. This information could also be distorted if the right channel (s) are not used because, the channels used in communicating messages affect how accurately a message would be received.

In organisations, information could be transmitted to and between employees through a telephone call, a paper; as in a letter or a memo and any other desired means such as face-toface, email, intranet, etc. This indicates that the communication medium plays a role in organizational communication because it supports effective communication and optimal employee performance to occur in an organization.

In spite of the above, certain challenges could arise for organisations irrespective of the channels of communication chosen. The challenges could take the form of inadequate proficiency in the usage of the channel, inappropriate matching of channels with message and message goals or challenges of cybercrimes and deception where computer and internet-enabled channels of communication are deployed.

Ibom Multi-Specialty hospital was established by the Akwa Ibom State Government and was officially launched in 2015. The hospital began operation with 150 expatriates. On April 18th 2018 the hospital recorded its first neurosurgery.

Therefore, it is intent of this research to find out the channels of communication used in Ibom Multi- Specialty Hospital, and further examine which of these channels of communication are suitable in enhancing employee performance and productivity.

Statement of the Problem

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Research has proven that effective communication is a key to a successful organizational performance as it permits workflow and overall productivity. Today, with modernized or latest communication gadgets, many organizations are looking up to a positive performance. However, it is not certain whether Ibom Multi- Specialist Hospital Staff communicate using channel that are capable of enhancing effective communication for which scholars unequivocally agree to be a precursor to optimal employee performance. This study seeks to reveal the available communication channels in use in Ibom Specialty Hospital, assess the suitability of the channels in enhancing employee performance as well as identify problems encountered by employees of the hospital while using these channels of communication. Consequently, the study shall answer the following questions:

- 1. What channels of communication are preferred by staff in Ibom Multi- Specialty Hospital?
- 2. Which of these channels of communication is suitable for enhancing positive employee performance?
- 3. What are the challenges faced while using this preferred channel to communicate?

Review of Related Concepts and Literature

Communication in Organization

Communication and information are central aspects of all organizational activities be they management of offices, developing satisfying jobs and worker relations, motivation and commitment, corporate redesign, information systems implementation and marketplace strategy (Encyclopedia of Communication and Information, 2019) buttressing Batta and Nkanta's (2019) submission that organisations cannot exist without communication keeps organization members well informed about the vison and strategies of the organization and helps members to work together with a common purpose. In organisations, communication flows from the sender which is the source of the communication (be it an individual or a group) through a medium to a recipient who then attempts to understand which message the sender wants to convey. Also, the communication process may sometimes be interrupted by a noise in the communication channel, which can impede communication.

Organizational communication comprises of formal and informal communication. Formal communication is associated with the formal structure of the organization and comes in forms such as meetings, conferences, telephone calls, company newsletters, performance reviews etc. The advantage of formal communication is standardization which makes communication of every message clear (Grace College, 2019). Informal communication on the other hand, is communication that involves person to person communication networks of employees that are not officially sanctioned by the organization. It is spontaneous and quick and often characterized by inaccuracies, misinterpretation or distortion. Also, communication flows from different directions: upward communication, downward communication and sideward communication. Upward communication the one which goes up the official hierarchy, from the lower to the higher level in the organization. This is mostly used for sending information associated with the proposals system, employees' opinion, work insight, attitudes and problems of the employees. Hee, Ang, Qin, Rowan, Husin and Ping (2019) add that upward communication, a communication occurs when subordinates request for opinions from their superiors or try to trigger decision from the top management. This also enables employees express their feelings about jobs and procedures showing the ability of employees in performing their jobs. No matter the direction of flow of information for communication in organisations, there is need to determine which channels to adopt for communication to be effective.

Communication Channels in Organization

Communication channels in an organization are the means through which messages flow to, from and across members of that organisation. Batta and Nkanta (2019) posit that channels include oral means such as telephone calls and presentations, and written means such as reports, memos and emails. They continue that communication channels differ along a scale from rich to lean. Rich channels to them are more interactive, provide opportunities for two way communication, and allow both the sender and receiver to read the nonverbal messages. The leanest channel on the other hand, present information without allowing for immediate interaction and they often convey just the facts. Smith, Patmos and Pitts (2018) highlighted four channels of communication that are very technologically inclined. They are:

- a. **Email:** E-mail communications are strictly text based, making it one of the leaner channels of communication, though effective and efficient as a communication medium. Although e-mail lacks personalization and is limited in its ability to transmit multiple cues and accommodate for language variety (Lee, Kosat & Larsen, 2005), it does allow teleworkers the advantage of continuity across conversations, (Marwick,2001).
- b. **Instant Messaging:** Instant messaging is a form of textual computer-mediated communication that allow users to communicate synchronically by indicating when others are available online to communicate. It allows for rapid feedback between coworkers and is a common social tool, allowing employees to engage in informal conversation and to multitask (Zhang & Fjermestad, 2008).
- c. **Telephone:** Telephone communication is synchronous and allows for a greater exchange of social information when both parties are available at the same time. Additionally, the phone differs from other communication channels available as it does not allow for the sending of mass messages with continued optimum interactivity as conveniently as other communication channels.
- d. **Video Communication:** Video communication systems offers a wide enough bandwidth allows face-to-face interactions. Sias et al. (2012) in Smith et al. (2018) found that individuals who spent more time teleworking were more likely to use video conferencing solutions to replace the diminished presence of face-to-face interaction than those who teleworked less.
- e. Social Media: Kasturi and Vardhan (2014) see social media as another channel of communication having a recent origin. It has turned out according to them to be the most effective communication tool in the history of communication. An entire organization can turn to be a single social community. Social media earns this significance due to two factors-ubiquity and interactivity. Ubiquity in the sense that media technologies affect everyone in the society they are employed even if everyone may not be the audience of such media; interactivity has to do with selectivity and interaction that social media offers its users in their choices of information sources and interaction with other people.

Mutuku and Mathooko (2014) also add that in the evolving business and corporate world, numerous channels are used for internal and external organizational communication. They range from bulletin boards, intranets, newsletters and e-mail, to even face to face communication in meetings and gatherings. They stated that channels such as reports and letters are less effective for information exchange than "dynamic" channels such as one-on-one

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conversations, corridor chats and small-group meetings--that incorporate dialogue in the workplace.

Optimal communication channels and employee performance

There is a strong link between the channels of communication ,effective communication and employees performance .This assertion is buttressed by Westmyer et al., (1998) in Dennis and Hargie (2004) who opined that communication competence requires judicious selection of the most appropriate or socially acceptable channel, and the one that will be most effective in the accomplishment of relational and informational goals in line with organizational strategies. Effective communication goes a long way in enhancing employee productivity by binding employees together. The visible impact can range from team spirit, increased employee performance, and reduced employee turnover, amongst others.

Therefore, in choosing communication channels, the advice from Kulachai & Nakwatchara (2018) that communication channel should be created spontaneously but with strong consideration to individual preferences guided by the direction of the communication is apt. Managers therefore have a responsibility to make intelligent and informed choices about channel and media selection, depending on a multitude of variables, including the purpose of the information exchange, the existing level of uncertainty on the items under discussion, and the extent to which people are savvy with the various communication options available. Batta and Nkanta (2019) have also asserted that the key to effective communication is to match the communication channels with the goal of the message. For instance, written media may be a better choice when the sender wants a record of content and has less urgency for a purpose.

Also, in their submission on communication channels Smith et al. (2018) opined that the availability of new technologies and the evolving nature of business environment have increased the need to have a highly integrated communication channel. The advancement in technology has increased the rich options available in communication channels; though the richness depends on ability to communicate information, ability to handle multiple cues, feedback rate, and the amount of personal focus. These factors may also be the reason why some communication channels such as e-mail, instant messaging, phone, and video communication would be more appealing to some workers and organization than other channels of communication. These options however come with certain challenges which if not handled properly could diminish the optimal use of these channels.

Dennis and Hargie (2004) Xiongfei and Xitong (2016) hinted on this when they opined that in selecting a communication channel the following should be considered:

1. **Cost:** One of the primary motives that drives the adoption of most new working practices is cost reduction. E-communication offers such benefit. Findings from Batta and Nkanta (2019) had confirmed that cost effectiveness was a key consideration in choosing of communication. However, they advise that achieving message goals should not be sacrificed on the altar of cost effectiveness.

- 2. **Time:** On the credit side, e-mail reduces the time for both internal and external transfer of messages and the Internet provides a quick way to source information about the company both for the employee and the customer. On the debit side, while e-communication has changed the way in which people operate their working day, time wasting is one of the largest associated problems.
- 3. **Information Flow:** the major concern here is the ability to allow for the free, restricted and timely flow of information; as the sender and receiver agree.
- 4. **Storage and Retrieval:** Computer applications are helping to solve the growing information storage problem–bulky filing cabinets and cupboards are fast disappearing.

Kasturi and Vardhan (2014) have also identified other issues pertaining to the choice of communication channels by managers. They include security concerns. Here, social media sites pose a threat to the security of personal information. Hacking of websites is the most common of the concerns. Another is deception. The identity of those who join the social networking sites may either be original or fake. Also, privacy where many people restrain themselves from taking part in a dialogue with a fear of losing their privacy.

Effective Communication and Organizational Performance

Communication is the life blood of an organisation meaning that it sustains organizational tasks and relations. Effective communication in Onifade, Opele and Okafor (2019) view entails that communication should be complete- convey all the facts required by the employees; concise-leaving no questions in the mind of the receiver and aiding decision making by the receiver. Others features of effective communication are considerate communication- which seeks to accommodate the needs of the audience; clear communicationmaking use of exact appropriate words; concreteness-using unambiguous words; courteous communication-having to do with messages that respect the receiver ad correct communication-having to do with exact, factual and well -timed messages. These should inform the choice of channels of communication and other communication strategies in organisations

The effects of communication strategies on organizational performance are enhanced by the availability of an open communication environment. This is because it allows the members of the organization freedom to share feedback, ideas and even criticism at every level, (Kibe, 2014). While studying employee communication and organization performance in Kenya's horticultural sector, Bery, Otieno, Waiganjo & Njeru (2015) found that communication facilitates exchange of information and opinion with the organization. Communication aids in improving operational efficiency thus improving organization performance, which makes communication a major determinant of organization performance.

Performance which can be seen as a multicomponent concept and can be distinguished by the processes and outcomes (behaviors). The behavior over here denotes the action people

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exhibit to accomplish a work, whereas the outcome aspect states about the consequence of individual's job behavior because in a workplace, the behavioral engagement and expected outcome are related to each other. Performance in the form of task performance comprises of job explicit behaviors which includes fundamental job responsibilities assigned as a part of job description. Task performance requires more cognitive ability and is primarily facilitated through task knowledge (requisite technical knowledge or principles to ensure job performance and having an ability to handle multiple assignments), task skill (application of technical knowledge to accomplish task successfully without much supervision), and task habits (an innate ability to respond to assigned jobs that either facilitate or impede the performance) (Atatsi et al., 2019). In an organizational context, task performance is a contractual understanding between a manager and a subordinate to accomplish an assigned task.

Theoretical framework

Two theories are chosen as anchor for this research. They are Human Relations theory and the Human Resource Theory

- **a. Human Relations Theory:** According to Andy (2012) the human relations approach is important because it encourages a two-way communication- communication between a worker and the manager instead of unidirectional communication from the manager targeted at the worker. Furthermore, the human relations perspective sees communication as a tool that can be used by management to "buy" cooperation from subordinates. Thus, the manager provides subordinates departmental information and allows the subordinate to engage in open communication about various departmental issues with the manager. In Ibom Specialty Hospital, managers need to choose channels of communication that can foster a two-way communication and elicit cooperation from employees and subsequently enhance performance.
- **b.** Human Resource Theory: The theory posits that all workers are reservoirs of untapped resources, believed to come into an organization with a variety of resources that management can tap into if they try. These resources range from physical skills, energy, creative ability and the capacity to be responsible, self-directed, and self-controlled (Shykhnenko, 2020). The requirement for this theory is that managers should not be focused on controlling employees nor getting them to "buy-in" to decisions; but should rather focus on the creation of a working environment that fosters employee creativity and risk taking in an effort to maximize and tap into the inherent resources in employees(Tuczek,Castka &Wakolbinger 2018).

The implication of this is that communication in this perspective must be constant and bidirectional and participation in decision-making must include both management and workers. Moreover, communication channels which encourage participatory communication should be adopted for optimum employee performance.

Methodology

The research design for this study was descriptive survey design. The method is relevant because the research focuses on people, that is, staff in Ibom Multi-Specialty Hospital and the channel(s) of communication that enhance optimal performances. The population of this study comprised of staff in Ibom Specialist Hospital which is summed up to 174 (One Hundred and Seventy-Four) Census was adopted for the study since the population of staff of Ibom multi-Specialty Hospital was considered manageable. Consequently, respondents were drawn from out- patient department, In-patient Department, theatre, maternity, obstetrics ang gynaecology, laboratory, pharmacy, accident and emergency, dialysis, endoscopy, physiology, janitorial, works, billing, front, account desk

The measuring instrument used in this research was questionnaire which was validated by three experts from the Department of Strategic and Corporate Communications, Faculty of Communication and Media Studies, University of Uyo. The reliability of the instrument was tested using 30 staff of the University of Uyo Teaching Hospital who share similar characteristics with those understudied and a reliability coefficient of .86 was realized. Data for this study were collected using the questionnaire, tabulated and analysed using simple percentages. The decision rule taken by the researchers was that a percentage score range of 14.0 % - 50.0% will be classified as preferred and suitable communication channels for enhancing positive employee performance. The explanation building technique was adopted in the discussion of findings.

The researchers with three research assistants administered one hundred and seventyfour copies of the questionnaire to the respondents. However, one hundred and sixty-six copies were retrieved and four out of that were not considered useful for the study. This represents 94.2% return rate, which is good for reaching valid conclusions in this study. The Tables below reflect data obtained from the study.

Research Question 1: What channels of communication are preferred by staff in Ibom Multi-Specialty Hospital?

Channels	Frequency	Percentage (%)		
Face to Face/Meeting	24	14.8		
Phone calls/SMS	22	12.7		
Social Media (WhatsApp)	35	20.4		
Memos	73	51.4		
Email	8	8.5		
Total	162	100		

Table 1: Preferred Channels of Communication used by Staff in Ibom Multi-Specialty Hospital
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Results from Table 1, indicates that 51.4% of respondents preferred memos, 20.4% preferred Social Media (WhatsApp) while 12.7% of the respondents preferred phone calls as their preferred channels of communication.

Research Question 2: Which of these channels of communication is suitable for enhancing positive employee performance?

Table 2:	Suitability of	Communication	Channels	in	Enhancing	Positive	Employee
Performance in Ibom Multi -Specialty Hospital							

Channels	Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Face to Face/Meetings	Less suitable	15	9.25
Phone Calls/SMS	Suitable	40	24.7
Social media (WhatsApp Group)	Effective	48	29.6
Memos	Very suitable	50	30.8
Email	Less suitable	9	9.25
Total		162	100

The result from Table 2, indicated that Staff of Ibom Specialty hospital perceived Memos, (30.8%) social media (29.6%) and phone calls/short messaging services (SMS) (24.7%) as being suitable in enhancing optimal employee performance

Research Question 3: What are the challenges faced while using the preferred channel to communicate?

Table 3: Responses on challenges faced in the usage of preferred communication channels

Channels	Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Memos	Late Circulation,	82	57.7
	Poor Feedback, and		
	Poor-quality		
~	Messages	0 <i>i</i>	
Social Media	·····	36	25.5
(WhatsApp Group)	Poor Electricity and Phone Glitches		
Phone calls/SMS	Poor Network, and	24	16.9
	Phone Malfunction		
Face to face meeting	Tight schedules	14	8.6
Email	Poor network,	8	4.9
	subscription costs		
Total		162	100

Table 3 reveals that 57.7 % of the respondents associated late circulation, poor feedback mechanism, and misinterpretation of messages with Memos; about 25.5 % associated the social media (WhatsApp Group) with network fluctuation, poor electricity supply and Phone glitches while 16.9 % associated phone calls/SMS with poor network and phone malfunction. Respondents (8.64 %) alluded to the fact that tight schedules pose a challenge to Face to face meetings while the challenge encountered in the use of e-mails were poor network and subscription costs. This was the view of about 4.93% of respondents.

Discussion of Findings

On the Preferred Channels of Communication used by Staff in Ibom Multi-Specialty Hospital the study found that management staff and employees in Ibom Multi- Specialty Hospital mostly use Memos, followed by WhatsApp and phone calls and SMS in communicating task-oriented information. The findings reveal that a triangulation or multichannel approach is adopted by management of the hospital. Smith et al. (2018) opinion that the availability of new technologies and the evolving nature of business environment have increased the need to have a highly integrated communication channel is buttressed by this finding.

Secondly, respondents perceived memos, social media and telephones as being suitable channels that enhance the performance of their tasks in the hospital. This finding aligns with findings from other studies. For instance, Lee (2011) had found in a study of Malaysian organisations that print media were effective as they complimented digital channels in the organisations. Kasturi and Vardhan (2014) opinion that social media has become the most effective communication tool in the history of communication has also been proven by this study. Further, Batta and Nkanta (2019) also found that telephones were perceived as being very effective for communication by management and staff of the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN).

The last research question addressed the challenges encountered in the use of the preferred communication channels to communicate effectively. Respondents, 57.7% reported that in the use of Memo, there is usually late circulation of information, poor feedback mechanism that restricts free flow of communication creating misunderstanding of messages. Social media was reported by 25.5% to face challenges relating to poor network/fluctuations as well as phone glitches. Respondents also experienced network fluctuation and malfunctions as well as challenges in subscription cost while using telephones and E-mails for conversations and sending messages. The finding that memos were associated with poor feedback resonates with Smith's et al (2018) view that the advancement in technology has increased the rich options available in communication channels; though the richness depends on ability to communicate information, ability to handle multiple cues, feedback rate, and the amount of personal focus.

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The setback here is in the inability of users of memos to get appropriate and timely feedback can be overcome by scheduling meetings at appropriate /favourable times. Also, that very few respondents (8.6%) perceived a challenge using face to face communication channels mean that many respondents were comfortable using this channel. This proves that the face-to-face channel is a suitable channel of communication as findings from research question indicated; and as Lee (2011) had recommended, face-to-face communication should be adopted for quicker, more accurate and immediate response when transmitting information to staff. Further, face to face communication provided a better understanding of the managers' instructions. Moreover, this finding has implications for the management of the hospital whose onus it is to conduct a communication audit of the communication audit should be able to facilitate the identification of who should communicate with whom within the organisation? Who is currently communicating with whom? What problems are communicated? Where does the information come from? How do people receive information? and how the communication affects the relations between the employees?

Conclusion

The survival of organisations is largely based on efficient communication as communication helps to establish, reshape and create facilities for the general well-being in organisations. Further, organisational interaction ensures that all workers are aware of what is through important and timely information shared. Arising from the findings and analysis of this study, it was discovered that the formal organizational communication channels in Ibom Multi- Specialty Hospital are Memos, social media (WhatsApp Group), Phone calls and SMS. Also, these channels were suitable for enhancing employee performance in the hospital. Moreover, challenges such as late circulation of information, poor feedback and network/fluctuations as well as phone glitches. Respondents also experienced network fluctuation and malfunctions as well as challenges in subscription were some of the challenges encountered by respondents. Based on this, it is therefore concluded that the choice of a communication channel is a prerequisite for enhanced performance of employees in an organisation.

Recommendations

Sequel to the above findings, it is recommended that;

- i. The management of Ibom Multi- Specialty Hospital should encourage the use of the face-to-face channels as this poses the least challenge to employees
- ii. The management should improve upon the circulation and quality of memos which findings reveal were the most suitable channel of communication.
- iii. The management should work towards the improvement of electricity supply as well as internet service in the hospital.

iv. The management should carry out periodic communication audit to evaluate the current communication activities of the Management and their influences on the effectiveness and performance of the employees.

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