

BEING TEXT OF A LECTURE SERIES ON

COMMUNICATION SKILLS

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1.0 OPENING REMARKS

I wish to express my profound appreciation for the opportunity given to me to serve as one of the resource persons for this important workshop. The topic for discussion which is "Communication Skills" is an important aspect of legislative duties and procedures, protocol, public relations and security matters which will go a long way in achieving the objective of the workshop as it will enhance the communication skills of the participants by providing you with a clear understanding of the nature of communication and its relevance in an organization, as well as avail officers with the requisite skills needed for an effective communication.

1.1. INTRODUCTION

Communication plays a vital role in our daily lives. It has so much impact in our daily affairs to the extent that we consider it to be part of life. For example, in the twenty-four hours of a day, almost every citizen communicates with his or her fellow human beings. Communication provides a means by which people in business; politics, government and other professions act and interact, exchange information and ideas, develop plans, proposal and policies, make decisions and manage men and materials. It is the lifeblood of any organization. It is something we cannot do without both in our homes, place of work, business, legislative duties and procedures, protocol, public relations and security matters.

Good communication is not merely passing information; it entails creating understanding among the parties involved. It is against this backdrop that the lecture will dwell mainly on the nature of communication, the various functions of communication, the variables in the communication process, the importance of communication in an organization, essentials of good communication and the barriers to effective communication, as well as the general understanding of communication in an organization.

2.0 THE NATURE OF COMMUNICATION

The term communication is derived from the Latin word communis meaning common. Communication has many and various meanings, to some it denotes the means and media of passing information (e.g. telephone, radio, telegram, television, etc) while to others they refer it to the channel of communication such as the complaint/suggestion box, the graphic and the grievance procedure.

Beach D.S. in his book titled. "The Management of people at work" defined communication as the transfer of information and understanding between person to persons. While, Appleby R.C. described it as the inter change of ideas, facts by two or more persons through the use of words, letters and symbols.

The communication system used by animals was through the signaling behavior; this is more limited than that of human being because it involves language, speaking and visual aids. However, communication can be summoned up as the process whereby meanings are exchange so as to produce understanding among human beings. This

does not only consist of spoken words but consist of all the ways in which conveyed. Even silence may convey meaning and therefore be considered as communication.

Dance and Larson (1976) came up with some of the definitions as follows:

- Communication is any means by which a thought is transferred from one person to another.
- Communication is the process by which one person (or a group) shares and imparts information to another person (or group) so that both people (and group) clearly understand one another.
- Communication is not just the giving of information; it is the giving of understandable information and receiving and understanding the message. Communication is the transferring of a message to another party so that it can be understood and acted upon.
- The communication process involves all acts of transmitting messages to channels which link people to the language and symbolic codes which are used to transmit messages, the means by which messages are received and stored and the rules customs and conventions which define and regulate human relationships and events.

3.0 FUNCTIONS OF COMMUNICATION

The traditional functions of communication are:-

Information: relates to facts, news, opinions and messages about things, people and situations in our environment. As human beings, it is natural that we need these messages in order to understand and react knowledgeably to situations. The messages also enable us acquire enough knowledge about people, things and situations around us.

Persuasion: Communication facilitates the process of selling and adoption of new values in a society. It is functional in enhancing the process of introducing people of contrary opinions or perceptions to alternative ideas or perceptions. Under the market situation, sellers adopt persuasive communication to make prospective buyers accept their products or services. Advertisers use the persuasive communication to a great advantage.

Entertainment: Communication facilitates the conveyance of signs, symbols, images and sounds of leisure Activities like sports, dance, music, drama, literature, films and other artistic creations relax the muscles and mind of the consumers.

Education: Communication facilitates the exchange of knowledge for intellectual growth and formation of character as well as the acquisition of skills at all levels of human development. With the use of communication, lecturers are able to transfer knowledge in the subject areas to students.

Cultural Promotion: The culture of a given society can be preserved and transmitted to the next generation or to people in other societies. For instance, with the folktale tradition, African communities transmit their cultural values to the younger generation.

4.0 COMMUNICATION PROCESS

Communication as a process means that a transmitted message passes through different stages before reaching its final destination. Each of these stages affects the other and they interact freely with one another. Communication is not a static activity. Therefore, it cannot be said to have a beginning middle or an end in the strict sense of those words because the different states in the process are always in continuous interaction. These different stages are what we refer to as the variables in the communication process. The variables include the following:

- The source (sender or encoder)
- The message
- The channel
- The receiver (decoder or destination)
- Feedback
- Noise.

Source refers to the initiator or sender of a message. The source has the responsibility of formulating the message in a way that accurately conveys his idea to the receiver. He needs to visualize his message from the receiver's viewpoint. The sender's basic task is to select communication symbols and skills that will bring about understanding in the mind of the receiver.

The Message in this case is the "commodity" or "the thing itself", which is being communicated. It refers to the thought, ideas, attitudes, intentions or needs which the source sends to the receiver. The term message embraces three coactive elements of most business communication transactions. These are verbal message (i.e. the spoken word), non-verbal message (i.e. the body language) and the meta-verbal message (i.e. the message behind message). For instance, "welcome" could be interpreted as friendly or offensive depending on how you say it.

The Channel is the medium through which a message passes from the source to the receiver. Channels of communication could be through television, radio, telephone, fax, satellite etc.

The Receiver in a communication process is the momentary destination of a message. Momentary here means there is no such thing as a permanent receiver or sender of a message.

Feedback is the response the receiver of a message gives after interpreting the perceived message. This response or reaction could be in any form; it may be a sign, a nod, an outright disapproval or even silence. Feedback is therefore an essential part of the communication process. It helps to show whether or not:

- Communication has taken place

- The receiver is prepared and willing to partake in the communication process.
- The sender had adequately formulated and sent his/her message.

Noise is a technical term for all forms of obstacles/distortions which affects a message. It could emanate from source, channel and the like. That is, noise could be physical, psychological or linguistic.

Physical Noise include loud sounds from radio sets, markets in full session, loud conversation, sound from workmen's tools or from moving vehicles.

Psychological Noise includes poor mental attitude; depression, fatigue or other mental and emotional disabilities.

Linguistic Noise relates to one's ability to use the language of communication. Linguistic noise therefore falls into three categories:

- **Semantic**, this can occur as a result of the wrong choice of words or the use of words with unfamiliar meaning.
- **Grammatical**, this can occur as a result of faulty sentence construction, Misapplication of rules of language or misuse of punctuation marks.
- **Phonological**, which manifests itself in poor pronunciation, e.g. 'piles' when 'files' is meant, 'Milo' when mirror is meant, 'shop' when 'sip' is meant, "sow" when 'show' is meant.

To reduce the incidence of noise, the senders often repeat their messages, repeat some particular important part of their messages several times or try to improve upon them by using examples and analogies. This ensures that the message squeezes through the noise to the receiver.

5.0 THE IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNICATION

The importance of communication for the survival of the individual and organizations cannot be overemphasized as it is necessary for:

- Growth of the business organization
- Workers training
- Specialization of tasks
- Competition
- Crisis Management
- Motivation
- Evaluation
- Government relations

Growth of the Business Organization most business organizations are much larger today than they were some years ago. Then, as the organization grows, so also do its communication problems. That is why effective communication system is needed in any organization so as to achieve its goals and objectives.

Workers Training in any organization is very important in ensuring efficiency of the workforce. Though related to workers' education, training is geared towards importing skills or knowledge to workers with a view to enhancing their performance on the job in organization. Communication is used in this case for skills acquisition.

Specialization of tasks Communication plays an important role in the specialization of tasks in organization. In this case, the employees of the same field communicate with one another by the use of jargons or verbal short-cuts, example, Dr. Cr, VAT in banks. This saves time and increases productivity in the organization if used properly.

Competition with the expansion of businesses, the market now witnesses the introduction of wide range similar products from different companies, thereby increasing the consumer choice. For example in Telecommunication Industry, we have MTEL, MTN, GLO, CELTEL etc. Then, how does a particular business survive this competition? To ensure survival, such a business organization must fall back on massive advertisements and other forms of consumer relations or persuasive communication. That is, communication enhances the survival of business organization in a highly competitive market.

Crisis Management Conflict is inevitable in any organization. The more employees in an organization, the more the troubles, then, the more the need for a good communication network to educate workers on management decisions, to co-ordinate their inputs and to manage the resultant conflicts that may arise from the interaction of these employees.

Motivation Theories of motivation have clearly shown that the more productivity of a group of employees improves, the more such workers are positively motivated. Workers in any organization like to be given a sense of belonging and other incentives that can motivate them to greater productivity. Motivation is a by-product of good communication culture between management and employees. Therefore, communication enhances good morals, job satisfaction, the feeling of belonging and security in employees.

Evaluation Different organization adopts different methods of evaluating their employees. Some organizations utilize weekly, monthly or quarterly reports from heads of units, staff annual evaluation report, sales report etc. the need for such regular evaluation of an organization activity underscores the need for proper information management skills. Good and timely information leads to improved and well-informed management decision.

Government relations The government regulates the activities of business organizations in different ways. These could be through licensing, taxation and environmental protection laws. Business organizations are therefore required to provide the different levels of government with a wide range of information to facilitate their work and healthy relationship.

6.0 MODES OF COMMUNICATION

There are many modes of conveying messages from a sender to a receiver. Each of these modes has its advantages and disadvantages. If for instance you have a message to send to your friend in Kaduna; you may decide to deliver the message in person, you may decide to call him or her on the phone, and you may decide to write that person a letter, or even send it through e-mail.

All these are some of the different options open to you for the transmission of the message to your friend in Kaduna. It is obvious that while you have many options available to you for transmitting your message, the cost and effectiveness of each of these means of transmission differ. The effectiveness of a given mode is determined by many factors. These range from the nature of the message, the target audience, the competence and the resources of the sender and other environmental factors.

A thorough understanding of the different demands; merits and demerits of the different modes of communication would help you decide at all times which is the most cost-effective and efficient means of conveying what message.

The modes of communication can be classified into three namely:

- Oral mode
- Written mode and
- Mediated communication

6.1 ORAL MODE

Communication is used in day-to-day activities like conversations, interviews, tutorials and other discussions that are done in a face-to-face communication situation. Oral communication can take place between two people, among a small group or a large group of people. When an individual voices out his thought, he is said to be engaged in a form of oral communication.

In oral communication, the participants do not only use speech but also the tone of their voices in conveying meanings. There is also the use of facial expressions, gestures and other expressive body movements to reinforce the message being conveyed.

6.1.1 FACTORS THAT AFFECT ORAL COMMUNICATION

Oral communication has four basic controlling factors that the intending user needs to take into consideration before deciding for this mode. These are behavior, appearance, voice quality and listening skills.

Behavior we noted earlier that oral communication does not entail speech and sound alone; it includes gestures, facial expression and other body movements that are capable of supporting the spoken words. Often confusion arises as to the meaning of what was said if it was not accompanied by appropriate gestures. The speaker therefore has to know the appropriate behavior that will amplify his message.

Appearance here refers to other items of information like costumes, make-up, hairstyle, nails, jewelries and other objects that compliment the physical appearance of the speaker. Often in oral communication the speaker's appearance is the first thing that strikes the receiver long before the speaker says a thing. It is part of what determines the sender's initial credibility and the degree of attention his message enjoys from the listener. Some dresses are appropriate for some occasions just as they are inappropriate for other situation. For example, a pair of pajamas and slippers may not be suitable for an occasion of this magnitude.

Voice quality this factor refers to the speaker's use of tone. It involves the speaker's mastery of the rules of the language as well as his phonetics, that is, pronunciation and articulation. Some people are naturally endowed with sweet, melodious voices that can easily convince people, while others have coarse voice quality that tends to irritate their listener's ears.

Listening Skills in oral communication, it is not enough for the speaker to know how to pass his or her messages or to adopt appropriate appearance and behavior; he must be a good listener too. This is to avoid breakdown in oral communication.

6.1.2 ADVANTAGES OF ORAL MODE

- It gives room for instant reception, processing and feedback from the receiver. This gives the sender an opportunity to assess the effectiveness of his or her message and to make modification if necessary. The receiver too can ask for instant clarification on any point he or she does not understand. The instant feedback reduces uncertainty in the interpretation of the message. This leads to better understanding between the participants.
- It is flexible and the sender has the opportunity to adopt his message to suit his audience.
- It offers better possibilities for further planning of the message.
- The source can assess the weak points in his communication on the spot.
- It assures the sender that his message is not only being received but understood.
- It is competitively cheap and timely if the participants are within the reach.

6.1.3 DISADVANTAGES OF ORAL MODE

- It is basically transient (lasting for a short period only), and may not be easily recalled for future reference, unless recorded with the aid of an electronic device like tape recorder or camera. Experience has shown that when such electronic devices are used, the participants become too conscious of their actions and utterances. This affects the form of the message itself.

- Oral communication is easily misrepresented and susceptible to different forms of distortions ranging from omission of detail, addition of extra information, modification of message to suit personal idiosyncrasies, highlighting of a few details etc.
- Some emotional messages like termination, death, retrenchment and other misfortunes are not easy to convey to the victims by words of mouth.
- The over-dependence on spoken words put a lot of stress on our mental faculties, because we have to try to assimilate all that has been said and possibly recall them when that need arises.
- It is often not practical or convenient to reach and converse with high level officials in a face-to-face encounter.

6.2 WRITTEN MODE

This refers to the translation of oral messages into alphabetic symbols. It ranges from the human handwriting to the printed text. This mode of communication is used for documents like letters, memoranda, and minutes of meeting, posters, computer-print outs and newspapers.

6.2.1 ADVANTAGES OF WRITTEN MODE

- Written communication is more permanent and can be stored for future reference
- It cannot be easily misquoted since materials can easily be retrieved for verification.
- It can be read several times over for a better understanding of the content. It can also be read anywhere at any time the reader chooses.
- The sender can edit his message and introduce new ideas before transmission. This gives room for coherence (understanding) and greater impact.
- It can be read several times by the sender and modified before it is transmitted to the readers.

6.2.2. DISADVANTAGES OF WRITTEN MODE

- Written communication lacks immediate feedback.
- It does not have instant reception and interpretation like oral communication.
- The process of transmission takes more time than in oral communication where the participants are in a face-to-face situation.
- People are cautious in composing written messages because they could be used against them in future or in a law court.
- It is more expensive compared to the oral mode.

6.3 MEDIATED COMMUNICATION

Mediated communication involves the transmission of oral and/or written messages through electronic devices such as fax, telephone, radio, television, on-line computer, teletype, electronic mails, walkie-talkie, microfilm, video tapes and the like. It is most useful in large organizations where face-to-face communication is limited or is ineffective in reaching many people at the same time.

6.3.1 ADVANTAGES OF MEDIATED COMMUNICATION

- It provides greater convenience to the participants as they can engage in other activities as they communicate.
- It gives the sender more flexibility in the techniques of packaging and sending his messages.
- It gives the receiver greater control over the message reception in that he can decide to tune in or off at his convenience. He can contribute actively in the process of information selection, packaging and eventual transmission. This is contrary to the sender of controlled oral and written communication
- It has an improved feedback mechanism since the receiver can either talk back or type in his reaction immediately.
- It provides more information to many people at the same time.

6.3.2 DISADVANTAGES OF MEDIATED MODE

- Most mediated communication lack the advantage of combining oral and non-verbal means for more faithful and effective transmission and reception of messages.
- Most mediated communications are depersonalized so much so that the participants may not know much about each other. This could hamper the success of the communication.
- The gadgets are expensive to acquire, consequently, they are beyond the reach of some potential receivers. After all, you need to own a set to receive the message.

7.0 TYPES OF COMMUNICATION

There are different types of communication we participate in at one point or the other in our daily transactions. As individuals, we spend some time to reflect on our past experiences, plan our programs for the day, and exchange pleasantries with our friends and neighbors. Engage in discussion with our colleagues in the office, attend lectures listen to radio or watch television. All these are different kinds of

communication situations that can be categorized into groups for the purpose of analysis and better understanding.

Over the years, communication scholars have attempted to categorize communication in different ways. To some communication can simply be brokered into two types: personal and non-personal. Others break communication into three distinct types intrapersonal, interpersonal communication.

7.1 INTRA-PERSONAL COMMUNICATION

This refers to that kind of communication that takes place within an individual. According to Wiseman and Baker (1967), intrapersonal communication forms the base of operations for all communications.

Indeed, every individual communicates with the aid of his five senses namely the sense of touch, sight, hearing, smell and taste. These different sense organs receive and process stimuli from the environment. Our reaction to events or other external stimuli is dependent on the manner in which our brain interprets the stimuli.

Intrapersonal communication is indeed the base of all kinds of communication. If your internal sense organs cannot co-ordinate effectively, you are not likely to interpret data and other stimuli from your environment effectively. If you cannot communicate within yourself effectively, you are not likely to succeed in communicating with other people. For example, before you can understand this lecture, your eyes will need to perceive the words, which are sent to the brain for decoding. It is only when your brain has assigned the appropriate meanings to each of these words you are reading in this lecture that you would get to understand what message I am trying to convey to you. Therefore, intrapersonal communication is the bedrock of all forms of communication.

7.2 INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION

This kind of communication occurs between two or more individuals in a face-to-face situation. It includes communication in day-to-day activities like the interaction between two friends, classmates, Father and child, discussion between two business associates or between siblings. This form of communication is very functional in forming and sustaining human relationship.

7.3 GROUP COMMUNICATION

This form of communication entails the interaction between members of an identifiable group, be it large or small. A group can simply be defined as a collection of people with identical goals. Discussion in a class, workshop, seminar, clan meetings Old Boys Association meetings, camp meeting etc. are examples of group communication. The individual members of the group participate actively in the communication act to achieve predetermined goals.

7.4 MASS COMMUNICATION

Mass communication refers to that kind of communication in which a relatively large and undifferentiated audience is reached through a mass medium. It entails the simultaneous delivery of identical message to wide range of receivers. From this definition we can deduce that mass communication involve a mass medium like radio, television, newspaper or magazine etc.

7.5 EXTRAPERSONAL COMMUNICATION

Extra-personal communication is the product of our technological age where messages are not only exchanged between humans, but also between machines and machines as in the case of on-line computers or fax machines.

8.0 BARRIERS TO EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

It is probably not surprise that managers frequently sight communication break downs as one of their most important problem. In one study, 80 percent of managers sighted communication as the cause for difficulties on their jobs. It should be noted however, that communication problems are often symptoms of more deeply rooted problems e.g. poor planning may be the cause of uncertainty about the direction of the firm.

Similarly, a poorly designed organization structure may not clearly communicate organizational relationships as performance standards may leave managers uncertain about what is expected of them. Thus, the perceptive manager will first look for the causes of communication problems instead of just dealing with the symptoms. No matter how carefully sender transmit a message, barriers and break downs in communication is bound to occur.

Therefore, good communication must build in safeguard against breakdowns and barriers. The safest approach to noise free communication is careful planning and attention to detail when analyzing the situation and encoding the message. The more you understand the complexity of communication and the way it might break down, the better you can plan to avoid these problems. Some of the barriers are:-

- Lack of planning to communicate
- Un clarified assumptions
- Semantic Distortions
- Badly expressed messages
- Loss by transmission or poor retention
- Poor listening and premature evaluation
- Distrust, threat and fear
- Insufficient adjustment period to change

For human beings to live together amicably there must be a certain level of understanding among them in terms of generation transmission, reception and interpretation of all kinds of messages. These messages may be feelings, ideas, facts and information. The messages we send to others need to be understood and acted upon. Lack of communication can bring about ill feelings, hatred, quarrels and

misdirection among individuals because there is lack of understanding between them. In corporate organizations, lack of understanding can lead to industrial unrest. Therefore for our homes and indeed the larger society to run smoothly with a common purpose and direction, we must learn to communicate effectively our ideas, plans and information to others.

The following essentials of communication should be considered in ensuring an effective communication (be it oral or written).

- Candid
- Clear
- Complete
- Concise
- Concrete
- Correct
- Courteous

9.0 MESSAGES/MEMORANDA (MEMO)

A memorandum is a message written for use within the organization. Traditionally, letters are used for external communication; ordinarily the memorandum is intended solely for communicating with others within the organization (internal).

The main explanation for the popularity of memoranda is that within large organizations there is a great need for communication. As organizations grow, problems of coordination becomes more severe, memoranda can help to keep the various parts of the organization in touch with each other. Memoranda have many different uses, to convey information from one department to another, for communication between branches, or for the records and reference. In fact, the memorandum is the most widely used form of written communication within the organization.

A memo is being used as a defense mechanism in case the sender is accused either of not sending the message at all or sending a different message.

9.1 FEATURES OF MEMORANDUM

- (1) It should be brief and straight to the point
- (2) The subject matter should be dealt with in a direct fashion, without unnecessary embellishment.
- (3) It should only deal with the subject matter.
- (4) There is no ambiguity (you have to be precise in the use of words).

However, staff on essential duties especially the security unit and the clinic are enjoined to continue with their normal duties.

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10.0 CONCLUSION

I want to conclude by stating that the lecture has updated the knowledge of participants on communication as a process and what a public servant should do in a work place to make his/her communication effective. It is important as explained in today's lecture to restate the importance of communication to the overall success of any organization. It's in view of its importance to legislators, protocol officers, public relations practitioners and security agents that I made the following recommendations:

1. The communication skills of public servants should be enhanced through adequate training programs so as to afford them the opportunity of communicating their organizational objectives more effectively.
2. Participants are advised to always safeguard their communication by planning adequately to overcome all the barriers to effective communication.
3. Benue State government should pay attention to the emerging trends within the communication sector which is reshaping Legislative duties and procedures, protocol and security activities in the country due to the rapid changes in technology. It is expected that officers are moving with the changing pace of technology so as to be abreast of development in the sector, particularly in this information age.
4. Superior/Subordinate form of communication be enhanced in the Benue civil service as what is presently obtainable does not allow for a productive and harmonious working relationships in view of the feeling of too important on the part of some superior officers who often times, passes instructions to subordinates without courtesy and due respect.
5. And finally, public servants particularly, superior officers should not be taking their communication functions with levity as their communication can impact either positively or negatively on the overall image and credibility of the organization which they represent.

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