

The Oft-Forgotten: The Role of Cleaners, Messengers, Security Operatives and Gate Keepers in Effective Organisational Communication and Development

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to explore the role of the oft-forgotten group of people in organisations such as cleaners, messengers, gatekeepers, security operatives, drivers and so on who often provide the initial interface with the various publics of the organisation in providing effective internal and external communication within the organisation. The methodology of this research is exploratory review of various articles and books. The results of this paper indicate that cleaners, messengers, security operatives and gate keepers are very crucial in providing effective organisational communication, particularly using oral and informal communication. They provide the initial contact between the customer or the external publics of the organisation and the organisation itself; and more often, they are a crucial part of how the external publics perceive the organisation. While it is understood that corporate leaders everywhere spend upward of 80 percent of their work time in communication-centred activities, we thought it goes without saying that cleaners, messengers, security operatives and gate keepers spend 100 percent of their work time in communication-centred activities. If businesses must maintain an adequate level of communication effectiveness to survive and if they must raise the level at which communication contributes to productivity and eventually to profitability of the businesses, the place of cleaners, messengers, security operatives and gate keepers is crucial because they provide crucial informal, oral and interpersonal communication to the lowest cadre of customers who cannot readily reach the top management. We recommend that organizations must make effort to positively influence job elements. Any such effort should involve cleaners, messengers, security operatives and gate keepers.

Keywords: *.Cleaners .Messengers .Security Operatives .Organisation Communication*

Introduction

When people are identified by a shared interest, whether they daily convene in a particular place or not, they make up an organisation. They are bound by a shared purpose. Every organization is actually an economic and social system. Organizational managements make effort through formal structure as well as through informal interaction to establish sound systems within and outside organization to positively influence those job elements and achieve their objectives.

According to Gortner, Nicholas and Ball (2007, p. 157), when people come together to work for a common goal(s) they constitute themselves into levels of authority. They also divide the work according to areas of specialization so that as they work together, the goals of the group may be attained. That is how organizations are formed. Meanwhile, organisation refers to a workplace and are both used in lieu of each other in this section, and the rest of the study. An organization is a stable system of individuals who work together to achieve, through a hierarchy of ranks and division of labour, common goals. Every organization therefore, can be seen as an information processing system in which messages of all sorts are imported, sorted, analyzed, and disseminated with a view to achieving specific predetermined results.

Organisations are social interventions for accomplishing goals through group efforts. Various environmental forces influence organisations. There are two types of environmental

forces, Vis: direct and indirect. Some of the main direct forces are: economic, technological, socio-cultural, political and international. The key elements in an organisation are: people, structure, technology and external environment in which the organisation operates. When people join together in an organisation to accomplish an objective, some kind of structure is required.

Effective communication processes lie in a background of every organisation that wants to be successful in a long term (Purves, 2005, p. 13). Usually with the word communication, people understand the interaction with others on everyday basis with the aim of exchanging information. On the organizational level, communication is divided more narrowly - in external and internal communication. Internal communication is communication among organization's management and internal stakeholders (Welch, Jackson, 2007), whereas external communication is the one focusing on the audiences outside the organization (Saunders, 1999, p.36)

Communication is considered as the blood vessels that bring life flows and lack of information cause will be disorder of the heart. In short, without effective communication, the survival of organisations will not be possible.

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Oftentimes in studies of organisational communication, attention is paid on the effectiveness of communication by those on the higher rung of organisational ladders. What about the oft-forgotten cleaners, messengers, gatekeepers, security operatives, drivers and so on who often provide the initial interface with the various publics of the organisation? They are first to greet, welcome and engage the various publics of the organisation before they (the publics) are given access to those at the higher rung in the organisational hierarchy. What are their roles in effective internal and external communication in organisation?

What is Communication?

There is probably no concept that is as variously, or to be more exact as commonly, defined as communication in social and management sciences. There are thousands of definitions on communication. However, one chooses to define it, communication has not only remained a critical component of society but constitutes the very fulcrum on which society revolves.

Communication touches every sphere of human activity. It informs all of man's actions because it is occasioned by his need to interact with his fellow man. It manifests itself in symbolic, verbal forms. It is man's ability to create symbols, ascribe meaning, an interpret messages that elevates him above the status of the lower animals and given form and character to his existence. According them, the universal nature of communication has led to countless definitions of the term, and here we examine some of them.

According to Fill (2009, p. 33), communication is the process by which individuals share meaning. Therefore for interaction and even dialogue to occur, each participant in the communication process needs to be able to interpret the meaning embedded in the other messages, and be able to respond.

When we communicate, Konkwo (2003, pp. 3-4) notes, we intend, thereby, to influence the behaviour of our recipients by sharing our thoughts, feeling and desires with him. It is any means by which a thought is transferred from one person to another. It could also be defined as the process by which one person (or a group) shares and imparts information to another person (or group) so that both people (and group) can clearly understand one another.

Human communication falls into two broad categories, verbal and non-verbal. That is why Purer, cited in Konkwo (2003, p. 3) saw communication as the verbal or non-verbal language interrelationship of people with the aim of exchanging information.

In his own opinion, Konkwo (1997, p. 13) categorizes human communication into intrapersonal, interpersonal, public and mass communication. The classification, according to him, was made along the line of some examples taken from everyday communication experience.

Verbal communication is communication through words, which can take either oral or written forms. Oral communication, in itself, is used in intrapersonal, interpersonal and group

situations. Intrapersonal relates to the process of information transfer that goes on within an individual; interpersonal communication, often referred to as face-to-face communication, is the exchange of ideas and information between two people. Group communication involves the exchange of ideas and information among member of a group, and this could involve the communication that takes place in the workplace, which is our interest in this study. Mass communication is mediated transfer of messages.

Verbal communication relies on spoken or written words to share information with others. Dialogue is a form of verbal communication. It is a discussion or conversation between people. It is a process in which participants are exposed to new information (Daft, 1984, p. 39).

Nonverbal communication is sharing information without using words to encode messages. There are four basic forms of nonverbal communication: proxemics, kinesics, facial and eye behavior, and paralanguage (Welch and Jackson, 2007, p. 178). Proxemics is the study of an individual's perception and use of space. Kinesics refers to body language, which is used to convey meanings and messages. Nonverbal mode could be used to complement the verbal mode. Choosing an appropriate channel of communication involves understanding symbolic meanings and the information richness of messages.

Oguibe (2014, p. 65) provides a practical overview of the communication process, viz: the sender has an idea, the sender encodes the idea as a message, the sender produces the message through a channel, the audience receives the message, the audience decodes the message, the audience responds to the message, and the audience provides feedback to sender.

Communication is essentially a perceptual process. The sender must encode intended meaning to create messages. The receiver then decodes the messages to obtain perceived meaning. Effective communication depends on the sender and the receiver sharing an understanding of the rules used to encode meaning into messages. Effective communication between individuals (the sender and the receiver) involves many steps, including encoding, decoding, and feedback.

How Does Communication Work in Organisations?

Within every organization, official message transfer has to be made, asserts Rhodes (2009, p. 12). There must follow well laid down lines of authority. The organizational charts give directions as to the routing of these messages. And organizational chart, therefore, is a diagram showing the hierarchy of relationships within an organization. It tells at a glance who is in charge of the total system and who reports to whom. Organisation is a place where two or more people work together in a structured way to achieve a specific goal or set of goals. Goals are fundamental elements of organisations.

According to De Ridder (2003, p. 36), the first goal of organisational communication should be to inform the employees about their tasks and about the policy and other issues of the organisation. The second goal is communication with a means to create a community within the organisation. Communication in organisation creates a community.

According to Konkwo (1997, p. 23), the communicability of the various units or subsystems of the organization with each other enables the organization to achieve their internal and external goals. It is through the aggregated and coordinated efforts of the human beings in the organization that organizations can survive and function in their environments.

Communication is essential for effective functioning in every part of an organization. Although marketing, production, finance, personnel, and maintenance departments may receive direction from corporate goals and objectives, communication links them together and facilitates organizational success. The importance of effective communication for managers cannot be overemphasized for one specific reason: everything a manager does, involves communicating. Communication is needed to increase efficiency, satisfy customers, improve quality, and create innovative products.

According to Bovee and Thill (2010), organizational communication has several key functions: gaining compliance; leading, motivating and influencing; making sense of issues; solving problems and making decisions; managing conflicts, negotiating and bargaining. Communication helps control and coordinates the work of the organization through a formal, external system and an informal, internal system.

Organisational communication is variously patterned into vertical and horizontal communication, and formal and informal forms. However, there are variants, which are introduced by some authors. Organizational communications differ in formality. Formal communications are official, organization-sanctioned episodes of information transmission. They can move upward, downward, or horizontally and often are prearranged and necessary for performing some task. Informal communication is more unofficial. People gossip, employees complain about their boss, people talk about their favourite sports teams, they whisper secrets about their co-workers, and work teams tell newcomers about how they operate. The grapevine is the social network of informal communication that helps people interpret the organization, translates management's formal messages into "employee language", and conveys information that the formal system leaves unsaid

Konkwo (1997) maintains that communication in organizations takes place basically in any of all of three forms, namely, oral, written or technically mediated. By means of the oral form of communication, individuals working in the organization bring their various abilities, skills and competence to bear on their relationship with others. The process of communication can be dyadic or interpersonal and/or among a group of people or in the public. Dyadic communication is that form of communication that takes place between two people. He contends that there is communication among people on the same level in the organizational hierarchy often referred to as lateral communication.

Upward communication functions as a reporting and control system for the organization. Horizontal communication flows correct individuals within the same work unit, span diverse but interrelated divisions and levels, or even link different organization; task coordination, problem solving, information sharing, and conflict resolution. Horizontal interaction is inevitable empirical findings shows that organizational communication can be differentiated in numerous ways. The channels and the contact may be formal or informal, the direction of communication maybe upward, downward, horizontal, or external; a variety of networks may develop among individuals and groups, and some individuals communication roles may be established within the organization's communication system.

Below are charts presented by Oguibe (2014, p. 67) about the kinds and channels of organisational communication. As it is usual, the place and role of cleaners, messengers, security operatives and gate keepers were forgotten.

Downward Communication

- Job instructions and descriptions
- Policies and procedures manuals
- Appraisal and performance feedback
- Official briefings
- Orders and directives
- Meetings (face-to-face, electronic)
- New employee induction programs
- Memos and emails
- Telephone
- Intercom and public address systems
- Notice boards and intranets
- Newsletters
- Annual reports
- Posters, calendars/planners
- Training programs
- Nonverbal communication of culture (open plan/democratic work space, segregated 'mahogany row'; presence of/lack of status indicators – parking spots, privileges, secretaries etc.)
- Social activities (in-house sports teams, exercise programs, water cooler and cafeteria, end-of-week party)
- Blogs
- Podcasts
- Wikis

Upward Communication

- Meetings (face-to-face, electronic)
- Participative decision making (teams, projects)
- 'Captain's table' lunches – executives meet staff
- Upward appraisal/360° feedback
- Suggestion systems
- Anonymous graffiti boards/intranets
- Email
- Telephone
- Ombudsman/ombudswoman
- Counselors
- Grievance procedures
- Union newsletters
- Training programs
- Grapevine
- Social activities (in-house sports teams, exercise programs, water cooler and cafeteria, end-of-week party)
- Open-door policies
- Opinion surveys and communication audits
- Exit interviews

HORIZONTAL COMMUNICATION

- Meetings (face-to-face, electronic)
- Grapevine
- Cross-departmental, cross-divisional, cross-site projects
- Telephone
- Email
- Social activities (in-house sports teams, exercise programs, water cooler and cafeteria, end-of-week party)
- Training programs
- Staff personnel (legal, IT, training/human resources) communicating with line (mainstream workflow) personnel
- Messages defining territorial rivalries/silos
- Instant messaging
- Texting
- Blogs
- Wikis

EXTERNAL/PUBLIC COMMUNICATION (OFFICIAL)

- Speeches
- Advertising, marketing
- Letters, email
- Meetings with community and other stakeholders – boundary spanning
- Blogs

DIAGONAL COMMUNICATION

- Telephone, email
- 'Going over the head of those immediately in chain of command'
- Social activities (in-house sports teams, exercise programs, water cooler and cafeteria, end-of-week party)
- Informal organisation – personal contacts
- Staff personnel (legal, IT, training/human resources) communicating with line (mainstream workflow) personnel
- Expertise-to-expertise communication – 'authority of knowledge' instead of 'authority of position' – internal networkers, boundary spanners

EXTERNAL/PUBLIC COMMUNICATION (UNOFFICIAL)

- Whistleblowers, media leaks
- External grapevine
- Insider trading
- Industrial espionage/intellectual property theft
- Blogs, complaints/'flaming' websites

Lester and Cross (2006) outline five important characteristics effective organizational communication, namely: must provide practical information, give facts rather than vague expressions; present information in a concise, efficient manner; clarify expectations and responsibilities; and offer compelling, persuasive argument and recommendations.

Communication in business needs to be effective as it is the essence of good management. Effective communication helps managers perform their basic functions of planning, organizing, leading and controlling. One of the main characteristics of business communication is that it is goal-oriented. It is different from other types of communication as the purpose of business is to make profit.

Theoretical Foundation: Systems Theory

Systems theory comes very handy here in explaining the interconnectedness of the various elements in the organisation in providing effective communication, irrespective of rank and level of consequence. Organizational situations are dynamic. The elements of organizations have remained relatively constant, their purposes, structures, ways of doing things, and methods for coordinating activities have always varied widely and yet interrelated like a system. All the elements of the organisation, including gatekeepers, cleaners, security operatives and messengers and the rest of elements are interrelated in a system. Organizations are open systems that are influenced by and have an impact on the world around it. In one of the approaches to the definition of communication, Konkwo (1997) explains communication as an organic whole comprising its component parts or sub-systems, each of which is an existential, interdependent or intra-causal relationship with each other. That is in agreement with the explanations of system theorists.

In the systems approach to explaining an organisation, it is a system that is perceived in its holistic essence as an entity or an organic whole comprising its component parts or sub-system, each of which is in existential, interdependent or intra-causal relationship with each other.

The Oft-forgotten: Cleaners, Messengers, Security Operatives and Gate Keepers

It is important at this juncture to point out, albeit briefly, some of the basic duties of the four *oft-forgotten*, starting with the cleaner. The Cleaner is one whose regular occupation is cleaning offices, buildings, equipment, and other things as might be directed by line employees and top management. They are usually in constant touch with the public. Some of them come to clean the office space at intervals during work.

The messengers carry messages or perform errands in organisations. They are some of the least paid and lowest staff in organisational hierarchy. They carry a message or go on an errand for line employees or top management, especially as a matter of duty or business. Sometimes they are called Couriers. They are also usually in constant touch and interaction with the public.

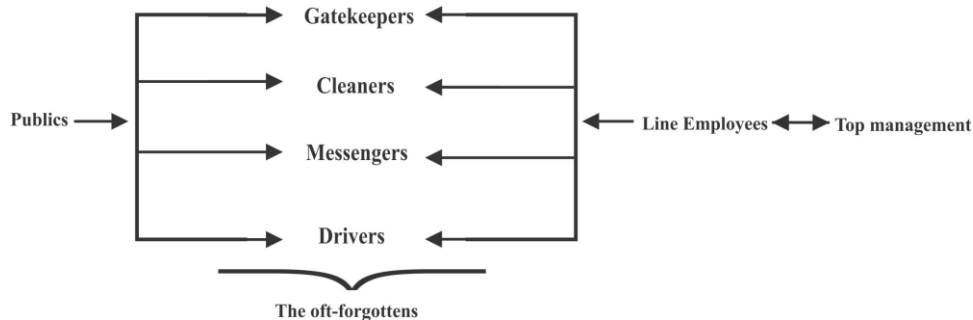
The security officer (or security guard) is a person who is paid to protect property, assets, or people in the organisation. They are responsible for the organization's entire security posture. They are also usually in constant touch and interaction with the public.

The gatekeeper is a person who controls access to the organisation. They can also double as security operatives. They monitor or oversee the people who come in and leave the organisation. They are also usually in constant touch and interaction with the public.

Discussion of the General Roles of the *Oft-forgottens* in Effective Organisational Communication

Social scientists and psychologists spend a lot of money and time on research to enable them to measure and predict workers' attitude and commitment to works, and factors that affect their productivity. In so doing, sampling techniques and instrument construction that helps to accurately measure attitude and other workplace elements have been devised, and certain generalizations have been made, and findings applied. Some of those elements such as cleaners, messengers, security operatives and gate keepers are overlooked, yet are crucial.

The place of Cleaners, Messengers, Security Operatives and Gate Keepers in organisational communication could be summarised in the model below:



The model is our demonstration of how the cleaners, messengers, security operatives and gate keepers interface with the publics, line employees and top management in every organisation. Communication is one of their defining characteristics. A large part of their day is spent on communication, ranging from having informal conversations with publics and staff of the organization especially via face-to-face interactions.

Rumour and grapevine are however often peddled by the cleaners, messengers, security operatives and gate keepers. But rumour itself is not entirely wrong. It is the unofficial and unconfirmed information sent through interpersonal channels. Grapevine has an origin which is well-founded but the person who gives out the information is not easily found nor will any person own up as its originator. Sometimes the organisation uses the *oft-forgottens* to propagate a grapevine to gauge the opinions of the publics over a policy the organisation intends to implement.

Konkwo (1997) maintains that communication in organizations takes place basically in any of all of three forms, namely, oral, written or technically mediated. By means of the oral form

of communication, cleaners, messengers, security operatives and gate keepers working in the organization bring their various abilities, skills and competence to bear on their relationship with the external publics and staff. They inform the organisation, first hand of the perception, attitudes and opinions of the external publics towards the organisation. Therefore apart from communication roles, they also play a public relations role. Meanwhile, the process of communication can be dyadic or interpersonal and/or among a group of people or in the public. Good dyadic or interpersonal relationship in an organisation can foster good organizational climate. That is to say cleaners, messengers, security operatives and gate keepers can determine the organizational climate in an organisation by the way they handle interpersonal communication with the external or internal publics of the organisation.

If businesses must maintain at least an adequate level of communication effectiveness to survive and if they must raise the level at which communication contributes to productivity and eventually to profitability of the businesses, then the place of cleaners, messengers, security operatives and gate keepers is crucial. As the people that provide the initial contact an organisation has with the external public, they shape the perception of the external publics about the organisation. If they maltreat or speak rudely to the external publics, it would be safe for the external publics to conclude that the organisation maltreated or spoke rudely to them.

To stay profitable in the highly challenging and competitive global market economy, all factors of production, namely: men, machine and materials, should be wisely managed. Among the factors of production, the human resource constitutes the biggest challenge because unlike other inputs, employee management demands skilful handling of thoughts, feelings and emotions to secure highest productivity and cleaners, messengers, security operatives and gate keepers are the group of workers who mostly interface with by members of the external publics. Oftentimes, they handle the thoughts, feelings and emotions of the external publics when they are begrudged or when things go wrong in the business premises and the customers, for instance need some people to talk to. For instance, the first impulse is usually to meet gatekeepers or security operatives at banks when the ATM is not dispensing cash or when a customer's card is stuck in the machine.

While Mintberg (1973, p. 23) understands that corporate leaders everywhere spend upward of 80 percent of their work time in communication-centred activities, we think it goes without saying that cleaners, messengers, security operatives and gate keepers spend 100 percent of their work time in communication-centred activities. They do the meanest communication. Ranging from directions on how to park cars, how to enter into the organisations, requirements to fill a form in the organisations, provision of writing materials to customers and attending to other communication needs of customers.

Every business is actually an economic and social system. Their activities are always in a constant flux, and are interrelated. They must connect and coordinate those activities effectively. Plurality of people is the essential ingredient of an organization. No matter the ranks of the people, they are instrumental to the success of the organisation. There is also a plurality of human elements in organisations, such as motivations, attitudes and perception. Cleaners, messengers, security operatives and gate keepers are rare beneficiaries of said motivations. This should not be so.

Recommendations

We hereby make the following recommendations:

Every organization must make continuous effort to create synergy in these elements, in order to make the team more productive and more effective. Organizations make effort through formal structure as well as through informal interaction to establish sound systems within and outside organization to positively influence those job elements. Any such effort should involve cleaners, messengers, security operatives and gate keepers. Because some of them are the first to be seen by various (external) publics or customers of an organisation during a visit to the organisation, cleaners, messengers, security operatives and gate keepers should be well trained and motivated, because they initially represent the image of and shape the perception of the organisation.

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